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In Search of the Truth:

Modern Church-State Relations in Yunnan Province

“Citizens of the People’s Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief.”

Article XXXVI, Constitution of the People’s Republic of China

“China is a land where Christians, particularly those in the underground church, are often under attack. China recently launched a campaign of persecution against Christians who are not registered in the official state church.”

Gospelcom.net

Kathryn Rosenbaum

SIT: Yunnan Province

Spring 2004

Abstract

The relationship between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Protestant church is a complicated relationship that varies greatly with time period and location. This paper explores the interactions from various viewpoints, the history of the relationship, the legislation pertaining to the relationship, and a brief study of the interactions in two very different locations in Yunnan Province—Kunming and the Nujiang valley.

Introduction

Since the 1980s, China has seen drastic changes that have affected almost every element of life. From the Deng Xiaoping era onwards, China has opened to foreign influence and trade, placed a large emphasis on development, especially economic development, and has greatly loosened the grip of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over its people. Despite this general opening, elements of society has been impacted to different degrees at varying periods of time. Religion is an institution that has encountered a varying relationship with the CCP. From Buddhism that many Chinese all over China practice to the Falun Gong, each religion has a specific relationship with the government. Officially, five religions are recognized in China as being legal and separate religions; these include Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Christianity.¹ This paper will explore the recent relationship between Protestantism and the government, including legislation, a brief history, and the perspectives of different groups of individuals. As the relationship not only varies by time period, but also greatly by geographical location, the final part of this study is a comparison between the church-state relationship in two distinct places in Yunnan Province: Kunming and the rural Nujiang valley, an area mainly inhabited by minorities.

¹ Here, “Christianity” refers solely to non-denominationalist Protestantism, as the Chinese government defines Catholicism and Protestantism as completely separate religions. In this paper, both Christianity, Christians, and the Christian Church refer solely to the Protestant faith.

A brief history of the relationship between the CCP and the Protestant Church in China.

Since 1949, the relationship between the Protestant church in China and the Chinese government has fluctuated greatly. After Liberation in 1949, churches were greatly persecuted as being bourgeois and a tool of imperialist powers. Under Deng Xiaoping, China began a process of opening up and as a result, reforms created a Chinese church that works legally under government control. Today, the situation varies from place to place with the attitudes of local and upper level authorities regionally, and at the district and local levels.

Starting as early as 1921, the Chinese Communist Party proclaimed the Marxist ideal that religion was the "opiate of the people" and that it was a feudal and bourgeois remnant.² According to the ideology of the time, religion shows the oppressive capitalism conquering the working class and was a tool of imperialist power over China³ because of the great amount of influence they had on their pupils and the fact that the theological education was conducted mainly in English with English reading materials.⁴ The Missions of the 19th century also coincided with such events as the Opium War and Unequal Treaties, so "Missionaries and colonialism in China were inseparable, at least in the minds of the Chinese."⁵ At the same time, missionaries told their Chinese pupils that the atheistic Communist ideology is Godless.⁶

During Liberation, the plight of the missionaries and the status of Christianity and, indeed, religion in China, embarked on what would become a rough journey through persecution and regulations. In 1950, 40 Chinese Protestants under the leadership of Wu Yaozong met and published the Christian Manifesto—Creating a Chinese Church for a New China. This document, eventually signed by 400,000 Protestants, about half of the known Protestants at that time in the country, was a complete revamping of Protestantism in China. Among the aims of this document are

² Orr, Robert. *Religion in China* (Friendship Press, 1980), 31.

³ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵ Kauffman, Paul. *China, the Emerging Challenge: A Christian perspective* (Baker Book House, 1982), 82.

⁶ Orr, *Religion*, 29

that Christians, Churches, and Christian organizations must see and show the imperialist wrongs that have infiltrated the religion.⁷ A part of the manifesto itself says that the Church must “rid itself of all traces of imperialism, to give first loyalty to the people’s government, and to maintain unquestioning obedience to the Communist Party.”⁸ In short—this was a complete admitting of the wrongs that missionaries had done, a rejection of foreign interference and influence, a self-examination of the religion and purging of imperialist aspects, and a dedication to patriotism and the CCP.

In 1951, the next step came in the growing government dominance of Protestantism. In this year, a group of church leaders met in Beijing to meet about the disposal of American missionary-sponsored properties in China. However, the true purpose of this meeting was revealed by the spokesman who presided over the conference proceedings. He said “the mission of this conference is to cut off thoroughly all relations between the Christian church in China and American imperialism and to help the patriotic Christians to promote a new movement for independence, self support, and independent propagation of the Faith, so as to realize the decision of the government administrative council.”⁹ The most monumental consequence of the conference was the formation of a new organization—the Oppose-America, Aid-Korea, Three-Self Reform Movement of the Church of Christ in China. The name of this organization changed to the Three-Self Reform Church, and later, the widely-known Three-Self Christian Patriotic Movement (Henceforth often referred to alternately as the TSPM, TSP Church or Three-Self Church), the official church of China.¹⁰ The three selves are self-government, self-propagation, and self-support.

A striking example as to what the church in China was going through at this time comes from a list of “Patriotic Resolutions” from a Shanghai district in the late 1950s. Included in this list of eleven resolutions are the Five Don’ts: “don’t break laws,

⁷ Orr, *Religion*, 32.

⁸ The Christian Manifesto, 1950

⁹ Reynolds, M. H. JR. “The Church in China” (Foundation Magazine, January-February 1982).

¹⁰ Reynolds, Stockwell, Orr, among others.

preach reactionary doctrine, use healing promises to get converts, invite free-lance evangelists, attend or preach in home services,” Observe the Five Must’s: “cooperate with the government’s religious policy, expose free-lance evangelists and home services, be economical, discipline one’s body, and take part in every socialist campaign,” follow the Five Loves: “country, party, socialism, the Three-Self Movement, and labor.”¹¹ Other resolutions include building political study for pastors and laymen, teaching pastors at least six patriotic songs, guaranteeing 85% of church members’ participation in social campaigns, and having a criticism meeting every three months to check the progress on these points.¹² In other words, the churches were forced to become patriotic.

As to the type of oppression that was going on at this time, sources vary as to what extent there was persecution. Mao Zedong said, even in 1957, that people get rid of religion through education, discussion, and criticism—not through coercion or repression.¹³ In the early Mao era, the majority of Christians were even patriotic socially and economically—just not philosophically or theologically.¹⁴

In the Cultural Revolution, however, everything changed. Christians all over China were persecuted, and Mao’s Red Guards wrecked havoc on believers and anything relating to Christianity.¹⁵ While on the campaign to eradicate religion, all Bibles and Christian literature were confiscated, any remaining vestiges of institutionalized Christianity were stifled, all church buildings were closed, Christians were humiliated through assault, both physical and emotional, there were many cases of martyrdom, imprisonment in labor camps, some Christians felt forced to commit suicide, many denied their faith and even betrayed their fellow Christians.¹⁶ A Christian man who suffered 17 years of imprisonment for being against the government related that as soon as he was incarcerated at the beginning of the

¹¹ Qtd. in Orr, *Religion*, 46.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Orr, *Religion*, 32.

¹⁴ Ibid., 30.

¹⁵ Ibid., 35.

¹⁶ Nield, Barbara. “China’s House Churches.” (Renewal Journal #3, Brisbane, Australia, pp. 4860). For more details on Christians during the Cultural Revolution, there are many resources dealing with the Cultural Revolution that make reference to Christians, as well as biographies of survivors.

Cultural Revolution, the prison officials came up and told him that he did not stand a chance of rehabilitation because he was a Christian.¹⁷ Stories, such as the famous Lijiang musician Xuan Ke being suspended from the ceiling by his hands in the shape of a crucifix are commonplace.¹⁸ Much literature has been published on the Christian experience during the Cultural Revolution, and it was a terrible time of ruthless persecution and terror.

After the fall of Mao and the rise of Deng Xiaoping, the policy towards Protestantism and religion in general really mellowed out, as did many elements of Chinese life. The 1978 Constitution guaranteed freedom to practice religion, however, atheism is the only religious doctrine that can be taught.¹⁹ In 1979, legislation was actually put into place that denoted a mandatory two-year prison term for officials who wrongly ban freedom of religion²⁰—a further step to try to guarantee the freedom that the Constitution set. In the same year, the Bureau of Religious Affairs was re-established to act as a liaison between the government and religions.²¹

Key in the revival of Protestantism after the Cultural Revolution is the implementation of the China Christian Council (the CCC), which was founded in 1980 to act as a national church structure. This organization came after the Third National Conference of Chinese Christians, which focused on reopening churches and education. The CCC serves a different and more specific purpose than the TSPM-- the CCC works to meet pastoral and ecclesiastical needs and the members are mainly pastors and other leaders, whereas the TSPM encompasses all members.²²

Today, Christianity in China is growing. Under the Religious Affairs Bureau, the CCC, and the TSPM, the church is controlled and regulated, though Christians experience more freedom than they have since 1949. The realities of church-state relations vary by location, and many laws since 1980 have been enacted that impact these relations. Some of the most important of this influence the process in registering

¹⁷ H., Laoshi. Interview. Note: Throughout this paper, at the request of many people I interviewed, pseudonyms will be given to protect their safety. This man will be referred to as H, Laoshi.

