

THE ORIGIN OF THE "THREE SELF"

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I. Introduction

The present piece of writing, as a result of my new effort more than six years ago in dealing with the old problem of the "three self", roughly falls into three parts, focusing respectively on the origin of the "three self", the different descriptions of the "three self", and the application of the "three self" in the milieu of the Church in China.

Regardless of its various versions in the English language,¹ although "three self" seems a little bit dated to some,² and often being abused, it actually needs some critical assessment. The important question it raised remains unsolved. I am particularly thinking of the present situation

¹Such as "Three-Selves", "Three Selves", "Three-Self" and "Three Self". The noun following them could be "idea", "concept", "formula", "notion", "policy", "principle" (or the plural form "principles"), or "theory". The variety in expressions is very puzzling. Moreover, the expressions in Chinese cannot be always translated back into English as the familiar three-self formula. Thus self-administration, self-financing, self-rule, self-management and self-determination and other terms are attested in various writings. Cf., for instance, Bishop Tu Shihua's speech, "To have an Independent, Self-Ruled and Self-Managed Church Is Our Sacred Right," in *A New Beginning: An International Dialogue with the Chinese Church*, ed. Theresa Chu and Christopher Lind, 1983 (hereinafter *A New Beginning*), 99-103.

²Referring to the British missions after the death of Henry Venn, Andrew F. Walls of the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, observes: "No one even formally abandoned the Three-Self policy, but it became a thing for the sweet by-and-by. What was the point of talking, like Venn, of the 'euthanasia of a mission' as an objective when there was a self-evident need for more and more missions?" ("British Missions," in *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era: 1880-1920* [hereinafter *MIE*], 162.)

of the church in China, especially the tension or split between the open church and the house church, which largely resulted from the Three Self Movement (hereafter TSM) in the fifties. Another situation is the evolvement of the so-called "free ministry", which has become a burning issue in China recently, is becoming problem which may also be traced back to the TSM in the fifties. During the Anti-Rightist Movement of 1957, the church leaders met from October 28 to December 4, declaring that the "free ministry" was an anti-socialist activity and evil in nature, thus demanding from the government a just and lawful punishment on those Rightists.³

However, the notion of "self" in this compound term, must first be clarified so as to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Four points could be mentioned at this point before proceeding to discuss the origin of the three self.

A. According to the three self theory, "self" should not be seen as a denial of the work of the Holy Spirit of God's own actions. No matter which version of the three self theory we are referring to, the author of that version would definitely agree that the dependence on God's mercy and might, grace and great activity is of primary importance for building Christian Church and its mission. Some even put it more directly, saying the Church's autonomy means dependence on God.⁴

B. The word "self" must be understood in the sense of a local or native Christian community, rather than in a personal sense. So egoism or selfishness will not be the case in question.

C. The counterpart of this "self" is a foreign missionary body, though one may also interpret it in the light of external power attempting to control, whether religious or political. If one reads self-support with a notion of "missionary support"⁵ in mind, he or she will be less likely to miss the point. I think more and more people today realized that as human beings we have not become dependent in the neurotic sense, nor are we independent as some thought we were.

³Xiang Quanguo Jidutu Jinxing Shehuizhuyi Jiaoyu" ("Educating Socialism to Christians in the Country"), in *People's Daily*, December 6, 1957.

⁴Chu, *A New Beginning*, 96, 139.

⁵The term "missionary support" was actually used in Christian mission history. See, for instance, F. Rawlinson, Helen Thoburn and D. MacGillivray eds., *The Chinese Church as Revealed in the National Christian Conference* (Shanghai: The Oriental Press, 1922; hereinafter abbreviated as *CCRNCC*), 276.

D. To review all these concepts of the "self" against the backdrop of contemporary thought, one is also made aware of the relational nature and relativity in these expressions. It does not mean an absolute self-sufficient, self-satisfied or self-contained state, nor could it be understood as self-isolation as some Chinese church leaders had been warned on numerous occasions. When St. Paul says, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ," he does not forget to remind us at the same time of another responsibility, that is, to "let every man prove his own work," because "every man shall bear his own burden" (Gal. 6:2, 4-5). This teaching sheds light on the contemporary concept of interdependence.⁶

II. "Three Self": Its Origin

The origin of the three self theory has been an enigma for many students of missiology and church history. The following is a very brief review of some of its best known explanations proposed in the study of the history of Christian mission.

A. One very popular opinion is to attribute the invention to Henry Venn.⁷ Born into a well-known clergy family, Henry Venn once mentioned that his good education owed much to his father's advice: "My father gave me the wisest instructions about my studies,...he encouraged me also to seek the acquisition of all kinds of knowledge--mechanical knowledge, astronomy, electricity, gardening, and heraldry."⁸ Bishop K.H. Ting in "A Rationale for Three-Self" mentions the connection between the three self theory proposed by some

⁶For the discussion on the rootedness (selfhood) and relatedness (ecumenicity), see Philip L. Wickeri, "Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-self Movement and China's United Front," unpublished Ph. D. dissertation (Princeton Theological Seminary, 1984), 90, 94; cf. Chen Zemin, "The Task of Constructing Theology in the Chinese Church," *Jinling Theological Review*, vols. VI & VII (Feb. -Aug., 1957; recently reissued in *Ching Feng* 79 [Oct. 1984], 17-33), which provides some first-hand material on continuity and discontinuity as understood by Chinese Christians. Chen in the article relates the transcendence/immanence to the continuity/discontinuity, and further regards them as two foci within an ellipse made up of a linking line in a series of *loci*.

⁷For the life of Henry Venn (Feb. 10, 1796-Jan. 13, 1873), see Wilbert R. Shenk's *Henry Venn--Missionary Statesman* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983).

⁸Cited by Machael Hennell in *John Venn and the Clapham Sect* (London: Lutterworth, 1958), 164.

enlightened foreign mission societies and the three-self movement in China of 1950s:

It is worth noting that Three-Self: self-government, self-support, and self-propagation as an aim of church-building was a long-accepted principle in enlightened missionary circles. Henry Venn, the chief executive of the Church Missionary Society of England, was probably the first person to put these three words together as the goal of missionary work. He did this in 1850 in a paper entitled "Native Church Organization" in which he also spoke of the "euthanasia of mission". The whole idea was that the missionaries were to work in such a way as to make themselves dispensable.⁹

But Ting is not the first person, nor the last one, to discover the foreignness or exotic nature of the term "three self".¹⁰ This is a quite prevalent conviction. Actually, as far as the term three self is concerned, Venn could be credited. But with regard to the specific notion of three self in terms of self-government, self-support and self-propagation, Venn does not deserve more credit than Rufus Anderson.¹¹ Before moving on, let us enquire on the earliest possible date as to when Venn put the three self's idea together.

⁹K.H. Ting, "A Rationale for Three-Self" (delivered on Sept. 28, 1984 in Doshisha University, Japan), *Christian Witness in China Today* (Kyoto: Doshisha University Press, 1985), 4. In another paper he prepared for his trip to Japan in autumn, 1984 Ting repeats his conviction: "It wasn't the Communists who imposed this movement on the Chinese Christians. Long before there were Communist[s] in China, certain missionary authorities, such as Henry Venn, the Chief Secretary of the Church Missionary Society in London in the 1850s, had already put together these three words as the ideal for missionary work in Africa, Asia and Latin America." ("A Chinese Christian Selfhood," *Christian Witness in China Today*, 39.) Interestingly enough, Paul Lee held a similar opinion even earlier: "The three self...is not an invention of the Communist government in China, and even has less to do with communism. The three self being a slogan first served as the policy of the church reform under the leadership of C.Y. Cheng in 1922." *Ching Feng*, 63:2. The earliest occasion on which Ting admits the foreign origin of the three self is probably his "Another Look at Three-Self," *Ching Feng* 72 (Dec. 1982), 1, 10. On July 12, 1987, while addressing a LWF conference in Denmark, he repeated his tribute to Henry Venn for putting these three self's together as the goal of missionary work. (K.H. Ting, "The Church Is There in China," *Nanjing Theological Review* (hereinafter *NTR*) IX [Nov. 1988], 2)

¹⁰Since neither his paper is documented nor his source known, it is difficult to tell on his behalf the exact source of this historical account of the idea of the three self.

