

## THE CHURCH AS A PROTECTOR: ANTI-CHRISTIAN CASES AND RESOURCE CONFLICTS IN POST-BOXER CHAOZHOU

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*This article examines the role of Western missionaries and Chinese Christians as new powerbrokers in the competitive arena of rural politics in South China during the post-Boxer decade (1900–10). Focusing on four well-documented lawsuits involving Christians in the Chaozhou-speaking region of Guangdong province, this study shows that the power relationship between Christians and non-Christians had undergone a qualitative change since 1901. The crushing of the Boxers increased the prestige of Western missions and Chinese churches on the land, and it was this prestige that made it possible for native Church leaders to use the judicial process to effect changes in their favor and to enforce settlement agreements at the county courts. Litigation became an important tool of unifying and empowering rural Christian communities. These case studies not only provide insight into the local management of treaty rights and foreign affairs but also highlight the instrumental role of the churches in China during a time of rapid and profound change.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Chaozhou, Shantou, intra-/inter-lineage conflicts, litigation, community mediation*

The church became a protective society, whose members and leaders would help each other in all matters of disputes and litigations. (John Campbell Gibson)<sup>1</sup>

In an agrarian society where land is the basis of power and security, disputes over access to and control of land often give rise to violent conflicts. This was particularly true for the Chaozhou-speaking Christians in northeast Guangdong province, where fighting often broke out whenever Western missionaries and Chinese Christians acquired immovable property for building churches and schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Many of the so-called

<sup>1</sup> John Campbell Gibson, *Mission Problems and Mission Methods in South China* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, 1901), 184–85.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this article, the term Christian refers to the Catholic and Protestant missionary movements in South China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

anti-Christian cases (*jiao'an*) originated from the longstanding intra- and inter-lineage conflicts, even though the ostensible reasons given were different. Missionaries were often at a loss because local resource disputes and anti-Christian violence frequently overlapped. Their ability to intervene in rural conflicts relied on the powerful backing from foreign powers in treaty ports and beyond. When they intervened successfully, the native churches became what John Campbell Gibson, an experienced English Presbyterian missionary in Shantou, called a protective society that offered its members material security and political patronage. Against this backdrop, many native Church leaders asserted their treaty rights to challenge their opponents in the county courts and to claim compensation for damages caused by their rivals. As Christianity emerged as a new potent element in rural politics, it greatly affected the Church, state, and community relations in modern China.

The sources for this study are drawn from a vast array of correspondence among the American diplomats, American Baptist missionaries, and Chinese provincial and county officials. This article focuses on four well-documented lawsuits involving Christians in rural Chaozhou during the post-Boxer decade (1900–10). It argues that, since the failure of the Boxer Uprising, the power relationship between Christians and non-Christians had undergone a qualitative change. In most of the community resource conflicts, the rival factions no longer resorted to collective violence such as village feuds (*xiedou*) to vent their anger and to bargain with the state as they had done in the past.<sup>3</sup> The defeat of the Boxers increased the prestige of Western missions and Chinese churches, and it was this prestige that made it possible for native Church leaders to utilize the judicial process to effect changes in their favor and to enforce settlement agreements at the county courts. Litigation became an important tool for unifying and empowering rural Christians. The first two lawsuits concerned intra-lineage disputes in White Grave and West Hill. When the Baptist lineage members appealed to the American missionaries for help, they deliberately challenged their lineage leaders and intensified the debates about the local enforcement of treaty rights. The other two disputes originated from disagreements over the appropriation of village resources for state-building in Nine River and Bridge of Happiness. Since the Chinese state de-sacralized the religious sphere and launched the temple-to-school campaign to restructure the rural society, many Christians partnered with the government to challenge the traditional status quo. These case studies not only provide insight into the local management of treaty rights and foreign affairs, but also highlight the instrumental role of the churches in China during a time of rapid and profound change (see Figure 1).

A major methodological problem is the representativeness of the four selected lawsuits. A survey of the Shantou-based *Lingdong ribao* (*Lingdong Daily* 岭东日报) shows that over fifty anti-Christian incidents allegedly took place across Chaozhou from 1902 to 1911, but the county officials seldom reported the locally resolved disputes to the central government in Beijing.<sup>4</sup> The four cases under study represent only a fraction of the overall situation. Despite this limitation, these

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, *The Bible and the Gun: Christianity in South China, 1860–1900* (New York: Routledge, 2003, Chinese edition, Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> *Lingdong ribao* (*Lingdong Daily*), 1902–911, Shantou Municipal Archive, Shantou.