¹⁸ Xuan Ke Interview.

¹⁹ Orr, *Religion*, 32.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 33.

²² Stockwell, Foster. *Religion in China Today*. (Beijing: New World Press, 1996), 202.

a church legally, in restricting foreigners and their relation to church, and in the administration of the CCC and the TSPM churches today.

Legislation and Guidelines: Key official organizations and documents

The Chinese Constitution states in the section titled The Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens that “Citizens of the People’s Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief.”²³ It protects people from discrimination for either practicing or not practicing a religion, and prohibits the forcing of a religious faith on people. However, an entire section of this article states, “The State protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system of the state.”²⁴ It also states that religious bodies and affairs are “not subject to any foreign domination.”²⁵ These statements are key in understanding legislation and official organizations relating to religion. As a result, only people over 18 can officially practice a religion because it is free for adult citizens to practice, and things like faith healing and keeping people from medicine are not permitted.

The China Christian Council

The CCC is the official organization that oversees pastors and church leaders throughout China and as the national organization for church affairs.²⁶ According to the CCC Constitution, “The aim of the CCC is to unite and lead all patriotic and church loving Christians in China who believe in and serve God and who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord in glorifying God and benefiting people; to abide by the national Constitution, laws, regulations and policies, and to observe social mores; under the leading of the Holy Spirit, with one heart and unity of purpose, in obedience to the truth of Scripture, to uphold the Three-Self patriotic principle, to

²³ Chinese Constitution, Article XXXVI.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ China Christian Council Constitution, Article I, Section II.

formulate and perfect the rules and regulations of the Chinese Church, to make our Chinese Church an independent, self-run and well run Church and to enable Chinese Christianity to adapt to socialist society.²⁷ When dissected, this statement is quite interesting and shows quite clearly some of the fears of the Chinese government, as well as some of the key elements in the church-state relationship. The idea of leading all "patriotic and church loving Christians" articulates the priorities of the CCC-- that members must first be patriotic and then be church loving Christians. This excludes any Christians who are against the government or may have ideas that seem contrary to governmental goals. The fact that one of the aims of the CCC is to "abide by the national Constitution, laws, regulations and policies, and to observe social mores" and "enable(s) Chinese Christianity to adapt to socialist society" also demonstrates that there is great fear that Christians may be against the constitution, and, interestingly enough, against social mores, and by including this in one of the aims, the CCC turns into not solely a religious organization, but an organization that teaches socialist ideology. The implication is also that Chinese Christianity does not at all fall in step with socialist society, but must "adapt." The emphasis on the Three-Self principles and an "independent, self-run" Church again, eliminates foreign influence in this organization and indoctrinates this idea throughout the people. As is evident by this basic mission statement, the focus is not solely on developing Christianity in China, but deals greatly with patriotism, socialist society, and the idea of becoming an independent, self-run church.

Immediately after this statement, the CCC "accepts lawful administration by the Religious Affairs Bureau"²⁸ and, therefore, is directly controlled by the government and under government jurisdiction. This is further seen through one of its goals-- fostering the relationship between local churches and government.²⁹ Besides being a religious organization, this is truly a governmental branch and works with and under the government directly. Under government control, the CCC does do things to benefit Christians and Christianity in China. Since 1980, 20 seminaries have been

²⁷ CCC Constitution, Section IV.

²⁸ Ibid., Section V.

²⁹ Ibid., Section VII.

built, and over 20 million Bibles have been printed and distributed throughout the country.³⁰ It also "promotes theological education and the publication of the Bible, hymnbooks and other literature for the Chinese church, the exchange of information among local churches in evangelism, pastoral work and administration, and promotes the formulation of church orders for local churches and the development of friendly relations with churches overseas."³¹ The leading organizations and a true embodiment of the inextricable bond between the Chinese church and the state, the CCC and TSPM together, under the jurisdiction of the Religious Affairs Bureau, control legal church activity in China. As is evident, one of the key elements is that of a true Chinese church outside of foreign control and influence. There are many restrictions and regulations on those foreigners who practice Christianity in China.

Regulations on Foreigners who Practice Christianity

One of the biggest regulations concerning the government's relationship with the church is its serious distrust of foreign influence. During the extreme patriotism of the Mao era, missionaries were seen as a manifestation of Western imperialism, and missionaries were expelled from the country. Today, Christian foreigners are allowed to come to China and worship, however, there are many regulations on their activities, especially in reference to contact with Chinese nationals.

The freedom for foreigners to practice religion in China is guaranteed in the Rules for the Implementation of the Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens within the Territory of the People's Republic of China, a document published in the China Daily in 2000. Whereas the government administers the official churches for Chinese, foreigners are allowed to practice relatively freely on their own. As a result, foreign churches exist in many large cities where the only restriction is the prohibition of Chinese nationals' presence. Many times, guards are stationed outside of the church door and will check passports of

³⁰ amityfoundation.org.

³¹ CCC Constitution, Article IV.

people who appear to be Chinese. Though a straight answer to what exactly the repercussions are if there are Chinese nationals in attendance is not found in legislation (to the extent of my research), when asked, an American woman who had once brought a student of hers in would only say, "there was big trouble."³²

Missionary activity within China is strictly prohibited and this is enforced all over China. Many of the incidents of persecution reported in the west are a result of foreign nationals or Chinese themselves guilty of perceived missionary behavior. The concept of why missionary behavior is so strongly condemned is essential to understand and will be discussed further under the varying viewpoints. The definition of missionary behavior is defined in Article 17 of the Rules for the Implementation of the Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens within the Territory of the People's Republic of China. Some of the most important restrictions on foreigners is that they cannot "develop religious followers among Chinese citizens; preach or expound the scripture... without permission; producing or selling religious books and journals, religious audio-visual products, religious electronic goods or other religious articles; and distributing religious propaganda materials."³³ Although this may seem benign, it renders house-churches started by foreigners illegal as well as anything else that includes foreign and Chinese contact involving Christianity outside the Three-Self Church.

Legislation on Registering official churches in China

In order for a church to function legally in the PRC, it must be registered,³⁴ a process that is quite complicated. It is explicitly stated in the Regulation Governing Venues for Religious Activities, instituted in the Decree No. 145 of the State Council of the PRC January 31, 1994, that religious venues cannot host any activities that

³² Fumi, Interview. Note: Fumi is a Japanese-born American citizen who had stayed in Kunming for five years, bringing Chinese nationals to Christianity and baptizing them. She left shortly after the interview to volunteer for a prayer vigil in Israel.

³³ Rules for the Implementation of the Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens within the Territory of the People's Republic of China, Article XVII.

³⁴ Regulation Governing Venues for Religious Activities, Article II.

"harm national unity or the social order, harm citizens' health, or obstruct the national education system... [and] shall not be controlled by persons or organizations outside China."³⁵ In this document, consisting of 20 articles, there are five articles that deal strictly, though not specifically, with the consequences if the stipulations are violated. The ultimate administration of these registered churches lies with the Religious Affairs Bureau,³⁶ and it is explicitly stated that the interpretation of this document ultimately lies with this government institution.³⁷

For a church to be eligible for registration, there are several conditions that must be met. These include a fixed name and location, a congregation of citizens who participate in religious activities on a regular basis, a management organization, professional clergy, management regulations, and a legal source of income.³⁸ At the same time, upon initial application, among other requirements, the opinion of the local People's Government or neighborhood committee must be provided.³⁹

Besides requiring registration and therefore restricting churches' legal rights, these documents also give rights. A registered church may legally accept donations (though Chinese nationals must decide what the contribution will go towards),⁴⁰ as well as sell "religious articles, artworks, and publications."⁴¹ Once registered, a church's "legal rights and the normal religious activities which take place there will be under the protection of law"⁴² and is virtually out of harm's way provided the church follows the rules. However, what is probably the most instrumental article in the entire document is Article 18: "The People's Government at the provincial, autonomous region, and municipality level may, in compliance with this regulation, formulate practical measures on the basis of local realities." In short-- one of the key reasons that the church-state relationship varies so drastically by location is because legislation allows for it.

³⁵ Regulation Governing Venues for Religious Activities, Article IV.

³⁶ Ibid., Article XIII.

³⁷ Ibid., Article XIX.

³⁸ Registration Procedures for Venues for Religious Activities, Article II.

³⁹ Ibid., Article III.

⁴⁰ Regulation Governing Venues for Religious Activities, Article VI.

⁴¹ Ibid., Article VII.

⁴² Ibid., Article III.

Viewpoint: The Western Perspective

The Western Perspective on church-state relations also varies from person to person, organization to organization. The most outspoken individuals and groups are those who speak against the Chinese government. This section will try to explore the different perspectives, though, there is more information and more people willing to speak out loudly who are against the government than those who work in tandem with it.