¹¹The reason is whenever Venn talks about three self, he means self-supporting, self-governing, and self-extending (or in the form of self-support, self-government, and self-extension). Self-preaching or self-propagation is not there. This particular detail makes a significant difference as one tries to understand the principle of three self according to suggested by Venn.

The major source available to us is the collection of papers edited by Max Warren. It is sufficient for our modest purpose, even though it excludes some early and very relevant documents from the writings of Henry Venn. The first step is to have a look at the paper cited by Ting. This initial effort leads to the discovery of at least two slight mistakes in the information provided by Ting: 1. The original title for Venn's paper is not "Native Church Organization" but "The Native Pastorate and Organization of Native Churches". To be exact, this is the title of a publication consisted of three papers. 2. The date of the publication can be identified either be as 1851, 1861 or 1866, depending on which paper one is referring to. The year 1850, however, is too early for Henry Venn to have published it.¹²

B. The second proposal is to regard Rufus Anderson as the father of this three-self theory. For instance, in a recent article by Henry Rowold, we discovered the following passage: "The 'Three-self' concept was propounded most persuasively by the missiologist Rufus Anderson to describe the objective of mission endeavor, namely to bring into existence a church that would be self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting."¹³ In his article "The Three-Selves Formula: Is it built on biblical foundation?", Peter Beyerhaus, also mentions the possibility of Venn developing Anderson's three-self theory. The Chinese version of the three-self principle is closer to Anderson's understanding than to Venn's.

Anderson's first systematic treatment of three self might probably be found in his *Foreign Missions* in 1869.¹⁴ In his earlier writings, there are numerous places where Anderson mentioned two of the three

¹²See printed pamphlet no. 30 in "Bibliography," Warren, *To Apply the Gospel*, 40. The three papers published in one pamphlet can be found in "Missionary Publications Miscellaneous," vol. III, no. 6; "Papers on India," vol. II, no. 37; and "Papers on India Miscellaneous," vol. IV, no. 11. The Editor of "Bibliography" suggests that "For another interpretation on this subject see *Church Missionary Intelligence* [1862], 121-34." I drew the conclusion independently and found only after the completion of my first draft that Shenk held the same view in his *Henry Venn--Missionary Stateman* (44).

¹³Henry Rowold, "God's Miracle of Life: The Church in China Today," *Concordia Journal*, 15: 1 (Jan. 1989), 25, n.5.

¹⁴In 1872, three years later than Anderson's book, this topic was on the agenda of a general missionary conference: "State of the Native Church, and the Best Means of Making it Self-Supporting, Self-Governing and Self-Propagating," in *Report of the General Missionary Conference held at Allahabad 1872-73* (London: Seeley Jackson & Holliday, 1873), 249; quoted from John C.B. Webster, "British Missions in India," in *MIIIE*, 42.)

self elements together. For instance, in ABCFM's Annual Report of 1841, which is selected by the editor as Selection 6 in *To Advance the Gospel*, he wrote: "[Concerning the native ordination,...] In this way the gospel soon became indigenous to the soil, and the gospel institutions acquired, through the grace of God, a self-supporting, self-propagating energy."¹⁵ In Annual Report of 1848, which is signed by Anderson and the other secretaries of the Board, there is also a similar concern:

In respect to the native mission churches, the inquiry will arise, how far they ought to be independent of the jurisdiction of all bodies of men in this country; how they are to be trained to self-support and self-government;.... What are the responsibilities of the Board for the teaching of the missionaries, and for the character of the mission churches.¹⁶

C. Recently, some European scholars raised the question whether Henry Venn put forth his indigenous church concept only after Charles Gutzlaff. This attribution to Gutzlaff is the third understanding of the origin of the three self notion. According to A.J. Broomhall, Gutzlaff quite early declared his principle of complete dependence on God for the supply of material needs, emphasizing the function of Chinese evangelists who worked under Chinese supervision, and on believers who contributed.¹⁷ Later he outlined his "indigenous principles" which also focus on the evangelization of China depending on Chinese preachers, all with the prayerful co-operation of the Western Church. Perhaps the more revolutionary aspect in his thought is the insistence on the support of the Chinese Union.

The various thoughts concerning the indigenous church were well considered by Gutzlaff even before he returned to Europe in September 1849. In November, 1849, Henry Venn published an article entitled "Native Churches, under European Superintendence, The Hope of Missions" in the *Church Missionary Intelligence*. Comparing the notions of these two men, one will easily discover who is more revolutionary and more ahead of time. Broomhall did not argue for this point, but implied with some hints in the first volume of his biography of H. Taylor. There he mentions the aforementioned publication of Venn,

¹⁵*To Advance the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Rufus Anderson* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 103.

¹⁶*To Advance the Gospel*, 122.

¹⁷A.J. Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor & China's Open Century* 6 volumes (London: Hodder and Stoughton, and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1981-1988), 1:324.

and goes on to cite Venn's paper of 1851--after Gutzlaff's return to Hong Kong--to the CMS Committee, which was accepted and issued to missionaries. In that paper, Venn did set out the objects of a mission as "the settlement of a Native Church under Native Pastors upon a self-supporting system."¹⁸

D. The fourth viewpoint is that the three self theory resulted from a group of people's common effort. This seems to be the most widely accepted interpretation today. Here are some illustrations from recent works. 1. J. Verkuyl affirms that both Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson "coined the famous phrase which has now become much misused and heavily criticized: 'the three-self formula'."¹⁹ 2. Philip L. Wickeri holds a similar opinion in his dissertation on the three self theory and practice of the Chinese Protestant church.²⁰ 3. Jean Woo recently also stands with this interpretation. According to her, "The idea of Three-self, however, could be traced back to either Henry Venn...or Rufus Anderson, who in the 1840's advocated that missionaries should follow the pattern of Paul to form local churches with the responsibilities of self government, self support and self propagation."²¹

But the most strong support comes from Rufus Anderson himself. As a contemporary of Henry Venn and fellow mission theorist, Anderson contributes a clue to the origin of three self theory by putting a footnote in one of his works.²² Anderson's opinion is clearly expressed in the following passage:

This necessity of a native pastor to the healthful and complete development of a self-reliant, effective native church, is discovery of recent date. I cannot say, nor is it important to know, by whom this fundamental truth or law in missions was

¹⁸Hudson Taylor & *China's Open Century*, 329. Broomhall might suggest the probable influence of Gutzlaff on Venn. But the difficulty to prove this is only too obvious and demands more work for further conclusions.

¹⁹J. Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*, tr. by Dale Cooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987 [1978]), 52-53 (cf. Shenk, p. xii for Beaver's opinion).

²⁰Wickeri, "Seeking the Common Ground," 84ff.

²¹Jean Woo, "Movement of the Spirit in China Today," *China Notes* XXVI: 4 (Autumn 1988), 496. The same article also appears in the October 1988 issue of *Missiology*.

