

## **The Seventh-day Adventist Century of China: Prophecy, Publishing, and Print Culture**

Christie Chui-Shan CHOW  
Ph.D. Candidate, Religion and Society Program  
Princeton Theological Seminary, US ([chui-shan.chow@ptsem.edu](mailto:chui-shan.chow@ptsem.edu))

Joseph Tse-Hei LEE  
Professor of History, Pace University in New York, US ([jlee@pace.edu](mailto:jlee@pace.edu))

### **Abstract**

This conference paper examines the role of religious publishing and print culture in the Adventist missionary expansion into modern China. At the turn of the twentieth century, Adventist missionaries and their Chinese workers decided that the time was right to try to reach everyone in that large country through the medium of print. They founded the Signs of the Times Publishing House, initially based in Henan 河南 province and later relocated to Shanghai 上海, to produce Adventist literature and to propagate the doctrines of Sabbath-keeping, the second coming of Jesus Christ, biblical prophecies, and health reform. Drawing on archival materials and organizational reports, this study demonstrates that the Adventist print media was a large-scale operation as it published and disseminated its prophetic and healthcare literature across the country. The Adventists placed printed religious messages into the hands of a wide range of people and attracted them to Adventist congregations. Using modern printing technologies and nationwide church networks, they succeeded in handing out tens of thousands of Adventist tracts and periodicals in areas not yet visited by any Protestant missionaries.

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# The Seventh-day Adventist Century of China: Prophecy, Publishing, and Print Culture

Christie Chui-Shan Chow  
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There are many places in which the voice of the minister cannot be heard, places which can be reached only by our publications—the books, papers, and tracts filled with the Bible truths that the people need. Our literature is to be distributed everywhere....The [Adventist] press is a powerful means to move the minds and hearts of the people....The press is a powerful instrumentality which God has ordained to be combined with the energies of the living preacher to bring the truth before all nations, kindreds, tongues, and peoples.

Ellen Gould Harmon White, *Colporteur Ministry*<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

When Ellen G. H. White (1827–1915), the prophetess of the Seventh-day Adventists in America, institutionalized the literature ministry (i.e., the work of printing and distributing religious pamphlets and books) in the early twentieth century, she could hardly imagine that within a few decades Adventist missionaries would have established a vast print media to propagate doctrinal ideas and practices worldwide. This chapter examines the role of religious publishing and print culture in the Adventist movement in modern China. At the turn of the twentieth century, Adventist missionaries and their Chinese workers decided that the time was right to try to reach everyone in that large country through the medium of print. They founded the Signs of the Times Publishing House, initially based in Henan 河南 province and later relocated to Shanghai 上海, to produce Adventist literature and to propagate the doctrines of Sabbath-keeping, the second coming of Jesus Christ, biblical prophecies, and health reform. Drawing on archival materials and organizational reports, this study demonstrates that the Adventist print media was a large-scale operation as it published and disseminated its prophetic and healthcare literature across the country. The Adventists placed printed religious messages into the hands of a wide range of people and attracted them to Adventist congregations. Using modern printing technologies and nationwide church networks, they succeeded in handing out tens of thousands of Adventist tracts and periodicals in areas not yet visited by any Protestant missionaries.

The success of the Adventist print media is significant on at least two levels. First, Protestant missionary enterprises became increasingly diversified in China after the failure of the Boxer Uprising (1900–1901). In a new era of global Christian revival, numerous evangelistic groups were determined to establish a presence in such a huge country, and many independent missionaries were not affiliated with or funded by any established denominations.<sup>2</sup> The Seventh-day Adventists, however, represented a systematic attempt to gain access to the China mission field, and religious print media served as an indispensable vehicle for its evangelistic efforts. Second, the Adventist publishing enterprise produced remarkable institutional networks to circulate its literature, through which many Chinese readers were moved to accept the Adventist prophecy as a reliable description of their current situation. In studying the development of religious print and prophetic literature in early modern Europe, the historian Jonathan

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1 Ellen Gould Harmon White, *Colporteur Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1953), 4, 148.

2 R. G. Tiedemann, “The Origins and Organizational Development of the Pentecostal Missionary Enterprise in China,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 14, no. 1 (January 2011): 108-146.

Green argues that “[p]rophecy cannot fail; it can only fail to find the right readers.”<sup>3</sup> Upon receiving Christian prophetic literature, each generation of European readers contextualized the text in a broad temporal narrative that spanned from Creation to the Last Judgment. When they drew upon biblical prophecies to articulate a new vision of the future, they in turn reinterpreted the present according to the Scripture. This was also true for the spread of Seventh-day Adventism in China. One of the most frequently expressed fears in Adventist literature was that of sociopolitical disorder and an institutional void. The symbiotic relationship between end-time expectations and popular concerns about present turmoil attested to the primal hopes and fears of early-Republican Chinese society, a society that was trapped in a perpetual cycle of regime change, warlord conflicts, and natural disasters. The content of prophetic literature touched on all types of unpredictable crises that might happen to Chinese churches, ranging from Christians’ struggle and survival in numerous world-ending disasters to their ultimate victory. When Chinese Christians of different denominations read prophetic literature, many were converted to Seventh-day Adventism and became transmitters of the prophecies themselves, with a duty to proclaim the religious message both aloud and in writing. The circulation of Adventist literature reveals a chain of colporteurs-readers who were both broadcasters and recipients of the religious message. After 1949, the Chinese Communists co-opted the Adventist Church into the state-controlled Three-Self Patriotic Movement, yet most Adventists resisted this move and organized themselves into a diffuse network of house churches.<sup>4</sup> One important strategy of resistance was to mass-produce Adventist literature through the eras of Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976) and Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904–1997). This literature not only made Seventh-day Adventism accessible to the public by showing them the relationship between Adventist theology and the daily lives of Christians, but also laid the foundation of a religious revival in the Reform period of the late 1970s and 1980s.<sup>5</sup>

Beginning with a historical account of the Adventist missionary expansion into China, this study highlights the patterns of literature evangelization and church growth that set the Adventists apart from other Chinese denominations. It then focuses on the publication of *Fuyin xuanbao* 福音宣報 (*The Gospel Herald*) and *Shizhao yuebao* 時兆月報 (*Signs of the Times*), two widely circulated periodicals, and examines some of their contents that reflect Adventist concerns with Sabbath observance, the end-time, and health reform. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the continued use of print media to theologize the Adventists’ struggle in present-day China.

## 2. The Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Expansion into China

Seventh-day Adventism began as a Christian millenarian movement in nineteenth-century America. It adopted mainstream Protestant beliefs and the spiritual writings of its prophetess, Ellen G. H. White (1827–1915), as doctrinal authority. Adventists firmly believed in the second coming of Jesus Christ. They lived according to what they understood to be the correct understanding of biblical laws and dietary restrictions, especially the Ten Commandments, so that they would be separated from the mundane world and prepared for the end of days, whenever it should come. Adventists were thus expected to live in the world, but to be not *of* the world: they strove to distinguish themselves from mainstream society. For example, they observed the seventh-day Sabbath, also known as the biblical Sabbath, on Saturday (i.e., the original seventh day in the Judeo-Christian calendar) rather than on Sunday, and abstained from alcohol, stimulants, tobacco, and meat. These doctrines attracted many adherents from other Protestant

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3 Jonathan Green, *Printing and Prophecy: Prognostication and Media Change, 1450–1550* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 154.

4 Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, “Co-optation and Its Discontents: Seventh-day Adventism in 1950s China,” *Frontiers of History in China* 7, no. 4 (2012): 582-607.

5 Joseph Tse-Hei Lee and Christie Chui-Shan Chow, “Christian Revival from Within: Seventh-day Adventism in China,” in *Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Francis Khok Gee Lim (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2013), 45-58.

denominations across the United States.<sup>6</sup> Since Adventists were scattered across the country, they came together through the shared bond of church newspapers. With the improvements in printing technology and postal services, the early Adventist movement was built on the flow of written communications, and Adventist editors published church papers and pamphlets in order to spread their doctrine.<sup>7</sup> In 1887, Abram La Rue (1822–1903) traveled to the British colony of Hong Kong and became the first Adventist missionary to reach China. Using Hong Kong as a base, he visited Canton (Guangzhou 廣州) and Shanghai, distributing religious tracts to English sailors and bilingual Chinese. In 1891, he hired a Chinese to translate the pamphlet, *The Judgment*, and printed 2,500 copies. A year later, he had that colleague translate “The Sinner’s Need for Christ,” a chapter about repentance and confession from *Steps to Christ*, a popular book written by Ellen G. H. White. Circulating religious literature was thus part of the mission strategy from the outset of the Adventist missionary movement in China.