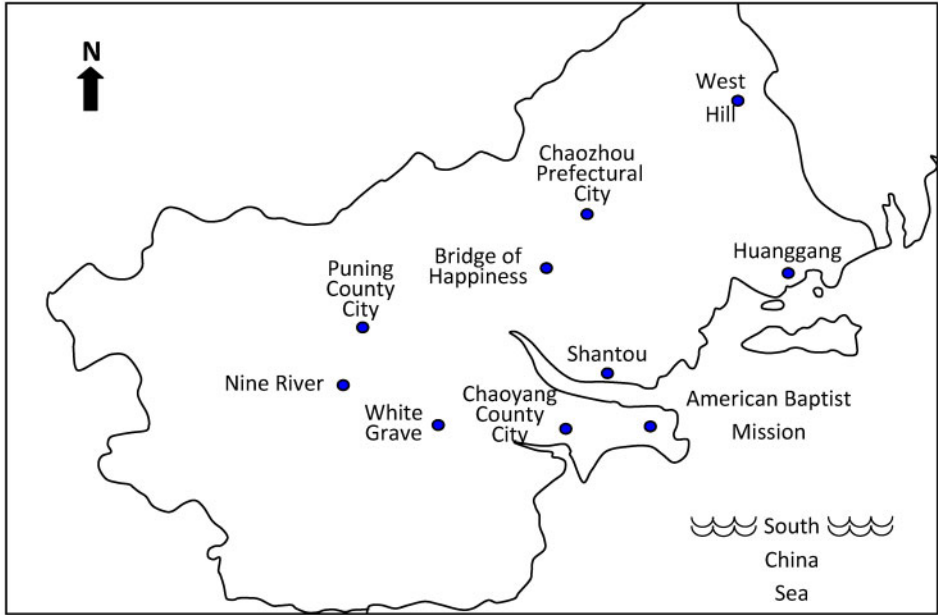


FIG. 1. Northeast Guangdong. *Image provided by Tse-Hung Lee.*

incidents should not be dismissed altogether. For one thing, they are the only local official records available for us to examine the anti-Christian cases in post-Boxer Chaozhou. Here, the arguments of both Christians and non-Christians can be reconstructed from the diplomatic sources as plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses. Without directly resorting to bloody violence, the rival factions challenged each other in the county courts. The reasons for litigation had to do with private material interests ranging from disputes over access to lineage resources, to conflicts over community expenses and retaliation against individuals. The rhetoric of the sources reveals the preexisting tensions and discontents that had shaped the normal intercourse between Christians and non-Christians.

This thematic focus on community power contest departs from the traditional historiography that interprets the anti-Christian incidents through the lens of anti-imperialism, anti-foreignism, and cultural antagonism.<sup>5</sup> Most scholarly studies of Christianity in post-Boxer China focus either on the scale of treaty enforcement<sup>6</sup> or on the gradual improvement of Church, state, and community relations.<sup>7</sup> It is

<sup>5</sup> For some recent studies of Christian communities in late imperial China, see Daniel H. Bays (ed.), *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), and Jessie G. Lutz and Rolland Ray Lutz, *Hakka Chinese Confront Protestant Christianity, 1850–1900, with the Autobiographies of Eight Hakka Christians and Commentary* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Dong Wang, *China's Unequal Treaties: Narrating National History* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Yang Dachun, *Wanqing zhengfu jidujiao zhengce chutan (A Preliminary Study of the Late Qing Policies Toward Christianity)* (Beijing: Jincheng chubanshe, 2004); Jiang Sun, "Yangjiao or the 'Other': Christianity and Chinese Society in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Frontiers of History in China*, 6:1 (2011), 53–73.

generally argued that, after 1900, the missionaries became less aggressive in defending their treaty rights than they had been in the contentious period of 1880 to 1900, and that their willingness to compromise with the Chinese officials stabilized the Church-state interactions.<sup>8</sup> Yet, most of the primary sources on the post-Boxer disputes inform us about the agendas of Chinese officials and foreign missionaries at a particular time rather than the experience of ordinary participants. R. G. Tiedemann cautions that the previous interpretations were shaped by “the emotive language of missionaries, imperialists, and Chinese nationalists,” and that they overlooked “the underlying but enduring patterns of cooperation and competition” between Christians and non-Christians.<sup>9</sup>

Delving below the surface of these interpretations, this article asserts that the reality of Church, state, and community interactions was more nuanced and grounded in complex local conditions. Because the rival factions lived in the same settlement and belonged to the same lineage, concern for unity and stability always coexisted with the impulse for competition and confrontation. In the process of conflict resolution, power relations changed frequently under the external influences of Western missionaries and Chinese officials. When the late imperial state was in decline, the native Church leaders held onto their original autonomy and crossed the boundaries between sacred and profane to claim more influence against the lineage elders, temple managers, and county and sub-county officials. If power interactions are defined as the ability to influence the making of decisions concerning community interests, it is important to examine how the rival factions deployed different strategies to hold their communities together. Thus, the rise of Chinese Christians as new powerbrokers in rural politics and the contest for power should be the foci of discussion.

## CHRISTIANITY AND RURAL SOCIETY IN CHAOZHOU

The Chaozhou (Tie-Chiu 潮州) mission, widely known as the Swatow (Shantou 汕头) mission in the Western literature, was one of the fast-growing mission fields in modern China. Located along the South China coast, the region was far away from the central and provincial governments and notorious for its long history of rural violence. The Chaozhou dialect was the dominant language in the coastal areas, whereas the Hakka dialect was widely spoken in the poorer interior.

The Beijing Convention of 1860, one of the infamous “unequal treaties” signed in the aftermath of the Second Opium War between China, Britain, and France, laid down the framework for Christian expansion throughout the late nineteenth century. It opened the Chaozhou prefectural city, Chaozhoufu (潮州府), as a new treaty port, but due to strong anti-foreign sentiment, American and British

<sup>8</sup> Alan R. Sweeten, *Christianity in Rural China: Conflict and Accommodation in Jiangxi Province, 1860–1900* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2001), 178–95; Ernest P. Young, “The Politics of Evangelism at the End of the Qing: Nanchang, 1906,” in *Christianity in China*, 91–113; Roger R. Thompson, “Twilight of the Gods in the Countryside: Christians, Confucians, and the Modernizing State, 1861–1911,” *ibid.*, 53–72.

<sup>9</sup> R. G. Tiedemann, “They Also Served! Missionary Interventions in North China, 1900–1945,” in *Re-interpreting the East Asian Christianity*, ed. by Feiya Tao and Philip Yuen-Sang Leung (Hong Kong: Center for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2004), 159.

diplomats moved to the harbor of Shantou, about 60 km south of the prefectural city. After establishing themselves in Shantou, the American Baptist and English Presbyterian missionaries encountered much hostility from Confucian literati, government officials, and lineage elders in cities. The only option was to shift the focus of evangelization toward the interior. As a result, Christianity grew as a rural phenomenon and native converts came from diverse social backgrounds: they were farmers, artisans, merchants, medical practitioners, beggars, and widows. They used their social networks to bring relatives, neighbors, and friends to the churches, a pattern of church growth that fitted well with the missionary expectation of self-propagation through native agency.<sup>10</sup> Because these networks were outside Chinese official control, they provided a stable and effective channel of religious transmission that integrated Christianity into the local society.