²²It is found in Chapter VII of *Foreign Missions: Their Relations and Claims* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1869), 111, n.1; see also *To Advance the Gospel*, 98, n. 2. The note indicates Anderson's conviction that Venn might not be the very discoverer of the three self theory. In fact, Venn was also informed about this, for he soon published a book review of Anderson's *Foreign Missions*.

first declared. Like many discoveries in science, it very probably was reached by a number of persons, at nearly the same time, and as the result of a common experience.²³

There are several remarkable things contained in this short passage. First, it suggests that as early as 1869, people were wondering about the origin of three self theory. Secondly, as an active missionary theoretician in his time, even Anderson did not know who first made the discovery, though he was sure that it was "a discovery of recent date". Thirdly, his conclusion seems still tenable today and makes sense to those who have undertaken a close study of the historical development of the theory. My impression is any kind of theoretical reflection has its own milieu and basis of experience; even the exceptional theory of three self is by no means an exception.

The editor in his "Introduction," to *To Advance the Gospel* says Venn likely got some influence from Anderson as far as his idea of self-propagation is concerned. F.M. DuBose believes that Venn and Anderson "coined almost identical phrases which have become the classic expressions of indigenuity (the "three-selves" of mission strategy)...Venn used these designations in a letter in 1867, and Anderson used them in a book published in 1869. To what extent these men collaborated, we are not sure (communication across continents was not as easy then as it is today). Venn reviewed Anderson's book in the *Church Missionary Intelligence* in 1869, the year the book was published and two years after he had used similar phrases to express the same concept."²⁴ One of the earliest post-WWII critics of the three-self formula is Peter Beyerhaus, whose "The Three-Selves Formula: Is it built on biblical foundation?"²⁵ also mentions the possibility of Venn developing

²³*Foreign Missions: Their Relations and Claims*, 111; see also Selection 5 in *To Advance the Gospel*, 98. R. Pierce Beaver first calls our attention to this footnote in his "Introduction," *To Advance the Gospel*, 37.

²⁴DuBose, *Classics of Christian Missions*, 242 (cf. also *To Apply the Gospel*, 15-49). DuBose concludes that Venn and Anderson "no doubt compared notes" because they corresponded with each other, but "Just how careful a student each was of the other is not certain, though their ideas were strikingly similar. Each appeared with his ideas almost simultaneously without the opportunity, in light of the communication limitation of the time, for one clearly to have been the mentor or disciple of the other." (*Classics of Christian Missions*, 250.)

²⁵*International Review of Missions*, LIII (1964), 393-407.

Anderson's three-self theory. But so far as I know, an entirely satisfactory solution to the enigma of the origin has not yet been reached.

III. Three Self: Different Interpretations

The divergence between different people's understanding of the three-self is also quite evident. To summarize the writings of Venn and Anderson, we note the following highlights.

A. Venn's version of three self is:

1. self-support, self-government, and self-extension--This order might not be accidental by nature, but rather reflects the emphasis of the author on mission strategy. An analogy may be drawn from India, where many Indian Christians from the late 19th to the early 20th century on, advocated *swaraj* (or self-rule). For instance, the Christo Samaj pressed for *swaraj* or a completely independent Indian Church in 1892. Professor John C.B. Webster of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary provides an inspiring observation here, "Closely linked up with this concern for self-government was the concern, stressed almost exclusively by missionaries, for self-support...many missionaries argued that the Indian Church must first create a solid economic base for independence before it could be given to them. The Indians on the other hand gave priority to self-government, arguing that it was in the very nature of things a pre-condition of self-support."²⁶ Or, as Torben Christensen of the University of Copenhagen views: "What India needed was a united Indian Church, 'self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating,' free to develop its own Christianity on the basis of its cultural heritage."²⁷ This divergence between the concern of missionaries and Indians also illustrates the order of three-self adopted by Chinese Christians.

2. not regarded as one principle, but as *three principles*;²⁸

3. its order from support, through government, to extension;²⁹

4. at odds with Anderson's self-propagation in terms of self-extension.

²⁶"British Missions in India," in *MIIIE*, 43.

²⁷"Danish Missions in India," in *MIIIE*, 128.

²⁸Cf. *To Apply the Gospel*, 75. Actually the plural form of principles are also found in some others' writings, and among them is the writing of Jiang Wen-han, the later YMCA leader in China and from the Lutheran tradition.

This last point deserves more attention. People in China have become more sensitive to the use of the term "extension". For example: several years ago, Han Wenzao remarked at an international conference: "Churches in Old China were, in fact, the extension of foreign missions and consequently were unable to take root in Chinese soil for the propagation of the Gospel."³⁰

B. Rufus Anderson's three self theory is: 1. based on his belief in the spirit of the gospel, and deeply rooted in the conviction of democracy and liberty; 2. not very paternalistic; 3. regarded as one principle with three aspects; 4. used to guide mission which is also a learning process.

The following comments might not consist of an unfaithful interpretation: Anderson's three self theory is based on his belief in the spirit of the gospel, deeply rooted in the conviction of democracy and liberty.³¹ Anderson was addressing two burning issues of the day. The first is the relationship between the missionary board and the different denominations which take part in the board. In the USA the problem of slavery in mid-19th century made the issue more complicated. Anderson and others believed that liberty and independence to some extent are not only necessary but very essential for Christian institutions. The second issue concerns the relation between the missionary board and the local churches abroad, which the document calls "the native mission church". In this respect, liberty is also a must. At that time, denominationalism also tried to exercise its influence on the board and its mission. Anderson and his colleagues rightly rejected this attempt. It is quite evident in the statement that denominations should not be imposed upon the native churches:

Indeed, experience has clearly shown that it is not well to attempt the transfer of the religious denominations of Christendom, full-grown and with all their

²⁹Shenk rightly notices that self-support became the key to Venn's whole system of missions and in earlier days he even subsumed self-government under self-support (*Henry Venn--Missionary Statesman*, 44).

³⁰Han Wenzao, "On International Relations of the Chinese Church," *A New Beginning*, 104.

³¹See *To Advance the Gospel*, 125, 139. Philip Wickeri also noticed this, and he quoted to some extent the conclusion reached by Verkuyl, saying, "Anderson's advocacy of self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating churches was grounded on his opposition to both ecclesiastical colonialism and an individual-pietistic approach to salvation." ("Seeking the Common Ground," 86; cf. Verkuyl, 64.)

peculiarities, into heathen lands; at least, until the new-born churches shall have had time to acquire a good degree of discriminative and self-governing power.³²

Anderson is not so paternalistic³³ as his British counter-part. For Anderson, mission is no doubt a learning process. He says that "We need to gain a new experience, and to revise many of our principles and usages; and for this purpose to go prayerfully to the New Testament."³⁴

But Venn and Anderson are not the only two who have advocated the conception of three self in church history, though they are surely among the earliest ones. Now it is also necessary to have a review of some other figures whose contribution to the development of the three self idea by interpretation and practice cannot be overlooked by any earnest student of Christian mission history. The following are three random samples.

C. Before the Basel Mission became a German colonial mission, Otto Schott its director from 1879 to 1884, famous for his "A heavy accusation against us--an earnest call for repentance," wrote in a private note concerning the mission industries:

They are hindering the process of the congregations towards independence.... Their pedagogical aim they will not reach because the missionaries control everything, even the smallest detail, and distrust the people...the establishments ruin the character of the people; the Christians become slaves and pliable members of the congregation because on their pliability depends either acceptance or dismissal of the establishment. As long as we continue in this way there cannot develop any spiritual life; one creates religion by punching people on their stomachs. ("Man macht Religion, indem man den Leuten auf den Bauch schlagt.")

Schott championed the "Three Self" policy, and asked the Mission to deviate from her nationalistic thinking. According to him, the aim of

³²To *Advance the Gospel*, 139.

