

Watchman Nee and the House Church Movement in China

Author: Dennis McCallum

Watchman Nee was only one of many players in the drama of the struggle for the heart of the Chinese people, but he was one of the most interesting. His Little Flock movement was more influential in planting house churches throughout China than many realize. His career also demonstrates some of the problems the church can inherit when patriotism is confused with Christianity.

Introduction

From the time China was opened to western visitors in 1973 we have heard a growing stream of reports increasing in their excitement, about house churches there. At first, visitors claimed that, against all odds, the house church movement was still intact after 25 years of persecution.¹ After several years, however, the reports became more sanguine. Estimates appeared claiming that there were 30 million authentic Christians meeting in house churches.² Later estimates went higher still to 50 million and beyond.³

We can appreciate these figures when we contrast them to the estimated total number of Christians before the revolution of 1949. Most authorities estimate that there were less than one million evangelicals, but certainly, no more than two million before the communist takeover.⁴

These reports are amazing because during the past 30 years the Chinese church has lived under acute persecution, probably as harsh as that of any church in the world. Estimates of those killed go into the millions.⁵ In addition, virtually the entire evangelical Chinese-Christian intelligentsia was destroyed or silenced. Therefore, by even the most conservative estimates, the Chinese church must be considered one of the most victorious in the world. During a thirty five year period when the church in the developed countries has not experienced any significant growth at all, and in many places has decreased in size, the Chinese church has grown at least twenty, and perhaps fifty-fold.

It seems today that most of the ferment of growth in China is occurring, not in the Government sanctioned "Three-Self Patriotic Movement" (TSPM) churches, but in less organized and illegal house churches.

Standing at the headwaters of much of this spiritual ferment is a shadowy figure to western eyes. He is an enigma, and a paradox, but unquestionably one of the great Christian workers of this century-- Watchman Nee.

Biographical Background

Watchman Nee was born Ni Shu-tsu or Henry Ni in Swatow, November 4, 1903. He was later renamed Ni Ching-Fu, and finally, after his commitment to Christian work, Ni To-sheng--that is, Watchman Nee.

His father, Ni Weng-hsiu or Nga Ung-siu of Foochow, born in 1877, was the fourth of nine boys. He served as officer in the Imperial Customs Service and died in Hong Kong in 1941.

Like so many well known servants of God, Watchman Nee had a family heritage of Christian Service. The first school in Foochow offering western-style education was opened in a suburb of the old city in 1853, and it was here that Watchman Nee's grandfather Nga U-cheng heard of Jesus Christ and was won to Him.

Four years later in 1857, the year in which the first Christian church in Foochow came into being, he was one of a group of four pupils baptized in the Min River. He progressed so well that the missionaries trained him as an evangelist, and soon he was proclaiming the gospel in this city of half a million souls. Eventually he was ordained a pastor, the first Chinese to be so honored in the three north Fukien missions. He had a gift for expounding the Scriptures for which, after his death in 1890, he was long to be remembered.

The strongest influence in Nee's early ideological development seems to have been his mother Lin Huo-ping.⁶ Her early experience included being sold as a slave to another couple in Foochow by her parents who could no longer afford to feed her. These in turn sold her to a wealthier merchant as an adopted daughter.

Huo-ping is portrayed by Kinnear as a strong-willed woman who became belatedly, but deeply committed to Christ and the Scriptures.⁷ She seems to have been mentally gifted, easily excelling the other students in the western style school in which she studied-- the Chinese Western Girls School in Shanghai. She had been deeply influenced by Huo King-en, who was at that time only the second woman in China to have graduated in medicine in the U.S. Huo-ping prevailed on her father to work towards sending her to the U.S. to study medicine as well. Another gifted woman who affected Huo-ping at this time was Dora Yu, who had also been selected to study abroad, but had felt called of God to return from Europe to preach in China instead.

Before Huo-ping could carry out her plans, her mother accepted a marriage contract with Nga Ung-siu (Nee's father, who was later renamed Ni Wheng-hsiu by the civil service). It was inconceivable at that time for her to violate an agreement entered into with full parental authority. With bitterness of heart, she submitted to the inevitable.

Her marriage, which seems to have turned out alright after all, issued in nine children. While raising them, Huo-ping became active in patriotic activities associated with Sun Yat-sen. She was a tireless political organizer and agitator, forming the Women's Patriotic Society and often speaking publicly. When Sun Yat-sen came to Foochow in 1913, she was given an official role in the reception. Eventually she was awarded the order of the Second Class for Patriotism by the Kuomintang government.⁸

When, in 1919, she committed her life to Christ, she became active in evangelistic preaching, and her political activities diminished.

Culture Clash: China, the West, and the Church

Thus in the early life of Huo-ping as well as her husband's family, the interplay and indeed the clash of Chinese and Western influences, with Christianity confusingly intertwined. In this respect the Nee's are typical of China as a whole at this time.

It is impossible to study the history of the church in China without appreciating the intimate and eventually dangerous interplay between Western culture and the Christian church in China.

Dr. Ng has pointed out that nationalism came late to China. However, there was a strident form of "culturism" that preceded nationalism as such. As Ng puts it,

"What lay beyond its (China's) borders was of little value or consequence, and the need to compete with outside forces simply did not exist."⁹

The Manchu Dynasty at this time had a strictly isolationist outlook. Fifty years earlier Emperor Chien Lung had said to George III of England, "As your envoy can see for himself, we possess all things. I set no value on objects strange and ingenious, and have no use for your country's wares."¹⁰

"The Opium Wars (1839-42) which shocked China out of her complacency, could be taken to mark the beginning of nationalism in China."¹¹ This national humiliation woke the Chinese up to the need to rise up to the challenge of the west.

After 1842, the British and the Dutch were eager to establish trade with China. At that time Hong Kong was ceded to the British and five coastal cities were opened to Western trade. But this concession had been wrung from the Chinese at the barrel of a gun.

Even after giving trading rights to the British, the Chinese forbade bartering, and would only allow the British to buy Chinese wares with silver. This was hardly what the British had in mind. It was later discovered that the Chinese could be persuaded to pay cash for Indian opium. For this reason the British forced the Manchu Dynasty to legalize the use of opium in the "unequal treaties" signed in 1862.¹²

It was during this period that Protestant missionaries began to arrive in China in great numbers. Hudson Taylor arrived in 1854 and founded the China inland mission in 1865. Therefore, in many Chinese minds there was an intimate connection between Christianity and the western gunboat diplomats who were humiliating the Chinese at the same time they fostered the opium trade.¹³

From 1851 to 1864 the country suffered terribly from the Tai-ping Rebellion led by an unsuccessful candidate for civil service examination. Hong Xiuquan had been influenced by Christian tracts, and because of a dream, felt that he was called to rid China of idolatry and corruption. He set out to overthrow the Manchu Dynasty and replace it with a heavenly kingdom named Tai-ping, meaning "great peace". As the revolution developed, mystical and superstitious elements were added, and in time the movement lost any Christian emphasis it may have had. Hong became obsessed with the idea that he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ. He established his capital in Men Ging and for 10 years his armies extended their control over large areas of the country.