The most difficult challenge facing native Christians was their lineage affiliation. Before the Communist Revolution of 1949, most villages in Chaozhou were dominated by powerful lineages. In areas with little government control, lineages were territorial corporate units in which the elders managed communal affairs and distributed common resources such as land, water, and firewood among all the members. Communal rituals and ancestral worship were performed to maintain lineage cohesion. Equally important were temples, which coexisted with lineages and enforced group solidarity through the holding of temple festivals. These ceremonies drew the boundary between insiders and outsiders. People who had contributed to lineages and temples were regarded as insiders and given access to the use of land and water resources for agricultural production. People who had formerly participated but refused to be involved after conversion to Christianity were viewed with suspicion and treated as outsiders. The first few people to profess their faith in a lineage were often bitterly and violently opposed by the elders. If these converts stood firm and relied on the political and economic resources of foreign missionaries, they could easily turn the churches into protective organizations. In those deeply divided communities, religious conversions followed preexisting communal divisions. Ambitious Christians with independent means of production and a higher social status tended to break away from the old lineages and made the churches their new powerbases. As the churches began to take shape, they coalesced into exclusive sub-lineage congregations.<sup>11</sup> There was a considerable overlap of Chinese kinship and Christian identities. Where the churches were erected outside the walled villages and surrounded by Christians, they were misunderstood as independent Christian settlements. In fact, these Christians identified themselves with their denominations and lineage factions. This remarkable overlap of religious, kinship, and territorial identities still characterizes most Christian communities in Chaozhou today.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> William R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 34–58.

<sup>11</sup> Lee, *The Bible and the Gun*, 21–38 and 101–61.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Tse-Hei Lee (李樹熙), “Jiehe lishi dang’an ji tianye diaocha de jidujiao yanjiu fangfaxue: yi Chaoshan jiaohui weili [Integrating archival research and fieldwork in the study of Christianity in Chaozhou and Shantou],” *Zhongguo shenxue yanjiuyuan qikan* (*The Journal of the China Graduate School of Theology*), 48 (2010), 63–85.

Political issues involving Western missionaries and Chinese Christians were complex. The late nineteenth-century treaty system and the local officials' hostility engendered a sharp divide between Christians and non-Christians, even though both communities lived adjacent to each other for decades. Whenever fighting erupted between Christians and non-Christians, it usually started for nonreligious reasons. Sectarian and customary strife, especially in the peripheries of the Chaozhou region, originated from socioeconomic disputes. Without an efficient system of arbitration, civil and criminal disputes that could be resolved by competent county magistrates escalated into battles between rival factions. Any violent acts that coincidentally involved rival factions were framed by the Christians as deliberate attacks on them because of their faith. These disputes quickly turned into cycles of vengeance, and such hostilities intensified the debates about the treaty rights of native Christians, leading to more frustration and anger on all sides.

These institutional factors complicated the status of native Christians in South China during the Boxer Uprising, a movement directed against all forms of foreign presence, especially Western mission institutions and Chinese churches. Such anti-foreign sentiment resurfaced in North China amid widespread drought and famine in 1899 and 1900, for which the Christians were unfairly blamed. Anti-foreign and anti-Christian violence broke out not only in areas far from the imperial capital but also within the foreign concession in Tianjin and the legation quarter in Beijing. The empress dowager Cixi made a catastrophic decision to side with the Boxers and declared war on foreign powers on June 21, 1900. The foreign powers sent an expeditionary force to suppress the Boxers, and in October 1900 the imperial court fled to Xi'an. Li Hongzhang, the Governor-General of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, along with other coastal governors made peace with the foreign forces. The imperial government immediately reversed its anti-foreign stance and ordered the provincial authorities to protect Christians from the Boxers' attacks. The failure of the Boxer Uprising increased the prestige of Western missionary enterprises, and the Chinese Church was now looked upon as a powerful institution on the land. It was then that the American Baptist Mission quickly expanded their work from the old mission headquarters in Shantou's Rocky Corner into Chaoyang and Raoping counties. In 1902, the Baptists set up additional mission fields in Chaoyang county city, 15 km southwest of Shantou, and in Huanggang market town in Raoping county, 48 km northeast. These two places that had previously resisted conversion now sought it in huge numbers partly because people saw that many mission school graduates acquired the vocational skills to participate in the treaty-port economy and partly because the missionaries were willing to use the treaty rights to defend the native converts during the Boxer Uprising. To many Church leaders who benefited from treaty protection, closer links with the missionaries enhanced their bargaining power and social prestige. Missionary patronage was the crux of this patron-client system. But when Christianity embedded itself into local politics, the missionary movement often polarized preexisting factions, pushing them to challenge each other publicly. For the Church leaders to display new power and influence outside the religious domain, they appealed to foreign missionaries to defend their religious rights and community interests. This development led to the proliferation



of lawsuits and created new mediating spaces between Christians and non-Christians as shown in the following cases.

#### THE WHITE GRAVE CASE (1907–09)

Located in the Great South Mountain Range along the borders of Chaoyang and Puning counties, White Grave (Baifen 白墳) was a hilly settlement populated by the Lin lineage. Longstanding resource disputes prompted the rival lineage factions to join the American Baptist and French Catholic missions, respectively, and the intra-lineage conflicts over the ownership of mountain resources led to the Christian sectarian rivalries in 1907.