³³"Paternalistic" is a more appropriate word here. People have criticized Venn for "his acceptance of the British colonial power structure and his assumption of the superiority of the white man." (DuBose, *Classics of Christian Missions*, 244; cf. Warren, "Henry Venn," in S. Neill, et al. ed., *Concise Dictionary of the Christian World Mission* [London: Lutterworth, 1970], 636) Like many of his contemporaries, Venn was not necessarily promoting colonialism and imperialism, but it can be said that in his thinking, more or less, he "gave way to the common trends" of his times (cf. W. Glüer, "German Protestant Missions in China," for the comment on the Basle and the Rhenish Mission, in *MIE*, 52).

³⁴DuBose, *Classics of Christian Missions*, 244 (cf. also Shenk, *Henry Venn--Missionary Statesman*, p.xii, paragraph 4).

the mission should be the creation of self-reliant Christian congregations in India and Africa. The indigenous churches should develop their own cultural and religious characteristics within their native environment rather than becoming copies of German Christians.³⁵

D. It is now proper to have a look at Roland Allen's understanding of the principle for an indigenous church. The important place of Roland Allen in the Chinese development of the three self theory has long been acknowledged. Wickeri correctly points out that for Allen the problem of imperialism and the task of establishing independent and indigenous churches was "far more urgent than it had been for Venn, Anderson, or any missionary before him".³⁶ When Allen was writing the outline of his missionary principles, he admitted: "I have been writing of principles which have a wider application than to Foreign Missions. The principles could be applied to any work anywhere. All that I insist upon here is that they are world-wide."³⁷

E. In the 1920's, Gustav Osterlin (?-1973) of the Church of Sweden Mission (CSM) developed his own strategy independently. He used to say, "I arrived in China as a right-minded missionary secretary, but after only a few years, I became a heretic." The new CSM method was the radical consequence drawn from the "three self" principle, but he regarded it not as the goal of missionary work, but as "a strategy to be followed from the very beginning." Osterlin saw clearly that the only future for the Chinese church lay in making it entirely independent of foreign cultural and economic influence. He turned his attention to the little country congregation which had to be developed to her full integrity. Therefore, his methods after 1928 included "the system of non-stipendiary village priests, *chianglao*, who remained in lay employment as peasants or carpenters, but were ordained, after special training, not only to preach but to administer the sacraments." In his opinion, this is a necessity for the fully developed and independent Church. This system of an ordained non-stipendiary ministry was introduced in the CSM synod, and later on was also adopted by the Norwegian mission.³⁸

³⁵Karl Rennstich, "The Understanding of Mission, Civilization, and Colonialism in the Basel Mission," in *MIIIE*, 97.

³⁶Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground*, 87.

³⁷R. Allen, *Missionary Principles*, 167.

To sum up this rapid review, we may say that the concept of three self varies in many implications. The people who advocate such an idea do not always have the same emphasis, nor could they have an identical interpretation of its relation to the task of Christian mission. All this provides a background for the forthcoming review of the application of the three self in China.

IV. Three Self: A Specific Application in China

The Three Self Movement in Chinese Protestant Christianity is certainly the most significant application of the three self principle in the 20th century. But long before the TSM, the indigenous church movement had already been launched for several decades. This prehistory of the TSM has recently drawn more attention among historians. On the Chinese scene, the indigenous movement passed at least three stages: the nineteenth century, the period about the founding of the Republic of China and the 1920's.³⁹

A. According to some scholars abroad, the earliest Chinese indigenous church, however, was probably the church left by William Burns in Amoy. Latourette noticed and wrote about this independent church in South China. Broomhall adds his comment by saying that the statement of Latourette seems more notable than other tributes to Burns, because "It was (in Henry Venn's words) self-governing, self-supporting and self-extending--the fruit of his personal humility. Other missionaries served it by teaching and advising, until it was able to stand and grow without them." Shen Yifan and Cao Shenjie, of the China Christian Council, on the other hand traced the start also to the nineteenth century. According to them, *zili yundong* ("self-reliance movement" or "independence movement") is a part of the Protestant experience in China since last century. The particular representative they have found is Chen Mengnan, a Baptist who established a *zili hui* ("independent church") in Guangzhou in 1872. It is very likely that Chen Mengnan will be regarded as the first Chinese Protestant to advocate independence.⁴⁰

³⁸The contribution of G. Osterlin is well summarized in Lars Osterlin's article "The Crusade of the West and the Church of China," in *MIE*, 151-54. L. Osterlin is the son of Gustav Osterlin and used to be the Dean of Linköping, Sweden.

³⁹Cf. Yang Senfu, *Zhongguo Jidujiao Shi (History of Christianity in China)* (Taipei: The Commercial Press, 1968), 291.

Another early Chinese self-governing church which is more often mentioned by Chinese scholarship, is the *Fuyin Tang* (Gospel Church) of Dengcun (Deng Village), Shanxi province, founded by Xi Shengmo (Hsi Sheng-mo, or Hsi Liao-chu, 1835-1896) in 1881, two years after his conversion to Christ through David Hill (whose Chinese name is Li Xiushan, meaning Cultivating-the-Good Li). Though Xi was not ordained until 1886 by Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, he did ministry from the very beginning with a view to its self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.⁴¹ In fact, Xi's contribution to the self-propagation of the Church in China is so great that even today many people can sing the hymns composed by Xi from memory.⁴²

Around the turn of the century, many Chinese Christians had been aware of the urgency for a church self-established, self-supported and self-trained. Therefore, a movement for independence and self-expression emerged within the churches in China. In 1906, Yu Guozhen established in Shanghai an independent church which he called *Zhongguo Zili Hui*, or "Chinese Self-Reliant Church." In 1910, this kind of independent church had been founded in many provinces like Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, Hubei, and Hunan. In 1920, the representatives from about eighty independent churches attended their first national conference. These independent Chinese churches had representatives of 60 from ten provinces in China and 4 from abroad.⁴³ By the year 1924, two years after the National Christian Conference, there were already more than 330 independent local churches.⁴⁴

B. The three self theory *en bloc* applied to the Chinese context⁴⁵ can be traced back at least to 1922. That year saw the meeting of the National Christian Conference held in Shanghai, from May 2 to May

⁴⁰See K.S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (London: SPCK, 1929), 259; Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century*, 308; and Wickeri, 93.

⁴¹See Yang, *Supra* note 37, 297.

⁴²Cf. Mrs. Howard Taylor's "Pastor Hsi: Confucian Scholar and Christian," trans. Liu Yiling under the title of *Biography of Hsi Shengmo* (Hong Kong, 1957/1959). See also Zha Shijie, *Biographical Sketches of Chinese Christians* (Taipei, 1983), vol. 1, 21-25; Wang Shenying, "Pastor Xi Shengmo and His Hymns," *NTR IX*, 100-104.

⁴³Cf., for instance, *CCRNCC*, 19: "Provincial and Denominational Representation--Chinese Delegates".

⁴⁴See Yang, *Supra* note 37, 298.