In 1902 the American Adventist mission board sent Jacob N. Anderson (1867–1958) and his wife to Hong Kong. The following year, Anderson established a mission station in Guangzhou, marking the beginning of the Adventist presence in South China. Another group of Adventist missionaries arrived in north China through the help of Eric Pilquist (18??–1920), a Swedish-American missionary who had come to China in 1891 with the Scandinavian Alliance Mission and then worked in Henan province for the British and Foreign Bible Society, a nondenominational publisher aimed at making the Bible available in all languages, and who had joined the Seventh-day Adventists in early 1903. Pilquist helped the medical missionaries Harry W. Miller (1879–1977), Arthur Selmon, Carrie Erickson, and Charlotte Simpson to establish a new station at Shangcai 上蔡 in Henan. These two groups of Adventists simultaneously carried out evangelistic work in North and South China. Before long, many other missionaries arrived and built schools and seminaries to train native evangelists. Miller and Selmon also established a small printing house to produce religious literature, and set up clinics to offer free medical services in Shangcai. A typical Adventist mission station had four functions: working for the conversion of souls, publishing religious materials, educating the minds of the local people, and healing their bodies through medical treatment. This became an established pattern of evangelistic outreach for Adventists.

As latecomers to China among Christian missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century, these Adventists benefited greatly from the work of earlier Protestant missions. They converted members of other denominations, whom they called “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and who kept the Christian Sabbath on Sunday instead of the biblical one of Saturday.<sup>8</sup> They introduced Adventist doctrines to local Protestant churches and mission stations, recruited their pastors and mission school teachers as new converts, and supported them in founding new Adventist congregations. Many Protestant missionaries criticized Seventh-day Adventists as “sheep-stealers,” who sought to convert members of other denominations. The Adventists distributed printed materials among existing churches, won people over through persuasion, and encouraged them to switch their membership to an Adventist congregation. American Presbyterian missionary C. Stanley Smith frowned upon this practice when he received reports from Taiyuan 太原, where the Adventists did “more proselyting than evangelizing” and took away many Presbyterian congregants.<sup>9</sup> The Chinese joined the Adventists for a variety of complex reasons. In 1914, American Baptist missionary Ellison Story Hildreth (1884–1962) reported that the Adventists had “succeeded in unsettling a good many of Baptists” in Dengtang 登塘 market outside Chaozhou 潮州, a prefectural city along the South China coast. As one woman confessed, “I am a member of this [Baptist]

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6 Gary Land, ed., *Adventism in America* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998).

7 Bladur Ed. Pfeiffer, *The European Seventh-day Adventist Mission in the Middle East, 1879–1939* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981), 13-25.

8 Jomo Smith, “Christianity with Chinese Characteristics: Adventist Adaptation to Changing Patterns of State Behavior” (MA thesis, University of Michigan, 2007), 9-10.

9 *The China Christian Year Book* (Shanghai: Christian Literature Society, 1936), 98. We thank Prof. R. G. Tiedemann for sharing with us this reference.

church and I am faithful to it; but if it is necessary to keep the sixth day to be saved, I am willing to keep that as well as the worship day; is there any objection to doing that?"<sup>10</sup> Keeping the seventh-day Sabbath gave this Chaozhou Baptist woman an assurance of salvation that she lacked, and this practice became an indication of her true conversion. The Adventists also recruited Hong Zijie 洪子杰 (1864–1936), an ordained elder in charge of a Baptist congregation in Chaozhou, forty kilometers north of the treaty port of Shantou 汕頭. Although Hong was said to be “deficient in some of his morals” and later left the ministry, he maintained good contacts with the local Baptist communities. Hong met Guo Ziyang 郭子穎, a Presbyterian educator from Xiamen 廈門 and a recent convert to Adventism. They debated doctrine, and Guo converted Hong.<sup>11</sup> Hong then became an enthusiastic Adventist preacher and worked “to win away Baptists and Presbyterians from their allegiance.”<sup>12</sup>

A crucial component of the Adventist mission strategy was to make their publications easily accessible to the public. Christian print media had had a prominent presence in China since the nineteenth century, and the Adventists had to compete with a whole range of Protestant publications in the media marketplace.<sup>13</sup> In 1903 Harry W. Miller and Arthur Selmon founded a small press to produce evangelistic tracts and *The Gospel Herald* (*Fuyin xuanbao* 福音宣報). Each issue of *The Gospel Herald* had sixteen pages and subscriptions were twenty-five cents per year. In 1909 the missionaries relocated the printing operation to Shanghai and renamed it the Chinese Seventh-day Adventist Press. Later in the same year, they renamed *The Gospel Herald* to *Signs of the Times* (*Shizhao yuebao* 時兆月報), changing to a format of twenty pages per issue, with the annual subscription fee being thirty-five cents. As the *Signs of the Times* became a popular periodical, the Adventists renamed the Chinese Seventh-day Adventist Press to the Signs of the Times Publishing House (*Shizhao baoguan* 時兆報館) in 1911, and moved the office to 721 Baoxing Lane, North Henan Road in Shanghai (河南北路寶興里 721 號), an area that was rapidly developing into the publishing center of China.<sup>14</sup> The strategic location of Shanghai as a springboard to the rest of China was a crucial factor. At that time, Shanghai was the capital of modern publishing in China and its native machine shop proprietors and technicians were well-familiar with Western printing machinery. With the use of new printing technology, newspapers, periodicals and books were widely circulated among an urban and suburban readership.<sup>15</sup> In the mid-1930s, 260 publishers were registered in Shanghai, and throughout the 1920s and 1930s, as many as 1,200 Chinese and dozens of foreign newspapers were printed in the city.<sup>16</sup>

Of all the Adventist publications, the *Signs of the Times* emerged as the most widely circulated Christian periodical in twentieth-century China. In 1916, for example, missionaries received 10,000 subscriptions for this magazine, and the total value of subscriptions and book sales was \$3671.97 (USD)

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10 Ellison Story Hildreth, “Letter from Shantou,” December 5, 1914. RG 8, Box 8, the Ellison S. Hildreth Papers, Yale Divinity School Library, China Records Project Miscellaneous Personal Papers Collections.

11 The Chinese Union Mission (comp.), *Zhonghua shenggong shi* 中華聖工史, vol. 2, (Hong Kong: The Chinese Union Mission of the Seventh-day Adventists, 2002), 513.

12 Ellison Hildreth, “Letter from Shantou,” December 5, 1914; Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, *The Bible and the Gun: Christianity in South China, 1860–1900* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

13 John T. P. Lai, *Negotiating Religious Gaps: The Enterprise of Translating Christian Tracts by Protestant Missionaries in Nineteenth-Century China* (Sankt Augustin, Germany: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2012).

14 “Shizhao baoguan 時兆報館,” in *Zhonghua shenggong shi*, 301-305.

15 Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876–1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).

16 Chieko Nakajima, “Health and Hygiene in Mass Mobilization: Hygiene Campaigns in Shanghai, 1920–1945,” *Twentieth-Century China* 34, no. 1 (November 2008): 55.

in 1916, compared with \$564.79 (USD) in 1914.<sup>17</sup> Two decades later, in 1937, over 70,000 copies of the *Signs of the Times* were being sold monthly, and the number was much higher for some of its special issues.<sup>18</sup> This success was credited to the effective use of the postal system to reach areas not yet visited by the missionaries, and to the dedication of the colporteurs: travelling salesmen of devotional literature, who promoted subscriptions among Christian and non-Christian readers.

It was through print media that many Chinese initially heard of Seventh-day Adventism, and some would go on to invite colporteurs to visit their homes, congregations, and townships. The Adventist Mission in Anhui 安徽 province had a particularly impressive track record of literature ministry. Twenty-six of its forty-one Chinese staff members were colporteurs and evangelists, and the rest were school teachers and office helpers. Whenever these colporteurs from Anhui proselytized, they “adopted the tent meeting method of preaching the truth in new places” and handed out religious tracts among the audiences.<sup>19</sup> Before the Adventist missionaries came to Qufu 曲阜, the home town of ancient sage Confucius in Shandong 山東 province, they first dispatched two colporteurs from the Anhui Mission to sell religious literature. In 1916 the colporteurs sold large numbers of books and collected 1,800 subscriptions for the *Signs of the Times* in Shandong alone. Many subscribers in Qufu and nearby areas were fascinated by Adventist teachings and decided to invite the missionaries to come and build churches.<sup>20</sup> A similar pattern of evangelization took place in Wenzhou 溫州 in southern Zhejiang 浙江 province, where the colporteurs attracted two groups of believers. The first group belonged to an old independent church. After they read the Adventist publications, they decided to observe the Saturday Sabbath and invited evangelists to teach them. The second group held regular Sabbath on Saturday and studied religious materials together at the home of an Adventist believer.<sup>21</sup>

When Adventist colporteurs first made their way to different corners of China, they were put into direct competition with colporteurs of other Protestant denominations. An innovative business model, however, ensured a steady increase of magazine subscriptions and book sales: the American Adventist missionaries simply transplanted the longstanding model of literature ministry from home. They first recruited Chinese young men from Adventist schools and seminaries as colporteurs through a scholarship program, and assigned them to coastal cities and inland areas to sell religious books and periodical subscriptions. The colporteurs usually traveled alone or in pairs. They carried sample materials with them or picked up publications that were sent in the post from Shanghai to local congregations and post offices. They began their work by visiting other denominational churches and mission schools in the area where they could easily find prospective periodical subscribers and book readers. They then deducted their salaries and travel expenses from the collected subscription down payments and profits from sales of books, and sent the remainder along with the mailing addresses of subscribers to the *Signs of the Times*

17 “Report of East China Mission for Biennial Period Ending December 31, 1916.” Box 3, folder 3, Frederick Griggs Papers (collection 15), Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

18 Xie Jingsheng 謝景升, *Zhongguo jiaohui duiyu xin Zhongguo jianshe de gongxian* 中國教會對於新中國建設的貢獻 (Beijing: Yanjing Christian Fellowship, 1940), 8. For a latest study of this Adventist magazine, see Wang Runze 王潤澤, “Shisu yu shenxing de chongtu yu xietiao: Minguo jidujiao baokan *Shizhao yuebao*” 世俗與神性的衝突與協調: 民國基督教報刊《時兆月報》, *Beida xinwen yu chuanbo pinglun* 北大新聞與傳播評論, no. 4, (2009).

