**Xi Lian:** We're happy to be here, to have this opportunity to talk about the rise of the Christian movement in modern China as part of your series this year as I understand focusing on China and the West. The making of Chinese Christianity particularly in its Protestant form points to one of the most significant and profound ways in which the encounter between China and the West took place, an encounter with lasting impact on modern and contemporary China. And that movement has a clear beginning dated back to 1807. 1807 is the year that the first, when the first Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison arrived in Canton and started his missionary work.
This is his tomb in Macau.
The story of the rise of Christianity in China is more complex than say, that of the introduction of peanuts, maize, and sweet potatoes from the Americas in the late Ming Dynasty which did contribute to a dramatic increase in the Chinese population. In the classic study of the historical encounter between China and the West entitled "To Change China: Western advisors in China," Jonathan Spence observes that those advisors in introducing Western science and technology as well as a broad range of Western ideas and institutions from egocentric theories, Western medicine, and Christianity to economic planning, engineering, and universities were "initiating a series of events whose outcome they would be unable to determine."

In the case of Protestant faith, despite its unmistakable Western origin, once it was brought into China, it developed in a way that turned out to be beyond control and often beyond the imagination of Western missionaries. [Inaudible] Kingdom movement led by [speaking foreign language] the younger brother of Jesus Christ was the result of such a development. The Baptist missionary who did not baptize him but who taught him the Bible for a few months in 1847 in Canton could never have imagined that the society of God worshippers that [speaking foreign language] started would result in a rebellion that claimed more than 20 million lives in the mid-19th century. The revolutionary type of Christianity did not last but the [inaudible] Christianity in 20th century China would endure and flourish. As we shall see, this happened for the most part outside mission churches. While missionaries were, for the most part, reform minded, were envisioning a Western-style Christianity taking shape in China along with Western inspired political reform, economic development,
and social progress, the Chinese masses were breathing a different kind of life into a [inaudible] Christianity. Like the [speaking foreign language] movement, it also defied ideological and institutional control of Western missionaries and it flourished in a way that often surprised and sometimes dismayed Western missionaries and that is what I'm going to talk about tonight.

Let's start in the year 1900. By 1900, the development of Christianity in China after almost a century of Protestant missionary work remained quite limited. There were about 80,000 baptized Protestants and then about three-quarters of a million Catholics. The Catholic story, of course, they have a much longer story. Their story went all the way back to the 1550's when the first Jesuit missionaries arrived so not surprisingly they had more people than Protestants. But all things considered, the development was not particularly impressive. Also, in 1900, a movement known as the Boxer Uprising was going to wreak havoc and claim lives of about 250 foreigners, not all of them missionaries, Chinese, at the time, Boxers, could not always tell the difference between a missionary and non-missionaries. It would also claim the lives of some 30,000 Chinese Christians, most of them Catholics.
Let me show... here we have some -- this is a picture from the time and this is a rendering of the Boxers setting fire to a church. All that happened in... 1900. Apparently, by 1900, Christianity had not really taken root in China.
These are... scenes from our time.
And here's a -- some statistics from the Pew Research Center and they came out just last December. This represents the more conservative estimate but even that conservative estimate would put the number of Chinese Christians, Protestants and Catholics, at about 67 million. The independent Christians, Protestants, are those who do belong to the so-called free-self movement, the official churches and the other Protestants are those that belong to the official churches. So if you compare that to the figure for 1900, it represents a development, an increase of some like 600, 700 fold of Christians. How then do we account for such an explosive growth of Christianity during course of the 20th century? Now, first of all we probably want to look at the missionary movement. Of course, the missionaries did a lot in the course of the 20th century. By the 1920's there was some more than 8,000 missionaries, Protestant missionaries, working in China and representing more than 100 missionary societies.
And the missionaries also embarked on a very broad and ambitious program of introducing not just Christianity but Western culture into China. This is the campus of Yenching University which is now, the campus is now used by Beijing University starting in 1919.
This is a historical picture from inland Hunan Province, Hunan-Yale Hospital.
This is a lesser known college, Hwa Nan Women's College.
And you also have some Catholic institutions. This is the site of Catholic University in Beijing.
It's -- today it’s used by Beijing Normal University.
So you do have vigorous efforts by the missionaries. Still, with all those institutional buildings, universities, hospitals, schools, YMCAs, all kinds of institutional work, by 1949 when the Communists took over, the total membership in mission churches was about 623,000 communicant members and it's less than a million Protestants. The Catholics number about 3 million. As for the Protestants, this is what Jonathan Fairbank wrote. He said, "After a century of missionary work, it is evident that a missionary's long, continued effort, if measured in numbers of converts had failed." Certainly, 623,000 after almost a century and a half of missionary work was not a major accomplishment. And then in the 1950's, missionaries were going to be kicked out of China. By 1958, most of the denominational mission churches were forced to have joint service and then by 1966 when the cultural revolution began, almost all churches were closed. So the missionary, the age of Western missions were over by the 1950's and suddenly the officially recognized churches were all closed. I mean, how did Christianity survive and really have its impressive comeback after the Mao era?