The Western Perspective: Asia Harvest⁴³

Asia Harvest is a missionary organization that works to bring Protestantism to Asian countries. In China, their main goals are to support "fellowships and organizations in various ways, such as printing of Bibles and evangelistic materials, help in training and seminars for indigenous believers' groups, aiding evangelists in their efforts to share the Gospel, humanitarian aid in situations where this will help in promoting the Gospel, helping those who have lost their income because of their faith, and providing research materials to aid in reaching the unreached."⁴⁴ As a missionary organization, many of their activities are illegal in China.

Asia Harvest representatives have a simple view on the connection between the government and the Chinese Churches. One representative states that there are in fact, many "wonderful Christians in China" who worship in Three-Self churches and that there are also many problems that can be found in some house churches. As for the reason that many people turn to house churches instead of the Three-Self movement, he attributes that to the issue of "political control." Leaders and participants in house churches refuse to register and therefore become subject to control by an atheistic government. This representative of Asia Harvest stated and admitted that "there us no

⁴³ Unless otherwise noted, all information gathered for this section and quotations come directly from the interview with "Paul," an Asia Harvest Employee, 5/7/2004.

⁴⁴ asiaharvest.org

persecution in China for just being a Christian. There is plenty of persecution for being a fully committed disciple who seeks to spread the gospel" and this is the case whether the person is a member of a house church or a Three-Self Church. In fact, this is the main reason that TSPM members and pastors have left the official church to join a house church.

As for this organization's position, they take the stance that as part of Christianity, believers must pursue evangelization as one of the key doctrines of the faith and that it is this reason that Christians get in trouble. "If house churches all sat on their backsides and became nice, quiet believers [as are the majority] in the West, the persecution would stop immediately. But because they have a passion for soul winning and doing whatever it takes to evangelize their countrymen, they suffer greatly." Because of its commitment to evangelism, the Asia Harvest sees the Protestant church incompatible with the restrictions of the Communist government.

The Western Perspective: Missionaries

Though technically, their existence alone is illegal, there are indeed many missionaries that continue to work all over China, especially in large cities and very rural areas or minority populations. They lead a secret life, outside the eyes of most Chinese and the government by leading underground house churches or distributing materials surreptitiously. The distinguishing factor in most of these foreign individuals is that of fear. Though they come from many countries, namely America, Australia, the British Isles, and Korea, this portion of the paper will focus on Americans. (With the time constraints of the research and the extreme cloak of secretiveness that these people wear, it was only possible to interact with Americans because the bond of a common homeland made them more receptive to talking with me.)

Active missionaries come into China without giving any indication of their true intentions. They usually come on either a student or tourist visa, but instead of affiliating themselves with a specific educational institution, they "study Chinese on

their own,"⁴⁵ which may or may not entail actually studying. Some come with extensive Chinese knowledge, others come as beginners and target students or other Chinese nationals who speak English. While many of these foreigners come with groups or organizational support, there are others that come alone without any affiliation. Besides leading house churches, these foreigners also open English schools, clinics, day cares, or other institutions that serve dual purposes-- the primary purpose that is superficially evident, and that of evangelizing and supporting Christian converts.

All of these people are well aware that their actions are illegal and put both themselves and the Chinese that they have contact with in grave danger. As a result, mass paranoia ensues among these people. Though Chinese Christians often wear crosses or WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) bracelets, foreigners rarely outwardly display their faith. While outside of homes or church, many, though not all, refuse to say words such as "God," "Jesus," "Church," "Pray," "Christianity," "Bible," "Missionary," etc. On the telephone, especially, they worry about phone taps and use code words or veiled expressions to express these ideas. One American woman who I had extensive contact with said that she thought that for a period of a few weeks, she had someone following her and put her activities on hold. Though certainly not all foreign missionary Christians act this way, there is certainly a pervasive feeling of fear. As a result, many underground activities are only on a "need-to-know" basis, and, as a student studying abroad for one short semester, I was not able to ascertain very many details.

At one point, during an underground meeting, the leader brought up an area of town that had two underground churches within. As I was curious to hear the response, I asked, "What is an underground church? Is this right now an underground church?" The leader immediately stiffened and didn't answer. "That's a..." She laughed nervously. "That's a question that makes me paranoid. Yes, this is an illegal church. All of this is illegal. But let's not talk about that."⁴⁶ As to why the people fear

⁴⁵ Information comes from various interviews conducted during the months of March-May, 2004.

⁴⁶ Interview with an American missionary, 5/14/2004.

the government so much, their answers were in tandem with the laws that have been discussed previously. Foreigners who are caught proselytizing are given 72 hours to leave the country, and every missionary knows or knows of at least one person who this has happened to.⁴⁷

When asked about the different relationships between the government and the Protestant church, there are as many opinions as people, though they divide into two basic camps-- those who feel that the TSPM is a viable alternative, and those who feel that the TSPM should not be encouraged among Chinese nationals and some even go far to say that it is a tool of the devil.

There are some, who, when talking with Chinese Christians, will send them to the local TSPM churches without a second thought. When asked why, they answer, "It's the safest thing to do, and their hearts are in the right place."⁴⁸ Many of these people will admit that there is some censorship in the church, but that it is not enough to worry about in practice. When a Christian attends one of these churches, they are able to freely admit to any of the activities they pursue there, and are virtually untouchable by the law and persecution on religious matters. Many house churches, both Chinese and foreign-led, are places where TSPM members go for supplementary worship and education, and, in some cases, missionaries will work on a regular basis with these church-going members.

Other, and probably the majority of missionaries, denounce the TSPM as something that is a tool of the atheistic, Communist government, and, as such, should be avoided by all Chinese Christians. When I was discussing the churches in the Nujiang, one missionary cut me off with a dismissive wave and said "Yes, but I'm sure that they are Three-Self churches,"⁴⁹ and went on saying that they did not count as true Protestant churches and that the people were suffering under the oppression of the government. There is an aura of fear around missionaries in this camp, who cite instances when Christians were followed from the TSPM churches to underground

⁴⁷ Various interviews with American, Australian, and British Missionaries, February-May 2004.

⁴⁸ Information from this paragraph comes from various interviews with American Australian, and British Missionaries, February-May 2004.

⁴⁹ Interview with an American missionary, 5/14/2004.

activities which, in turn, led to the persecution of many.⁵⁰ Consequently, the Christian Chinese under their tutelage come to distrust the TSPM and the Chinese government.

Though many missionaries working in China do not cooperate with the TSPM and denounce it, there are also many organizations that work closely with the TSPM. The Lutheran church, for example, works closely with the official church and all of its missions are carried out through a cooperation between the two institutions, and most of these interactions take place with the help of the Amity Foundation, specifically working with to the English Teacher's program, polio rehabilitation, the Drinking Water Project in Henan Province, and orphan care.⁵¹ There are other denominations or different churches within the denominations who work through the Amity Foundation and with the TSPM churches, as well as individuals or smaller delegations who work independently and illegally. In Kunming, Project Grace is a religious foundation that works with the Poverty Alleviation Office to help locals with education, health, agriculture, rehabilitation of handicapped, and AIDS prevention. Not only is this program working hand-in-hand with the government, but it also won a China Friendship Award in 2000 from the national government in appreciation for its work.⁵²

Viewpoint: The Christian Chinese

Because of the varying conditions throughout China depending on location, it is impossible to do justice to the attitudes and opinions of Christian Chinese in this paper. Instead, this area will be explored specifically in the sections comparing the situation in Kunming and the Nujiang in Yunnan Province. These observations and opinions, though representative for Christians in this area, are by no means representative of Chinese Christians as a whole.

⁵⁰ Various interviews with American, Australian, and British Missionaries, February-May 2004.

⁵¹ See details on the Lutheran Church's interactions with China at http://www.elca.org/dgm/country_packet/china/church.html.

⁵² For more basic information on Project Grace, see <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/roundtables/032403/Hamrin.php>.

Viewpoint: The Government Perspective

Chinese Government and TSPM members' perspective is that the official leaders do not like the mentality of an "underground church." This causes denominationalism and divides the Chinese Church. Many officials see the people who propagate the "underground church" as calling for government overthrow.⁵³ There are problems with missionaries that these officials point out that still exist today. They disagree with the idea that China has a lack of Chinese Bibles, and say that instead, agencies raise money for Bibles and the funds are used towards other evangelical means.⁵⁴ At the same time, in the early 1990s, the Bibles propagated by missionaries were written in traditional characters-- a system that became obsolete in China with the Communist Revolution and is only used in places off the mainland-- therefore, the Bibles that were printed were unable to be read.⁵⁵

Though there is some freedom in the Chinese Church today, it is still very difficult to talk with officials about the situation. Many people expressed fear with my going to talk to officials in the Religious Affairs Bureau and stated that as soon as I left, the Bureau would doubtless alert the police who would follow me-- even one simple interview would stir concern. Even setting up a meeting with the leader of a Three-Self Church in Kunming proved fruitless-- he was "too busy" to meet with a foreigner. Therefore, the best way to get the government perspective other than simply looking at the legislation is through the Amity Foundation-- an organization that works closely with the CCC, and the TSPM.