When Shanghai was threatened however, the foreign powers organized an army and helped the corrupt imperial Manchu forces to destroy the Tai-pings. It is estimated that some 20 million people were killed during the more than 10 years of that war. The associations between the Taipings and Christianity were not helpful to the developing impression of Christianity in the minds of most Chinese.¹⁴

By this time the Manchu Dynasty was too weak to resist Western influence. The unequal Beijing Treaty of 1861 allowed missionaries to own land in China's interior and thus led to the building up of large institutions. The Roman Catholic church became a great land owner and later these same large institutions attracted strong criticism from Communist and other nationalist leaders.

More and more missionaries arrived to work in schools, colleges and hospitals, introducing western science and technology. Bohr says that the Chinese field had absorbed more effort, money, and human resources than any other mission field.¹⁵ Although all authorities agree that Christian missionaries opposed and deplored the opium trade which was being fostered by their own governments, it was

impossible for most Chinese to distinguish between white skinned, red-haired missionaries and white skinned, red-haired merchants who had come to exploit.

In 1900 the I Huo Chuan (or Righteous Harmony Fists), whom the foreigners knew as the 'Boxers', were murdering Chinese Christians and spreading anti-foreign outrage. The astute and unprincipled Empress Dowager, seeking to harness the dangerous movement to her own ends, had issued an order to destroy all aliens China-wide.¹⁶

Very much of the fury, both in the Boxer rebellion and in the revolution of Sun Yat-sen in 1911, which finally toppled the corrupt Manchu Dynasty was directed against foreign incursion and exploitation of Chinese society.¹⁷

In China, therefore, unlike Russia, the poor of the country looked not only to their own government, but also to foreign exploitation as the cause of their suffering. This outlook squared well with the tribalistic separatistic attitude of Chinese culture for the past two millennia. Ng summarizes this point when he says,

"Foreign encroachments on China were not only what set Chinese nationalism in motion, they were in fact its prime moving force. Close at the heels of the Opium Wars were the wars with England and France in 1858 and 1860. Then there was the Sino-Japanese War in 1895. In the treaties signed following China's defeat in each of these military encounters, important concessions were made to different foreign powers. . . . Thus one of the characteristics of Chinese nationalism from its very inception was its anti-foreign tendency. This anti-foreign sentiment was manifested again and again after each of the "incidents", in the forms of street demonstrations, boycotts of foreign goods, strikes, and at times attacks on foreign nationals."¹⁸

This anti-foreign tendency is important because of the close association between Christianity and foreign colonial powers in the Chinese mind. Ng reports on a distinct "anti-Christian" movement during the 1920's, also called the New Thought Movement. This movement was strong among the young intellectuals especially in the north of China. Their attack was not limited to Christianity, because Confucianism was also attacked,

. . . for its de-moralizing and de-humanizing effect on the people. The Confucian emphasis on meekness, obedience, respect for age, and the abhorrence of competition was blamed for producing a people that was weak, lacking in resistance, and in word, unfit for the demands of the modern world.¹⁹

However, Christianity was held doubly guilty by the growing mass of nationalistic thinkers, not just because its teachings were damaging, but because it was the "vanguard of Western imperialism", and the "tool which imperialists used in the exploitation of weak nations."²⁰

One of the resolutions adopted by the Young China Association in its fifth annual conference (August, 1924) read,

That we strongly oppose Christian education which destroys the national spirit of our people and carries on a cultural program in order to undermine Chinese civilization.

and again,

As the capitalist system must first be abolished before a new and just social order can be established, Christianity, being closely allied with it, must also be summarily dealt with.²¹

When the communists came to power, a great deal of their appeal came from hatred of foreign imperialists. Mao himself had developed an anti-foreign sentiment well before he became a Marxist.²² After he became a Marxist he continued to demonstrate an outlook that was a reinterpretation of Marx along nationalistic lines.²³

Although the whole sweep of Mao's policies and teachings regarding Chinese society is clearly beyond the scope of this paper, we will have to consider how Mao's nationalism has been (and is being) expressed toward the church.

Probably never before had the church's stand in relation to nationalism been any more critical in affecting her survival. Never has religious jingoism presented itself as any more of a threat and a rival to true spirituality.

Nee's Ministry

It will not be possible to recount the events of the thirty years of ministry allowed Nee. Instead, we will summarize the major trends and characteristics of his ministry and doctrine before considering the legacy of his ministry in China today.²⁴

Nee was said to be, ". . . a very active and mischievous youngster who always ruined furniture and dropped vases. When playing among either brothers and sisters of neighboring children, Nee always took a leading part and initiated all kinds of new tricks. From his very early days Nee displayed his gift of leadership."²⁵

Conversion and Growth

Nee's conversion came at the age of 16 in 1919. His Mother, Huo-ping, had reaffirmed her commitment to the Lord at a series of evangelistic meetings led by Dora Yu, the female evangelist who had impressed Huo-ping during her college days. When Huo-ping went to Watchman and confessed to unjustly beating him, Watchman decided to attend the meetings as well, and was powerfully converted. He offered his entire life to God for His service that day, and never changed his mind thereafter.²⁶

During the early 1920's, Nee was involved in itinerant evangelistic preaching, based out of Foochow. He would usually go out with a small ministry team to preach in a village that had not previously heard the gospel. Kinnear says that Nee was usually successful in reaching good numbers of people on these trips.²⁷ Some trips were undertaken with his mother (who also preached), including trips outside of China, to Indonesia. Nee's method of church planting was to begin with a small group of people meeting in a house. Later, a building would be sought if the group became large. From then on, they would hold both home meetings and meetings in the building. They would invariably train indigenous leadership for these groups.²⁸ Nee also received a bachelor's degree during this period from Trinity college in Foochow. During the later 1920's he lost at least two years of work because of his tuberculosis. It was during this period that he married Chaing Pin-Hwai, a family friend who had graduated in literature from the famous Yin King University. Her knowledge of literature would assist Nee in his writing and translation work. He remained with her until he was imprisoned.²⁹

During the 1930's, Nee traveled widely in China focusing more on church planting than he had previously. The base for his operations moved to Shanghai in 1932. During this period, he also made a trip to England, attending the Keswick convention, and eventually having a falling-out with his hosts, the

Exclusive Brethren of the "London Group", because he refused to separate himself from other Christians.³⁰

World War II

When The Japanese attacked China in 1936, freedom of movement gradually became more difficult. The economy also suffered. Nee seems to have been able to travel into Japanese occupied territory with some frequency, although he spent most of his time in nationalist areas. It was during this period (in 1942) that he went into business with his brother who was a research chemist. He became chairman of the board of China Biological and Chemical Laboratories, a pharmaceutical company. His declared reason for doing so was the fact that many of the leaders of the Little Flock were short of money, and this was a way that he could make tents and support "those with him" like Paul did.³¹

His fellow workers were against this move on his part, and eventually demanded that he cease preaching in the church in Shanghai. Therefore Nee was under church discipline, and not involved in preaching for several years in the mid 1940's.