11. During the conference, the goal of a Chinese indigenous church was set, and several self expressions were regarded as a way to describe the nature of an indigenous church.⁴⁶

Serving as the chair of the Conference, C.Y. Cheng commented in his opening address upon the significance of choosing "The Chinese Church" as the central theme of the Conference and expressed his ardent hope that as a result, this conference would mark a new stage of advancement of the Christian Church in China; that the conference would "help the churches and missions to see eye-to-eye and to realize more clearly than ever before the different functions which each is to serve...."⁴⁷ Though Cheng did not mention the three self theory in his speech, he did use the words such as self-reliance and self-expression several times, for instance,

⁴⁵The first difficulty is caused by translation. To facilitate the following discussion, we explain here the Chinese terminology. In Chinese, the Three Self principle adopted by the TSM is *zi-zhi*, *zi-yang*, *zi-chuan*. *Zi* means self while *zhi* means governing, administrating and control. But what makes the situation more difficult for people other than native speakers is that we also have a synonym for this notion, and that is *li* (the third tone) which is abundant in some early Chinese church literature too. Actually the Chinese terms used for three self in the indigenous movement more commonly are *zi-li* (3rd tone), *zi-yang*, *zi-chuan* (cf. C.Y. Cheng's interpretation of the indigenous movement; also see Wang Chih-hsin, *History of Christianity in China*, 274). But *zhi* (governing) and *li* (3rd tone; administering) are not always interchangeable. For instance, C.T. Chao use *zi-zhi*, *zi-li* (3rd tone) and *zi-chuan* in his "Some Comments on the Establishment of Chinese Christian Church," in *True Light Magazine* 26:6 (June 1927), 1-13; also in Shao Yumin, ed., 548. *Chuan* means to spread, to pass on, so it can be rendered as propagation or preaching; but it can also be put into words like expression or assertion. The very word of expression was a very strong one with some Chinese like T.C. Chao. There is no doubt about the content of the propagation or preaching (that of the saving message of the Gospel), the Chinese concern with the self-expression rather focuses on the way of expressing it and its effect. Another related Chinese word is often rendered into English as "independence/independent", though the term *zi-li* (here the *li* with the fourth tone means "to stand up" or "establish") should be more properly understood as "self-reliance" or "self-reliant", because the much closer Chinese term for independence is *du-li* (Cf. the three self's used by N.Z. Zia, "Christianity and Chinese Thought," in *Latest Works by N.Z. Zia* [Taipei, 1977], 134).

⁴⁶In the twenties, the term indigenous church or indigenization of Christianity was used without negative implication. This is different today. Prof. Chen Zemin touched on this topic as early as the Montreal conference in 1981 when he remarked: "We have been trying to indigenize Christianity, but at present I think the idea of contextualization is much better and more extensive than just trying to indigenize, which carries more or less a sense of looking backward through history." (*A New Beginning*, 20-21) Among the earliest to distinguish between indigenization and contextualization is Shoki Coe (cf. his "Contextualizing Theology," in *Third World Theologies*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, C.S. P. [New York: Paulist Press, 1976], 20).

⁴⁷CCRNCC, 31.

In all mission fields sooner or later there gradually emerges with the growth of the church the desire for self-reliance and self-expression. China is no exception in this matter. Circumstances in the past have led the Church in China to follow unconsciously the pathway of dependence upon the missions both for material and spiritual requirements.... But when the Church has awakened to the fact that it is not leading a natural and healthy life, the question of developing self-reliance becomes a most acute and burning problem. This is in reality a mark of growth.⁴⁸

The Conference, however, is surely a milestone in the history of the indigenous church in China. As Wang Weifan, a faculty member of Nanjing Theological Seminary evaluates the Conference and its impact in contemporary Chinese history, "Because of its historical limitations, the self-reliant movement of the Chinese churches in 1930's lacks a degree of thoroughness, but it cannot be denied that the self-reliant movement as such, demonstrates clearly the spirit of self-reliance of the Chinese churches as well as the national self-respect promoted by Chinese Christian intellectuals and fellow ministers and pastors who were active in the movement."⁴⁹

The historical place as well as the achievements of the Conference also has much to do with the so-called anti-Christian movement in 1920s. The movement began in 1922, shortly before the NCC meeting in Shanghai.⁵⁰ The main force of the movement is the intellectuals of the time.⁵¹ As Ka-che Yip points out, the general response of Chinese intellectuals to Christianity reveals their hope to ease the humiliation resulting from cultural borrowing, "By the early twenties most

⁴⁸CCRNCC, 31-32. Speaking of the situation, Cheng remarked: "Frankly speaking, we Chinese Christians are not satisfied with the situation in the Church as it is today, and we long to see readjustments and improvements." (33)

⁴⁹Wang Weifan, "Lay down Your Whip!" *NTR IX* (November 1988), 8.

⁵⁰For the relation between the Anti-Christian Movement and the Chinese indigenous church movement, see Wang Chih-hsin, *History of Christianity in China* (Hong Kong, 4th edition, 1959[1940]), esp. the chapter on "Anti-Christian Association and Indigenous Movement". For the original documents, Neander C.S. Chang's *Religious Thoughts in China during the Last Decade: A Source Book* (Beijing: Yenching School of Chinese Studies, 1927) provides many historical documents.

⁵¹Cf. Lu Shiqiang, "A Critical Survey of the Anti-Christian Issue among Intellectuals in Modern China," in Lin Zhiping ed., *A Collection of Essays Celebrating the 170th Anniversary of Introduction of Protestant Christianity into China* (Taipei, 1977), 277-97. Lu's main point made in that essay may be summed up as follows: the anti-Christian sentiment around the early years of the Republic (1911) were caused by thoughts of the West, such as Marxism, anarchism, scientism, and liberalism.

intellectuals viewed Christianity as not only unscientific and outdated, but also as a major obstacle to China's attainment of national independence. Many alleged that it was the vanguard of Western imperialism."⁵² The National Christian Conference against this background, therefore, is more meaningful to the Chinese Christians. This can also explain to some degree why in the documents of the Conference, there are so many statements concerning the self-reliance in building the Church in China. For instance, in "Commission I--The Present State of Christianity in China," the second chapter, which was devoted to the progress of the Christian Church in China during the last two decades, contained a brief description of the growth in the life of the Church: "The life of the Church manifests itself in three ways: 1. self-propagation, 2. administrative independence, 3. financial independence. In all these phases the life of the Christian Church has definitely moved forward." It is noteworthy that the report also uses the terms like self-control and self-determination under the subtitle of administrative independence, and self-support under the discussion of financial independence.⁵³

One of the most important and more frequently quoted documents produced by this Conference is commission III in the CCRNCC, "The Message of the Church", of which the "preamble" and the first chapter were read to the conference by Dr. T.T. Lew. Many scholars of TSM history have found the origin of the three self language in Section B of the first chapter, which is entitled "The Indigenous Church." The following are the most relevant passages:

3. But we wish to voice the sentiment of our people that the wholesale, uncritical acceptance of the traditions, forms and organizations of the West and the slavish imitation of these are not conducive to the building of a permanent genuine Christian Church in China.
4. We notice, moreover, that the Chinese Church is becoming conscious of her own unique mission and duty today.

⁵²Ka-che Yip, *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students: The Anti-Christian Movement of 1922-1927* (Bellingham, Washington: Center for East Asian Studies of Western Washington University, 1980), 2.

⁵³CCRNCC, 138-39; also 249ff: "Self-support is but one of the varied expressions of an indigenous Christianity.... Self-support, while closely related to self-government, should not be a condition upon which self-government depends. In some instances self-government may beget self-support. It is better that the two develop as concomitants, each an expression of the spirit of indigenous Christianity."

5. The history of China, the characteristics of the people[,] the nature of the work, the result of our past experience, and the rapid changing conditions of the country all demand an indigenous Church which will present an indigenous Christianity, a Christianity which does not sever its continuity with the historical Churches but at the same time takes cognizance of the spiritual inheritance of the Chinese race.

6. Therefore, we appeal to all the followers of Jesus Christ in China, with united effort, through systematic giving, to reach the goal of self-support, through persistent practice, fearless of experiment and failure, to reach the goal of self-government, and through religious education, an adequately trained leadership, and devoted personal work, to attain the goal of self-propagation.⁵⁴

C. The general situation for the Church in China at that time was still far from satisfactory. As C.Y. Cheng mentioned in his opening address to the National Christian Conference,

Some of the churches have developed along self-supporting lines from almost the first day when the church was founded while others have as yet barely made a start. In some churches the direction of church affairs has already passed entirely into Chinese hands while in many others the missionary pastor still holds the reins of power, and determines the line on which the churches develop. In some sections the churches are doing their own independent thinking, while in many others it is still true that they merely accept what others plan for them.⁵⁵

It is clear enough from the content of the passage that Cheng here is addressing the issues of the three self, even though he only uses the term self-supporting for the first point.