So I think the most important explanation for the post-Mao flourishing of Christianity would have to be sought outside mission churches. It would have to be sought at the grassroots level, what sociologist C.K. Young many years ago in his book "Religion in Chinese Society," would've called diffused religion, at the level of diffused religion. And this is what C.K. Young said about diffused religion in Chinese history. He said, "It typically arose during interludes between major dynasties in those times of civil strife," according to him, "economic -- in those times of civil strife, economic deterioration, social disintegration, and personal suffering, neither the once
dominant orthodox ideology nor the traditional passing of social institutions remained adequate. It was in popular often sectarian religion that the masses found superhuman powers that transcended the limits of man's earthly abilities" to wrestle with life's overpowering calamities.

In the first half of the 20th century, the transformation of Christianity from an alien religion into an indigenous diffused and popular faith, that's what happened. It's potency was found in supernatural powers by way of Pentecostal ecstasies and varied eschatology as well as in nationalistic exuberance and utopian communalism, so Christian movement in the 20th century was primarily a popular religious movement with these characteristics.
There were charismatic ecstasies. There was this obsession with apocalypse, with coming end of world and there’s also a theme of nationalistic opposition to Western missions in part because in the early part of the 20th century there was this rising nationalist movement in China. And the churches in China came under enormous pressure to dissociate themselves from mission churches. And some of those groups practiced a kind of utopian communalism that sort of sustained these -- helped sustain these communities. But these characteristics were mostly to be found in sectarian groups and also in Pentecostal revivals and many of these themes also were taken up by independent preachers.

One of those groups -- the one that was founded earliest, was called the True Jesus Church. And it began when this founder who was a rural migrant who had come into Beijing and was dealing in foreign merchandise experienced a personal crisis. He had tuberculosis and tuberculosis was incurable in the 19-teens and as so in that moment of personal crisis he sought a miraculous healing from the faith mission and it was in the process of encountering this faith healing that he eventually started a new church. And as it developed, this is a church that was energized by its Pentecostal faith which was, of course, adapted from the Pentecostal movement that first arose in this country in Los Angeles. And he adopted it and brought this -- created his own congregation, and some of his dreams and visions, tongues, and of course, healing and exorcism. And this new group promised that it can dissolve calamity and remove misfortune when one embraced the faith. Whatever disease, whatever illness they have will be cured instantly.
But also thrown on this nationalistic opposition to mission churches which this group, True Jesus Church, denounced as corrupt. And as it spread throughout China it was able to advertise its ability to cure disease and demonic possession and even opium addiction. Another group called the Jesus Family spread out from [inaudible] Province and like the first one, like the True Jesus Church, it also throve on its exuberant kind of Pentecostalism, dreams, visions, speaking in tongues, and rapture, being carried up to Heaven. But it also practiced a kind of communalism that proved to be a real -- the family became the site of kind of a -- the Jesus Family became some kind of a haven for Chinese who were displaced or people who were caught in the midst of warlordism, of vanity, of wars, Japanese invasion and natural disasters.
This is the founder, Jing Dianying.
And this is not exactly the Jesus Family itself but it was a similar church that divides its members into different departments. You have a Department of Carpentry, Department of Masonry, of people who have specialized labor and of course of people who attended the cattle and looked after the orchard.
In addition to such groups, there are also revivals that command -- led by a Christian general called Feng Yuxiang.
He organized a Christian army and he had a reputation of baptizing his soldiers with water cannon.
Apparently, Feng Yuxiang, he was trying to do is to find in Christianity inspiration for his soldiers. He was one of the many warlords and was hoping to lead a victorious Christian army that had Christian discipline but that also became a way of spreading Christianity.
Yet another form for this popular religion to spread at the grass roots level was the revivals, very often spontaneous Pentecostal revivals that broke out in Province in the 1930's.
And in addition to these you have independent preachers. Many of them have had bad relations with missions and then started their own congregations.
Like this one, the Christian Tabernacle.
And then you also have Chinese indigenous preachers who form traveling band like this one called the Bethel Band.
Led by a very charismatic preacher, probably the most celebrated revivalist in the 20th century, called John Sung who had a nervous breakdown when he was studying at Theological Seminary in New York. But he went back to China to carve out an incredible career being this fiery preacher and he was reputed to have converted more than 100,000 Chinese in his time.
But perhaps the one group, the one sectarian group, and most of these groups did take the form of sectarian groups. The one that had the most lasting inference on Chinese Christianity was founded and let by Watchman Nee who actually was adapting this [inaudible] brethren theology of what is referred to as pre-millennial dispensationalism I won't get into its intricate theology. Suppose it to say that it has an elaborate theology of the coming of end of the world as if he points to a cosmic clock that ticks with great precision toward that end time and that was going to carry into the Communist era. So by 1949 when the Communists took over, the indigenalization of Christianity was well underway. Its basic beliefs, basic sectarian structure, and its basic temperament was already well-formed. During the Communist era, both the harsh religion and the Mao and contemporary social dislocation, economic upheaval, official corruption, and the so-called moral mudslide all seemed to fit into eschatological reign of meaning that what you need has sort of decoded from the Bible.
Watchman Nee (1903–1972) and the Little Flock