19 “Report of East China Mission for Biennial Period Ending December 31, 1916.” The tent meeting method of evangelization refers to a gathering of Christian worshippers in a tent which was erected specifically for religious revival, preaching, and healing. The size of this meeting ranged from a small tent holding a dozen of people to a large tent able to accommodate several hundred worshippers.

20 “Report of East China Mission for Biennial Period Ending December 31, 1916.”

21 “Report of East China Mission for Biennial Period Ending December 31, 1916.”

Publishing House in Shanghai. The profits not only supported the colporteurs but also aided other types of ministry at the central office, thus resolving the vexed question of labor and capital—the colporteurs furnishing the labor, and the subscribers and book purchasers providing the capital. The story of Chen Jinghu 陳鏡湖 (Tan Kia-Ou) is illustrative of this phenomenon.<sup>22</sup> A Chaozhou dialect-speaking native from Raoping 饒平 district, Chen Jinghu came from a Baptist family. His third uncle, a zealous Adventist, introduced Jinghu to Seventh-day Adventism. After being baptized by Benjamin L. Anderson (1873–1962), Jinghu earned a scholarship to attend the Adventist school in Xiamen. During the semester break, Jinghu traveled to the interior of Guangdong 廣東 province to sell religious literature. When he left the Chaozhou dialect region, he carried handbills with Chinese characters: “Saving one-tenth of a cent per day enables you to read the *Signs of Times* for one year.”<sup>23</sup> Since Jinghu did not speak the Cantonese or Hakka dialects, the handbills bridged linguistic barriers and attracted many new customers. During the 1910s, Jinghu covered many districts in the Pearl River Delta and became a successful colporteur. He earned substantial profits to pay off his student debts to the Adventist Mission and to relatives who had sponsored his education. On one occasion, Jinghu met Chen Yixi 陳宜禧 (Chan Ngee-Hee, 1844–1929), the famous founder of the Sun Ning Railway Company 新寧鐵路, and published a long interview with this Cantonese entrepreneur. Chen was so pleased with Jinghu that he ordered ten subscriptions to the *Signs of Times* and bought a dozen copies of *Health and Longevity* (*Yannian yishou* 延年益壽), a popular healthcare treatise written by Harry W. Miller, to give to his relatives and business partners.<sup>24</sup> In the 1920s, Jinghu took several trips to French Indochina where he achieved record-breaking sales of Adventist literature.<sup>25</sup> He thus succeeded in using his interpersonal and entrepreneurial skills to distribute Adventist publications among Chinese merchants in the Pearl River Delta and Southeast Asia.

None of the Adventist missionary initiatives could have succeeded without the support of their Chinese colleagues. The early involvement of colporteurs as pioneering evangelists demonstrated their religious commitment for the service of the Adventist Mission. But they faced serious difficulties when rival warlords exercised control over much of the country during the period between the death of Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859–1916) and the Northern Expedition of 1927. Being outsiders, they did not speak the local dialects and were suspected by the warlords of being military spies. In 1915 one colporteur was imprisoned and mistreated by soldiers in Shandong province for two weeks, and another colporteur was a casualty of a battle.<sup>26</sup> In 1929 Chen Jinghu, the successful colporteur mentioned above, was kidnapped by bandits in the Hakka-speaking interior of Guangdong province and was only freed after spending several months as a hostage. More tragic were the deaths of two devoted colporteurs, Zeng Xiangfu 曾湘甫 and Bai Jinjian 白金鑾, who volunteered for a two-year evangelistic assignment to the Muslim-majority Xinjiang 新疆 province in February 1929. They both perished in the Kumul Uprising in February 1931, when Uyghurs rebelled against the authoritarian rule of the Xinjiang governor Jin Shuren 金樹仁 (1879–1941) and many Han Chinese were massacred. After receiving the news of their deaths, the missionaries in Shanghai were shocked to receive their final work report and a box of dried fruits, which had been dispatched by them only a few days before the massacre.<sup>27</sup>

Some colporteurs nevertheless managed to reach out to soldiers in military outposts and to appeal to them with the Adventist gospel. Edwin R. Thiele (1895–1986) mentioned a courageous colporteur who

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22 Tan Kia-Ou, *Bibles and Blessings in Old China: A Personal Testimony* (Singapore: Malaysian Signs Press, 1972), 14-20.

23 At that time, the annual rate of subscription was thirty-five cents. Tan, *Bibles and Blessings in Old China*, 14.

24 Tan, *Bibles and Blessings in Old China*, 16.

25 Tan, *Bibles and Blessings in Old China*, 21-35.

26 “Report of East China Mission for Biennial Period Ending December 31, 1916.”

27 *Zhonghua shenggong shi*, vol. 2, 689; Ezra L. Longway, *Dangerous Opportunity* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1974), 43-52.

had visited some war zones controlled by Communist rebels in the interior during the 1930s. On his way, the colporteur fell into a river and all his pamphlets and copies of *Signs of the Times* were soaked through. After he got out of the water, he encountered a Nationalist colonel and talked with him about Seventh-day Adventism. The colporteur professed his faith and asserted that the Gospel would transform people's hearts and minds and contribute to the spiritual salvation of China. The colonel was so impressed by the conversation that he immediately paid the colporteur the annual subscription fee for *Signs of the Times*. He also instructed other junior officers to follow suit and gave the colporteur a letter of introduction to other Nationalist colonels in nearby areas.<sup>28</sup> Thiele also recalls the story of another colporteur surnamed Fan 樊 from Hubei 湖北 province. A cloth peddler, Fan earned enough to support his family and never gave any thought about the meaning of life. He once passed through an Adventist congregation and "some mysterious, irresistible force" took hold of him. Afterward he attended the Sabbath regularly, became converted, and used his peer social networks to distribute religious tracts. He once visited the commander of a military outpost in his home district and sold three hundred copies of *Signs of the Times* among the soldiers.<sup>29</sup>

Colporteurs also played an indispensable role in assisting newly-arrived American missionaries in founding new stations in the periphery of China. For example, John Nevins Andrews (1891–1980) and his wife Dorothy (1903–1979) were assigned to Tatsienlu (Daqianlu; Tachienlu) 打箭爐, now called Kangding 康定, a town situated in the Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of western Sichuan 四川 province. Many Tibetan and Han Chinese residents there were not receptive to the spread of Christianity.<sup>30</sup> Andrews and the colporteurs first distributed religious tracts among members of the old China Inland Mission (CIM) church and invited them to observe the Sabbath on Saturday. When one Madam Duan left the CIM for the Adventists, she brought along her carpenter husband, her mother, and two boys. Dorothy Andrews saw in this "a victory over prejudice" against Seventh-day Adventism.<sup>31</sup> On another occasion, John Nevins Andrews went on an evangelistic trip with a colporteur to Guiyang 貴陽, where they preached outdoors and distributed pamphlets. They carried "a little sign talking about healing cases at 50 cash each," and treated many patients along the way. Upon arrival at Zunyi 遵義, they visited the local CIM station, which had been there for forty years but which had very few members. When the Adventists described themselves as being chosen by God to spread His message, the CIM asked why the Adventists did not go to places not yet visited by any other missions. The Adventists defended the decision to seek access to major cities so that they could hand out religious tracts to everyone.<sup>32</sup> One year later, the steward of a Tibetan prince walked into the Adventist mission compound with a tract in his hand. John Nevins Andrews welcomed the visitor and explained to him the doctrines of the second coming of Jesus Christ and the path toward salvation. The steward asked John for a Tibetan Bible so that he could study it himself and show it to his master.<sup>33</sup> The Adventist emphasis on Sabbath observance and spiritual discipline, and their belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ, appealed to people from all walks of life,

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28 Box 33, Folder 6, Edwin R. Thiele Papers.