The Amity Foundation

The Amity Foundation is a unique organization because it has ties to the government as well as to international ecumenical institutions, was started by Christian Chinese without foreign influence, and is run by both Christians and non-Christians. The organization was founded in 1985 and is actually service-oriented, with the goal of "social development through the fields of education, public health

⁵³ Stockwell, *Religion*, 205.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

and welfare, and printing and publishing.”⁵⁶ Religiously, it works to communicate the views and news of the CCC to the international world, and by printing Bibles and Hymnals and other Christian literature. In regards to government affiliation, because of their humanitarian work, the *guanxi*⁵⁷ is quite good and both the government and the Amity Foundation welcome each other’s support and help because, as the general-secretary of the agency in 1993 states, “As long as the government ensures religious freedom and effectively serves the people, we have no reason not to be cooperative.”⁵⁸ As such an organization with ties to the government while being a true NGO and one that communicates and works actively with the International community, it seems that out of all of the organizations, they are the most level-headed and unbiased.

While interviewing a member of this organization,⁵⁹ it seemed that her viewpoints were very moderate in comparison to those of other organizations. When it comes to the “rumor” about registration, she remarks that the congregations and churches must register in order to enjoy protection from persecution and enjoy religious freedom under the Chinese law. However, many unregistered churches exist and only some of these are persecuted or harassed depending on region and the church’s activities. Registered churches very rarely are persecuted and if so it is for blatant law-breaking. In order to register, there are certain requirements that must be met—for example, a place to meet, a leader, and accounting standards. If a church is unregistered, it is not always because they are dissidents or refuse, but could be merely that they do not meet the qualifications. The majority of the unregistered churches, however, do refuse to register because the leaders do not want government interference.

Although church registration is a necessity, she had not heard of any laws requiring Christians to register individually and brings up the point that there are so

⁵⁶ Ibid., 217.

⁵⁷ Guanxi: Literally connections, but refers to the Chinese system of relationships between people—in business settings, personal settings, etc. A difficult concept to describe to a non-Chinese audience, but an essential part of Chinese interactions personally, politically, and in business.

⁵⁸ Stockwell, *Religion*, 219.

⁵⁹ The rest of this section comes from a telephone interview with Katlin Fiedler, an Amity Foundation representative on 5/11/2004.

many Christians, and there are so many “floating Christians” or seekers that may come to one or two services to see what it is all about that the registering of individuals would be impractical.

As for the actual level of government interference, the Amity Foundation Representative admits that it is hard for outsiders to know. Her observations show that congregations are able to handle day-to-day matters and running of church affairs without interference. There are rumors about topics that are frowned upon, however, again, she has been witness to many sermons on Revelation which is the topic that the majority of people believe cannot be preached on. Either these regulations do not exist, or, according to her, the churches are able to ignore them, at least at certain times.

The government does, she admits, forbid foreign interference in church affairs. This is a policy rooted in the Mao era—before Liberation, there were 30,000 missionaries in the country. Although many missionaries did wonderful things for the people, in general, the government after 1949 frowned upon them for many reasons. Even just their presence has been criticized as contributing to China as a “semi-colonial and semi-imperialist” nation in the early 20th century. Foreigners, including foreign missionaries took advantages of privileged status and, at times, religion was used as an excuse to demand special treatment for foreigners and even for Chinese Christians. These are the reasons that historically, and today, the Three-Self principle is followed. This legislation does not forbid contact but control, administration, and influence—for example, Chinese Churches can accept donations from foreign donors, but the donors have no say in what the money can be used for—that is decided solely by Chinese Christians.

At the same time, there is lots of self-censorship in the Chinese Church. Although this is truly in many ways, a negative aspect, the Amity Contact brought up one advantage of this fact—because of the self-censorship, the government does not interfere because the people know that there are rules that must be followed. Consequently, there is less of a sense of active government interference and more of a sense of a governmental dominance or presence. At the same time, Christians come

up with ways to legally bypass the rules to achieve what they want. For example, as Chinese cannot practice a religion until they are 18 or older, according to law, many Churches provide English classes for students instead of the forbidden Sunday School classes. In these English classes, children learn Bible stories and it is, in fact, truly a Sunday School in disguise.

The Amity Foundation's perspective, though more on the side of the CCP than the missionaries, seems to be a balanced one—admitting that there are problems but also that there are freedoms that Chinese citizens can enjoy if they play by the rules. Though they may claim ignorance on certain subject matters, at least they do not provide false information. All in all, this unique perspective is probably the closest to the truth as is possible to attain.

A brief comparative study: Kunming and the Nujiang

Kunming

Kunming is the capital of Yunnan province in the southwest of China, and a city of about 4 million. Comparatively, Yunnan is a very lax province when it comes to persecution of Christians, though Kunming is the most heavily watched place in the province in terms of watching for missionary or other deviant behavior. Kunming has three large TSPM, registered Protestant churches, the largest of which has a regular Sunday attendance of about 1,200 over three services. There is also a seminary that caters to teaching minority nationalities and a foreigners' church where Chinese nationals are not allowed to attend. In addition, there are dozens, if not hundreds, of house-churches, both foreign and Chinese-led. Kunming is also the base for Project Grace, a faith-based mission project that is not evangelistic in nature and cooperates fully with the Chinese government.

Despite the paranoia of the foreign missionaries in China, in Kunming, many Chinese nationals are not as frightened as Western press would make them out to be. It is not an uncommon occurrence to see a Chinese man or woman wearing a cross while walking down the street, or a WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) bracelet. A cafe

in Kunming is owned by Christian Chinese, and on their menu, prominently on the cover is a large cross. The name of the cafe, not listed here for protection, is not a blatantly religious name but has religious overtones. Several university students I have met have spoken up in class when professors deny the existence of God, and met no negative repercussions. Others tell stories of singing "Silent Night" at a Christmas party that the English department put on, or, when asked to sing an English song, singing "Jesus Loves Me." A leader of the student "military"—an activity that many high school and college students participate in—quit upon becoming a Christian, telling her superior, "Now I am a Christian so I can no longer be a part of this."⁶⁰ Whether emboldened by faith alone or by the knowledge of what one can get away with, these are not actions that many would imagine possible in China, and, certainly, 15 years ago they would be unheard of.

At the same time, there are Christians who fear the government, though these are usually older Christians who have lived through much. An old man that I interviewed⁶¹ talked about how corrupt the Three-Self Church is, though he could not give specific examples, and believed, though I later found out falsely, that the TSPM only distributed Bibles that had affirmations of ones' loyalty to the Communist Party inscribed before each book. He mentioned that the police are normal police, but that there was a secret Gestapo-like police force and that in order to go to house-churches, many people disguised themselves and they changed the days of the week and times constantly so as not to draw attention to themselves. He did have some personal experience with the law. During the Cultural Revolution, he had been arrested and his captors in prison told him that he had no chance to survive because he was a Christian. Though not the reason for his arrest, it was definitely a mitigating factor in his horrible experiences. More recently, his daughter, also a Christian, was caught at a house-church in the early 1990s. The police made everyone present sign a document promising to never attend again, and then let them off the hook. At the same time, this man was the most adamant against the government and with the most pessimistic

⁶⁰ Interview with college-aged Christian 5/14/04.

⁶¹ Interview with H, Laoshi, 3/19/2004.

view, though he had the most negative experiences with the law because of his religion.

In Kunming, as was previously mentioned, there are many house churches, or, as many people sometimes call them, “underground churches” that are alive and active. As there is a legal alternative to house churches in the TSP Church, it is notable that so many Chinese turn towards illegal means to practice religion. Upon observation, however, many reasons become obvious as to why Chinese Christians take the illegal path instead of the legal one—there are many benefits to both foreign-led and Chinese-led unregistered house churches. The most obvious cause is fear of censorship in the TSP Churches and a need to go somewhere that is unrestricted. However, many people leave for other reasons that are more personal preference than taking an ideological stand. Though these are observations made from house-church members in Kunming, many of these reasons exist throughout China.⁶²

In a society where emphasis is placed on the collective over the individual, the house-church is a place where Chinese Christians can receive specialized attention. As most groups are from between four and fifteen members, specific attention can be spent on the individuals in a spiritual way. Many times, house churches can act almost as a support group for its congregates, spending time talking about different issues and lending advice and help for specific problems. Spiritually, prayer requests are taken and prayed upon, not just at the time of the meeting, but often, throughout the week by fellow believers in the house-church. The leader is able to find Bible verses pertaining to specific events in people’s lives, and the structure or schedule is flexible enough to be changed. Theological questions can be asked and discussed, leading to more of an education than that of simply listening to a sermon. All of these elements are impossible in a larger, official setting and are appealing to many Chinese Christians.