☐ “truth of the Cross”
☐ Premillennial Dispensationalism

“We have the blueprint of God’s plan in our hands.”
——Nee (1939)

Watchman Nee with T. Austin-Sparks, 1938
This is the church very briefly after 1949. Quickly, during the 1950's all these independent, sectarian groups were forcibly disbanded. Mission churches were forcefully merged by 1958 and in 1966 they were all closed.
And these are some of the scenes from the cultural revolution.
Scenes of destruction and you can see the denunciation and humiliation of clergy.
Mao died in 1960, in 1976. By 1979 as part of the new policy of greater tolerance on the part of new leadership, Christianity and other religions were allowed to come back and the churches were reopened in 1979.
The Rise of the Christian Movement in Modern China

Church Renovation in Anhui (2006)
Now, contemporary Christianity took the form of -- I think you can divide them into two different major streams. One would be the official churches known as the [technical difficulty] churches. That's placed under government control. And the other major stream can be referred to as unofficial Christianity. Throughout much of the 1980's and 1990's the unofficial Christianity mostly were underground so they are also referred to as underground Christianity but after 2000, in the last decade, increasingly they are becoming more open. And also in the last decade it seems that in addition to this denominate of Christianity flourishing mostly as a underground grass-roots movement, we're beginning to see intellectuals, some of the prominent, public intellectuals who are Protestants and who are increasingly playing an active role in the Chinese political light as political dissidents.

Yet another subgroup that is closely linked to the house churches, to the underground Christianity, would be Messianic sects. Many of them would have cultic features. Among the Catholics which I have not talked about, the Catholic church was also forcefully brought under the Communist control by 1957 when they were forced to sever their ties with Vatican and but due to cultural revolution the Catholic churches were also closed. They, like the Protestant churches, were brought back after 1979 and like the Protestant churches, they were also placed under government supervision through this Catholic patriotic association. And then, in a parallel to what was happening with the Protestant church you also have underground community of Catholics who remained loyal to the Pope.
So among the official churches, what you have is a Christianity that is evangelical, that preaches basic values of honesty, humility, patience, and also patriotic values that would shy away from some of the more controversial subjects. There are topics that the governments would not like them to preach like the apocalypse. But then among the underground churches what you have is a vibrant, very spirited kind of Christianity that tends to absorb and to be absorbed by popular religion to a large extent but also that emphasizes particularly the potency of the faith. So that people coming to churches to pray for their -- for the sickness or demonic possession but also for better grace in college entrance examinations, family problems. And it's also with the underground Christian churches that you have this theme of eschatological explications. In fact, many of these churches will set various dates for the end of the world.