Another important Chinese member present at the Conference, Professor T.C. Chao, also made some frank critiques of the weakness of the Church in China, as he delivered his conference address. After affirming the strength of the Church in China, Chao turned to the weakness. According to Chao, the Church in China was weak in the following four aspects: first, because of the weakness of her ethical

⁵⁴CCRNCC, 502. The Chinese version of the whole Commission, which was published shortly after the Conference entitled "Jidujiao quanguo dahui baogaoshu" (1922) in Shanghai, can also be found in Shao Yumin, ed., *Ershi Shiji Zhongguo Jidujiao Wenti (The Issues of Christianity in the Twenty-Century China)* [Taipei, 1980], 175-87). The same section has been quoted in numerous works, of which Wang Chih-hsin's *History of Christianity in China* is one of the earliest and perhaps the most popular one even today. Wang was invited to attend the Conference, and his work has been regarded as a standard reference for decades. Yang Senfu's history, published in 1970's, simply copied much from Wang, and the citation of "The Indigenous Church" is just one illustration.

⁵⁵CCRNCC, 33.

consciousness and life; secondly, because she is still foreign and divided; thirdly, because of the inability of the Church to adapt herself to her social and intellectual environment; and finally, lacking a more unified, thorough and definite evangelistic, social, economic and educational program for the conquest of the village for Christ and neglect of the young students' role in evangelization.⁵⁶ Even for Chinese Christians who were in favor of the modernization of the country, the problem of maintaining cultural pride was no less acute. The interpretation of Christianity provided by T.C. Chao is often cited as a case in point. In Chao's opinion, indigenization does not simply mean the independence, self-administration, and self-support of the Chinese church, although these aspects would serve as the first and important steps leading to the most important aspect of indigenization, namely, the "purification" of Christianity.⁵⁷ After the tragic May 30 Incident of 1925,⁵⁸ the surge of nationalist sentiment provided additional impetus to make the church in China truly indigenous. "The Three-Self Principles--self-support, self-administration, and self-propagation--which had been discussed by some Chinese Christian leaders in the early twenties increasingly gained acceptance with Christian circles."⁵⁹

On the other hand, Western missionaries were also making efforts to help build up an indigenous Chinese church. R.K. Evans calls our attention to the sectional and national conference of 1913, which according to him "declared emphatically for the policy of developing nationwide homogeneous denominational churches."⁶⁰ The attempt of Catholic missions at indigenization of clergy and Christian practices in China has a long history, and it could be dated back to 17th century. It is not fair, though, to say that the Catholic church was more obsessed with domination over the native Christians.⁶¹ Maryknoll's first provisional constitutions, for instance, approved by Rome on July 15,

⁵⁶CCRNC, 208-9; cf. Ka-che Yip, *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students*, especially Chapter 3 "Christianity and Problems of Chinese Identity," 15-30.

⁵⁷Yip, *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students*, 18.

⁵⁸The event had much influence on the Christian life of that day. An author confused this event of the "May 30th Massacre," as it is ordinarily called among the Chinese, with the May Fourth Movement of 1919, but his understanding of its being the zenith of Chinese anti-imperialist sentiments is not far-fetched. (See the quoted passage in Wang Weifan, 8; and Jiang Wenhan, "How 'Foreign' Was the Christian Religion in China?" in *A New Beginning*, 90-93, especially 93.)

⁵⁹*A New Beginning*, 48; Cf. T.C. Chao, "The Indigenous Church," *CR* (1925), 497.

⁶⁰CCRNC, 235.

1915, clearly emphasized the Society's aim at an indigenous church: "It will aim to form at the earliest opportunity a native clergy as the most efficacious means of perpetuating its work of conversion, and will be always ready to withdraw its membership to work elsewhere when this object shall have been obtained."⁶² It seems that Maryknoll missionaries in those days had already realized that a key to true indigenization was to let the Chinese take charge and to reduce any outside interference by Marykollers as much as possible. As Wiest remarks in his study, "In the transitional stage, the best way to maintain harmonious relationships was to keep responsibilities and places of work for foreign and Chinese priests separate."⁶³ As early as in 1927, Bishop James E. Walsh of Maryknoll Mission wrote: "The work would be incomplete if the Church were always to remain a foreign institution in the eye of the native.... The native priest is the best person to show that the Church is as much at home in China as it is in Europe and America."⁶⁴

It is well known among missiologists that of the three selves the most difficult one is self-propagation. It is remarkable, therefore, that Maryknoll missionaries also worked hard for a self-expressing native Chinese church which will be firmly rooted in the culture of the country.⁶⁵ The intention is clearly expressed in the comments of Bishop Fredrick Donaghy in August 1949:

In considering Chinese priests and Sisters, we must have vision: they will be the custodians of the Catholic Faith.... It is not for us...to strip them of their Chinese customs and graft on them a foreign culture alien to their way of life and

⁶¹Han Wenzao once mentioned before an international audience that "Historically, the Vatican and Catholic missionary bodies always tried to control the Catholic Church in China, to put her in a colonial status and to abuse her in the interest of Western colonial expansion." ("On International Relations of the Chinese Church," *A New Beginning*, 104) It cannot be denied, however, that some Catholic foreign mission bodies did try to control. (Cf. Wiest, "Catholic Mission Theory and Practice: Lessons from the Work of the Paris Foreign Mission Society and Maryknoll in Guangdong and Guanxi Provinces," *Missiology: An International Review*, 10, no. 2 [April 1982].)

⁶²Quoted in Jean-Paul Wiest in *Maryknoll in China--A History, 1918-1955* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1988), 4.

⁶³*Maryknoll in China*, 245; see also 259-60 for his critique of Maryknoll's failing twice to take the ultimate step toward indigenization--entrusting the overall administration of a territory to a Chinese bishop.

⁶⁴*The Field Afar*, June 1927, "Maryknoll's First Seminary in China," 152. quoted by Wiest in *Maryknoll in China*, 246.

⁶⁵Wiest, *Maryknoll in Chia*, 317.

thought...rather it is for us to adapt our minds to their way of thinking when it involves no principle and in thus doing preserve for them intact that heritage of Chinese thought which is their own treasure.⁶⁶

But just as Bishop Tu Shihua commented, the situation of the Chinese Catholic Church in general before the Liberation of 1949 was still quite discouraging. According to him, by 1946 the rate of indigenization was only 21.1 per cent, and that means, there were twenty-nine indigenous bishops in 137 Chinese dioceses.⁶⁷

D. The Liberation of 1949 marks a turning point in the history of the Church in China. After the Chinese Communists political takeover in the mainland, attempts at takeovers in other dimensions of social life were made. Christians felt the foreshadow of crisis, and tried hard to help the Church survive in the upheaval age. Compromise is one of the steps those concerned Christians took. One could not stay without any change. Church leaders such as T.C. Chao wrote much,⁶⁸ calling for a "evolution" or self-renovation in the church's life as a self-defensive approach. In those writings, self motif is frequently used, and there often in the same article appear four or more selves, including "self-renovation", "self-reform", "self-reliance", "self-support", "self-government" and "self-propagation". But ironically, as the movement went on, this sort of policy failed. Therefore, even T.C. Chao's self-criticism was severely criticized by radicals.⁶⁹ The request of some church leaders for the government's protection and affirmation of the

⁶⁶Quoted in Wiest, *Maryknoll in China*, 260; cf. 315.

⁶⁷*A New Beginning*, 100.