29 Box 33, Folder 6, Edwin R. Thiele Papers.

30 Dorothy Andrews, Tatsienlu, Sichuan, September 30, 1919, Box 8, Andrews/Spicer Papers (Collection 250), Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI. John Nevins Andrews (1891-1980) was a missionary pioneer to Western China and Tibet from 1916 to 1931. His grandfather, also John Nevins Andrews (1829-1883), was the first official missionary sent by the American Adventist mission board to a foreign land, Switzerland, in 1874. Tatsienlu is the Chinese transliteration of the Tibetan name Dartsedo. Located in a valley of the Tibetan Plateau about 210 km southwest of Chengdu, Tatsienlu was a major commercial town where porters carried Chinese brick tea from Chengdu to trade for Tibetan wool.

31 John Nevins Andrews, Kweiyang, March 28, 1918, Box 8, Andrews/Spicer Papers.

32 John Nevins Andrews, Kweiyang, March 28, 1918, Box 8, Andrews/Spicer Papers.

33 Dorothy Andrews, Tatsienlu, Sichuan, May 6, 1919, Box 8, Andrews/Spicer Papers.

including Chinese soldiers, entrepreneurs, women, other denominational church members, and Tibetans. The Adventist gospel also spoke to the sense of collective fear and insecurity pervasive in China during warlord conflicts of the 1910s, the Anti-Japanese War (1937–1945), and the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949).

### 3. The Transmission of Seventh-day Adventism by the Printing Press

From its very beginning, Seventh-day Adventism was disseminated through printed materials, and this prompted its missionaries to prioritize the literature ministry over other activities. As Edwin R. Thiele reflected on the Adventist publishing enterprise on the occasion of its thirtieth anniversary on March 13, 1935, he wrote that the *Signs of the Times* began as a “humble little journal” known as *The Gospel Herald* in 1905:

A wonderful work it is that was started in that distant little hamlet in Honan [i.e., Shangcai, Henan province] these three decades ago, and that has grown into our present highly organized literature producing and distributing machine—an organization that has sent our books, tracts, and papers into every province of China, and in many cases into every *hsien* [county] of every province, and far off into distant Sinkiang, Mongolia, and Tibet....This vast stream of literature has poured from our presses and has gone over mountain and desert and sea. It has been carried by wheelbarrows and camel caravans, by leisurely junks and speeding airplanes, on the backs of coolies or in modern railroad trains. It has found its way into the stately homes of proud mandarins, Buddhist monasteries, and the humble abodes of shopkeepers, farmers, and fishermen.<sup>34</sup>

*The Gospel Herald* set out to compete with other Protestant periodicals and to promote Seventh-day Adventism among both Christian and non-Christian readers. A closer study of this publication reveals the importance of the materiality of Adventist printed texts and images. As shown in many extant issues from 1908, the unique style of its cover design and the conventions of typography and layout were all invested with theological meaning. The Chinese word *fu* 福 (fortune) was beautifully printed in the four corners of the cover. The periodical title was printed in bold with the words *fuyin* 福音 (gospel) on the right and *xuanbao* 宣報 (herald) on the left. The Chinese characters *xuanbao* (proclamation) might not be identical in meaning to the English word, *herald*, but the translators chose *xuanbao* to convey a similar sense. There are also two overlapping circles drawn between *fuyin* (gospel) and *xuanbao* (herald). At the center of the inner circle is the Bible (*shengjing* 聖經), and the outer circle has a biblical verse in classical Chinese, stating that the gospel of God would bring salvation to all (Romans 1:16). In the middle of the magazine cover is a balance scale. The top bar of the scale has a verse on each side. On the right is Romans 7:12 (“The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good”), and on the left is Romans 3:22 (“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, we fall short of His Glory”). Two dishes hang from each end of the scale, with the right side slightly lower. In correspondence to Romans 7:12, in the right dish are listed the Ten Commandments (*shijie* 十誡) of Exodus 20. In reference to the concept of sin in Romans 3:22, the left dish shows people of all nationalities, with Chinese standing with American, English, French, German, Russian, Turkish, and Native Indian peoples at the back and with Japanese, Korean, and Indian persons kneeling at the front. The vertical bar of the scale refers to Ecclesiastes 7:23, asserting that adherence to the Ten Commandments signifies the acceptance of Christian orthodoxy (*daduan* 大端). When the Adventists promoted the belief in God’s law (*jieming* 誡命), they proclaimed it to embody the correct doctrine of Christianity. The bottom stand mentions verses

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34 Box 33, folder 17, “Signs of the Times Publishing House Board of Directors and Constituency, Minutes of Meeting, March 13, 1935,” Edwin R. Thiele Papers.

from James 2:12 and Acts 10:34, suggesting that God looks after those who follow the Ten Commandments faithfully, and that God shows no favoritism among those sinners standing on the left dish.

The magazine's cover image blends together the textual and visual messages of Seventh-day Adventism. Similar to the *yin-yang* symbol, both sides of the scale have complementary biblical messages. The top metal bar, the vertical bar, the hanging dishes, and the bottom stand correspond to each other in a geometric pattern. On the right, the Gospel, God's sacred law (*shengjie* 聖誡), the Ten Commandments, and freedom for those abiding by the biblical teachings are impressed upon the readers as the proper steps toward salvation, whereas on the left, sin is shown to permeate the world, but God is portrayed as accepting people from both East and West. The primary focus on the observance of the Ten Commandments summarizes the core Adventist values.

The target audience of *The Gospel Herald* was those devoted members of other denominations who had adequate literacy skills and doctrinal knowledge to reflect on the biblical verses presented therein. With respect to its contents, many earlier issues of *The Gospel Herald* carry photos of the young Chinese emperor Puyi 溥儀 (1906–1967) and other members of the imperial family. The periodical often begins with a few reports on the latest developments in global politics, especially regarding the interactions between the Ottoman Empire and various European powers.<sup>35</sup> This would have appealed to the literati, who were curious about similar military struggles then occurring between China and the West. After this, the magazine shifts the focus of attention to two distinctive Adventist doctrines, namely the belief in the imminent, premillennial, and visible return of Jesus Christ, and the observance of the Sabbath on Saturday. Many Protestant denominations share the belief in the second coming of Jesus, but the specific Adventist apocalyptic belief was pre-millenarianism: the idea that Jesus's return would be followed by a thousand-year period when his followers, mostly Adventists, would live with him in heaven. This contrasts with the views of many social gospel missionaries, who were post-millennialist and who believed that the second coming of Jesus could not take place until the world corrected its socioeconomic evils through human effort.

Fundamental to these doctrines was the need for believers to uphold God's law, which the Adventists associated with observing the Sabbath on Saturday and following the Ten Commandments strictly. This interpretative approach separated salvation by works from salvation by grace, and linked the former to Seventh-day Adventism. For anyone to uphold the heavenly commandments, one should have first acquired sufficient doctrinal knowledge and memorized relevant biblical verses. By placing the Bible at the top center of the magazine cover over a balance scale, the Adventists demonstrated a strong sense of rationalism and legalism. The pursuit of correct doctrine and the adherence to God's law gave rise to an intellectualized faith that likely seemed at odds with the quest for spiritual revival widespread in China at the time. Influenced by the Second Great Awakening of the early nineteenth century, prominent revivalists like Dora Yu 余慈度 (1873–1931), Watchman Nee 倪柝聲 (1903–1972), John Sung 宋尚節 (1903–1972), and Wang Mingdao 王明道 (1900–1991) paid less attention to the strict adherence to the Ten Commandments than did the Adventists. Emphasizing an experiential faith through a definitive conversion experience, these revivalists drew upon the ideas of *chengyi* 稱義 (justification by faith) and *chengsheng* 成聖 (sanctification) to depict the reception of the Holy Ghost as a transformative force in one's life, and urged people to confess their sins, reconcile with their enemies, and demonstrate heightened religious fervor.<sup>36</sup> In any case, the intellectualized sentiment remained strong among Chinese Adventists. The Adventists were so committed to Bible study that they defined what it meant to be an

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35 Giray Fidan, "Chinese Intellectual Kang You Wei and Ottoman Modernization," *European Journal of Social Sciences* 28, no. 2 (2012): 196-199.

36 Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 132-140.

Adventist in terms of understanding the Bible.<sup>37</sup> In the late twentieth century some independent churches in Shiping 石坪 in southern Zhejiang province referred to the Adventists as the Christian faction obsessed with biblical knowledge (*zhishi pai* 知識派).<sup>38</sup>

#### 4. Recasting the Idea of Time through the Adventist Calendar and Sabbath Observance

The Adventist publishing enterprise benefited considerably from the diligence of its Chinese staff. The appointment of qualified Chinese editorial staff was the most obvious form of sinicization in the church, especially among theologians, writers, and artists. During the lunar new year and other festivals, the editorial team often decorated the magazine covers with traditional paintings. When indigenization became a major issue in Catholic and Protestant circles during the 1920s, the editors redoubled their efforts to integrate the Adventist doctrines and practices into Chinese society. What follows is an overview of these endeavors.