I'd like to read to you a passage from the end of my book that will offer a kind of a snapshot perhaps of the kind of Christianity among the Chinese masses. This is about a group that calls itself the Disciples Society founded by a farmer in the 1990's, who experienced personal tragedy. His two sons died and after that he converted and then came under the influence of Watchman Nee and preached a faith that's eschatological but also adapted his self very nicely to the rural scene in Northern China. So again, the group's name is Disciples Society and the leader, called [speaking foreign language] he starred himself as the Christ of the third redemption, the first two having been accomplished, one through Noah's ark, the other through the cross. He is the Christ of the third redemption. And he builds a large following particularly among the rural population in North China.
In 2007, in Northern [speaking foreign language] a journalist visited a Disciples Society family in their three-hole cave dwelling, a typical farmer's home tucked into the hillside on the lowest plateau of Northwestern China. Over the cave's entrance, the faded red of the painted slogan, "Long Live the Chinese Communist Party" was still visible. Inside the cave, the couple with their heads wrapped in white turbans admitted that they had stopped singing the songs about Chairman Mao or visiting the local temple for many years. Instead, where they knelt on their kang, the heatable platform bed, each day at dawn and at a night, they faced a red cross on the cave wall. Their health had much improved since they believe in the Christ of the third redemption, they claimed, as did a fellow member who had been left an invalid by polio but who reported lessened pain in her swollen knees after joining the sect. The couple's cave had also become the meeting point for local Disciples Society devotees. In the dark of the night, it burst into life at the Revival of Kindred Souls who fill the mud courtyard with hymns set to the tunes of local folk songs. "What we need to do now is to spread the gospel," the husband said. "The more we preach, the more blessing we will get." With the anticipated amassing of the grains of life, he added, he was not afraid of the calamities at the world's end. At that time, even when others run out of grains, we will not starve.

Apparently after decades of explosive growth, Christianity in China today forms a part of global Christianity but I think a significant gulf exists between Chinese and Western Christianity in practice. First, among the official churches that are appropriated by the government a as a tool for maintaining social stability, order, and patriotic values,
among these churches many would find the spirit, at least some spirit of Christianity to be missing. What about underground Christianity? Despite its avowed biblical literalism, underground Christianity has often developed characteristics that are quite consistent with traditional popular religion with its emphasis on potency of faith or [speaking foreign language] as in Chinese, manifested in healing, in exorcism, in miracles. But also the anticipation of end-time cosmic disasters.
Let me finally point to some of the scenes from contemporary time. This is one of the largest Chinese church in the world I think. It's in Hondo built mostly with the donations from its congregation, increasingly well off congregation.
About 100 miles or so off in Ningbo area, you also have these beggars and migrant workers having their house church meetings. As I mentioned earlier, beginning in, around 2000, increasingly you have these urban churches.
And these are some of the quick scenes from urban and rural churches.
Pastor Jin Mingri presides at the illegal 800-member Beijing Zion Church *(WSJ, July 28, 2011)*

Illegal house church in rural Henan
The Rise of the Christian Movement in Modern China

Membership meeting, Beijing Shouwang Church, 2009

Rural house church
There you have a famous songwriter in contemporary China called [speaking foreign language] leading a congregation, singing songs that she wrote herself and you have underground church of their baptism. In all, I think the emergence of homegrown Christianity since the republican era in early 20th century points toward the evolution in Chinese popular religion in modern times when Christianity joined indigenous beliefs in supplying the core ideology of popular religion and sectarian movements. Like most forms of popular religion, the search for potency in public Christianity is rooted in the religiosity of Chinese masses.

Both the utilitarian appropriation of Christianity by popular religion and its tendency toward millenarianism show that Christianity introduced first by Western missionaries has indeed become Chinese. The encounter between Christianity and China in modern times has bore fruits but those fruits are not always recognizable. Thank you.

[ Applause ]

Of course, any questions that you may have.

Audience member: Tell me, how does the government, if there's a way to generalize about how the government feels about these Christian movements. How does it feel about them? And is there any way we can know that? Is there a reaction against them today or are they viewed more positively?
Xi Lian: The government is not concerned about free-cell churches, unofficial churches. The whole purpose of setting up these religious control apparatus is to make sure that they are under the government's close supervision. It is those underground churches that really get the government nervous and what makes the leadership nervous is not really, it's -- the content of its belief. Although the emphasis on eschatological themes can be unnerving but mostly because of its ability to organize. You may all recall that it was in 1999 the Chinese government, Chinese leader [speaking foreign language] decided to crack down on [speaking foreign language] And the crackdown really followed the sit-in when [speaking foreign language] suddenly demonstrated his ability to organize people on such a large scale. That really got the government very nervous. But compared to [speaking foreign language] I think the government knows that the Christian churches have a much longer tradition and has a more impressive record of organizing the masses.

So the government continues to be very nervous about the underground Christianity, particularly when it gets to a certain size. Some of you may have followed news about recent crackdown, more visible kind of crackdown on unapproved Christianity that happened in Beijing. This is actually a scene that had to do with that story. It's a church called [speaking foreign language] Church in Beijing. It started in the 1990's with two or three dozen people but by 2008, 2009 it was having more than 1,000 people and it was meeting not in a clandestine way. It was meeting in this rented office space. They could have opened an official churches and there are many churches like that. People, for the most part, officials were open one eye and close
the other eye, as the Chinese say. As long as they do not get too big. [technical difficulty] has a certain magical figure [technical difficulty] really nervous and start to put enormous pressure on them.