For a long time, the Lin lineage members at White Grave were tree and grass planters. They grew pine trees and grass on the mountain ridges to be used for fuel. The land was never held as the common property of the Lin lineage and anyone could cultivate it. Before the 1840s, the grass on the mountain ridges was free to inhabitants from White Grave and nearby villages. After the 1840s, the Lin lineage of White Grave recognized the high economic value of timber and grass. They claimed the hills to be their lineage property and prohibited other people from cutting timber and grass. In 1895, there was a commercial dispute between White Grave and a neighboring village over the cutting of grass on the hills. The rival parties took the case to the Puning county court. The Puning magistrate resolved this dispute according to customary business practice.<sup>13</sup> In his ruling, he stated: “The grass grows of itself, requires no labor or care, and comes to maturity annually. The planting of trees require the investment of time, labor and money; several years elapse before there is any income from the investment.”<sup>14</sup> He divided the three mountain ridges among the Lin lineage members, and registered the size, location, and value of these holdings in new property deeds. In this verdict, the Lin lineage of White Grave secured the absolute ownership of the ridge land by purchase and inheritance, and monopolized the access to the pine trees and grass on the hills.

Furthermore, the magistrate mapped the ridge land and wrote down the shareholders’ names in order to avoid any disagreement. He divided the grassland into 125 shares among the Lin lineage members. Fifty-six and half of the shares went to the Catholic faction of the Lin lineage, fifty-seven and half went to the Baptist faction, and the remaining eleven shares were distributed among non-Christians. The Catholics and Baptists acquired almost an equal share of the grassland, but there were no boundaries indicating the precise location of their shares. The custom was for them to meet on the site to decide the scale of grass-cuttings annually. As regards the holdings of the forest land, the magistrate declared the pine trees to be owned by the planters. Because the Catholics had not invested as much time and money as the Baptists in planting the trees, they

<sup>13</sup> David Faure, “The Local Official in Commercial Litigation in Early Nineteenth-Century China,” *University of Tokyo Journal of Law and Politics*, 1 (Spring 2004), 144–55.

<sup>14</sup> Adam S. Groesbeck, Chaoyang county city to P. S. Hauser, Shantou, November 25, 1907, Record Group No. 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Consular Post, Swatow, China (hereafter as RG84), vol. 13, “Miscellaneous Correspondence Received and Sent, December 15, 1906–March 22, 1909,” National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

acquired less shares of the forest land. Eight-tenths (8/10) of the pine trees belonged to the Baptists, 1.5/10 went to the Catholics, and 0.5/10 of the holdings to non-Christians.<sup>15</sup> The magistrate's decision in 1895 clearly favored the Baptists at White Grave and legalized their status as the largest owners of the forest.

The property divisions sowed the seeds of Christian sectarian rivalries. In 1907, a new magistrate was appointed. Then the Catholic lineage members decided to use the French missionaries' influence to overturn the former magistrate's decision. Their leader Lin Qizong (林起宗) argued that the pine trees were the common lineage property and should be divided on the same scale as the grass (56½; 57½; 11 shares). Lin Qizong's claim would allow the Catholics to control half of the timber. In response, the Baptists blamed the Catholics for challenging the official verdict. Lin Zongwen (林宗文), a Baptist leader, asked Adam S. Groesbeck of the American Mission for help, and wanted the new magistrate "to stand by the decision of his predecessor without wavering." In December 1907, however, the new magistrate arrested Lin Zongwen and planned to make a decision favorable to the Catholics.<sup>16</sup>

At that time, Groesbeck was involved in several property disputes in the neighboring county of Chaoyang. First, the Baptists had difficulty dealing with the Chaoyang government over the registration of two church property deeds. The church properties were located outside the American Baptist Mission headquarters in Shantou's Rocky Corner. The government never stamped the church property deeds to approve the transactions. Coinciding with this case were several anti-Baptist incidents in Chaoyang. One incident concerned the imprisonment of Wu Junyao (吳俊耀), a seventy-year-old Baptist in River Head Village (Xitou 溪头), for mediating a property dispute against his fellow church member in the county court. In another incident, the same anti-foreign Chaoyang magistrate jailed a Baptist over the control of a burial ground. After winning the case, the non-Christians destroyed the Baptist's family grave and occupied the burial land.<sup>17</sup> In this hostile environment, Groesbeck remarked cynically that the church had "more imprisonments than baptisms."<sup>18</sup> Because the Chaoyang magistrate refused to compromise with the American missionaries in the lawsuits, Groesbeck had to exercise the treaty rights to protect his flock. In September 1908, P. S. Hauser, the US Consul, called on the Circuit Intendant of Huizhou and Chaozhou prefectures to order the Puning magistrate to release Lin Zongwen of White Grave and to dismiss the Catholics' request.<sup>19</sup> It was then that the Baptists could hold onto their dominant control over pine trees and grass in the mountains.

<sup>15</sup> Groesbeck, Chaoyang county city to Hauser, Shantou, November 25, 1907, RG84, vol. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Groesbeck, Chaoyang county city to Hauser, Shantou, February 10 and 11, 1908, RG84, vol. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Groesbeck, Chaoyang county city to Hauser, Shantou, January 8, February 10, and March 4, 1908, RG84, vol. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Adam S. Groesbeck, "Letter to Friends," July 1, 1908, and "Annual Report, Chaoyang Station," 1909, Box 1, Folder 5, Adam and Clara Groesbeck Papers, Ax 818, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>19</sup> Daotai Wu, Chaozhoufu to Hauser, Shantou, September 15, 1908, RG84, vol. 9, "Chinese dispatches received November 15, 1906–April 1, 1909," 52.



## THE WEST HILL CASE (1908–11)

West Hill (Xishan 西山) is located in the mountainous terrain of Raoping county, about 92 km north of Shantou and 35 km northwest of the prosperous coastal market of Huanggang. The anti-Christian dispute in 1908 resulted from the antagonism of non-Christian neighbors, the ambiguity of the Chinese regulations over church property transaction, and the non-cooperation of the county government.

In the past, a branch of the Tang River (Tangxi 湯溪) flowed past the village and allowed inhabitants to travel downstream to the daily markets in Fushan (浮山) and Huanggang (黃岡). Today, it takes over an hour to drive along the hilly road from Huanggang to the village. The Tu lineage controlled the political landscape of West Hill. They were fluent in the Chaozhou and Hakka dialects. At the turn of the twentieth century, the American Baptists established a church in Fushan market and several Tu lineage members from West Hill worshipped there. The Baptist Mission intended to build a chapel at Small Banyan Shrine (Xiaorongshe 小榕社), another walled village adjacent to West Hill, but local residents forced the Baptists to go elsewhere because they worried that the church construction would obstruct “the cosmological streams of influence flowing from the dragon in the hill toward the village.”