One possible measure of worshippers' religiosity is their willingness to observe sacred time. As the religious scholar You Bin 游斌 points out, the Christianization of sacred time was central to the conversion process in China.<sup>39</sup> The idea of Sabbath-keeping was significant for Chinese Adventists on two levels. On an individual and daily level, Sabbath observance affirmed a regular practice of communicating with God at specific times, symbolizing "daily devotions and self-surrender to Christ."<sup>40</sup> On a communal and weekly level, the Adventists celebrated God's creation by gathering together on the seventh day of the week, which lasted from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. Through a "literal and historical" reading of Genesis 1 and 2, the Adventists interpreted the seventh day as God's final "conclusion to Creation week," a day set aside by God to bless and sanctify humans with His grace.<sup>41</sup> This theological understanding of the Saturday Sabbath affirmed a sacred relationship between the Adventists and God. In theory, the Adventists defined Sabbath-keeping as an irreversible mark of religious transformation. In reality, they encountered difficulty in maintaining this practice because the Adventist understanding of "rest" was often in conflict with that of society at large. In countries with a substantial Adventist presence, the Church usually provided institutional support by petitioning on behalf of its members for exemption from taking part in any public activities held on Saturday. But the Adventists in China had no one to speak on their behalf, and they often faced a difficult situation when public activities were scheduled on Sabbath.

The Chinese lunar calendar was based on agrarian rhythms and followed the cycle of seasonal farming activities, market days, and temple festivals. Since the lunar calendar had no weeks and people in rural areas had never heard of weekly divisions, it was a daunting task to talk of keeping the Sabbath. As with the Seventh-day Baptists who arrived in Shanghai during the late 1840s, Adventists found it difficult to comprehend the meaning of a seven-day weekly cycle and the Chinese terminology then used to describe the various days of the week. In the weekly cycle adopted by both Catholic and Protestant missionaries, Saturday or the Adventist Sabbath was made the sixth day (*libai liu* 禮拜六) to mark the end of the week, and Sunday was widely known as the day of worship (*libai ri* 禮拜日). Many Protestant denominations used *libai ri* and *anxi ri* (Sabbath 安息日) interchangeably and seldom distinguished the

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37 Eva Keller, *The Road to Clarify: Seventh-day Adventism in Madagascar* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 117.

38 Communication between Christie Chui-Shan Chow and an Adventist church leader in Shiping, Zhejiang province, on November 16, 2012.

39 You Bin, "Literacy, Canon and Social Reality: Socio-cultural Dimension of the Reception of the Bible among Ethnic Groups in Southwest China," *Ching Feng*, New Series 6, no. 2 (2005): 179-192.

40 Kenneth A. Strand, "The Sabbath," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology: Commentary Reference Series*, ed. Raoul Dederen, vol. 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 528.

41 William H. Shea, "Creation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 450.

two days. The challenge for the Adventists was to instruct the Chinese that *anxi ri* and *libai ri* were not synonymous, and that people ought to uphold the fourth commandment of keeping the Sabbath on Saturday (*shou anxi ri* 守安息日).<sup>42</sup> The only way to effectively do so was to distribute the Adventist calendar (*yuefen pai* 月份牌) in which they highlighted the Saturday Sabbath in red and encouraged people to worship on that day either at home or at nearby congregations. Whenever the colporteurs circulated religious pamphlets, they included a sheet printed with the lunar and solar dates for the Sabbath throughout the year. The Adventist calendar reminded Christians to set aside Saturday, not Sunday, for family or church worship, and to refrain from doing any work on that day. Ever since the Adventist missionaries propagated the belief that God's law required the observance of the Sabbath on Saturday, Chinese churches had taken this practice as a unique marker of their religious experience. Keeping the Sabbath collectively distinguished the Adventists from Catholics and other Protestants, even though this religious commitment often ran against the conventional culture of utilizing time for one's economic gains.<sup>43</sup> Since knowing the exact dates of Saturday for Sabbath observance was crucial to the identity of Adventists, the missionaries devoted more resources to producing their own religious calendar as opposed to the Chinese lunar and Western solar calendars then in print.

### 5. Reframing the Reality of Social Chaos through Eschatology

The process of religious translation is often controversial because it tends to add creative meaning to newly introduced concepts in the Chinese context. Lydia Liu characterizes translation as a trans-lingual practice in which terms and ideas from outside are reconstituted in the new host language.<sup>44</sup> This innovative process of religious transmission can be seen in the spread of Adventist eschatology in China. The Adventist missionaries believed strongly in the imminence of the end time and in the influence of supernatural forces on world events. Their eschatology (*moshi guan* 末世觀) was based on the Books of Daniel and Revelation. Convinced that the demise of the Ottoman Empire would herald the Second Coming of Jesus, Adventists worldwide monitored closely the Eastern Question, a series of political and diplomatic crises which arose from the contest for control among European powers over former Ottoman territories and which preceded the outbreak of the First World War (1914–1918). When the world entered a new technological era of the arms race among European states leading up to the war in 1914, the Adventists framed these developments in modern warfare and global politics in eschatological terms. While they never attempted to predict the precise date of the Second Advent and the end of the world, they continually broadened their eschatological framework to justify further delays in Jesus's return.<sup>45</sup>

Authors soon found that the most effective way to popularize Adventist eschatology was to reconstruct graphically the theological debate between Daniel and God. When the editors depicted the biblical story of Daniel receiving a revelation from God, they stressed the performative and dialogic modes of religious transmission by showing Daniel's vulnerability and his eventual submission to the divine will. The editors added many theatrical elements to dramatize these prophetic conversations, showing how Daniel overcame his emotional struggle and relied on God for help. Such representations were designed to make readers witness the intensity of conversations between Daniel and God, and to

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42 John Oss, "Chapter 19. Early Work of the Seventh-day Baptists in China," *The Week and the Sabbath in China*, ms., ed. John B. Youngberg and Samuel H. Hsiao, March 2001. Box 8, folder 1, John Oss Papers (Collection 67), Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

43 Christie Chui-Shan Chow, "Guanxi and Gospel: Conversion to Seventh-day Adventism in Contemporary China," *Social Sciences and Missions* 26, no. 2–3 (2013): 167–198.

44 Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity in China, 1900–1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 26.

45 Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 52–68.

reaffirm the necessity of obeying the divine will. The end purpose of Daniel's story was to instruct readers to uphold the scriptural teachings.

Pedagogically the Adventist print used images, illustrations, and photos as graphic supplements to the texts for readers. This draws our attention to the combined use of word and image, argument and icon as alternative modes of religious transmission. Print reinforced the traditional function of word and image: the less educated reread the text to better understand the images, and the educated might be prompted to modify their views based on inspiration from images.<sup>46</sup> The images were more than reminders of textual prophecies; the images constituted the core of the prophecies themselves, and indeed the text was dispensable. The prophetic images enabled readers to participate in allegorical interpretation. On the surface, print promoted and instilled fear by focusing on descriptions of immanent disasters. It challenged readers to maintain a godly Christian orderliness through keeping the biblical Sabbath and obeying the Ten Commandments.

Far from promoting a sense of pessimism, Adventist publications expressed the hopes, anxieties, and fears of a society deeply in crisis. Many articles portrayed quite graphically all that might happen to Christians, from their struggle in the coming end-time disasters to their ultimate victory. The writings documented much good that one ought to do, and condemned the evil that one ought to despise. The religious press also discussed the breakdown of law and order in detail, and this accurately captured Chinese worries about disorder. The early Republican society that the Adventist print reflected was one in disintegration. The chaos and disorder that had resulted from constant regime changes made people feel anachronistic and insecure. The collapse of the dynastic order and the founding of the new Republic did not bring peace and stability as many revolutionaries had promised, and the dream of building a strong republican state was tarnished by the politics of warlordism. The country degenerated into a period of military rivalries without a functioning unified government between 1916 and 1928. As political anarchy and moral decay plagued society, people no longer felt as certain as did their ancestors about the resilience of a Confucian cosmological and sociopolitical order.<sup>47</sup>

## 6. Christianizing the Idea of Human Body through Health Reform

While Adventist missionaries talked a great deal about the imminent end of the world, they also worked tirelessly to improve Chinese society through health reform. They applied the biblical imagery of the sanctuary to promote preventative healthcare. By characterizing the human body as a temple of God according to the biblical metaphor of 1 Corinthians 6:19, the Adventists emphasized a parallel between the divine quality and individual well-being. This is best demonstrated in a number of special issues of the *Signs of the Times* on healthcare, hygiene, and the dangers of alcoholism, opium, and narcotics. Working in an inspirational mode, the Adventists popularized many types of basic healthcare knowledge and Christian teachings for tired and stressed-out modern people, weaving Adventist teachings in with the everyday experiences of urban readers.