⁶⁸In one of his most frequently quoted articles, "Days of Rejoicing in China" (*Christian Century*, March 2, 1949), Chao proposes eight items to promote Christians in building New China, and among them numbers 6-8 are, respectively, to develop a "new missionary method," "to reinforce the theological education for the purpose of qualified church people," and "to gain an economic independence." Jiang Changchuan (Z.K. Kuang) submitted to the Government a five-point memo on behalf of Christians which states that: 1) The Church does not demand any privileges but asks for the freedom of believing and evangelization; 2) The Church will work cooperatively with the Government in national construction; 3) The Church is determined not to be used by any forces or powers; 4) The Church will try hard in collaboration to promote the early realization of self-reliance, self-support and self-propagation; 5) The Church will worship God and love human beings. (*Tien Feng* 181 [Sept. 24, 1949].) After the publication of the so-called "Christian Manifesto," the Chinese Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican Church) circulated a "Pastoral Letter" (July 5, 1950) also mentions the three self in its third item. Cf. Francis Price Jones, *Documents of the Three-Self Movement* (New York: Far Eastern Office, DFM/NCCCCUSA, 1963), 21.

⁶⁹See "The Three-Anti Campaign and T.C. Chao," in Jones, *Documents*, 70-71.

church's proper rights was turned to a demand for church people's confession⁷⁰ and loyalty declaration.⁷¹ On the NCC's 14th anniversary conference which was held in Shanghai from October 18th to 25th, 1950, the following message was reported to have been spread: "In this new and great age, our Church certainly will encounter a lot of reforms and changes in order to meet the need of our time."⁷² The so-called "Three Self Manifesto" itself is a final version after several revisions of a document entitled "Our Preliminary Opinions on Solving Christian Problems." This contains items such as "Concerning the registration of the Christian bodies", "Concerning the solution to the problems caused by the occupation of church buildings", "Concerning the various regulations regarding the religious freedom" and "Concerning the central organization in charge of the religious affairs"⁷³ Later on it turns out to be a declaration with two main purposes in mind, namely, to bring to the light the evil of imperialists and wipe out completely their residuum and, to finally complete within the shortest possible time the three-self movement the Chinese churches and Christian bodies have been proposing. The powerful hand of the veteran statesman Chou En-lai

⁷⁰See Zhao Fusan, "The Penitence and Renewal of the Church in China," in David M. Paton ed., *Anglican Self-Criticism* (London: SCM Press, 1958). See also Wu, "Unfolding the Banner of Christian Renovation Movement," *Tien Feng* 233-34 [Sept. 30, 1950], 13-15.) In an article in *Guangming Daily* (March 12, 1964) people still read sentences like "The Catholic and Protestant Churches in our country, long under the direct control of imperialists, are tools used to carry out the aggression against our country." (Cf. D.E. MacInnis, *Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China: A Documentary History* [New York/London, 1972], 53.)

⁷¹Henry Rowold puts it very clearly that in the 1950's, Chinese church leaders were largely obsessed with a kind of double "guilt" because of their being agents of religion and their association with the West. As a result, they were "viewed as Chinese Uncle Toms, lackeys of the West." S. Neill mentions that in the period "every Chinese Christian was automatically a criminal" and "Nothing in all this history is more painful than the denunciation of missionaries by Chinese friends whom they had trusted; it is evidence of the agony of mind through which Chinese Christians passed." (*A History of Christian Missions*, 430) But he simply seems to ignore the fact that more leading Chinese Christians were also denounced during the period, such as the cases of Andrew Yu-Yue Tsu (see his *Friend of Fisherman* [Hong Kong, 1972], chap. 26), and S.C. Leung (see his *Unfinished Autobiography*, Hong Kong, 1969). After the cultural revolution, some of these denouncers in the fifties confessed their obsessions and bad-conscience on some occasions, even to foreign visitors.

⁷²Wan Fulin, "An Introduction to the Self-government, Self-support and Self-Propagation in the Church in China," in *Tien Feng* 23:9 (Nov. 11, 1950), 2. This article also calls the forth-coming three self movement "The new three self movement" compared to the similar attempts at the early stages in the Church in China.

⁷³C.L. Lo, "The Origin and Development of the Three-Self Movement," in *Ching Feng* 71 (September 1982), 17.

was visible in this dramatic change. The skillful co-operation from some of the church leaders--notably from Y.T. Wu and years later K.H. Ting who came out quite openly "on the side of revolution,"⁷⁴--also played an important role.

The TSM has doubtlessly stood at the center of people's attention as it should. But the movement itself has passed through many changes as time went by.⁷⁵ This is particularly obvious as shown in the alteration of its titles. TSM was at first called the "Three-Self Reform Movement," and then in April 1951, it was renamed the "Chinese Christian Resist-America-and-Help-Korea Three-Self Reform Movement". Then in 1954, on the suggestion of Y.T. Wu, the movement was finally renamed as the "China Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement".⁷⁶

To what extent does the TSM represent the Chinese Christians? This is a very important question, and has been asked by many people abroad. Here I would not try to answer this question, but rather call attention to Arne Sovik who raised the same question in 1972 at Nordic Consultation on China.⁷⁷ Recently, Bishop Ting has been trying to use the China Christian Council as a symbol of the unity among the Chinese Christians. But since he himself serves both as the president of the CCC and the chair of the TSM National Committee, the relationship between the two organizations becomes even more confusing. According to their constitutions, the function and role of each has been distinguished theoretically,⁷⁸ but in practice the great overlap of the leadership can only lead people to conclude that the two organizations should be treated in the same way. Rowold therefore suggests in a recent article that it might be most appropriate to describe the "recognized" church by referring it as the TSM/CCC church, though he himself is opposed to the description of the "government-sponsored" church for its being obviously untrue and inappropriate.⁷⁹

⁷⁴Cf. S. Neill, 430, where the author also mentions that the losses were heavy, because so many leaders yielded to the government's desire.

⁷⁵For a relatively objective description of the movement in general see numerous articles published in *Ching Feng* in the eighties, such as C.L. Lo's "The Social Background of the Three-Self Movement" (70 [June 1982], 1-17), and "The Process of Establishing the Three-Self Patriotic Movement" (73 [March 1983], 16-31), and Paul Lee's "On the Freedom of Religious Beliefs in the Draft of the New Constitution" (72 [December 1982], 17-20).

⁷⁶Sovik, "The Three-Self Documents--A Revaluation," LWF Marxism and China Studies, Document No. 4.1.2.0/02, 1972, 5.

⁷⁷LWF Marxism and China Studies, Document No. 4.1.2.0/02, 1972, 3.

⁷⁸Cf. *Chinese Theological Review* (1987), 1-8, for the two constitutions in English.

Here occurs a difficult problem of definition as well. Shall we call the open or "recognized" church the three-self church? Though to quite a few people in China it is a negative term, many Christians from meeting-points or the "house churches" or "underground churches" have already declared that their churches are genuinely three-self churches. In church history, the Chinese church after the TSM is not the first entitled a three-self church. The C.M.S., which Henry Venn served for a long time, was committed to developing a three-self church in Punjab and elsewhere, though it remains unclear whether C.M.S. missionaries in the Punjab were in fact closer to a "three-self" church in 1920 than in 1880.⁸⁰ Another point of view is well represented by Paul Lee who insists that "'Three-self' is not a name of a church. Some, unfairly, call the church in China the three-self church. At present, the churches in mainland China are all practising self-support, self-reliance, and self-propagation, and therefore all of them are three self churches. The three self is a policy, rather than the goal, of the church, just like unestablishment is a policy of the Church in the United States--and all the U.S. churches are unestablished churches."⁸¹

When some government functionaries in China nowadays complain of the split of the Protestant Church, they seem simply to have forgotten that such a troublesome situation could be nothing but the aftermath of the TSM in the fifties. As it has been pointed out by many overseas missiologists and Chinese church historians, the government's effort in the fifties directly resulted in the domestication of the Church life.⁸² At that time, it perhaps was regarded as a good thing or success, because the number of churchgoers decreased rapidly, and many church buildings were "surrendered" to the government for "better uses". But who knows after 20 years, when the country opens once again to the outside world, and when the church shows her vitality and witnessing before the world, China has more people who would prefer to stay at home for worship rather than to go to church? It should be a good lesson for the Chinese leaders though they seem to have difficulty learning it.