In 1908, George W. Lewis bought a plot of land from Tu Meng, a Baptist at West Hill, and planned to erect a chapel there. The Tu lineage leaders did not oppose the property transaction. In the summer of 1909, Lewis transported all the construction materials to West Hill. But one night, some earthen blocks prepared for the construction were trampled and became useless. Several Baptist families also had things stolen from their homes. The Chinese preacher suspected that the people at Small Banyan Shrine committed the depredations but they denied any involvement.<sup>20</sup> In September 1909, George W. Lewis restarted the project and hired workmen from Small Banyan Shrine to level the ground for construction. A week later, lime and timbers arrived at West Hill and the carpenters were ready to work. At that time, the Tu lineage elders came out to oppose the church construction and threatened the Baptists with violence. One evening, some lineage members stole the lime and threw it into the fishpond of a Baptist family, thereby destroying the lime and killing the fish. The next morning they stopped the builders from entering the village. The elders were determined to stop the Baptists from establishing an institutional presence in West Hill.

Meanwhile, the lineage elders called Tu Pochen (涂波臣), a litigant of the Raoping county government, to return home and deal with the Baptists. Tu Pochen had a house “a little lower down and to one side of the [construction] site.” Because his house and the construction site were located outside the walled village, George W. Lewis never anticipated any opposition from him. Lewis suspected that Tu Pochen attempted to extort payment from the Mission; otherwise, as a litigant,

<sup>20</sup> George W. Lewis, “Statement of the Case Regarding the Opposition to Building a Chapel at Sai-Sua,” October 19, 1909; George W. Lewis, Huanggang to Leo A. Bergholz, Guangzhou, January 17, 1910, RG84, “Miscellaneous Correspondence, January 1, 1910–December 30, 1910,” 43.

he could stop the church property transaction and sue Tu Meng, his Baptist neighbor.<sup>21</sup>

When George W. Lewis returned to the area, he met with the elders of Small Banyan Shrine who mediated between the Baptists and Tu Pochen. Yu Sen (余森), one of the arbitrators, proposed a compromise. He asked Tu Pochen to buy another piece of land for the Baptists in exchange for the current construction site. He urged Lewis to exchange the mission property in West Hill for another piece of land at neighboring Small Banyan Shrine. Lewis agreed to compromise, but he found the proposed site at Small Banyan Shrine adjacent to a stream. As there was no bridge, the Baptists needed to wade across the stream on the way to the church. When the rainy season came, it would be difficult for the elderly and women to cross. Moreover, the proposed site was further away from West Hill, where most of the Baptists lived. Since there were no Baptists at Small Banyan Shrine, it would be necessary to hire a full-time chapel keeper to guard the building during the week. Nevertheless, Lewis would be willing to move, if the Tu lineage paid the moving expenses. But the arbitrators failed to get the lineage leaders to reach an agreement. Thus, the first attempt at community mediation failed.<sup>22</sup>

What annoyed the Baptist Mission most was the litigation process. After the anti-Christian faction stole the lime and threw it into a Baptist's fishpond, George W. Lewis reported the theft to Albert Pontius, the US Consul in Shantou, and urged him to complain to Long Chaoyi (龍朝翊), the county magistrate of Raoping. On October 23, 1909, Pontius' complaint arrived at the magistrate's office. On the same day, Tu Pochen helped the elders of West Hill to file a lawsuit against the Baptists. They accused Tu Meng and Tu Dongxiu (涂冬秀), both Baptists, of selling land to the American missionary and building a chapel. They claimed to be worried about the negative impact of the church construction on the cosmological harmony of their ancestral graves. Lewis dismissed the accusations and argued that the Tu lineage leaders never mentioned this concern before, and that Tu Pochen instructed the elders to use the cosmological argument against the Christians in the court.<sup>23</sup> Pochen's petition was a litigation tactic in response to Albert Pontius' complaint. The anti-Christian faction succeeded in blocking the construction work; they now used the court to counter the American diplomatic influence.

Shortly after filing the lawsuit, on November 9, the anti-Christian faction intimidated the Baptists by stealing the timbers shipped by Lewis from Huanggang and by destroying the rice crops of Tu Meng and Tu Dongxiu. The magistrate took the side of the Tu lineage and blamed the Baptists for causing the trouble.<sup>24</sup> On November 12, Magistrate Long instructed George W. Lewis to submit the previously stamped land deed for inspection. The church property deed was submitted in triplicate as legally required. The church property transaction was dated in late 1908 and the deed was stamped by Magistrate Long on April 17,

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, "Statement of the Case Regarding the Opposition to Building a Chapel at Sai-Sua."

<sup>22</sup> Lewis, "Statement of the Case Regarding the Opposition to Building a Chapel at Sai-Sua."

<sup>23</sup> George W. Lewis, "Statement of the Further History of the Sai-Sua Case and Taken from Former Correspondence with Consul Pontius," March 12, 1910, RG84, "Miscellaneous Correspondence, January 1, 1910–December 30, 1910."

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, "Statement of the Further History of the Sai-Sua Case."