At the same time, house-churches allow room for denominationalism, something

⁶² Most of this information comes from a compilation of interviews and casual conversations with Chinese Christians between February and May, 2004 and personal observation. The most key individuals who were most willing to answer questions and volunteer information include a 15-year old boy, a 24 year old graduate student, and H., Laoshi. Observation comes from visiting different house churches in Kunming during this time period.

quite rare in the Chinese Church. Charismatic practices especially, such as speaking in tongues, faith healing, or anointment with oil are not used in the TSPM, and if Christians are exposed to these traditions in China and are moved by them, the TSPM will never meet these needs and the people in smaller, unofficial settings are able to be comfortable enough to practice in these ways.

When it comes to house-churches led by foreigners, this opens a new door of possibilities and advantages to congregates. Quite often, these “Bible Studies” meet a certain night of the week and begin with dinner, fellowship, and then service. This provides material benefits—a free, good dinner, which, to less wealthy Chinese Christians may be reason enough to come; and the feeling of being part of a community. For people who may have left their families to work in the cities or students, especially, the feeling of an intimate, connected community is comforting and appealing. The foreigners, sometimes sponsored by institutions abroad, are able at times to give money to congregates in times of need. The foreign connection also, at times, is able to help people to go abroad to study theology and the connections to foreign institutions give Chinese Christians hope—sometimes false—to be able to go to another country to study.

In addition to these tangible benefits to house-churches, there is a psychological element. Though consciously, the dangers associated with illegal activity are detrimental, at the same time, there is an element of martyrdom and a testimony of faith in the decision to break the law. In the same way that suicide bombers give up their own lives for their faith, or that a prisoner of conscience breaks the law in the name of faith and willingly and peacefully go to prison, there is a sense of illegal activity bringing one’s relationship with God to the next level. Though not on the same level as suicide bombers by any means, it is a way of rebelling against the powers perceived as oppressive while fully realizing the potential consequences, and willingly putting oneself into that circumstance. By potentially becoming martyrs to whatever degree, the Christians in illegal house-churches prove their convictions.

In asking Christians in Kunming who participate in house-churches why they risk

legal repercussions, the answers vary.⁶³ The overwhelming majority (14) said that they have no problems with the TSPM churches except that they were not "spiritual" enough and could be, at times, dry and not involved. Four of the 18 cited that the TSPM church was, in fact, a tool of the government and corrupt, censored, or that there were dangers involved with attending. Out of these four, three of them had heard most of this through foreigners. One 15 year-old boy, highly devoted and fearless in his faith stated that the TSPM church was related to government organizations that only allow the New International Version of the Bible to be published in Chinese and that, among other reasons, he could not affiliate himself with a church that was so limiting. Eight of the eighteen practiced in house-churches that were charismatic, and therefore, their main problem with the TSPM movement was the lack of charismatic practices. However, in general, it is quite telling that the majority of the people here did not turn to house-churches out of fear or resentment towards the government, but as a preference in type of worship.

This picture of the situation in Kunming is still an incomplete one, due to hesitation on all sides to speak freely. I was warned many times by different people not to go to speak to government officials relating to the situation for various reasons. Some say that they will only say the party line and would be a waste of time. Others were afraid for my safety, saying that immediately after leaving the Religious Affairs Bureau office, I would be tailed, telephones tapped, and followed, putting myself and the program with whom I came to China in danger. Others cite that by drawing attention to myself and my curiosity on religion, it could put Chinese Christians or foreigners who participate in missionary activity in danger. Though detrimental to the complete story, these restrictions were ones that because of my limited time, credentials, and experience, I had to follow.

At the same time, the picture is incomplete because of the hesitation of Chinese nationals and even foreign missionaries to speak with me. The leaders of several churches in Kunming were "too busy" to let me interview them, and the

⁶³ These results compiled from talking to 18 Chinese Christians who participate in both foreign-led and Chinese-led house churches in Kunming through the months of February-May 2004. These people include a wide range of ages, from 15 to quite elderly.

leaders of the foreign church in Kunming were distrustful and unwilling to speak, citing that everything was on a “need-to-know” basis and my knowledge could jeopardize their work and the safety of many. Even Chinese Christians in non-leadership positions were, at times, unwilling to speak on some matters, or simply unknowledgeable about the church-state interactions. Once more, though frustrating, it was necessary for me to be content with the information I could gather.

On a side note, there is another important community that has not been explored in this paper. The Korean missionaries are plentiful in Kunming and parts of Yunnan, however, access to these people was impossible to find, due to language barriers and the fact that there was not a central location that I knew about where they congregate, such as the English-speaking foreigner’s church.

The Nujiang Valley

In stark contrast to Kunming, the Nujiang valley is a heavily Christian-populated area that is made up of three minority nationalities—the Lisu, the Nu, and the Dulong. The Lisu especially are a group whose members have been converted to Protestantism for years. After first a round of Catholic missionaries, and later, Frasier’s Protestantism, the Lisu could really be called a Christian people even before Liberation.⁶⁴ Liberation did, however, have a far-reaching effect and impacted the people of the Nujiang greatly.⁶⁵ The churches were persecuted from 1949-59 the same in the Nujiang as anywhere else.⁶⁶ With the TSPM in 1950, originally, the policy was applied to the Lisu churches. “Owing to their firm convictions and strong communal sense, these principles advocated by the government made the churches more autonomous and powerful in their organizations.”⁶⁷ The Christians that the government were able to manipulate, but this simply served to further increase the church’s influence and eventually, “all the regions along the Yunnan-Burmese border

⁶⁴ Covell, Ralph. *The Liberating Gospel in China: The Christian Faith Among China's Minority Peoples* (Baker Book House, 1995), and Tian, Ju-Tien. *Peaks of Faith: Protestant Mission in Revolutionary China* (Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), among others.

⁶⁵ Tian, *Peaks of Faith*, 69.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

were asked to discontinue the attempt to implement the Three Self Movement so that, with no progressive pillars to rely on, they had to shift the stress to ideological and organizational work along the non-believers.”⁶⁸ The TSPM succeeded in most of China to unite the denominations under one central Chinese church. In the Nujiang valley, however, and other parts of Yunnan, due to the influence from Burma, once more, this was a failed effort.⁶⁹

During political meetings, aimed to promote patriotism, the Lisu Christians were able to persevere by simply staying silent or only relating the principles of Christianity to those of Chairman Mao.⁷⁰ Other measures, such as taking leaders into big cities, failed as well because of the Lisu’s persistence.⁷¹ In fact, from 1949 to 1952, there was actually a 62% increase in Lisu and Wu (another minority group) believers.⁷² There was certainly persecution during the Cultural Revolution,⁷³ and from 1959-79, there was essentially no Christianity in the valley—even house churches were quite rare. In the post-Mao era, there were major exceptions in the Nujiang valley. Churches opened up again in 1980; in 1982 house churches were declared illegal, yet in Yunnan, no hard or rigid rules were laid down and permission was given for them to exist if certain requirements were met: “it should not interfere with production and the number attending for work should be sufficient.”⁷⁴ These house-churches, however, did become registered and were supervised by some extent by the local authorities.⁷⁵ In the 1980s, the Chinese government sent in 80 preachers who were trained in the TSPM seminaries. These pastors met resistance because of the clashes between their systems and the systems that survived the Cultural Revolution, and, eventually, the local powers prevailed.⁷⁶

Today, the relationship between the government and the Nujiang churches is

⁶⁸ Ibid., 72.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 131.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 73.

⁷¹ Ibid., 75.

⁷² Ibid., 79.

⁷³ Interviews with various churchpeople in the Nujiang.

⁷⁴ Tian, *Peaks of Faith*, 127.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 127.

⁷⁶ Pierce, Travis. Paper presented at SIT Study Abroad, Spring 2004.

strikingly different than that in Kunming.⁷⁷ The Nujiang Valley is in the Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, an area made up of mainly Lisu, Nu, and Dulong minority nationalities, though Han, Bai, Naxi, and Tibetans are also sprinkled throughout the area. Over half of the Lisu converted to Christianity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and Protestantism flourishes and has become integrated in their culture. Many Nu are also Protestants in the area and a spattering of Tibetans have converted to Catholicism in the northern part of the valley. The population of the Nujiang is about 470,000 of whom 90,000 are Christians.⁷⁸ At the time of research, there were 726 active Protestant churches in the Prefecture.⁷⁹

Liuku, the capital of the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, is the economic and governmental capital of the area and is the most “Han”⁸⁰ in all the valley. Outside of the main part of town, a 30 minute walk away in the suburbs is Liuku’s only church. It is slightly difficult to find—it is neither visible from the road nor is there any indication that the church is a short walk through a residential area up a hill, though anyone around knows of its presence and is more than willing to point people in the right direction. The church itself is a small, one-room building with a cross on top. Inside, there are wooden pews, an altar, and a chalkboard with Lisu writing. In Liuku, the church is distinctly Lisu, and, although others are welcome, however, congregants use Lisu Bibles and Hymnals, and the services conducted in the Lisu language. During services, men and women are separated on the left and right sides of the church, respectively, and old American hymns are sung in four-part harmony in Lisu. Generally, a service will bring 80-120 local believers.