The way it put pressure on this church, [speaking foreign language] Church, was to force the landlords to terminate their lease ahead of time. So one church member then went out to purchase a whole floor in an office building. They paid equivalent of more than $4 million U.S. to purchase this floor and thought that now that the place. But then the government intervened in this transaction. Even after they paid the money, they will not -- the key will not be turned over to them. So that's why since last year they have been meeting every week, they have been trying to meet every Sunday in a public, in a park. And every week they’ll stand there waiting to drag people away. So the true answer is, yes, the government remains very nervous about these organized underground churches.

**Audience member:** I wonder if you could address the movement of Catholic universities to Taiwan and, you know, anything about the difference between those who set up shop there and those who decided to stay.

**Xi Lian:** Well, I wish I knew more about the Catholic Church. My research mostly has to do with the Protestant church in China. I know both Protestant and Catholic institutions, both high learning and secondary schools, continue to do well in Taiwan and in Hong Kong. But they were all closed in China.
Audience member: Certain ones just saw the handwriting on the wall because these -- the university where I had a chance to teach in Taiwan, [speaking foreign language] Providence University, they came -- I mean, the nuns are still there. Nuns from Indiana are still there. They built it just the same as China. They took everything and it's very interesting. They even had their same connection with the same order of nuns that they had in China. Obviously different people, but the same connection and then right down the street there was another Catholic university. I mean, I couldn't believe that on the same road in [speaking foreign language] there was, there were maybe three Catholic universities along with all the other universities they had.

Xi Lian: Yeah, likewise, in Hong Kong also. Have quite a concentration –

Audience member: Very high concentrated and, yeah, so I thought that that was very interesting and I was wondering, you know, which ones chose to go, which ones said, "We'll stick it out." I wonder.

Xi Lian: Yes.

Audience member: I was wondering, you titled your second book "Redeemed by Fire." Can you explain why you [technical difficulty]

Xi Lian: It was taken from a poem by T.S. Eliot. I can read it to you. “The dove descending breaks the air with flame of incandescent terror of which the tongues
declare the one discharged from sin and error. The only hope, or else despair lies in the choice of pyre or pyre, to be redeemed from fire by fire." And of course, in this case, with the Chinese Christians I was mostly referring to their fiery eschatology and their fiery Pentecostal practice. Yes.

**Audience member**: Are most original Protestant missionaries-- were they from Pentecostal backgrounds where there was promoting of Pentecostal Protestant Christianity and if not how do you account for the rise of this Pentecostal style of Protestantism if that is not what the original Western missionaries were really doing because I think we see something parallel in Africa as well.

**Xi Lian**: This is an excellent question. The short answer is that there were Pentecostal missionaries in China but they play quite a, I would say quite a marginal role in the rise of the Pentecostal movement in China. There were some connections in early part. For instance, in the sort of basic of this sectarian group, the True Jesus Church, the initial inspiration, initial -- this little plane of Pentecostalism didn't come from a missionary, from a Pentecostal faith missionary. Once it struck fire, it took on a life of its own among the champions. For the most part, even the missionary societies, they did not take the Pentecostal, those faith missionaries, seriously. In terms of numbers, these are just small, very small minority of poorly organized missionaries. So that was not a big stream. For the most part, missionaries were trying to transplant a very rational reform, you know, reformist kind, humanitarian kind of Christianity and I think the missionaries in the long run, of course, they accomplished a lot in terms of
their contribution to Chinese modernization. Chinese Western medicine came to China mostly through these missionaries, missionary education -- all played a very important role in China's modernization. The most important part of their work which was to convert people, they did not do that well. And it's the Chinese themselves that somehow breathed a new kind of life into it.

Audience member: I wanted to ask you a question about the relationships, the relationships between the Chinese government and the free-cell underground and Catholic churches is fairly well -- it's pretty clear and laid out. But I guess my question is what is the relationship now, in this decade, between those three groups, between the free-cell, the underground, and the Catholics. I mean, a few, 20 years ago, there was deep suspicion, separation, that sort of thing. Has anything changed in 25 years between those organizations and the people who are members of those communities?