In 1947, Nee was restored to leadership in the Little Flock church in Shanghai, and again was active in church-planting and training of Christian workers. During the last few years of ministry before the revolution, the Little Flock became involved in migration evangelism, based on the scattering of the church in Jerusalem in Acts 8. This tactic, involved moving an entire house church into an area that was unreached.³² The results of this work were apparently striking.³³

Although some of Nee's time was spent preaching to a large (5000-7000 attendance) church in Shanghai, the main result of his work was the founding of hundreds of house churches throughout China. These were lay-led groups that centered on Bible study, witnessing to the neighbors, and fellowship. Singing, prayer and communion were also practiced.

Communist Takeover and Persecution

Mao took power in 1949. During the next several years he consolidated and extended his control of the country. In January of 1956, Nee was brought up on charges by the local authorities in Shanghai, and they held a public "accusation meeting." In front of over 2500 people he was accused of espionage, licentiousness and stealing church funds. His doctrine was also denounced because his preaching on the "last days" tended to demoralize the workers. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Days after his release in 1972, Watchman Nee died in his home province. He was 69 years old.³⁴

It is interesting to compare Nee to John Wesley. Wesley's work won, and incorporated into his fellowships about 120,000 people over the course of his 52 year ministry. Because of his work, and its aftermath, he is known to most people in the western world. The books on Wesley in an average library usually take up whole shelves, analyzing every aspect of his life and teaching.

Watchman Nee, probably exceeded Wesley in terms of the actual size of his ministry, even though the duration of his ministry was only a little over one-half as long, and was carried out under circumstances

including an 11 year-long world war. As will be seen later, the Little Flock movement probably reached a size of 150,000-300,000 active participants by the time of the revolution. He also appears to have spawned a striking aftermath. Yet he is virtually unknown to westerners, and most libraries have nothing on his biography at all!³⁵

Nee's Person

Nee quickly manifested the main personal and spiritual characteristics that would determine the tone of his ministry regardless of subsequent shifts in doctrinal emphasis. These characteristics can be summarized as follows:

Zealousness

Nee was unusually zealous from the first day of his Christian life until the last. His zeal was so intense that it might well have been considered fanaticism in our culture. On the positive side, his zeal no doubt was an important element in his ability to lead and persuade others. On the negative side, he tended to lack patience, driving himself to the point of physical collapse on several occasions.³⁶ He lived in self-imposed poverty.

Idealism

Nee was not only idealistic, he was hyper-idealistic. The word "compromise" was not in his vocabulary. Cliff points out that he bitterly denounced the western missionary churches because,

". . . (he) found the Christians of the missionary societies' churches half-hearted and compromising, and charged that the denominations were weighted down with what was to him man-made traditions regarding baptism, worship and ordination, teaching what was quite foreign to what he read in the New Testament."

and again,

"Convinced of the rightness of his unstructured assembly, free from denominational traditions, he asserted, 'Those who really want to live entirely in accordance with the Lord's truth will know real freedom in our midst.'"³⁷

Nee considered the western form of church life (especially the existence of denominations) "an affront to God".³⁸ He berated western missionaries for shamelessly asking for money for themselves.³⁹ He deplored the clergy/laity distinction that was so strong in western Christianity.⁴⁰ "While the responsibility of expanding the work of the Church lay chiefly, if not solely on the shoulder of the pastor in the other denominational churches, Nee concentrated on training all the believers to do the work of God."⁴¹

Thus Nee manifests himself as a purist in terms of primitive biblical Christianity. Interestingly, Cliff points out that a number of western missionaries agreed with Nee's criticisms, and forsook the agencies that had sent them in order to work with Nee.⁴² This did not earn Nee any popularity with western churches.

Another aspect of the same purism was his refusal to become a part of the popular nationalism that was dominating China at the time. During the war with Japan, he refused to pray that China or Japan would win. "It must be possible," he said in 1940, "for British and German, Chinese and Japanese Christians to kneel and pray together. . . in China, Christians and Missionaries have too much intimacy with the state. . . we ask for neither a Chinese nor a Japanese victory, but for whatever is of advantage. . . to Thee. . ."43 This remarkable excerpt from a war-time sermon was not what the average Chinese wanted to hear!

In another area, Nee argued that Christian workers should not only refrain from asking others for money for their own ministry, but that they should also not give any indication of need whether verbally or otherwise.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, like so many purists, Nee's meticulous insistence on even the smallest detail sometimes resulted in a violation of a major ethical imperative. Nee's idealism was one of his greatest strengths, but without prioritization, it also became a weakness.⁴⁵

Studious

Nee is repeatedly characterized by those who knew him as a profound student of the Scriptures. He demonstrates knowledge of the Greek text in his writings, although it is not clear to me whether he was versed in Greek or depended on other authorities.⁴⁶

Kinnear comments on Nee's preaching, that no one ever saw him use any notes, for he remembered and could reproduce anything he read."⁴⁷ After visiting Shanghai Charles Barlow commented:

Some of these dear brethren are very sincere and thirsting for truth. Watchman Nee is undoubtedly the outstanding man among them. He is far beyond all the rest. He is only 28, but has had a good education and is possessed of marked ability. He is a hard worker and reads much. . .⁴⁸

Witness Lee said of Nee, "I have never met a man so well-versed in the Scriptures as he."⁴⁹ Noted Chinese evangelist John Sung said, "For exposition of the Scriptures, I am not equal to Watchman Nee."⁵⁰ Therefore, like so many great figures in the history of the church, Nee had powerful intellectual gifts that were well developed, as well as a love of God's Word.