One of the deacons of the church was more than willing to talk and invited us in for tea.⁸¹ He sat down and, with a smile, answered our questions. Historically, he related that in 1944 and 1945, 20 American missionaries came to Fugong, a neighboring city halfway up the valley, and translated the Bible and hymnal into Lisu.

⁷⁷ In this study, Lisu and Nu churches in Liuku, Pi He, Fugong will be examined.

⁷⁸ Statistics from <http://yunnan.travel-to-china.net/yunnan/yunnanchristians.htm>.

⁷⁹ Pierce, Travis. Paper Presented Spring 2004.

⁸⁰ Han is the majority nationality group; what most would think of as “Chinese.”

⁸¹ At this point, I was traveling with Travis Pierce, to whom this paper owes a lot to for his invaluable help translating. The following information from the Liuku church comes from observation and interviews with him.

This written language did not exist traditionally and was actually created by missionaries and uses a variation of Roman letters to represent syllables. Today, everyone in the churches use the translated Bible and hymnal and printings have been as recent as 1997 and 1996, though the Bibles are harder to come by. In 1952, the government expelled foreigners, and the Nujiang missionaries were certainly no exception. As for what happened during the Cultural Revolution, the deacon would not say except that in 1978, Christians were once more allowed to sing hymns, something that had been forbidden previously.

Today, the church in Liuku is not a government-run church by any means, however, it is registered and the government knows about the church and has approved it. In the corner of the church building hangs a government certificate with the requisite chop seal allowing the building to be a place of worship. There are few restrictions on the church here, but restrictions nonetheless. One of the biggest issues is that foreigners are not allowed to interfere here, as in the rest of China. With a laugh, he assured us that our presence would not cause the least bit of problems, but that the government strongly believes “foreigners are different.” If a church member or the church as an institution was caught interacting with foreigners, everyone is “criticized⁸²” and accused of having anti-government sentiment. Again, I worried about our presence, but with a laugh, he assured us once more that we were more than welcome; one-on-one, small interactions are perfectly safe, and on the off chance that an official caught wind of it, he could always say that he forgot and make up an offhanded excuse and nothing would come of it. A church member for over 10 years, he could only remember one other time that a foreigner had come to visit the church.

As to fear, the Lisu Christians, again, according to the deacon, fear the government somewhat but only in case they “say something wrong.” When pressed for what could be perceived as wrong, the deacon said that it would be as if somebody was caught proselytizing, acting against the government, or committing crimes. The worst offence is doing mission work, or going to non-Lisu Christian areas

⁸² Literally pi ping: a term used in the Cultural Revolution and something quite more severe than criticism in English.

and evangelizing. If a Lisu is caught doing this, the deacon said that the government cares but that he “cannot say” what would happen. Whether this is because he does not know himself or he feels that it would endanger his safety is anyone’s guess, but it is important to note the gravity that he placed on this matter.

When asked whether or not the church was independent, he answered that it was. There are several key aspects of this church that make it different from churches in other parts of China. The biggest of these is the language barrier. The deacon informed us that there was no way that the church could truly be a part of a bigger organization because services did not take place in a language spoke by most Chinese, but instead, in a minority language spoke only by people in the area. However, he was quick to say that all churches in China are the same and that it is the language barrier and not the minority nationality status that blocked government interference or control.

In general, the church in Liuku seemed to be subject to the most control than any other place visited in the Nujiang. Nevertheless, every week, Lisu Christians come to worship legally, and there are really no problems with the government. The further up the valley and the smaller the town, the less control the government exerts over the church activity, and this is the closest town to the rest of Yunnan, as the Nujiang has one road that is often blocked by rain waterfalls or landslides. Despite this, the situation seemed to be very positive and, despite the poverty of the people in the area, the church was thriving.

Further up the valley, in between Liuku and Fugong is Pi He, a small Nu town that has a service station that most busses traveling up and down the valley stop for. With one guesthouse and a few restaurants, this town is not on the tourist map. However, right off the main road is a Lisu church quite visible, and, despite the fact that Pi He is a small town and Liuku is a city, the church was actually considerably larger than that in Liuku. From Pi He on up the valley, every town, village, and city, no matter how small, had a prominent Protestant church visible from the road. As the majority of the Christians in the Nujiang are Lisu, Pi He is different in its predominantly Nu population.

When asking around to see if someone will talk to us about the church, we were pointed in the direction of another church leader—not the pastor, but the equivalent, once more, of a deacon. It seemed as if most of what he said made sense with what was said in Liuku, but with a few variations. When it came to foreign involvement and influence, with a laugh, he assured us that it would cause no problems to attend services at their church or for him to answer any questions.

As for the relationship between the church and the government at the Pi He church, the first thing that the deacon said was that the government has very different relationships with different churches.⁸³ Christians and the CCP have different views on life and policy, but locally, the *guanxi* in this specific church and most of the churches in the Nujiang was very positive. In fact, many CCP members and town governmental officials are regular members of the church—as was evidenced by the regular attendance of the ranking police officer in the town who befriended us immediately and told us that he and his entire family are Christian.

Economically and in the content of sermons, the church is independent from others and from any larger organizations, and when asked about any persecution, the deacon laughed and said that there was no persecution—any more. During the Cultural Revolution, there was persecution and the church was shut down. It re-opened, as did so many others, in 1980 and has been going strong ever since.

As far as censorship goes, there seems to be a difference in policy and reality. There are certain topics that must not be preached on, although it is not common knowledge in Pi He which topics these are. The preacher knows, however, but does not have to censor himself because of the lack of supervision. With the good *guanxi*, the church is hardly ever “checked on” and when it is, it is obvious to everyone there because of the tight-knit community that the church is a part of. When officials come to listen in, the pastor simply preaches on safe subjects. The supervision rarely happens unless there is a “situation”—again, such as proselytizing or a church member breaking the law. Whether or not these Nu Christians⁸⁴ fear the government,

⁸³ Once more, the information comes from observation and speaking with the Pi He deacon.

⁸⁴ Although these are Nu people, many of the worship material including Bibles and hymnals and even parts of the

depended on whether or not the rules were followed. As long as they are, there was no fear whatsoever. Even when talking to us, he noted that we could use the place name in papers because everyone knows about the large Christian population in the Nujiang, just not actual people's names.

Again, this church in a small town enjoys a relative amount of freedom from censorship and persecution. Though technically bound by the same laws as the TSPM Churches in Kunming, the administration and supervision is much less lax because of good relationships with local government. This concept is evidenced by the fact that, instead of the age limit that the TSPM churches have—by law, an individual must be 18 years of age to practice a religion—there is no age limit in Nujiang churches.

Further up the valley is the center city—Fu Gong, a city that is 80% Christian and a mix of Nu and Lisu. There are several churches in the area, though none are overtly visible from the road. The situation there is most similar to that of Liuku as they are both larger than Pi He and under a bit more scrutiny.

At the largest Lisu church in Fu Gong, the government, once more, approved the meeting place and a stamped certificate adorns the walls. Services are in Lisu, and follow the same structure as those in Liuku—songs, prayer, and a sermon. Music is an important part of Lisu culture that has been embraced warmly by the converted. The *guanxi* at this church was, according to many church people I spoke with, very good and there were very few if any problems. Again, my presence as a foreigner was not considered taboo.

A pertinent side note is one of the songs that appears in the Lisu hymnal and is used in this church's worship service. The song is called "Free From the Law" and some of the lyrics include:

*“Free from the law, O happy condition,
Jesus has bled and there is remission,
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
Grace hath redeemed us once for all.*

service are conducted in Lisu because of the lack of a written Nu language. The service takes place mostly in Nu with some Lisu and Mandarin parts. As in most Lisu churches, this creates an atmosphere of relative safety and independence because of the language barrier.

*Now we are free, there's no condemnation,
Jesus provides a perfect salvation.
"Come unto Me," O hear His sweet call,
Come, and He saves us once for all."*⁸⁵

Although seemingly benign, it would appear that elsewhere this hymn would meet much resistance. The title and the song itself tells of the saving grace that came from Christ who the law condemned and who resisted the law. As some of the largest governmental criticisms come from saying that Christianity is anti-political and the fear that it will eventually cause uprisings or people who put other matters above the law of the CCP, it is remarkable that a hymn like this would escape censors and be able to be sung. As well as this song, there are others about Revelations, the Virgin birth, the resurrection, and the Second Coming of Christ—all topics that rumor has it are taboo in the TSPM church. The hymnal that contains all these hymns, though translated in the mid-20th century, have been re-printed legally, most recently in 1997. This alone shows that either the government does not care about these matters within the Lisu Christians, or that the language barrier makes it easy for text to slip through that may be censored elsewhere.