What most concerned many missionaries was the widespread practice of drug abuse among Chinese urbanites. In the early twentieth century, morphine was highly fashionable not only as a cheap substitute for opium for addicts but also as a modern medical product. Equally popular were other narcotic products like heroin powders and pills, cocaine, codeine, and other drugs. These products were far easier to ingest than raw opium. Appealing to people from all walks of life, the pills were sold ready for consumption and required no laborious preparation to use. People could consume as few as ten pills or up to a thousand pills daily. But without adequate testing and supervision, these narcotic substances led to

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46 Harvey Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

47 Odoric Y. K. Wou, *Militarism in Modern China: The Career of Wu P'ei-Fu, 1916–39* (Canberra, Australia: Australian National University Press, 1978); David Strand, *An Unfinished Republic: Leading by Word and Deed in Modern China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

economic hardship, serious health problems, and drug abuse. Popular belief in the medical benefits of narcotics contributed to a rise in their consumption.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, the widespread use of the syringe provided an affordable and effective way of delivering precise dosages deep into the human body. The Western origin of the syringe conferred status and prestige, and hence contributed to the popular consumption of narcotic substances.<sup>49</sup>

In view of the boom in the use of narcotics, in July 1926 Edwin R. Thiele of the *Signs of the Times* commissioned the Shanghai municipal laboratory to analyze the components of several anti-opium pills. The laboratory test discovered significant amounts of morphine and heroine in these pills. The pills contained a form of opium residue known as opium dross, a residue that was usually scraped from the pipe and kept for future use. When dissolved in water or wine, opium dross could be drunk by the addict to control the addiction.<sup>50</sup> In September 1926, the Adventists published a special issue of the *Signs of the Times* on narcotics. Three interesting features can be discerned in this issue. First, the editors drew upon Western biomedical evidence to correct the popular misconception of narcotics as being a pure and effective modern medicine. They published essays written by Chinese and American Adventist doctors to discuss the deterioration of health among narcotic users and to critique the use of the syringe to administer narcotic drugs. The Adventist medical practitioners juxtaposed the anti-narcotic message with their teachings on religion and health. For example, the medical missionary R. W. Paul used a metaphor of qualified and mediocre physicians to promote the Adventist emphasis on preventive care and a healthy lifestyle. The former cured disease by addressing the causes of illness, while the latter relied on heavy narcotics to relieve the symptoms of illness. The Adventist approach to healthcare was thus to help addicts reduce their dependence on narcotics and to restore their spiritual, mental, social, and physical well-being.<sup>51</sup>

Second, Adventists framed the spread of narcotic consumption as a threat to the collective well-being of the national citizenry (*guomin* 國民) rather than solely to the health of individuals:

Because our national citizens pay no attention to the dangers of narcotic consumption, there has been little progress in drug suppression. The problem actually gets worse. Narcotics become very popular partly because there is no public outcry, and partly because there is no strong media support of the official anti-drug campaign. Our periodical is determined to awaken all citizens (*guomin*) about the severity of narcotic consumption. We believe in the power of print in enlightening the public and urging them to act against narcotics. We are building on the success of a previous special issue on the dangers of opium addiction, which circulated as many as 540,000 copies across every corner of China.<sup>52</sup>

*Signs of the Times* argued that it was the duty of citizens to safeguard the national body against the widespread consumption of narcotics. When the Adventists drew on the contemporary discourse of nationalism to frame their discussion, they favored a collectivist reading of the dangers of narcotics and the undertones of their discourse were closely linked to concepts regarding the strength of the nation-state. This marketing approach made the special issue on narcotics very appealing to urban residents across China. By the end of September, a month after its publication, Thiele had received as many as 340,937

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48 Lars Peter Laamann, "Pain and Pleasure: Opium as Medicine in Late Imperial China," *Twentieth-Century China* 28, no. 1 (November 2002): 1-20.

49 Frank Dikötter, "A Cultural History of the Syringe in Modern China," *Twentieth-Century China* 28, no. 1 (November 2002): 37-56.

50 Box 31, folder 3, "Anti-Opium Campaign, 1926," Edwin R. Thiele Papers.

51 *Signs of the Times*, A Special Issue on Narcotics (September 1926): 21.

52 "The Editorial," *Signs of the Times*, A Special Issue on Narcotics (September 1926): 6.

orders for the special issue. The majority of issues were sold in cities along the major railways lines such as Beijing 北京, Shenyang 瀋陽, Changchun 長春, Shanghai, Changsha 長沙, Wuhan 武漢, Guangzhou, Xiamen 廈門, and Shantou 汕頭. Some copies were mailed to Chinese readers in Malaysia, the Songhua River Basin in Mongolia, and even Portland in Oregon.<sup>53</sup> No early twentieth-century Chinese Christian periodical reached as many readers worldwide as did the *Signs of the Times*.<sup>54</sup> By reaching out to domestic and overseas Chinese markets, this Adventist magazine integrated readers in China proper and abroad into a common Christian print culture and reading community.

Third, the Adventist editors supplemented the articles with many striking black-and-white illustrations and colloquial poems to make an impression on readers. Two full-page illustrations depict opium, morphine, and other narcotic drugs as a tiger biting a Chinese man and as a venomous snake occupying China, respectively. A half-page illustration characterizes narcotic addiction as equally bad as a tsunami flooding a Chinese city. This representation blamed the problem of narcotic addiction for causing serious illnesses, persistent poverty, rising crime and violence, and for threatening the elimination of the entire Chinese race. A cartoon (*lianhuan tu* 連環圖) was added to illustrate the metaphor of qualified and mediocre doctors in R. W. Paul's article. In that cartoon, the first frame pictures a poor man burdened with opium addiction and a mediocre physician coming to his aid; frame two portrays the physician lifting the burden of opium addiction from the man; frame three depicts the physician placing a larger burden, opium-curing pills, on the addict; and frame four shows the helpless man crying for help as he is crushed by the pills, while the physician does nothing to help. The implication being that due to greed and a lack of compassion among physicians, many addicts were never treated properly; they were given narcotics to manage the pain of narcotic withdrawal. The back cover has a lively poem condemning narcotic addiction:

Opium, opium  
With severe danger  
Ignorant people don't realize  
They drug themselves everyday

Swallowing clouds and breathing out mists  
As excited and as crazy  
First smoke opium to cure illnesses  
Then smoke opium to sleep

Eventually become addicted  
Incapable of controlling the addiction  
Addiction leads to illness  
Extremely difficult to get rid of

The body looks like a skeleton  
Almost like a ghost  
Waste the family fortune on smoking  
Have no shame and no honor

Have no money to buy opium  
Become critically ill

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53 "Report of Orders Received, Anti-Narcotics Special," September 1926. Edwin R. Thiele Papers, Box 33, folder 15.

54 Xie Jingsheng, *Zhongguo jiaohui duiyu xin Zhongguo jianshe de gongxian*, 8.

When faced with drug cravings  
Just like dying in hell

Tyranny is more dangerous than a tiger.  
But opium is the worst.  
Don't you ever try it!  
Don't make the same mistake again.<sup>55</sup>

Written by an anonymous author, this lively poem adopts a vernacular style of using colloquial language and phrasings from everyday life. The last few phrases refer to the ancient Confucian metaphor about tyranny being more dreadful than a dangerous tiger (*kezheng mengyu hu* 苛政猛於虎). The prose is so clear that even people with limited literacy would have been able to understand it easily.

Closely connected with these campaigns for the improvement of physical health was the nurture of one's spiritual well-being. In this regard, the Adventists fully supported the Nationalist government's campaigns against superstition in the 1920s and 1930s. After the Nationalists established their government in Nanjing 南京, they employed the ideology of secularism to recast religious principles and practices in political terms and to organize an anti-superstition campaign aimed at reshaping urban and rural religious spaces. This ambitious social and cultural engineering project entailed attacks not only on local cults and temple-based religions but also on all devotional and liturgical forms of ritual practice. The Nationalists believed that they needed to control religions that fostered localism, kinship loyalty, and ethnic pride in order to maintain national unity among the diverse population. In the name of science and progress, they condemned the religious teachings and rituals of certain groups as superstitious, threatening the political and social order of the modern state, and used suppressive and co-optative measures to restrict proselytizing activities at major Buddhist and Daoist institutions in the Lower Yangtze Valley, force the registration of religious property and personnel, and regulate ceremonial rituals and customary practices. Rebecca Nedostup, Shuk-Wah Poon, and Tong Lam, however, argue that the Nationalists were largely ineffective in remapping the religious landscape according to their desired order of social conformity and political loyalty.<sup>56</sup>

During the frenzy of the anti-superstition campaigns, Adventist publishers shared the Nationalists' vision of redefining the religious landscape, and wholeheartedly supported the government efforts to accommodate the protection of religious freedom with the need of eradicating superstition. The Adventists criticized a whole range of community religious celebrations and rituals as incompatible with modernity. They even drew upon biblical vocabulary to dismiss many Chinese practices such as *fengshui*, fortune telling, and spirit possession as heterodox and in conflict with the official creed of the churches.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the Adventists incorporated many state school textbooks into their literature evangelization. On January 14, 1934, the Adventist missionaries recommended the translation and re-publication of several textbooks for female converts, especially those designed to help students learning to read at both

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55 Back cover, *Signs of the Times*, A Special Issue on Narcotics (September 1926).