When this evidence is considered, it may seem surprising that Nee is sometimes considered anti-intellectual by western readers. This conclusion stems from his mystical-fideistic bent which was suspicious of autonomous reason. His very early magazine carried the statement of purpose, "The fostering and cultivation of the spiritual life, with no attempt to debate rationally." This position seems to have softened in later life, with better education.⁵¹

Activistism

Although Nee's works have been rightly criticized for "superspirituality", (falsely dichotomizing Christian good works and spirituality) his own life does not seem to have been plagued by introspective paralysis. Some later readers of books attributed to Nee have complained that he calls for so much concern over whether an action is "soulish" or "spiritual" apart from whether it is ethical, that he becomes very demotivating, and deflating. A careful reader of Nee has no difficulty identifying faulty statements in this area. However, it is interesting to note that Nee's life and that of his immediate hearers was characterized by almost constant action.⁵²

Nee's Doctrine

Nee was clearly influenced by the Plymouth Brethren and the Keswick, or "victorious life," form of teaching. He also read and admired Hudson Taylor, George Mueller, and Madam Guyon. These influences are evident from the time of "The Spiritual Man" (1923) up until "The Normal Christian Life."⁵³ The appeal of his preaching, according to Kinnear's sources, was "his gift of making so plain the way to God that relies solely upon Christ's finished work. All too many Christians were striving after a salvation based on good works."⁵⁴

Late in his career, Nee is said to have developed some doctrinal aberrations that went beyond his usual purism. These areas had to do with a heavy emphasis on authority and submission, and an increasing tendency to dichotomize the material and the spiritual, or the ideal and the real. Some of the literature published during the past ten years claiming to originate from the last 5 years of Nee's ministry are definitely deserving of criticism at many points.⁵⁵ However, care must be exercised here because of an unusual feature in his writings. Only two books actually written by Nee's own hand are available in English. These are Concerning Our Missions, and The Spiritual Man. Ironically, Nee criticized both of these works.⁵⁶ His other works are translated from notes taken from his lectures, and are therefore open to interpretive additions by the translators.⁵⁷

Initially, Angus Kinnear translated notes to produce several titles, including his best known works, The Normal Christian Life, Love Not The World, Changed into His Likeness, and What Shall This Man Do?. Later, the Little Flock church under the leadership of Steven Kaung published a series of books that all have the distinctive plain colored covers of the "Christian Fellowship Publishers" in New York. These include Spiritual Authority, Spiritual Knowledge, and Gospel Dialogue, to name a few. It seems clear to this author and others⁵⁸ that there is a more radical interpretation of Nee evident in the later books.

At the same time, it can not be denied that Nee was extreme in some areas, including spiritual authority and ecclesiology.

The emphasis on delegated human authority was in perfect harmony with Confucian ethics. Confucius taught that parents were never wrong, and that even when they were, one should obey them.

To understand Nee's extreme doctrine of "locality", one must remember that he had had a run-in with the exclusive brethren in England, and may have formed a rather one-sided picture of denominationalism in the west. He certainly did not want to see the western denominational divisions transplanted into China, let alone the unloving divisiveness of the exclusive brethren, and he can hardly be faulted for that.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Nee propounded an unworkable and unbiblical doctrine of locality and of under-qualified obedience to delegated authority which has resulted in extremism in modern America, China, and elsewhere.⁵⁹

Nee's Legacy

It is hard to tell how large the Little Flock movement was in China at the time of the revolution. One reason for this is the fact that Nee felt it was fleshly to consider numbers. Therefore there was no systematic effort made by Little Flock themselves to count their people. There was no formal membership

in the group, since Nee believed membership in the body of Christ was determined by God, and there was no good reason for the church to try to draw up a list.

According to Cliff, in 1949 the Little Flock had over 70,000 members in 500 assemblies.⁶⁰ However, according to the Ecumenical Press Service the "Little Flock" had at this time 362 places of worship and 39,000 members in the one province of Chekiang. These figures were interpreted as indicating that members of the "Little Flock" made up 15-20 per cent of the whole Protestant church in China, and that they may have been the largest single denomination.⁶¹ In other words, this estimate would show anywhere from 150,000 to 300,000 members for the Little Flock. Cheung affirms that there were "thousands" of assemblies by 1956, and that the Little Flock was the largest Christian group in China.⁶²

Nobody has even hazarded a guess as to how many of the millions of Christians meeting in house churches today may be the outgrowth of Little Flock groups. Two things are clear: There are many house churches that are directly derived from Little Flock churches, and there are many other groups that owe a substantial debt to Little Flock doctrine and practice for their survival.

The following characteristics detailed by Adeney demonstrate that God has certainly used the unique features of Little Flock to prepare Chinese Christians to live under the terrible social conditions of modern China.

When the organized churches were destroyed in the Cultural Revolution, traditional forms of Christian ministry were also done away with. The household churches have cast off the trappings of the West and have developed their own forms of ministry. . . The dynamics of house churches, therefore, flow partly from their freedom from institutional and traditional bondage.

and further,

Much that we associate with the Church is not found in Chinese house churches today. They have had to exist without buildings, set times of worship or a paid ministry. During the Cultural Revolution and even up to the present, the place of meeting is often changed from one home to another. Even the time is changed to suit the schedules of the Christians as they work at different hours. Thus, the house churches are extremely flexible.⁶³

Cliff agrees that,

Many of the features of the 'post Denominational Church' in China Nee would warmly endorse, denominational labels have gone. . . as he advocated for many years. Most of the pastors are self-supporting and the laity plays a prominent role in church life-- features with which he would be in full agreement. The Church has been freed from the encumbrances of maintaining large premises and of running institutional work.⁶⁴

It is obvious to this author that God was at work during the last years of freedom in China to establish an underground network of house churches that were ideally suited to survive and grow even in the appalling circumstances of the last 35 years. The groups have a distinct Chinese flavor in their doctrinal outlook and are entirely used to carrying on Christian witness on an underground basis.⁶⁵

Finally, Cliff and Adeney report that in the past few years, some groups have split off from the regular Little Flock churches to follow the teachings of Witness Lee. These have been dubbed (no doubt by their enemies) the "screamers." The name derives from ecstatic prayers offered in unison in the meetings. The screamers have been the target of special persecution in the past five years.

According to Cliff,

Many China watchers feel that the Chinese government is making the fanatical behavior of 'the Screamers' an excuse for tightly controlling all unaffiliated groups.⁶⁶

Nee, the Church, and the State in China

Watchman Nee and Mao Tse-tung were contemporaries. Mao, who was ten years older than Nee, established the Chinese communist party in 1920-- the same year that Nee began his ministry. Kinnear suggests that Nee and Chou En-lai may have been in Shanghai at the same time, and that student unrest there, in which Chou participated, may have had appeal to Nee as well.⁶⁷ These two revolutions, beginning at the same time, eventually collided head-on. It certainly seemed clear that, in the race to win China, Mao and Chou won.

Those involved in the underground church movement in China, as well as the established missions, have engaged in painful soul-searching, wondering whether more could have been done. The Christians had a 400 year head-start on the Marxists, and at least 70 years of all-out missionizing before a communist party existed. Yet they were apparently swept away by a movement only 30 years old.⁶⁸ Lately however, some are wondering whether the Chinese Christians might not get the last word!

One issue that has become very important in this regard is the area of Christianity and patriotic nationalism. As mentioned earlier, nationalism in China was intimately connected with anti-foreign resentment from the beginning.⁶⁹ Today, the communist regime, working through the agency of the TSPM, uses the existing nationalistic consensus in its attempt to extend its control over the religious life of the country.