As to what government officials say about the Protestantism throughout the area, it seems that they are resigned to the fact. Officials at the Liuku Cultural Bureau have mixed opinions. Among the Lisu, Christianity has helped them financially and in terms of social responsibility. As part of the Lisu tradition, drinking plays heavily in their ceremonies. At large gatherings, Lisu drink "from one cup" where Tonxin wine is consumed from one long bamboo tube by two people simultaneously with the people's faces and mouths touching, and, in one breath, the entire cup is consumed. This is done both with guests and with friends as a sign of respect. The large consumption of alcohol was detrimental to the Lisu because it used precious grain and the impacts of intoxication led to a less productive society. With the coming of Protestantism, early missionaries saw the way that this was a major cause of poverty in the region, and associated abstinence with Christianity. As a result, the Liuku

⁸⁵ Text in the Public Domain but taken specifically from cyberhymnal.org.

Cultural Bureau representative admits that Christianity has done some true good in the area.

However, there is also a downside to this influence. The culture of drinking is closely linked to the song and dance culture of the Lisu. These traditions, especially antiphonal (a type of singing where the ensemble is divided into groups that alternate singing in unison and as separate ensembles) singing, are unique and a key element of the Lisu's history. As the missionaries found it impossible to promote abstinence from drinking, while there were times of singing and dancing, they forbade these traditions and instead, introduced Biblical hymns with four-part harmony. The Liuku Cultural Bureau finds it nearly impossible to get singers to demonstrate the singing of the past and must take hymns and add patriotic lyrics to have Lisu participation in festivals, and take promising young Lisu singers and dancers and train them—requiring them to drink alcohol in their training and therefore, give up the fanatical Protestantism. In this way, Christianity is seen by officials as homogenizing the culture and destroying traditional ways.⁸⁶

The Nujiang valley has three seminaries—one each in Liuku, Fu Gong, and Gongshan. The curriculum is simple and includes music and Bible classes. There are no textbooks besides the Bible, and as a result, there is little influence from the CCC or TSPM. However, a textbook is being translated currently from Mandarin into Lisu to be used in the future—doubtless an officially-approved textbook.⁸⁷ As of now, the implications of this are unclear, though it is possible that this could make a large impact.

In the Nujiang, it is an accepted part of life that the Lisu and Nu are heavily Christian-populated communities. Though the same laws apply as do all over China, the enforcement of these laws and regulations are much more relaxed and the people enjoy more freedom. At the same time, there are much less evangelistic and illegal activities going on, which allows for less supervision than in Kunming.

⁸⁶ Liuku Cultural Bureau Representative.

⁸⁷ Interview with a leader in Gongshan.

Conclusion

The situation between the Protestant church and the Chinese government is certainly a precarious one. All legal religious activities are under the jurisdiction of the government, through several umbrella organizations whose goals are multi-fold—to promote Christianity as well as socialist principles, and to create a truly independent Chinese church that is made up of patriotic Christians. Under these umbrella organizations, as long as Chinese Christians follow the rules and guidelines of these institutions, there is little persecution, especially in areas such as Yunnan province. However, if these rules are broken in ways such as interacting with foreigners, worshiping outside the official church, evangelizing, or acting outside of the realm of acceptable socialist behavior, persecution and legal ramifications are likely. The degree of freedom and active persecution varies by location, as does the amount of fear that believers have. Almost every organization and truly, every person involved has a different opinion and different breadth of knowledge about the church-state relations and the way that they truly play out, and a true, comprehensive picture is difficult, if not impossible to attain.

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Appendix I: Itinerary:

4/23/2004: Lijiang to Liuku via Xiaguan. The bus from Lijiang to Xiaguan left at 9:30 am and was 30 yuan, the second bus left Xiaguan at 2:30 and was 40 yuan. The only hassle was that the bus station in Xiaguan that I arrived at was not the same that had busses to Liuku, but luckily, there were bus transports from one to another so it was quite easy and painless to figure out.

4/24/2004: Stayed in Liuku; visited church and talked to a deacon.

4/25/2004: Services at Liuku church in the morning.

4/26/2004: Liuku to Pi He. Bus left the station every half hour to Fugong-- simply told the driver where to stop for us. Left Liuku at 10:00, 16 yuan.

4/27/2004: Failed talking to expert one village up the valley (flagged down a bus); spoke with deacon of the Pi He church.

4/28/2004: Pi He to Fu Gong. Flagged down public truck service for 10 yuan. That night, attended Fu Gong Lisu service and spoke with several church members.

4/29/2004: Fu Gong to Gongshan. Waited around the station until a bus came. 20 yuan.

4/30/2004: Gongshan church explorations.

5/1/2004: Gongshan Catholic church service.

5/2/2004: Gongshan Lisu Protestant church service

5/3/2004: Gongshan to Bingzhongluo. Private minibus- 10 yuan. Back to Gongshan that evening-- caught a ride with friends.

5/4/2004: Gongshan to Fu Gong-- 11:00 bus for 20 yuan; 5:30 sleeper bus to Kunming, 120 yuan.

5/5-5/23/2004: Kunming. Local transportation includes taxis and busses; various trips to churches and people's houses.

Appendix II: Subjective Account:

My interest in pursuing this topic actually stemmed from a trip that I took in the summer of 2003 to Cuba to study the Protestant church there. I was only there for two weeks, and was only able to scratch the surface of church-state relations as much was hidden, but came back with questions-namely, how does religion survive in a socialist/communist country today? How are the two reconciled? Though optimally, I would like to be able to study this in multiple religions, it was necessary to narrow down to one specific one, and, because of my knowledge about Protestantism and the trip to Cuba, I settled on that topic.

There were problems relating to the sensitivity at the beginning-before I even came to China, an SIT representative called and told me that it might not be a feasible topic and suggested I come up with a back-up. Many times while trying to pursue information, I ran into the roadblocks of sensitive information and considered changing topics. My third week in China, I had a missionary telling me that her phone was tapped and she had friends that were kicked out of the country for evangelizing, and I knew that some of the activities I engaged in by simply being present-such as house-church meetings-were, in fact, illegal. All in all, I had five or six people say at various parts of the process that it was a dangerous topic to pursue and that I could endanger the lives of others. However, when I offered to give it up, they all told me not to, but, instead, to take specific precautions. As a result, parts of my research have suffered, and many of the goals I set out to complete are, in fact, incomplete.

I started gathering information well before ISP started, in both interviewing people, attending legal and illegal church services, and finding resources both in Yunnan and online. My third week in China, I was lucky enough to meet a wonderful Chinese Christian who was more than willing to introduce me to her friends, both Chinese and foreign. She first introduced me to the woman who had led her to Christianity, who took me to the foreigners' church in Kunming. It was strange and very foreign feeling to me-seeing about 100 non-Chinese, speaking English, and seeing how secluded and secretive the people were. There is no indication that the

building that houses the foreigner's church is actually even a church, and it looks like an office building. My Chinese friend who introduced me to the American missionary was not allowed to attend and sat outside, reading her Bible. Another shock to me was the charismatic nature of the church service-never before had I heard people speaking in tongues or dancing around the room while singing with a praise band. It was more foreign-feeling even than the Three-Self Church in Mandarin that I later visited, and even the Lisu churches in the Nujiang.

Later, my friend introduced me to another missionary, whose house-church services I attended regularly except to visit others to observe, the entire time I was in Kunming and had the opportunity. She was willing to talk somewhat, but was also quite skeptical of me sometimes. It was another quite interesting experience-to sit in a room with English-speaking Chinese and a woman from the same state as I am from, praying and having Bible study. It also made quite an impact on me that what we were doing was highly illegal and that I could be expelled from the country and the Chinese jailed if we were caught. Again, the charismatic practices were new and foreign to me and it felt almost as if it were a much different religion than the one that I practice. Before I left for field trip, they anointed my head with oil, an upper-class middle-aged Chinese woman had a vision that included me, and they prayed over me in tongues. It is definitely an experience that I will not soon forget.

One thing that angered me was the fact that the American woman was so much more paranoid than the Chinese. I truly don't know if it is American or Chinese ignorance, but when I asked at one point, what would happen if my friend was caught, the American said that she could possibly be tortured or killed, and her family in the rural areas could be impacted. My friend started crying out of fear. It made me feel terrible for having asked, but also somewhat angry. Why lead people here if that is their fate and they have a legal way of practicing? Or if it is truly too censored, why tell the most extreme response and not what is much more likely to happen, which is a warning?

At the same time, the foreigners were quite unhelpful and skeptical about me. I attended their Sunday services alone one week, and, to my frustration, whenever I

introduced myself, the people were quite dismissive and actually unfriendly-and this was before they knew that I was studying! On a personal and academic level, I was angry with their lack of hospitality and the irony of that with the people who had given up their life to spread the word of a loving God.

In Kunming, I was also able to attend a few services at the main TSPM church on Jinbi Road. This church was much more like the type of church I was used to-crowded pews, hymns, a sermon, and prayer. There was a white-robed choir, and several leaders (both male and female) who led the service. I recognized the Lord's Prayer and a doxology as almost identical to those in churches in the United States. There, a man who spoke English introduced himself to me and offered his assistance, but this fell through because he was "too busy."