56 Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009); Shuk-Wah Poon, *Negotiating Religion in Modern China: State and Common People in Guangzhou, 1900–1937* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2010); Tong Lam, *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation-State, 1900–1949* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

57 Luo Daoyuan 羅道源, “Lun fengshui zeri zhi miu” 論風水擇日之謬, *Signs of the Times* (January 1925): 7-18; Zhao Chen 趙晨, “Zhanzheng, kunan, jiushu: Jidu fulin anxirihui yu Zhongguo di Shizhao wenhua (1921–1951)” 戰爭·苦難·救贖: 基督復臨安息日會與中國的時兆文化 (1912–1951), unpublished essay, 2013.

elementary and advanced levels.<sup>58</sup> One common reading habit at that time was to circulate Adventist materials through family, peer, and native-place networks. In the process, many female readers participated in the distribution of literature and the circulation of its evangelistic content, and they helped to make the Adventist prophecies known to others.

## 7. The Church-State Conflict in Maoist China

After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), the Signs of the Times Publishing House relocated to Western China with the Nationalist government in 1938 and spent the wartime years printing religious tracts, periodicals, and books in Chongqing 重慶, then part of Sichuan 四川 province. When civil war erupted in 1946, many Adventist church leaders could not avoid supporting the Nationalist regime even though they were frustrated with its failures of economic policy. In 1950, the Adventists confronted a new reality, as they came under the rule of a powerful Communist state that was willing to intervene in the spiritual affairs of the church. The Communists launched the Three-Self Patriotic Movement to integrate the diverse Protestant denominations into the new Socialist order. The term “Three-Self” describes a mission policy that had organized native Christians in Africa and Asia into self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches. The Maoist state embellished the “Three-Self” slogan with “Patriotic Movement.” On the surface, the movement called for the ecclesiastical autonomy of Chinese churches, but its core goal was to force Christians to sever their institutional ties with foreign missionary enterprises in particular and with foreigners in general.

The official infiltration of Adventist institutions began at the Signs of the Times Publishing House in Shanghai, where printing workers and young editors were more receptive to Communism than were church leaders, and thus became essential elements in the building of an incipient party structure within Adventist circles. Most printing workers came from Anhui province, while the editors were largely Cantonese and Shanghaiese. In 1950, the Shanghai municipal government urged the Adventist printing workers to unionize themselves as part of the larger policy to create pro-government labor unions across the city. None of the Adventist editors, however, supported unionization. The labor union organizers recruited Gu Changsheng 顧長聲, a native of northern Jiangsu 江蘇 province and a junior member of editorial staff, then in his early thirties. Gu came from a relatively poor family and had received help from missionaries to attend the China Training Institute (Zhonghua sanyu yanjiushe 中華三育研究社), the Adventist junior college at Qiaotouzhen 橋頭鎮 in Jiangsu. He had also worked as an interpreter for American soldiers in wartime Chongqing. After the end of the war, he joined the Signs of the Times Publishing House in Shanghai and translated two popular Adventist texts written by Arthur Maxwell, *The Atom Bomb and the End of the World* and *The Last Page of History*, propagating the idea that the end of the world was near, and that God intended to use American atomic bombs to destroy the world. The translation project made Gu a rising star in the Press.<sup>59</sup> When the tide turned against the missionaries, he switched to the anti-Christian camp. Once the Communists infiltrated the Signs of the Times Press, they utilized native place and ethnic ties to recruit supporters and channel existing grievances into anti-imperialist sentiments. To align with the state was an irresistible attraction for the printing workers and junior church staff, because they were motivated by the general war propaganda to display loyalty to the new regime. They were also becoming radicalized, mastering new political vocabularies in order to condemn the missionaries. Another important Communist power-building tactic was to organize the frustrated church workers into a new core that would pit itself against the current leadership. The Communists paid a great deal of attention to leadership training, and formed the Seventh-day Adventist Three-Self Reform Preparation Committee (*Jidu fulin anxirihui sanzi gexin choubei weiyuanhui* 基督復臨安息日會三自革新籌備委員會) to undermine the existing church leadership. It assigned Nan

58 Box 32, Folder 4, *Minutes of the China Division Executive Committee, Officer's Report*, January 12–23, 1934, 186<sup>th</sup> to 192<sup>nd</sup> Meeting, 428. Edwin R. Thiele Papers.

59 Gu Changsheng, *Awaken: Memoirs of a Chinese Historian* (Lexington, KY: Author House, 2009), 49–50.

Xiangqian 南祥謙, a union organizer at the Signs of the Times Press, to chair the accusation committee and Gu Changsheng to be its secretary.

Shortly after the accusation meetings began, the state instructed the newly-formed Seventh-day Adventist Three-Self Reform Preparation Committee to take control of all Adventist institutions. This process of co-optation involved a combination of top-down and bottom-up power-building tactics. The top-down tactics refer to the government's efforts to recruit supporters for the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. The bottom-up tactics included infiltrating Adventist circles, radicalizing print workers, and replacing the current leaders with collaborators. Some pro-government Adventists joined the Three-Self movement partly out of self-interest, and partly in the hope of ameliorating the harshness of the anti-religion measures and the forced indigenization of the church. As they reconciled their personal agendas with the constraints imposed on them by the state, they justified their mode of survival and fashioned a means for self-aggrandizement and personal gain.<sup>60</sup>

In this hostile environment, the congregants found themselves in a dilemma, torn between the public need to support the state and their private life of upholding their faith and continuing to participate in religious activities at home. When the Adventists were no longer permitted to hold regular religious activities outside of Three-Self affiliated churches, they embraced activism and created a self-sustaining Christian community rather than abandoning their faith. Those accused church leaders with strong convictions remained defiant and supported their words with acts of resistance and circumvention. They strengthened the faith of their flock against Communist influence in part through religious publishing. In 1954 David Lin 林大衛 (1917–2011), the former national secretary of the Chinese Adventist Church, partnered with a group of dedicated youth from the Huzhong Church 滬中教會 in Shanghai to translate five of the major spiritual writings of Ellen G. H. White into Chinese, including *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Prophets and Kings*, *The Desire of Ages*, *The Acts of the Apostles*, and *The Great Controversy*.<sup>61</sup> The translations were later called the “Conflict of the Ages Series” (*Lidai douzheng congshu* 歷代鬥爭叢書). The graphic account of spiritual battles in these works provides the readers with an eschatological lens through which to interpret their own personal experiences: justification through confession of faith, sanctification by enduring persecution, and gaining of the promise of salvation. The entire set of translations was smuggled into the British colony of Hong Kong and most chapters were printed in multiple issues of the local Adventist periodical, *Last Day Shepherd's Call*. Yet in Maoist China, the Communists restricted any form of private publishing. The Adventists had to use limited, small-scale technologies to produce the literature, using mimeograph-printed copies (*youyin ben* 油印本) or hand-copied volumes (*shouchao ben* 手抄本).<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, this translation project was of great significance, because it helped to standardize Adventist doctrine and instilled a sense of spiritual identity among congregants in the early 1950s. As a result, readers internalized church doctrine for themselves, self-theologized their everyday experience, and became local agents of religious change. In China, where literacy was regarded as a sign of power and status, giving local believers the ability to write and read was important to the spread of Adventism, because it transformed them into a group of reading congregants and earned them respect in their social circles. Paralleling advances achieved through Bible translation in Africa during the same period, as chronicled by the historian Lamin Sanneh, this development put the power of religion into the hands of ordinary people so that they could interpret the Gospel for

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60 Lien-Chieh Tsao, “The Development and History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in China Since the Communist Takeover” (MA thesis, Loma Linda University, 1975); Lee, “Co-optation and Its Discontents.”

61 *Zhonghua shenggong shi*, vol. 1, 136, and vol. 2, 546.

62 Perry Link, *The Use of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6.

themselves.<sup>63</sup> This pattern of evangelization fit well with more widespread ideas of self-propagation, sustainable church development, and spiritual renewal.