⁷⁹Rowold, "God's Miracle of Life: The Church in China Today," 27, n. 21.

⁸⁰John C.B. Webster, "British Missions in India," in *MIIIE*, 43-44.

⁸¹See Paul Lee, "What Church Abroad Should Know about the Church in China & What Attitude They Should Take," *Ching Feng* 63 (1980), 1-5.

⁸²Cf. Jones, *The Church in Communist China: A Protestant Appraisal* (New York: Friendship Press, 1962), 153, 157; cf. *Documents*, 180ff; also Sovik, 10. As a result of the unification movement, only four out of 65 churches in Beijing remained open in 1958.

The problem is not in the church *per se*, but rather in the structure of the state administration. In the past 40 years, the government on China mainland has been mixed up with the function of the Communist Party. This combination of the government and the party has caused too many troubles for public life in China. It also seriously affects religious affairs.⁸³ The reason is very clear: the Party is Marxist and atheist as well, but the government should not seek the interests only of the atheist. Otherwise, not only the government becomes anti-religious, it also excludes the possibility for the religious to participate in the country's public service and decision-making process. The cultural revolution of the sixties is often labelled as the worst mark of the abnormal political life in China. One would ask how it could be normal if a considerable part of the citizens are deprived of their own rights? The serious situation of splits in the Church in China may be regarded as a direct result of the government's interference in religious affairs. The consequence is very serious in two aspects. On the one hand, the government is accused of discrimination on the basis of religious belief; on the other hand, any support or help from the government will be suspected as a trap or trick, a Judas' kiss, which only proves the statement of a government-sponsored church.

V. Some Concluding Remarks

The TSM has an important place in China's contemporary church history, and also sets up a lesson for world mission and missiological studies. An evaluation of the TSM has been done by some scholars abroad, though the work has not been appreciated by some TSM leaders. The time will come when a better judgement is made. But here I'd like to offer some points in view of the next stage of development of the Church in China.

First, the TSM was originally meant to preserve the church in a completely new political situation. Therefore its motives cannot be mechanically identified with the result it causes. It is often reported abroad that the movement later ran counter to the "aspirations of those Chinese Christians who were genuinely interested in establishing an indigenous Christian church governed directly by Chinese."⁸⁴

⁸³An illustration is the so-called "Religious Affairs Bureau" which as a branch of the State Council, represents by a great degree the viewpoint of the Party's propaganda department. (Cf. point 3 in K.H. Ting's "Fourteen Points" for a brief description of the function of Chinese organizations.)

⁸⁴Yip, *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students*, 89.

Secondly, many serious mistakes occurred in the course of the movement.⁸⁵ The major critique in this regard is its overdone compromise with and its eventually falling as a tool of the government, for whom it provides "a framework for communication and united action in the church."⁸⁶ Even today, some Christians in China still feel sad when they recall the hurricane of the movement. Here one must also distinguish between the different stages of the movement.⁸⁷ Since there was no other national organization responsible for the things done to the Church, naturally the TSM has to accept responsibility for the troubles.

Furthermore, we may reconsider the question whether the Church in China is really a church much closer to the goal of three-self as some have suggested.⁸⁸ Many people both in China and abroad think that the Protestant Church in China now is more tightly grasped by the government than ever before. Of course, this church is usually referred to as the "recognized" church. The point is *self* should be understood in the sense of the church, or the Christians of the local community. If the church is dependent on the government, the result is no better than being dependent on former foreign missions. Therefore, if the three self principle is adhered to in the future, the emphasis should be on the independence from internal as well as external interference, no matter in what name such interference is exercised.⁸⁹

Up to this point, one may conclude that the application of the three self theory in China is quite different from the original intention of the

⁸⁵Anthony Chang from Hong Kong noted that "it was very clearly said that the Three-Self Movement did go to extremes sometimes." (*A New Beginning*, 138) But Bishop Ting's expression is more apologetic in character: "Being a mass movement, the Three-Self is prone to committing mistakes. We have been trying to do something none of us has had experience in. But because we are not bound so much by vested interests, but are eager to make the movement a success, we have not found it too hard to correct our mistakes as we go along" ("Difficulties and Prospects," *A New Beginning*, 118). These words sound like an echoing of what Marcus Cheng said in 1957 (cf. Jones, *Documents*, 153).

⁸⁶Richard C. Bush, Jr., *Religion in Communist China* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 197.

⁸⁷For instance, Arne Sovik notices that K.H. Ting seems to have been more radical in 1954 than two years later ("The Three-Self Documents--A Revaluation," 3).

⁸⁸See Henry Rowold, 25, n.5, where the author says that "Where that 'three-self' was originally a governing principle of supportive mission, it was used in China by the government to cut all means of outside support. Part of the Lord's divine irony (over against both government and mission agency) is that this patient, consigned to inevitable death, not only survived but thrived as a church much closer to the goal of "three-self" and thus much stronger than ever before."

Western developers of the theory. It is not my intention to pass judgment on the historical place of the TSM, though the clarification of the origin of the theory and its Chinese version will allow a more precise evaluation in the future. To conclude, I believe, regardless of the outdatedness, the theory if properly interpreted, can also play a vital part in the reformation of the church. In this sense, the theory which is taken by Chinese as a principle can also make a contribution to the improvement of China's church-state relationship in the years to come.

ABSTRACT

The article begins with the rationale for writing this paper and some definitional clarifications on the often ambiguous or misunderstood term "self". It recounts the origin and history of the Three-Self Movement from the earliest Western missionaries of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson to the indigenization process of the Chinese church. The article acknowledges that the origin and development of TSM are enigmatic, and that different interpretations exist with regard to the concept of "Three Self". Three stages of the indigenous movement from the nineteenth century, the founding of the Republic of China and the 1920's are also narrated in substantial details. Though the author concludes that the application of the three self theory in China is quite different from the original intention of the Western developers of the theory, the material will provide significant data to the reformation of the Christian church and the improvement of church-state relationships in China in the years ahead.

撮 要

本文先交代寫作原委，並澄清既不明確又常遭誤解之「自」的定義，然後從最早期宣教士，如范亨利 (Henry Venn) 和 安魯弗斯 (Rufus Anderson) 開始至中國教會本土化的過程為止，依次說明三自運動的起源和歷史。本文承認三自運動的起源和發展是難理解的，對「三自」觀念亦有不同的詮釋。對本土化運動的三個

⁸⁹In this respect, the task of the three self in the Church in China is far from being fulfilled. Paul Lee pointedly reminds us of a danger, saying that "it is very dangerous to think the church run by the Chinese people and refusing foreign preachers to be a 'three-self' church. It is due to the fact that many Chinese have already established themselves regardless of the tradition and interest of country and nation, and these churches are entirely foreign-doctrine-preaching churches, though they name themselves Chinese Christian Church." (*Ching Feng* 72, 18)

階段，即自十九世紀以來，中華民國建國前後及1920年代，本文都十分詳細地描述。雖然作者在總結中，認為三自理論在中國應用時，與其西方創始人之原意已很不同，但他仍希望本文在未來能為更新基督教會，和改進中國教會與政府的關係，提供重要的資料。