Xi Lian: Again, that's a very good question but also very complex one to address. Both among the Catholics and among the Protestants you have very complex relations. You have competition, jealousy, among those competing groups. But also you have a level of collaboration. The Catholic story is really a fascinating one. You know, when the government brought back the Catholic, the patriotic association, the government would consecrate its own Bishops without Vatican's approval. But as time went on, actually many of those consecrations has passive approval by the Vatican. So for instance today you have like one-third of all those Catholic Bishops that have been
chosen and appointed by the Chinese government also have Vatican approval. But that still does not change the reality that there is sometimes fierce competition among the underground Catholics and the official Catholics. Now among the Protestants, from almost the very beginning, late 1970's and early 1980's, the underground church had denounced the official church as Babylon, the whore, because it has, you know, collaborated with the government, because it had -- because in the official church, according to the underground Christians, Christ is no longer the undisputed head. You have two heads. So among particularly rural house churches, many of them still retain quite a militant kind of hostility toward official churches. But then things vary from place to place. I think in the more urban and more coastal areas you can find more instances of actual collaboration between the official and unofficial churches. Some ministers who work in official churches, they actually keep up their own ties with unofficial churches so it's a more complex kind of picture. Yes.


Xi Lian: Yeah and since he appropriated or transplanted this -- a kind of theology that is not in the mainstream in the West but it became very powerful in China because of its eschatology that divides. It adopted this theory of John Nelson Darby from the brethren from the early 19th century that separates human history very neatly into seven stages. And you can match each stage, each church in the book of Revelations, you can match that with a certain historical stage. And so with that you have signs of
progression unmistakably toward this climax of end time tribulations and so that became very, very powerful in China. Yes.

**Audience member:** Do they have Christmas trees in China? Are they similar to the ones where you would find in America, where Christian families will have some sort of tree that they would put lights on? I’m curious.

**Xi Lian:** You know, a decade or so ago I was noticing an interesting kind of irony. In Beijing, there was one Christmas in Beijing, people were crowding into churches and cathedrals to attend Christmas and of course they had Christmas tree inside those churches, not in individual homes. And it was so crowded you actually have to get ticket, to reserve ticket to get into those churches. At the same time, outside Beijing in those house churches, their Christmas celebration would end up with [inaudible] their service. So increasingly Christmas has become part of the Western culture that's being embraced by many Chinese. It's fashionable to celebrate Christmas.

**Audience member:** Is it celebrated by even some Chinese who are not Christian?

**Xi Lian:** I think so. And you have people having their wedding, non-Christians who will try to have their wedding in your churches.

**Audience member:** [Inaudible] I think the Christmas kind of business activities in China, not religious. [inaudible]
Xi Lian: Yes.

Audience member: Another question about relationships. Phillip Jenkins in his books on global Christianity argues that in many contexts, the feeling about missionaries is ambivalence. So on the one hand you want to give missionaries their due that they've brought Christianity to your territory but on the other hand as these churches become more independent and indigenous, the Christianity is Chinese and the Christianity is Nigerian and missionaries may serve a peripheral role. I'm wondering with respect to Christianity in China today, how Western missionaries are interacting with these organizations? Obviously with these underground churches, you know, you talk to people in the States who are going to go on little trips and their going to be fixing computers but what they'll really be doing is proselytizing. On the other hand, you have a respect for the free-cell church from some people but there are organizations in Hong Kong that are running printing presses in [speaking foreign language] to produce bibles for the free-cell. Are you -- what's the relationship between these churches and these missionaries? How's it playing out right now?

Xi Lian: In contemporary China, the official policy, as you all know, is that the Chinese Christianity has to be free-cell, right? Self-support, you know, self-obligation, and self-government, so official policy does not allow any Christian missions into China. So in a way that makes the relationship easy, that the government churches will not simply allow that. But as you point out there are many people going on short-term missions and they will meet up with the underground churches. Sometimes it will be a
leadership training where you have those village Christian leaders who are brought to the area to meet up with this missionary to go through an intense period of training.

But I question. I'm not so sure how much of an inference these missions are really having on contemporary Chinese Christianity. I do have, I do come across evidence of one missionary, one Pentecostal missionary who was based in Hong Kong who was very active in China in the 1980's and 90's and has seemed to have brought back a particular kind of Pentecostalism that was not previously, that was not particularly widespread. But I think increasingly we are seeing the Chinese Christian church developing its Chinese Christianity, developing its own temperament, its own theological convictions. In fact, some of the most active contemporary sects or cults, as someone would call, develop a very assertive kind of perhaps nationalism in disguise.