I had planned to meet with the leaders of the Jinbi Road church, as well as with members of the Religious Affairs Bureau in Kunming. However, the first fell through because the person who offered to come and translate and set up the meeting called, but the pastors were "too busy," a recurring theme that was quite frustrating, to say the least. The second fell through first because I felt uncomfortable meeting with them until the bulk of my research was over to keep putting people in jeopardy, but eventually, even one of the program directors thought that meeting with them could put the program itself under the microscope-why would students be studying this, of all things?

The most rewarding and fruitful time of my ISP was definitely the trip up the Nujiang valley. After the long bus ride from Lijiang to Liuku, it was amazing-I sat in the hotel room the next morning and realized that I had an entire month without responsibility except to myself and to the project and that I have never had that much freedom in my life. The thought of having a province of China to explore was overwhelming and really, quite a peculiar feeling. The first night of ISP, Travis Pierce, another SIT student who was also traveling up the Nujiang, and I had met with some friends of the program director who took us out for dinner and around town. The place itself was stunning-with people wearing two-tailed, brightly colored purses-both male and female, and suspension bridges hanging over the raging Nujiang River.

The first thing that Travis and I did-his project was also on Christianity but was quite different from mine-was to hop in a cab and get them to take us to the Liuku church. It was outside of town, and we had to ask many people for directions to it-including mistakenly walking into someone's house! Eventually, we found it and poked our heads into the small, dark windows, seeing the low wooden benches and fake flowers hanging down from the ceiling. There was nobody there, as it was a Saturday, and we were about to give up for the day, thinking we could do nothing until services the next day. We tried asking people what time the services were, but they spoke mainly Lisu, so it was difficult to communicate. Just as we were about to leave, a man came up with keys to the church, wondering if we wanted to see inside. We did-and he told us a few things about it. When Travis, who speaks much better Chinese than my six-weeks worth, asked if we could ask a few questions, he invited us in, served us tea, and got one of the church leaders to come talk to us who spoke better Mandarin.

It was a successful day, and, after walking back along the Lisu houses and crossing a suspension bridge to the main part of Liuku, we settled in and looked around the city and explored the markets. The next morning, we were off to the mountain, this time joined by Laura, another SIT student in the Nujiang valley. The church service is something I will remember the rest of my life.

We walked into the church, which was empty, except for a few brightly colored two-tailed bags that sat on pews, marking peoples' seats. Each bag held a Lisu Bible and hymnal-something that still fascinates me. The Lisu language is Romanized, and the hymnal is written in the non-staff notation that seems so common throughout China, and had Lisu text but English titles-among them songs like the Hallelujah Chorus. The service started, and the three of us were served tea, though nobody else was. Travis sat on the other side of the church because it is segregated by sex. After the choir-about 16 enthusiastic Lisu of all ages-sang the hymns in Lisu in four-part harmony, they invited us to sing. Laura and I sang Amazing Grace in two-part harmony, and I could tell that they appreciated it. After the sermon, again, they asked us to sing, but Laura didn't know any Christian songs. I tried to think of the oldest,

most traditional hymn I could think of and sang “Blessed Be the Tie That Binds.” To my utter astonishment, the last song that the congregation sang was the same song-in Lisu. Even though I couldn’t communicate with them, they understood my song and sang it back: “Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love/ The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.” Amazing. I had goose bumps and was nearly brought to tears. At the end of the service, we left with the preacher and everyone shook our hands as we left, saying, “Bless you” in Chinese. It was definitely a moving experience.

Several days later, Travis and I were on our way to Pi He, a Nu village up the valley. We took a bus up and most people were stunned that we stopped there because it wasn’t exactly a tourist destination. In any case, we found a guesthouse and immediately settled in. The people were incredible. Curious children offered us handfuls of mulberries, and our guesthouse owner invited us to dinner. Later, she invited her friends to come, play the pipa, and dance traditional Nu dances on the street. I tried and stumbled around and eventually got the old women to dance the Macarena and the Electric Slide-again, definitely a memory that will stay with me. The policemen told us we did not have to register, and one invited us to their one-room house behind their store to watch television and drink homemade liquor. Pi He was an incredible place.

We walked down the road and found the church without really having to look-it was bigger than the Liuku church and had Lisu writing on the walls, though the interior was similar. It was strange to me that the Nu people all used Lisu writing, Bibles, and hymnals. In any case, after yak butter tea in the house of some nearby men taking a break from building a stone wall topped with jagged pieces of glass, we headed back.

It was harder to find people in Pi He who would talk to us about religion. Laura, another SIT student, called from Liuku with a promising lead the Cultural Bureau there had given her. Unfortunately, the man was "too old" to help but gave us the name of an expert in Pi He who, again, was wonderful enough to answer questions. The rest of the time in the Nujiang was not as productive academically, but was quite

rewarding. In Gongshan, I was able to attend both a Lisu service and a Saturday night Tibetan Catholic service. It was incredible to hear people singing, back and forth with each other in Tibetan about the God that I also worship-- such an awesome, a truly awesome experience. In Bingzhongluo, there was not much information, but the Nu spring festival was also an interesting time, to say the least. The people were so giving in the Nujiang that it is somewhere that I would suggest people go to visit anytime.

Through it all, it was an amazing time-- academically, spiritually, and just in life experiences. Although the experience raises more questions than it gives answers, all in all, the ISP was invaluable and I would love to be able to study things more in-depth.

Appendix III: Possible Topics to Pursue for Future Independent Study Projects

The Nujiang Minority Nationalities: Nu and Lisu Identity

-- In the Nujiang valley, as the Nu and Lisu people live together fairly peacefully, it seems that many of their customs have been adopted by one another. It would be interesting to see what is seen as specifically Nu, specifically Lisu, and what has been adopted by each one; for example, festivals, clothing, religion, etc.

The Nu Spring Festival

-- The Nu Spring Festival incorporates Tibetan, Dulong, and Lisu performances. An interesting project might be to attend the festival and interview people, find out the customs behind it, and trace the way that the festival has changed in recent years.

The Liquors of Yunnan

--From snake liquor to homemade spirits made from tendons, to the Nujiang's corn liquor, the processes, histories, and traditions behind a few specific types of liquor would make a fun and fascinating project.

Transport in the Nujiang Valley

-- There is one main road that often gets blocked by landslides; many precarious wooden suspension bridges over the river, and cables that goods and people attach themselves to as a zip cord and go flying over the river-- all normal and acceptable means of transportation. From the history of the road to the different bridges today, the transportation is rather unique in this area.

Tibetan Catholicism in the Nujiang: The Tibetan Catholic Culture

-- The northern Nujiang has a large concentration of Tibetan Catholics. Their culture might be remarkably different from Tibetan Buddhists or non-Tibetan Catholics in the area. A study of the acculturation of the two traditions might be interesting to pursue, as well as their thoughts on identity.

The Political Atmosphere in a Yunnanese Village

-- From village elections to Mao Zedong, the global situation to village politics, compiling the opinions of people in a small town, possibly a minority village, this could be an interesting jumping point to see what people in remote areas think of what has been going on around them.

Exploring Minority Images

-- Many Han Chinese believe that the minorities in Yunnan love to dance and sing and wear traditional clothing. It could be interesting to talk to people-- either living in Kunming where the minority population is not as overt, or in a place such as Lijiang where the minority influence is huge-- to see what the realities are in the way the local Han people see minorities and the way the minority people see themselves and their identity.

Missionaries and Party Animals: The Kunming Expat Community

-- In Kunming, after staying a few weeks, two large communities of foreigners living in the city emerge: those who are Missionaries and seek to convert people, avoiding the party scene, and those who teach English, study, or work for NGOs and live a life full of partying. It would be interesting to study these two groups and see if and how they interact and get a sense of their views on China and the other group.

Life According to Xuan Ke, the Self-Proclaimed Most Important Man in China

-- Xuan Ke has lived an incredible life and has an incredible breadth of knowledge. Studying anything under his tutelage-- music, Christianity, communism, the Naxi (Nakhi) culture and history-- would be a very worthwhile experience.

Minority Music: Dizis and Hulusis

-- From Xishuangbanna to Zhongdian, many places sell hulusis and dizis as "minority" souvenirs and parts of their culture. The homogeneity of it is almost disturbing and the same CDs are for sale everywhere. It would be interesting to see what the origin of these instruments are and if they have been incorporated into the cultures of different Yunnanese minority nationalities.

The Implications of Christian Art

-- In every major city and tourist destination in Yunnan, Christian art, jewelry, and handicrafts are sold. From jade crosses and scrolls of Bible Verses in Kunming's Bird and Flower Market, hand-painted bottles with Christian motifs or wood carvings of a crucifix next to Dongba art in Lijiang, to crosses for sale on the streets of Dali and the Nujiang, Christian art seems to be flourishing. However, whether or not these people who sell these items are religious or are simply trying to cater to a different group is unknown. What are the implications of this? Is it a response to tourists, especially those from the West? Is it created by Christians for Chinese?