In most policy statements, the TSPM refers to patriotism and/or family in the same context as religion. In other words, the twin values of "blood and soil" are mixed in liberally with Christian vocabulary in an attempt to cater to the "hearth and home" feelings of the people albeit with a thin coating of religion spread over the top. The following statements are illustrative:

"Freedom of religious belief must operate within the scope permitted by law. Whether citizens are religious believers or not, their common political base is patriotism, upholding the leadership of the Party, and upholding socialism. This demands that we Christians uphold the constitution and the government's policies and decrees. This is also a necessary condition for the normalization of religious activities."⁷⁰

The doors of the two city Christian organizations are wide open, welcoming everyone--even those who have made mistakes--to change their attitudes and return to the big family which loves country and loves religion.⁷¹

"Fellow workers and fellow believers,. . . there are still, according to our knowledge, some rather abnormal religious activities in existence in Canton. We hope that the people involved will. . .uphold the policy of the Three-Self and be patriotic and law-abiding, going along the road of loving country and loving religion, and striving together for the unity of the church."

and,

"We hope that Lin Xiangao will. . . be at one with the believers in the entire city, standing on the platform of loving country and loving religion."⁷²

The reader who has learned to read between the lines will quickly recognize the presence of code words in these statements intended to stimulate a warm spot in the heart of the Chinese people, while keeping all loyalty to Christ strictly contingent upon loyalty to the state.⁷³

Should Nee have taken a stronger stand in favor of the state's programs? Kinnear says that,

It seems clear that Nee believed some degree of cooperation with the New Government on the lines of Romans Chapter 12 to be both possible and necessary. . . (they urged) believers not to emigrate but to stay in China for the Lord's sake. They should be prepared to give up material comforts and, as good Christians and good Chinese, to cooperate sincerely with the State when called upon for such public work as road-building and irrigation works. Only, they must not act in conflict with the Bible nor deny their Lord.⁷⁴

Of course, this would have to be his stand in public, but one wonders how naive Nee was in his private outlook. Did he realize that it was only a matter of time until the whole church would be forced completely underground? Was he secretly taking measures to get ready for the ferocious holocaust that was descending?

Kinnear thinks not.

It would be probable that Watchman, like so many others, was deceived by those Party officials he observed into thinking them reasonable men who could be dealt with wisely.⁷⁵

If Kinnear is right, then Nee was in the same boat as the World Council of Churches, who have accepted the legitimacy of the TSPM from the beginning (and still do), as have most of the Protestant mission based churches.⁷⁶ Indeed, few could have predicted the horrors of the cultural revolution.

Nee did seem to be insensitive to the social currents at work in the communist movement in China. In another passage, Kinnear points out that in 1948, the Little Flock churches began to attain an unexampled level of prosperity,

". . . just at a time when "capitalist" was to become a term of opprobrium and when, in a regime without any concept of Charities Commission, the mere possession of wealth was going to arouse immediate suspicion. The case for ideological reformation of the movement seems almost, by this ill-conceived development, to have been presented to the Communist Party ready-made on a tray."⁷⁷

Before we become too critical however, we should probably ask ourselves what we think the Little Flock should have done with this money. Further, while this development was unfortunate, it is doubtful that it changed the outcome significantly. To committed Marxists, a voice like Nee's had to be silenced.

It is the view of this author that Nee and the Little Flock were in a no-win situation, as regards their relationship to the political powers. Attempts by Christians to curry favor with the government in China have had pathetic results in the past. The Marxist government has cynically used any cooperation offered, and later repressed the appeasing church in the same way they have the resisting one.⁷⁸ There is also the further issue of whether cooperation with the present regime could be justified even if it did issue in good results on the pragmatic level.⁷⁹

In the view of this author, the best tactic that the Little Flock could have taken is the one they did take--namely, creating the structures needed to take the church underground. Any church that was easy to take over on the organizational level proved to be no match for the TSPM and the Religious Affairs Bureau, because of the latter's willingness to use violence. On the other hand, history is clear in detailing the difficulty of erasing a true grass- roots movement from any society.

This means, for instance, that the Little Flock would have had to do their charitable and educational works on the level of the local church, rather than through a national denominational agency. Ironically, the doctrine of "locality" (a hyper-autonomous view of the local congregation), one of Nee's most widely criticized doctrines, had the effect of conditioning these house churches to expect nothing from a national structure.

This doctrine would have conditioned them to raise up their own leadership from within the group as well. Nee taught that, just as foreign missionaries sought to make the Chinese church self propagating, self supporting, and self governing, he sought to make the church in each city and village that way.⁸⁰ Under present conditions such an arrangement is essential. Note that there is no suggestion that we should adopt a doctrine that is unbalanced, but that God has used the unique features of this group to move ahead even against terrifying opposition.

One group that understands the irrepressible nature of grass roots Christianity perfectly is the TSPM and the Religious Affairs Bureau of the People's Republic of China. Notice the importance they place on following a normal institutional pattern.

All churches which have obtained government approval. . . must uphold the "Three Self" principles, and . . . (a) fix the field of operation (local area for the preacher's ministry); (b) fix the place (for the church); (c) decide on the people (appoint the responsible people).

and again,

The ministerial activities and religious activities of each church should all be conducted inside the church building.⁸¹

Unfortunately, the TSPM's zeal for conventional wineskins has nothing at all to do with doctrine, but rather with the issue of control. So far however, they have shown themselves unable to control the Spirit of the Living God.

Today in China according to Bohr, ". . . increasingly critical of Marxist ideology, many Chinese youth claim to be searching for "spiritual fulfillment."⁸² If this is true, there is certainly a growing voice from house churches offering that fulfillment. This is a clear indication that the story of God's witness in China is far from over. Indeed, there is no reason to think that China will not continue to be one of the true spiritual hot-spots in the world--due in part to the work done by one of God's agents, Watchman Nee.

Endnotes

1. Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, "Christian Witness to the Chinese People", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, Ralph D. Winter, Editor, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981) p.670. This source is from the early 1970's. Similarly, by relying on the Government figures, WCE allows for 1,080,000 Chinese (Roman) Catholics, and 495,000 Protestants, with an additional 1,600,000 admitted "crypto Christians" (secret Christians). Furthermore, only 114,000 Catholics, and 70,000 protestants openly profess church affiliation. This is typical of sources derived from the mid to early 70's. At the end of the article, the comment is added, "By 1981, evidence was increasing of very rapid church growth in many areas of China, including among tribal peoples, with large numbers of young people everywhere." This comment seems to be tacked onto the end of the article. *World Christian*

Encyclopedia: A comparative study of churches and religions in the modern world AD 1900-2000, David B. Barrett Editor, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) pp.231-234.