When the Maoist government arrested the pastors and sent them to labor camps for political re-education, many Adventist congregants in Wenzhou, Xiamen, Guangzhou, and rural townships stepped in to continue the religious movement. Using their homes as small printing houses, the congregants circulated the spiritual writings of Ellen G. H. White, and gathered in secret to reflect on the words of their prophetess. In Wenzhou, the female evangelist Huang Meide 黃美德 (1925–2010) hand-copied most of White's books and gave them as gifts to non-Adventist Christians, thus converting many of them to Adventism. Huang was later arrested and jailed in 1960, but her literature ministry continued on without her. A number of recipients of her books faithfully carried out Huang's ministry until the end of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>64</sup>

As China entered the Reform era, the Adventists resurfaced and sought to make the spiritual writings of Ellen G. H. White again accessible to the public. David Lin re-edited all the previous translations of White's works in the "Conflict of the Ages Series" and asked the Shanghai Chinese Christian Council for permission to distribute these books. In the end, the Three-Self patriotic church officials only permitted the public circulation of *The Desire of Ages*, which talks more about the life of Jesus Christ than Adventist eschatology. The Adventists continued to appeal to the Chinese state for the right to print and distribute their denominational literature as they had done before 1949. Because the officials in charge of religious affairs needed to censor any published church materials, the Adventist leaders were reluctant to compromise by modifying the theological contents of their writings and reducing the number of copies circulated. The Taiwan-based Signs of the Times Publishing Association tried to bypass the censorship regime by working with a commercial press in Wuhan to reprint and sell the Adventist publications legally. Yet today many overseas Adventist materials still have to be smuggled into China. Throughout the 1990s, Mainland Adventists developed at least two underground book distribution networks based in Guangzhou and Xiamen. In 2000 the Hong Kong-based Chinese Union Mission produced a simplified character editions of *The Last Day Shepherd's Call* and *The Ministry* (*Chuandao zhe* 傳道者), both periodicals for Chinese Adventists to exchange ideas with each other and to share their conversion testimonies. In 2010 that office compiled a series of all of Ellen G. H. White's writings in Chinese, and distributed them among congregants in China.<sup>65</sup>

Despite these institutional obstacles, many Mainland Adventists followed their conscience and produced tracts and periodicals in spite of the restrictions imposed by the state. Beyond these overt acts of defiance, Adventist writers and readers also creatively engaged with prophetic and theological literature. In Wenzhou, a popular preacher named Zhao Dianren 趙典仁 wrote several biblical commentaries for many officially registered and house churches. During the 1990s he published his sermons and essays, *The Salvation Book Series* (*Jiu'en xilie congshu* 救恩系列叢書) and *The Pebbles Collection* (*Shizi ji* 石子集), all of which had been previously distributed to Adventist congregations by mail.<sup>66</sup> In 2010 some well-educated Adventists in Beijing's Gangwashi Church 缸瓦市教堂 recognized the need to address specific moral and cultural issues facing an increasingly materialistic Chinese society. They enthusiastically embraced online publishing and launched a quarterly magazine titled *The Cedar* (*Xiangbai shu* 香柏樹) without government approval. They also produced *Best-Life* to promote Adventist

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63 Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 95-103.

64 The Diary of Huang Meide, acquisition of Christie Chui-Shan Chow.

65 Communication between Christie Chui-Shan Chow and a Wuxi Adventist in Hong Kong in May 2012.

66 Zhao Dianren, *The Salvation Series, Vol. 1–5* (Jilin: Jilin Jidujiao liang hui, 2001); *The Pebbles Collection, Vol. 1–3* (Jilin: Jilin Jidujiao liang hui, 1999).

healthcare, and *The Bible Says* (*Shengjing shuo* 聖經說) to interpret biblical teachings.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps most remarkable was that they also posted these magazines online to reach out to more people. They envision the Internet as an invisible highway that transcends the physical barrier between publishers and readers, and that will allow readers to forward the divine message electronically to their peers. The call to counter secular culture by publishing online and offline took precedence over any concern for official regulations. The editorial of the first issue of *The Cedar* in 2010 justified their decision to publish by referring to the spiritual insights of Ellen G. H. White:

We believe in the power of the written word. The popular literature in our age is full of confusion and filth. Our people desire words of purity. In commenting on literature evangelism, Ellen G. H. White once described the great objective of our publications as being an instrument to exalt God and to draw attention to His Word. God calls upon us to lift up, not our own banner, not the banner of this world, but His banner of truth.<sup>68</sup>

These remarks reflect a strong theological critique of the censorship regime and a powerful defense of the right to freedom of expression. In 1994 Adventists in Wuxi 無錫 published *Eden* (*Yidian yuan* 伊甸園), a monthly magazine for young people. Two years later, the Wuxi municipal authorities instructed them to suspend the publication, but the congregants remained defiant and *Eden* remains in print today. As one of the editorial members explained, “The religious publishing situation is better now than it was ten years ago. The government is still tolerant, but the officials can always intervene. What we are doing is technically outside the law.”<sup>69</sup> The whole editorial team was prepared to face more pressure from the state.

Adventist media took a new trajectory in post-reform China; it not only worked to strengthen the faith of readers but also to provide a platform for Adventist leaders to discuss theological differences and resolve internal divisions. Since the 1980s, Zhejiang province has witnessed a series of schisms concerning Adventist doctrines, liturgies, and leadership succession. The need to articulate an authentic Seventh-day Adventist faith motivated many factional leaders to develop different programs of literature evangelism. The vast amount of literature they produced suggests that media remains the most popular way to consolidate the Adventist faith, and that religious publishing enables these factional leaders to communicate their theological agendas to followers and to argue against the views of their opponents. The story of Liang Shihuan 梁世歡 is instructive. A third-generation Adventist in Cangnan 蒼南 district in southern Zhejiang, in 2009 Liang Shihuan published *The Wheatfield Gospel Quarterly* (*Maitian fuyin jikan* 麥田福音季刊), a highly popular print and electronic magazine, to engage in theological discussion with religious inquirers and to project a more intellectual image of Adventism. With these innovative technologies, Liang Shihuan presents himself as a cosmopolitan preacher and church leader, and has successfully converted many college students and young urban professionals in Cangnan district.<sup>70</sup>

## 8. Conclusion

As latecomers to the China mission field, the Seventh-day Adventist missionaries distinguished themselves from other Protestant denominations in two major respects. First, despite its strong belief in the imminent end of the world, the Adventist missionary enterprise embraced the modernizing elements of the West. When the missionaries first arrived in China, they quickly identified potential converts from

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67 Communication between Christie Chui-Shan Chow and an Adventist from the Gangwashi Church of Beijing in Hong Kong in May 2012.

68 *The Cedar*, no. 1 (2010): 1. Retrieved on May 1, 2013 from <<http://www.fygy.org/xiazai/qikan/xiangboshu/香柏樹創刊號.pdf>>.

69 Communication between Christie Chui-Shan Chow and a Wuxi Adventist in Hong Kong in May 2012.

70 Lee and Chow, “Christian Revival from Within,” 51-53.

other denominations and appealed to them with a sharp and clear message about Sabbath observance. They founded the Signs of the Times Publishing House in Shanghai to launch a nationwide printing program that competed with other Protestant presses and supported evangelization at the grassroots level. This publishing enterprise maximized its limited resources and succeeded in disseminating the Adventist message across the country. Through the program of literature ministry, the Adventists assigned countless colporteurs as frontline evangelistic pioneers to sell religious literature, to proselytize in areas not yet visited by Protestant missionaries, and to prepare the way for Seventh-day Adventism. Once Adventist literature had reached the hands of ordinary readers, it had the potential to make a long-lasting impact on the recipients. Many Adventist missionaries were convinced of the ability of Christianity to transform human minds. Wherever Christianity spread, it was understood to eventually find its own momentum in various contexts. Andrew F. Walls sees religious conversion as resembling a translation process that turns “the pre-existing materials of thought” of native converts toward Christ. This Christological perspective implies “a change, not of substance, but of direction” in the converts’ or tract readers’ worldviews.<sup>71</sup> When faith-seekers come to grips with the Adventist gospel, they accommodate it within their pre-existing values.

Second, the missionaries made print media the cornerstone of the Adventist movement in China, to the point that it became an essential part of the denomination. After the Communists expelled all foreign missionaries and took over church institutions in the early 1950s, many Chinese Adventist leaders turned to the longstanding model of literature ministry and mass-produced the spiritual writings of Ellen G. H. White to empower the congregants to resist state control. The mimeographed and hand-copied volumes of Adventist literature provided many worshippers with the spiritual strength and resources to resist the pressures of the Maoist regime and to cope with the confusion and uncertainty of living in a tightly-controlled authoritarian society. This development placed the liberating power of religion directly into the hands of people to enable them to draw upon Adventist theology to analyze the world around them. As a result, there was a substantial divide between the Adventists’ lived experience and the government’s vision of a state-controlled Three-Self Patriotic Movement. To those Adventists who upheld the independence of their faith and who continued to hold religious activities at home, the post-denominational emphasis of the Three-Self propaganda had little relevance. Far from abandoning their belief, many Adventists rejected the subservient role that the Three-Self church leaders had imposed on them. As with other Protestants, they effectively ignored what they could not change in terms of national policy, while making use of the situation to preserve their strength and defend what they could of the church’s independence. They reflected on Adventist printed materials, liberated themselves where possible from the patriotic religious institutions, and established autonomous worship communities according to their needs, despite persistent interference and systematic controls applied by the state.

Entering the early twenty-first century as an indigenous Christian body, the Adventist movement continues to flourish in a religious space outside the state-controlled patriotic institutions. Similar to the missionary mentors in early twentieth-century China, most Adventists today are motivated by a strong conviction that religious publishing serves as a powerful instrument to win over the hearts and minds of people. The last two decades have witnessed the proliferation of Adventist literature directed specifically at the masses. The continued growth of Adventist groups in urban and rural areas, the expansion of their publishing activities and networks, and the rise of lay activism reflect the variety of innovative resources and strategies that the Adventists have employed to strengthen themselves. Those American missionaries who had launched *The Gospel Herald* and *Signs of the Times* a century ago and who stayed in China until their expulsion after the outbreak of the Korean War would likely be impressed by the blossoming of Adventist publishing culture today.

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71 Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 26-54.