1909. The respective copies of the deed were kept in the offices of the county magistrate and the provincial treasurer, and the English version was sent to the US Consulate in Shantou. Magistrate Long's purpose was to take away the last piece of evidence from the missionaries if he could. Albert Pontius made no protest and advised George W. Lewis to comply. Accordingly Lewis sent a preacher to bring the deed to the magistrate on November 26, 1909. Subsequently, Magistrate Long invited Lewis for a meeting.<sup>25</sup>

On December 4, 1909, Lewis arrived at the magistrate's office. While Magistrate Long was friendly toward the missionary, there was tension in the air. First, the magistrate pressurized the missionary to compromise with Tu Pochen. But Lewis blamed Tu Pochen for his reluctance to make peace with the Mission. Then the magistrate pointed out that Lewis had not observed the "new regulations" regarding the purchase of land in the interior. Lewis explained that he had never learned of the new regulations, and that if there had been any new regulations the magistrate should have informed him rather than stamping the church property deed on April 17, 1909. Therefore, the magistrate should be responsible for the administrative error. Finally, Lewis mentioned the theft of his timbers. Magistrate Long suggested Lewis sue the lineage headmen of West Hill. At the end of the meeting, the magistrate did not return the deed. He neither investigated the theft nor punished the guilty parties. He simply put everything on hold.<sup>26</sup>

Upon returning to Shantou, Lewis found Albert Pontius to have left for a new post in Nanjing. Within a day or two, Magistrate Long instructed the arbitrators from Small Banyan Shrine to visit Lewis and arrange another round of community mediation. But the arbitrators failed to persuade Tu Pochen to compromise. When the new US Consul, George E. Chamberlin, arrived at Shantou in May 1910, Lewis immediately asked him to appeal to the Circuit Intendant in the prefectural city and to the Governor-General of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces in Guangzhou. Because of the personnel change in the US Consulate, this case dragged on for another year.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the Circuit Intendant and the Governor-General were dissatisfied with Magistrate Long's performance. In August 1910, the provincial authorities sent a deputy magistrate to resolve the anti-Christian disputes in Raoping.<sup>28</sup> The decision was a careful political calculation in that the senior officials in Guangzhou exploited the West Hill case to get rid of Magistrate Long and to reinforce the provincial control over the county government.

The intervention by the higher authorities was a key to resolving this case. In February 1911, the Baptist Mission finally compromised with Tu Pochen through

<sup>25</sup> Lewis, "Statement of the Further History of the Sai-Sua Case."

<sup>26</sup> Lewis, "Statement of the Further history of the Sai-Sua Case."

<sup>27</sup> Lewis, Huanggang, April 26, 1910, and Lewis, Huanggang to George E. Chamberlin, Shantou, May 17, 1910, RG84, "Miscellaneous Correspondence, January 1, 1910–December 30, 1910," 72 and 112.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, Huanggang to Chamberlin, Shantou, August 12, 1910, RG84, "Miscellaneous Correspondence, January 1, 1910–December 30, 1910," 223.

an exchange of property. But C. C. L. Williams, the new US Consul, advised the Mission only to do so after receiving the title deed from the deputy magistrate. Williams insisted that the church property deed had to be returned now, and the charge of theft could be dealt with locally. Therefore, Williams asked for “the [US] Legation’s assistance in obtaining peremptory orders to the Magistrate to return the deed at once” because of the following reasons. First, no county official should impeach the validity of a title deed that had been legally recognized by the Chinese authorities. Second, the US Consulate had an obligation to protect the American church properties and to help the Mission secure the title deed. Third, Magistrate Long had set a precedent of ignoring the appeals of the Consul and this would stir up the anti-foreign element in the county.

Coinciding with the West Hill case was the implementation of new rules about the purchase of Christian church property in early 1911. The new rules that allowed the officials to disapprove any transaction were designed “to prevent the mission societies from exercising their treaty rights” in the interior.<sup>29</sup> In early 1911, Circuit Intendant Wu wrote to C. C. L. Williams:

According to the New Land Regulations all churches in acquiring property in inland places should, one month before they pay the purchase money, require the landowner to post on the ground for sale a notice stating clearly that that is his own property, the reference number of his title deed or triplicate document, the four boundaries, and the length and breadth of the ground under question, and also the words “to be sold”; and should the ground be at an open port the landowner should at some time and for a month advertise the same in the most widely read Chinese newspaper, if such there be; and, if there is no interference during the full month, then the church can buy the ground and should send the title deed through her consul to the Chinese official in charge of that place to find out that such a transaction is not prejudicial to the locality nor would there be any interference, then the title deed can be sealed and kept. Furthermore, there are special forms for church property which must be registered in the land office for future reference and in this respect they differ from the ordinary triplicate form for Chinese subjects.<sup>30</sup>

As reasonable as it sounded, it was difficult to implement the New Land Regulations in the interior. A village property seller would find it extremely inconvenient and impractical to go to Shantou and advertise the church property transaction in *Lingdong ribao*, the widely circulated newspaper, before finalizing the deal. The regulations never prohibited the acquisition of church property, but they allowed the officials to block such a transaction in case of community protests.

<sup>29</sup> C. C. L. Williams, Shantou to William J. Calhoun, Beijing, February 10, 1911, Record Group No. 59, Records Relating to China Among the Central File of the Department of State (hereafter as RG59), Box 4663.

<sup>30</sup> “A Copy of the Reply from His Honor, Daotai Wu, to H.B.M.’s Consul Re Church Site, Theft of Building Materials and of Paddies in the County of Ungkung,” RG84, vol. 10, “Chinese Dispatches Received, April 13, 1909–December 31, 1910,” 46.

Circuit Intendant Wu referred to these rules and blamed Tu Meng for not advertising the church property transaction in the newspapers. At the same time, Wu initiated the third round of community mediation by authorizing Yu Sen, the arbitrator from Small Banyan Shrine, to find a new construction site for the Baptists and enquire about the amount of the stolen timbers. In December 1910, a new magistrate named Dong finally arrived at Raoping. Magistrate Dong blamed his predecessor, Long Chaoyi, for not investigating the theft of the Baptists' building materials, but he pointed out that the old church property deed was "in the form of an absolute title deed, the same form as that ordinarily used by Chinese subjects"; it was not the original red deed. Since the original deed did not conform to the new rules, Magistrate Dong issued a new property document after Lewis accepted the new construction site in Small Banyan Shrine.<sup>31</sup> This decision gave a face-saving opportunity for all the parties. The Baptists secured "an alternative, and equally suitable, piece of ground," and "received full compensation for building materials which had been stolen from the former site" and "for labor expenses in connection with its building operations, the sum agreed upon being Mexican \$400."<sup>32</sup> Even though the Tu lineage elders were resourceful and succeeded in blocking the church construction in West Hill, pressures from the higher authorities forced the Raoping county magistrate to settle the dispute.