2. "There may be as many as 30 million Christians in China today. . . ." Jim Falkenberg, "A Word on the Word", in *The Quiet Miracle*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Mar. 1985) p. 2. Compare G. Thompson Brown, *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983) p. 178. Also, "The respected Chinese Church Research Center in Hong Kong claims that house-church members. . . total to 30 million and more. Privately, some Chinese officials say the figure is closer to 20 million. "A Church in Crisis Weeps and Prays", *Time Magazine*, Vol. 124 No. 12 (Sept.17,1984) p. 74.

3. ". . . now even conservative estimates range between 30 and 50 million." C. Peter Wagner, *On The Crest of the Wave: Becoming a World Christian*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books A Division of GL Publications, 1983) p.30. Winter says, "In China the staggering truth is clearer every day: despite intense opposition. . . Christians have grown from one or two million to easily 50 million." Ralph D. Winter, "About You," (Pasadena, CA: U.S. Center for World Mission, 1983) p. 2. One has to suspect that this figure is exaggerated. However, the fact that scholars are making these statements certainly point to breath-taking growth.

4. Bohr says that there were 750,000 Protestant Chinese Christians. This figure is apparently based on formal church membership, which may overlook some converts involved in informal types of fellowship. He also says that there were over 3 million Catholics, although much of this is to be discounted because of the Catholic practice of counting as Catholics all those who have been baptized Catholic. Since no adult decision is implied, the number claimed by the Catholic church is often unrelated to the number actually attending mass with some regularity. Richard Bohr, "State Religion in China Today: Christianity's Future in a Marxist Setting," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (July 1983) p. 321,323 WCE allows 1,200,000 Protestants in the year 1900! These figures are impossible to reconcile. *World Christian Encyclopedia*, David B. Barrett Editor, p. 231. Winter allows 1-2 million true believers in 1949. See note #3 above. Wagner holds for "fewer than 1 million" authentic believers in 1949. C. Peter Wagner, *On The Crest of the Wave*, p. 30.

5. This figure is even more difficult to ascertain with certainty. We will probably never know how many Christians were killed in this modern holocaust. According to Judith Banister, Chief of the Chinese Branch of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, "More people died in China during the period of the Great Leap forward than in all the battles of First World War, or the holocaust of Europe's Jews, or the Soviet Collectivization and Stalin's terror." Ansley of The National Academy of Sciences and Princeton University says that "about 27 million" died. Both quoted in Carl Lawrence, *The Church in China: How It Survives and Prospers Under Communism*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985) pp. 31ff. It is not known how many of these were Christians, but it is clear that a significant percentage of them were.

6. Lin Huo-ping (Peace Lin) of Foochow, born in 1880, died in 1950. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p. x.

7. According to Cheung, she was, ". . . always harsh and severe," and administered many beatings to Nee for his frequent mischievous pranks. James Mo-Oi Cheung, *The Ecclesiology of the "Little Flock" of China Founded by Watchman Nee*, (Deerfield Ill: Unpublished Thesis for Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1970) p. 1,2.

8. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, pp. 33,36.
9. Lee Ming Ng, "Christianity and Nationalism in China," *East Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1 No. 1, (Spring, 1983) p. 71.
10. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p. 18.
11. Lee Ming Ng, "Christianity and Nationalism in China," *East Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (Spring, 1983): p. 72.
12. David H. Adeney, *China: The Church's Long March*, (Ventura, CA.: Regal Books, 1985) p. 38. Compare Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p.
13. P. Richard Bohr, "State Religion in China Today: Christianity's Future in a Marxist Setting," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (July 1983) pp. 323, 324.
14. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, pp.
15. P. Richard Bohr, "State Religion in China Today: Christianity's Future in a Marxist Setting," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (July 1983) p. 321.
16. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p. 26.
17. "While it failed to usher in a strong and unified country, the 1911 Revolution. . . created the objective conditions in which nationalism could thrive." Lee Ming Ng, "Christianity and Nationalism in China," *East Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (Spring, 1983): p. 72.
18. Lee Ming Ng, "Christianity and Nationalism in China," *East Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (Spring, 1983): p. 74.
19. Lee Ming Ng, "Christianity and Nationalism in China," *East Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (Spring, 1983): p.76. We will see that Nee possessed some of these same characteristics, and brought them into Christian theology.
20. "While suspicious of religion generally, the emperors were particularly wary of Christianity, which they viewed as potentially subversive because of its ties to the foreigners." P. Richard Bohr, "State Religion in China Today: Christianity's Future in a Marxist Setting," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (July 1983) p.322.
21. As Wang Ching Wei, one of the leading opponents of Christianity put it, ". . . it (Christianity) is the wedge of foreign influence driven into our country by foreign money and organization, controlled by foreign personnel and backed by foreign governments." Lee Ming Ng, "Christianity and Nationalism in China," *East Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (Spring, 1983): p. 80,81.
22. During the early 20's, ". . . he had no set theory, only an indignation against foreign exploitation, the heritage of his generation." Han Suyin (pseud.), *The Morning Deluge: Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Revolution, 1893-1954*, (Boston, Little, Brown, 1973) p. 33.
23. During the early 20's, ". . . he had no set theory, only an indignation against foreign exploitation, the heritage of his generation." Han Suyin,(pseud.) *The Morning Deluge*, p. 33.

24. It is interesting to note that there is very little biographical material available that deals directly with Nee. The definitive biography (and the only complete biography that I have found) is Angus Kinnear's excellent work, *Against the Tide*. A much shorter summary appears in Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984). Otherwise, there has been much more interest in Nee's doctrine than in his ministry.
25. James Mo-Oi Cheung, *The Ecclesiology of the "Little Flock"* p. 2.
26. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p.37-41
27. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, pp. 2-84. Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984): pp. 290-291. A stirring example of one of his experiences during this period can be found in his own words in *Watchman Nee, Sit Walk Stand*, (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1957) pp. 57-64.
28. Cheung comments on the contrast between the vigor and wealth of the Little Flock churches compared to the weakness and dependence of the other mission churches. "The secret in Nee's success lay in his emphasis in the deepening of the believers' spiritual life and the intensive training in the Word of God." James Mo-Oi Cheung, *The Ecclesiology of the "Little Flock"* p. 5.
29. James Mo-Oi Cheung, *The Ecclesiology of the "Little Flock"* p. 4.
30. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, pp. 85-160
31. II Thess. 3:8 Kinnear thinks that Nee was also stimulated by the business world, and that this played a part in his decision. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, pp. Cliff sees this period as a clear breach on Nee's part of his own teaching on church finance. However, he does not explain his reasoning, and I am more inclined to agree with Kinnear that it was in harmony with his teaching in *Concerning our Missions*. See Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984):p. 294
32. According to Chua Wee Hian, in one of the early episodes of migration evangelism, seventy families went into northwest China and thirty went into northeast China in 1930. He says that these families had planted over 40 local churches by 1944. Chua Wee Hian, "Evangelization of Whole Families," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, Ralph D. Winter, Editor
33. Cliff says that several strong communities were established in unreached areas of the northern provinces through this tactic. Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984) p. 294.
34. Kinnear provides a copy of his last letter, along with a translation. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, pp.160ff and 237-238.
35. Of the four libraries checked by this author, (including the microfilm card files of the entire Columbus, Ohio Municipal Library) only one contained any biographical works on Watchman Nee.