You'll see this cosmic plan having its -- being launched from China and being sent from China. For instance, one of the contemporary, the most influential contemporary sect or cult called the Lightning out of the East or [speaking foreign language] or Eastern Lightning, proclaimed a female Christ and she said, "I have descended," she claimed, "I have descended in this world, bringing [inaudible] to people in the East." And she is the female Christ and salvation is going to be launched from China and I suspect there is that kind of nationalism that would make for inference and that would seriously limit the missionary influence. Yes.
Audience member: With respect to what you just mentioned is China going through something similar to what the United States went through, manifest destiny.

Xi Lian: Well, the manifest destiny, as I understand, was clearly and perhaps also self-consciously political crisis and of itself although contrary to some belief, manifest destiny was not openly expansionist or at least a mild form of, discreet form of expansionism. But I don’t see that in China because up till now, Christianity in China remains for the most part the religion of the marginalized people. It has not quite made its way into the cultural mainstream. Things are slowly beginning to change with more public intellectuals embracing Christianity and even some who are not baptized Christians openly appreciative of Christianity and looking to Christianity for inspiration for China's political reform. For instance, [speaking foreign language] who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010 is not a baptized Christian but even in his private letter written to fellow political dissidents, he expressed this clear admiration for Jesus as a great personality who was able to bring true freedom, a spirit of freedom to people who can't remake society. And so that is beginning to happen. But still I think for the most part it is a religion of the marginalized people whether it's in the rural area or in urban area.

Audience member: You did mention though that there was a form of nationalism expressed somehow connected to it so that was the reason for [inaudible].
Xi Lian: Yeah, I find that nationalism among Chinese Christians is a very interesting phenomenon in that almost from the very beginning in the early 20th century, those who were very nationalistic did not present their nationalism as nationalism because it raises suspicion that that group should oppose Western mission simply because they are Western, they are foreign. It seemed, sounds too secular. [technical difficulty] will oppose Western mission churches on spiritual ground, you know, decry Western Christianity as being corrupt, as having deviated from the true spirit of Christianity and presenting them themselves as more true to the spirit of primitive Christianity. So it's a more subtle kind of nationalism and I think that has continued into our time, those who see themselves as being more central to God's scheme of salvation. We seldom wave this nationalist flag but still present it in spiritual terms.

Audience member: I'm wondering about the influence of Taoism or Buddhism on these Christian groups.

Xi Lian: Excellent question, actually. Again, here is -- you have an interesting phenomenon. Almost all the Chinese churches would denounce traditional religion, including Taoism, Buddhism, and popular faith while at same time unconsciously adopting, absorbing, appropriating, many of the practices into the religion for instance, in Watchman Nee, he questions theology, I think you can read a lot of Taoist mysticism into his theology but he would never acknowledge that he's under Taoist influence. And I think the confusion inference of Chinese churches clearly is profound, particularly in this moralistic tendency. Yes.
Audience member: Okay, so how do you say Christianity in Chinese and what’s the letters do they use to represent -- like how do they translate it?

Xi Lian: There's actually, actually there's -- the Chinese have been using the term in a not very precise way. What is often meant and understood to be Protestantism in English is translated into something, [speaking foreign language] which actually means Christianity. The precise term would be [speaking foreign language] or [speaking foreign language] that's hardly anybody use that term. It simply translated into Christianity. But Catholicism, [speaking foreign language] is reserved for Catholicism.

Audience member: And what do those words mean exactly? Like, when you say, the standard word for Christianity, they have like the word Christ. Do they use the word that the Chinese has -- before Christianity came the word was used to refer to some sort of savior for the word Christ or is it a transliteration of -- that's kind of what I meant.

Xi Lian: In the case of the term [speaking foreign language] it is a transliteration --

Audience member: Transliteration.

Xi Lian: -- from, for Christ. But when Christianity was first brought into China and the [inaudible] we talked about earlier, when the [inaudible] Christians first brought
Christianity into China in the 7th century, they had a hard time finding the right term. At first, they opted for a term called [speaking foreign language] which is actually a Taoist term. And they were having these all different terms, initially with Taoist and at some time also Christ was also referred to as [speaking foreign language] as Buddha. But it was until when the Jesuits came and finally they decided on the term [speaking foreign language] Lord of Heaven. But the controversy over terms actually lasted all the way into the 19th century. They were having debates on what would be the right term to translate God. So in the union version of the Bible that came out in 1919, as late as 1919. Various missionary society that sponsor this joint translation project could not come to a final agreement. One version is [speaking foreign language] or Lord on High, the other version is [speaking foreign language] Spirit. And so what they decided is to print Bible, some with [speaking foreign language] some with [speaking foreign language] and the version of which would have a space before it because you need two characters and you have the space left.