#### THE NINE RIVER CASE (1909)

In March 1909, the Puning county magistrate punished Zhu Fenglao (朱豐老), an elderly Baptist at Nine River (Jiujiang 九江), for his refusal to surrender the ownership of the private village school to the government. The dispute was part of the broader Christians' resistance against the status quo of the dominant Fang lineage in Puning. In the early 1890s, the American Baptist Mission founded a church in Big Dam (Daba 大壩) market, where residents of Nine River came to worship. Several worshippers from Nine River were baptized, including Li Xi (李希), a 51-year-old woman in 1893; her 20-year-old son, Zhu Qing (朱清), in 1894; Zhu Nan (朱南), a 16-year-old teenage in 1895; and Li Hua (李花), a 47-year-old woman in 1896. Zhu Fenglao, a village leader, and his family were baptized after 1900.<sup>33</sup> Zhu devoted himself to the church at Big Dam and withdrew from the management of everyday affairs at his village. He befriended Jacob Speicher, the American missionary, and saw the advantages of being part of a superior power relationship. He planned to send his grandsons to receive modern education at the Big Dam Baptist Elementary School so that his descendants could use the missionary resources to build better lives for themselves.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> "Magistrate Dong of Raoping to Mr. Williams," RG84, vol. 10, "Chinese Dispatches Received, April 13, 1909–December 31, 1910," 47.

<sup>32</sup> C. C. L. Williams, Shantou to Percival Heintzleman, Beijing, August 8, 1911, RG59, Box 4663.

<sup>33</sup> *Lingdong jiayin: Lingdong jinxinhui lishi tekan (Lingdong Good News: A Special Issue on the History of the Lingdong Baptist Church)*, nos. 10–12 (Shantou: Lingdong Baptist Church, 1936), Shantou Municipal Archive, Shantou.

<sup>34</sup> Jacob Speicher, Jieyang county city to P. S. Hauser, Shantou, March 17, 1909, RG84, vol. 13.

On March 10, 1909, Fang Erjun (方爾鈞), a county educational commissioner and a member of the powerful Fang lineage, arrived at Big Dam with three constables. Armed with revolvers and chains, they planned to confiscate a temple building to be converted into a modern school. But the constables could not find Zhu Fenglao at home. They were so frustrated that they attacked and arrested Zhu Yinhe (朱銀河), the youngest son of Zhu Fenglao. The confrontation provoked the villagers, who demanded the release of Zhu Yinhe. The constables at once drew their revolvers to threaten the crowds. But the villagers fought back, taking Fang Erjun and the constables as hostages and transferring them to the church at Big Dam. Fang Erjun managed to escape amidst chaos and returned to the county city. He accused the people of Nine River of kidnapping the constables and requested reinforcements. The Puning magistrate immediately issued a warrant for the arrest of Zhu Fenglao, accusing him of attacking the officials and plotting against the educational reform.<sup>35</sup>

This dispute should be understood against the advent of the New Policies, which started in 1901 and reached a climax in 1905 with the abolition of the civil service examination system and the introduction of modern government schools. Edward J. M. Rhoads hails this top-down reform movement as “China’s breakthrough into the modern age,” dominated by the West and Meiji Japan.<sup>36</sup> The rural communities, far from embracing the New Policies, felt the blow of the educational reform because the county government ordered the community leaders to convert their temples and ancestral halls into public schools to be controlled by the reform activists, and to surrender the earnings of their land endowments for the reform.<sup>37</sup> According to Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, the confiscation of temples represented an ambitious project of restructuring the agrarian society and redefining the state’s relationship with rural organizations. Shocked in the aftermath of the Boxer Uprising, the state attempted to modernize itself by replacing lineages and temples with a top-down governance structure.<sup>38</sup> The expropriation of lineage and temple properties and the imposition of new educational taxes, however, led to instability. As Shuk-Wah Poon points out, as many as fifty-four riots broke out against modern schools nationally between 1902 and 1911. To prevent the confiscation of village properties by the reform activists, some villages joined the Christian churches in order to gain extraterritorial protection. Other communities circumvented the state by building their own private schools, a tactic of using education to boycott education.<sup>39</sup> This tactic worked well for areas with stronger congregations such as the Baptists in River of Hardship (Kuxi 苦溪 or Guxi 古溪), South Stream (Nanxi 南溪), and

<sup>35</sup> Speicher, Jieyang county city to Hauser, Shantou, March 17, 1909, RG84, vol. 13.

<sup>36</sup> Edward J. M. Rhoads, *China’s Republican Revolution: The Case of Kwangtung, 1895–1913* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 71.

<sup>37</sup> Adam S. Groesbeck, “Report for Chaoyang Station, 1908,” January 9, 1909, Box 1, Folder 5, Adam and Clara Groesbeck Papers.

<sup>38</sup> Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 45 and 55.

<sup>39</sup> Shuk-Wah Poon, “Between Religion and Superstition: Buddhism and Daoism in Guangzhou, China, 1900–1937,” *Journal of Religious History*, 33:4 (December 2009), 457, and *Negotiating Religion in Modern China: State and Common People in Guangzhou, 1900–1937* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2009).