36. Nee apparently had tuberculosis during most of his ministry. Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984): p. 291.
37. Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984): p. 290.
38. Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, (Washington: International Students Press,1969) p. 72.
39. Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, pp.97-111 This work was originally published under the title "On the State of Our Missions" in Chinese. Nee wrote a preface to the book expressing his reluctance to issue an English translation. He said that he would prefer having a book published which "better represents my ministry". He added that he dreaded "those who agree and would use it as a manual for service" far more than "those who oppose and would use it as a chart for attack," p. 6. Ironically, just as he feared, this book has been used by Witness Lee to substantiate his doctrine of "Locality". Although the book contains much that is useful, the reader must remember that Nee was struggling with how to set up the church in China (which often had no existing churches in a given locality), not with how to reorganize American Christianity. See the critique of Nee's doctrine below.
40. Very early in Nee's career while still with a student group in Shanghai, he had shown his unwillingness to compromise on these issues, "Nee and Leland Wang clashed, the former strongly opposing the need for ordination or for Christian workers to receive fixed salaries. Nee was asked to discontinue fellowshiping with these Christians." Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984): p. 290.
41. James Mo-Oi Cheung, *The Ecclesiology of the "Little Flock"* p. 6.
42. Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984): p. 291.
43. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, pp. 151,152.
44. "It is a shameful thing to profess to trust in God and yet play pauper, disclosing one's needs and provoking others to pity." Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, p. 105.
45. The example above (note # 31) illustrates this well. Nee actually advocates lying for the sake of integrity! note p.104. In another incident, Nee refused to explain his own actions during the war (because he believed it was vainglorious to defend one's self when under attack), and as a result, was thrown out of the church! Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, pp. 165-166.
46. For example Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*, (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1957) p. 66 on "reckon" and numerous other vocabulary and textual notes in the same work.
47. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p. 153.

48. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p. 110. He also noted that he heard Nee say that he got through the New Testament once a month.
49. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p. 111.
50. Leslie T. Lyall, *Flame For God: John Sung and Revival in the Far East*, (London: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1954) p. 164.
51. Cited in James Mo-Oi Cheung, *The Ecclesiology of the "Little Flock"* p. 6. The statement was changed after 1931, and dropped the anti-rational portion. However, see his comment in 1948 that, "We cannot dissect divine facts and outline and systematize them. It is only the immature Christian who demands always to have intellectually satisfying conclusions." Watchman Nee, *What Shall This Man Do?* (Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: Christian Literature Crusade, 1967), p. 8.
52. "Spiritual inertia was never in fact a feature of the 'little Flock' work. If some groups. . . made Bible study their first exercise, most were very vigorous indeed in their evangelistic witness and outreach. They supported it too with imaginative follow-up of converts." Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p. 156.
53. Cliff's attempt to divide Nee's teaching career up into three stages is not successful in my mind. The influences that Cliff says were present later, such as Keswick, were also present earlier. One wonders whether Cliff is not confusing different periods in Nee's ministry with different translators and publishers of his sermons. These tend to coincidentally follow a rough chronological correspondence-- the Little Flock group in New York publishing the later sermons. Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984).
54. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p.81.
55. See a ringing denunciation by Ranald McCauley and Jerram Barrs in *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience*, (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978) pp. 44ff. with notes. What they call neo-platonism is actually neo-Chinese-ism. They also exaggerate and unfairly quote Nee, taking several of the statements cited out of context. They fail to adequately explain why, if an inner man- outer man dichotomy is so bad, does Paul use the same language. It is clear that Nee's objectionable language is not coming from Plato at all, but from Romans 7, and II Corinthians 4. It is also quite clear that in several cases Nee's Chinese word for "self-willed," or "stubborn," is translated "reason". While I cannot speak to the translation issue involved, a study of the context in *Release of the Spirit*, and *Normal Christian Worker*, will confirm that there is a translation difficulty, because the word "reason" is non-sensical in context.
56. He said that *Spiritual Man* was too dogmatic and systematized, and that *Concerning Our Missions* was liable to distortion. See note # 27 above and Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*, (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1957)p. .
57. Not a single audio tape or movie of Nee has surfaced.
58. Cliff and Kinnear both noticed this trend. Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984)pp.293,294 and Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, pp. 180,181.

59. Witness Lee has founded the 'Local Church' movement, which according to Cliff, is "exclusive and traveling a different doctrinal path to that of Nee." Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984), p. 295. However, Cheung fails to see this distinction. He even thinks that Witness Lee can be studied in order to discover Nee's views on ecclesiology. But this overlooks important differences, particularly in the area of ecclesiology. Lee took the mild tendency of Nee to allegorize Scripture to such radical extremes that little if anything of Nee can be learned from studying Lee. Even Cheung admits that Lee's teaching on the kingdom is heretical. James Mo-Oi Cheung, *The Ecclesiology of the "Little Flock"* p. 15.

Other off-shoots are not as radical. "A group of assemblies formed by his colleague Stephen Kaung on the east coast of the USA has been cooperative with all evangelical causes, retaining the best elements in Nee's teaching." Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984), p. 295. This author met Stephen Kaung in 1972. He was a stirring speaker, deeply committed to the cause of Jesus Christ, but also seemed somewhat legalistic and authoritarian. Again, these tendencies are not striking at all in a Confucian society.

In India, Bok Sing continues to lead a vigorous revival, but with some of the same shortcomings mentioned above.

60. Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984): p. 291. He does not explain how these figures were arrived at.

61. Ecumenical Press Service, Geneva, 22 November 1957).quoted in Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p. 254.

62. James Mo-Oi Cheung, *The Ecclesiology of the "Little Flock"* p. 5, 14.

63. David H. Adeney, *China: The Church's Long March*, (Ventura, CA.: Regal Books, 1985) pp. 146-148 These words would have pleased Nee.

64. Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984):p.296. Compare Liao, "Nee led an indigenous Brethren Church movement which seemed at first an avowed rival to the established mission-related churches, but Nee's strong emphasis on evangelical doctrines and returning to biblical Christianity proved to be beneficial to all Chinese Christians. *World Christianity: Eastern Asia* Vol. 2 David C. E. Liao editor, (Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, 1979) p. 42.

65. Cliff also points out that Nee's influence has been considerable outside of China, especially in the Catholic Charismatic Movement, and the so-called "shepherding movement" associated with Mumford and others. His books are also, according to Cliff, being studied regularly in mainline Churches in the USA, including Methodist, Lutheran, and Baptist churches. According to Enroth, Ericson, and Peters, the so-called "Jesus Movement", read Nee as on of their few extra-Biblical sources. Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984): pp. 294,295.

66. Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984): p. 295.

67. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p. There is no evidence that either Chou or Mao ever met or knew Nee.
68. Wendell Flory, "A History of the Brethren Involvement in China," *Brethren Life and Thought*, Vol. 11 No.4 (Autumn 1966): pp. 33-48. Flory's tone is wistful and melancholic. He openly wonders how much good the Brethren did in China.
69. See section # 2 above.
70. David H. Adeney, *China: The Church's Long March*, p. 228.
71. Angelo S. Lazzarotto, "The Chinese Communist party and Religion," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (July 1983) p.
72. "Material for Oral Propagation Concerning Endorsement of the Municipal People's Government Religious Affairs Bureau's Curb on Lin Xiangao's Illegal Activities", quoted in David H. Adeney, *China: The Church's Long March*, pp. 228-229 (emphasis mine). The goal of church unity, (understood not as the unity of the Spirit, but as organizational unity), is also cited as justification for doctrinal compromise and repression of freedoms in many of these statements.
73. Interestingly, this posture is not new with Mao, but is in harmony with Chinese tradition: "Since the beginning of imperial times, over 2,000 years ago, religion was to be subordinate to the state. . . The government remained watchful because, aside from Taoism, China's major religions had all been imported,. . . These include Buddhism, Islam and Judaism (which) became largely Sinicized. Christianity, unfortunately, remained the most foreign of China's religions." P. Richard Bohr, "State Religion in China Today: Christianity's Future in a Marxist Setting," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (July 1983) p. 322.
74. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p. 191.
75. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p. 188.
76. See Wendell Flory, "A History of the Brethren Involvement in China," *Brethren Life and Thought*, Vol. 11 No. 4 (Autumn 1966): p. 46. He felt that the Brethren churches were definitely correct to join the TSPM. Some of Nee's former co-workers have also joined, and a few are quite high up in the organization. See Norman H. Cliff, "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984): p. 296.
77. Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, p. 182-183.
78. This is the argument in *The Quiet Miracle*, Vol.63, No.2 (Mar. 1985). The TSPM church itself is basically the product of appeasement and compromise with the government.
79. David Rausch, *Legacy Of Hatred, Why Christians Should Not Forget The Holocaust*, (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1984), pp. 163-169 Rausch demonstrates that the church in Germany was later deeply embarrassed by its willingness to look away from the exploitation of an un- godly government.
80. Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, p. 70.

81. "Decisions Regarding the Safeguarding of Normal Religious Activity" Adopted on March 29, 1982 by Yunnan Province TSPM/China Christian Council, quoted in David H. Adeney, *China: The Church's Long March*, p. 230 (emphasis mine).

82. P. Richard Bohr, "State Religion in China Today: Christianity's Future in a Marxist Setting," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (July 1983) p. 338-339.

Bibliography

- Adeney, David H. *China: The Church's Long March*. Ventura, CA.: Regal Books, 1985.
- Barrett, David B. Editor. *World Christian Encyclopedia: A comparative study of churches and religions in the modern world AD 1900-2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Bohr, P. Richard. "State Religion in China Today: Christianity's Future in a Marxist Setting," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (July 1983).
- Bouc, Alain. *Mao Tse-tung: a guide to his thought*. New York, St. Martin's Press, 1977.
- Brown, G. Thompson. *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983.
- Cliff, Norman H. "Watchman Nee-- Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol.8 No. 2 (Oct. 1984)
- Falkenberg, Jim. "A Word on the Word", *The Quiet Miracle*, Vol.63, No.2 (Mar. 1985).
- Flory, Wendell. "A History of the Brethren Involvement in China," *Brethren Life and Thought*. Vol. 11 No. 4 (Autumn 1966).
- Kinnear, Angus I. *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*.
- Lawrence, Carl. *The Church in China: How It Survives and Prospers Under Communism*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985.
- Lazzarotto, Angelo S. "The Chinese Communist party and Religion," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (July 1983).
- Liao, David C. E. Editor. *World Christianity: Eastern Asia Vol.2* (Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, 1979).
- Lyll, Leslie T. *Flame For God: John Sung and Revival in the Far East*. London: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1954.
- McCauley, Ranald and Barrs, Jerram. *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience*, (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978).
- Nee, Watchman. *The Normal Christian Life*. Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1957.
- _____, Watchman. *The Normal Christian Church Life*. Washington: International Students Press, 1969.
- _____, Watchman. *Sit Walk Stand*. Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1957.
- Ng, Lee Ming. "Christianity and Nationalism in China," *East Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (Spring, 1983).
- Niklaus, Robert. "Global Report" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No.1 (Jan. 1984).
- Rausch, David. *Legacy Of Hatred, Why Christians Should Not Forget The Holocaust*. Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. 1984.
- Suyin, Han. (pseud.) *The Morning Deluge: Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Revolution, 1893-1954*. Boston, Little, Brown, 1973.
- Wagner, C. Peter. *On The Crest of the Wave: Becoming a World Christian*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books A Division of GL Publications, 1983.
- Winter, Ralph D. Editor. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981.

Watchman Nee, or Ni Tuoseng (Chinese: 倪柝声; pinyin: Nǐ Tuōshēng; November 4, 1903 – May 30, 1972), was a church leader and Christian teacher who worked in China during the 20th century. In 1922, he initiated church meetings in Fuzhou that may be considered the beginning of the local churches. During his thirty years of ministry, Nee published many books expounding the Bible. He established churches throughout China and held many conferences to train Bible students and church workers. Following the Communist Revolution, Nee was persecuted and imprisoned for his faith and spent the last twenty years of his life in Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement in Maoist China. Church History 74:1 (2005), 73. ^ Lee, Witness. Shortly after, Watchman Nee returned to Mainland China, and when advised by others not to return, he said: "If a mother discovered that her house was on fire, and she herself was outside the house doing the laundry, what would she do? Although she realized the danger, would she not rush into the house? Although I know that my return is fraught with dangers, I know that many brothers and sisters are still inside. How can I not return?" Because of men and women who are faithful to God even in persecution, China has a thriving underground church today, consisting of more than 31 million members. God bless our brothers and sisters in every nation, especially those who are suffering under persecution. Video Credit. He has studied the movements in the tradition of Chinese ministers Watchman Nee (1903–1972) and Witness Lee (1905–1997) for more than forty years. The suit largely ended Evangelical denunciations of the movement, and the Local Church has since quietly pursued its work in the West without further controversy. In China, since some of Nee's followers accepted, and some rejected, the teachings of Lee, one terminology that was used distinguished between the "old Local Church" (Laodifangjiaohui, 老地方教会), who accepted Nee but rejected Lee, and the "new Local Church" (Difangjiaohui, 地方教会), i.e., Lee's own organization. That designation also came to be more broadly used for a variety of groups in the house church movement, especially