**Audience member:** So was this bible that you're talking about, like, was it translated by missionaries from the West into Chinese or by native Chinese speakers into Chinese. Like, the main bible that sort of was first distributed in China, who translated -- people who spoke Chinese, the native, versus people who learned Chinese later in life?

**Xi Lian:** The -- most of the versions that most Chinese churches continue to use after this day is the 1919 union version and that version was the work of a group of
missionaries after a conference in 1890. They agreed that they need to work together. Prior to that, there had been different societies doing their own translations, some individuals that do their translation. They decided that to have the complete bible translated, they need some collaboration among these different societies so they form a committee to work on the translation and those missionaries who work on this committee, most of them haven’t been in China long enough so they didn’t know Chinese. But the actual translation, for the actual translation they would still hire many Chinese –

**Audience member:** Yeah, to help the [inaudible]

**Xi Lian:** So it's a collaboration between missionaries and the Chinese [inaudible]

**Audience member:** And did they use like transliterations for a lot of the names? Like Ezekiel, I mean, they just transliterated that into Chinese? They didn't try to translate the meaning of it? I mean I guess the same issues came up when translating the Buddhist text into Sanskrit and Chinese. I mean, how do you deal with the names? Should be transliterated –

**Xi Lian:** It's mostly transliteration.

**Audience member:** Transliteration.
Xi Lian: So Ezekiel would be [inaudible]

Audience member: Okay.

Xi Lian: Yes.

Audience member: Just to refer to Phillip Jenkins again, so one of the observations he makes is that to the deep joy of Christians in the West, Christianity is growing like crazy in other places, right? And it's following demographic trends but it's even outstripping those. So this is the fastest growing religion in the world and numbers are being added but to the great consternation of Western liberal Christians like, you know, the faculty in religious studies departments around the country, these Christians are not turning out the way that they would have liked. That is they are, they tend to be more Pentecostal, they tend to be more charismatic, millenarian, conservative in their values, and they tend not to be embracing anything like a Latin American Liberation theology which is joining their faith to a political agenda which would be, you know, would embrace good values. And I guess I'm wondering that as in China as the peripheral groups that you talk about are where the movement is really growing, you know, eventually the whole middle class probably, but is there any tendency to see Christians to be part of a larger political movement against the center [technical difficulty] are they in any way giving Western liberals hope that there could be a beachhead for political change that Christianity might lead? Is there anything going there?
**Xi Lian:** There are indeed such hopes. In fact, some people, scholars in China, who have been studying some of the house churches in some of the coastal, more affluent areas, particularly one city called [speaking foreign language] in [speaking foreign language] Province, are increasingly seeing a level of democratization in some of those independent churches. Many of those churches are led by so-called [inaudible] Christians, enterprising entrepreneurs who make a great deal of money and are now building their own churches and introducing a new way of -- a new kind of organization into their churches. And sometimes you see an element of democracy. For instance, you have a committee that runs the affairs of the church and so there is hope amongst some people that this kind of incipient democratization among some open churches might eventually spill beyond those churches and carry those kind of values, the important values, to broader Chinese society.

Personally, I don't see that coming very soon. You have isolated cases of this democratization among churches. Perhaps if I were to look for a bright spot of hope of Christianity contributing to a democratization, it would be a phenomenon that's sometimes referred to as the cultural Christians, those both Christians who are intellectuals who are trying to bring Christian values into the Chinese political and social life and also some liberal academics who, even though they have not personally joined a particular church, have really warmed to Christianity. And particularly when they look to what happened in Eastern Europe, they see Christianity as being linked to that movement of democracy, how Christianity have contributed as they would see -- contributed to the top layer of some of the Communist operatarian [phonetic] regimes and hoping the same thing would happen in China.
In the long run, I'd like to entertain the hope, myself, but I think in the short term even those cultural Christians, those Protestant intellectuals, some of them very articulate, that established formidable process in the Chinese culture. And probably because of the internet, because internet in the last decade has democratized information and learning so because -- in part because of internet many of these cultural Christians are really having their voice heard by ordinary Chinese. But even with that I see major hurdles. One important weakness, I think, with these Protestant cultural intellectuals is that they have yet to mobilize, connect with and mobilize public Christianity which remains for the most part politically apathetic. It's a curious irony that Christianity, cultural Christianity has been apolitical or even -- I guess I can say, has been apolitical but on the other hand they have tremendous potentials to become a political movement. But I think that has yet to happen.