Upper Market (Bushan 埔上). They utilized these Church schools to avoid paying taxes and to fight against the state's power. But in areas where the Church was weak, the Baptists had to close their schools and submit to the government pressure.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, the Nine River case raises question about the Church's association with Westernization and China's quest for modernity. The local picture of Christian institution-building differed from the development of mission schools and colleges in coastal cities. Before the Puning county government put in operation its own system of public schools, the leaders of Nine River and nearby settlements joined the Baptist movement to counter the power of the Fang lineage. They bitterly opposed the Fang's attempt at extorting taxes under the guise of the educational reform, and converted their traditional academies into Christian schools. They also hired qualified teachers from Shantou and implemented the new curriculum relevant to the vocational needs of their children. This Sino-American educational joint venture was a cost-effective and politically sound option for those villages critical of the Fang lineage.

Nevertheless, the state rejected this tactic of using Christian schools to boycott the educational reform. The provincial and county authorities sided with the Fang lineage and rejected the rights of local Christians to open the privately run Church schools outside Shantou. In late 1908, the Puning magistrate ordered the Baptists in South Stream to close the Yangzheng Elementary School (養正初等小學). The South Stream Baptists challenged the order in the county court and refused to surrender the school's finances to the officials. In 1909, the officials told Li Zhiduan of Front Mountain Village (Shangqianxiang 山前鄉) to hand over the Qinye Academy (勤業學堂), but Li Zhiduan converted the village school building into a new Church school. When the officials forcefully shut down the two-year-old Dagan Elementary School (大觀初等小學) in Dapu market, the villagers boycotted the Fang-controlled school and sent their children to a nearby Baptist school. As many people allied with the Baptist Mission, the Fang-dominated county government felt threatened and took action to assert its own rule.<sup>41</sup>

While dealing with the Nine River case, Jacob Speicher complained about the mistreatment of another Baptist in Puning.<sup>42</sup> Speicher criticized the magistrate for prohibiting Heng Puyun from running his private school. The situation in Puning was far more complex than that of other administrative areas. Thanks to the accomplishments of General Fang Yao, a prominent military commander in late nineteenth-century Chaozhou, the Fang lineage not only dominated the politics and economy of Puning but also had extensive networks of patrons and protégés across Chaozhou. Because of this political consideration, Albert W. Pontius, the US Consul, avoided offending the Fang lineage. He refused to support the missionaries, explaining that only government's authorized schools were permitted

<sup>40</sup> Adam S. Groesbeck, "Report, Chaoyang Station, 1908," November 17, 1908, Box 1, Folder 5, Adam and Clara Groesbeck Papers.

<sup>41</sup> "From the Daotai Regarding Converts' Trouble with School Authorities, Puning," March 31 and April 1, 1909, RG84, vol. 9, "Chinese Dispatches Received from November 15, 1906–April 1, 1909," vol. 2, part 2, 70–71.

<sup>42</sup> Albert W. Pontius, Shantou to Jacob Speicher, Jieyang county city, June 6, 1909, RG84, vol. 8.

in the interior, and that the Puning magistrate had the right to stop Chinese Christians from opening private schools outside the treaty port. In another dispute over the Baptists' refusal "to pay the customary school tax" in Puning, Pontius stressed that the Baptists had no right to refuse such a request, and urged Jacob Speicher to maintain a collegial relationship with the Puning government.<sup>43</sup> Evidently, the American diplomats did not dare to challenge the Fang lineage, and Zhu Fenglao eventually lost in the lawsuit brought against him by the county magistrate. The outcome of the Nine River case suggests that the missionaries did not always have their way when they exercised the treaty rights to protect the Christians. Although the issue of treaty rights affected the litigation strategies of the missionaries, it never guaranteed victory in the court.

### THE BRIDGE OF HAPPINESS CASE (1914)

Bridge of Happiness (Leqiao 樂橋) was located southwest of the Chaozhou prefectural city along the border of Haiyang and Jieyang counties. Together with Village Stream (Cuoqi 厝溪) and Big Pavilion (Dating 大亭), it formed an inter-village alliance called Wu's Bridge of Happiness (Wuleqiao 吳樂橋). These three settlements were surrounded by a branch of the Han River on its north, east, and south. The Wu lineage founded Bridge of Happiness during the Ming dynasty. They built a stone bridge across the river and dominated the local politics. Therefore, the inter-village alliance was named after the Wu. The Xu lineage came later to found Big Pavilion and the Huang lineage established Village Stream. By the early twentieth century, all the lineages except the Xu were in decline. The Xu lineage expanded from Big Pavilion to Bridge of Happiness and made up the majority population in both settlements. The Xu lineage benefited from the fast-growing wooden carving industry in the Lower Han River. Many of its lineage members were famous artisans who were commissioned to build wooden carved Buddha statues for major temples in Chaozhou prefecture and neighboring Fujian province. This brought in a considerable amount of revenue and power to the Xu lineage.

The Xu lineage had a long history of intra-lineage rivalries. In early 1914, the Western Shrine (Xishe 西社) of the Xu lineage conflicted with the Eastern (Dongshe 東社), Northern (Bishe 北社), and Southern (Nanshe 南社) Shrines at Wu's Bridge of Happiness. They disagreed with the communal decision to turn the ancestral hall into the Ruimu Academy (瑞木學堂). The Western Shrine broke away from the Xu lineage and decided to erect an independent ancestral hall. They instructed their own members, including the Baptists, to contribute to the new ancestral hall. The Baptists refrained from taking side in this intra-lineage dispute, and this antagonized the Baptists' relationship with the leader of the Western Shrine Xu Dequan. Xu Dequan hired Xu Qichang (許其昌), a litigant in the Chaozhou prefectural city, to sue the Baptists and blamed church pastor Hong Daozhong (洪道宗) as a troublemaker:

<sup>43</sup> Pontius, Shantou to Daotai Wu, Chaozhoufu, June 18, 1909, RG84, vol.10; Pontius, Shantou to Speicher, Jieyang county city, June 25, 1909, RG84, vol. 8.

All the chapels of the foreign missions in various places ostensibly teach the people to repent of their sins and to do good, but in reality lead people to act contrary to right conduct and to transgress the laws, thereby causing them to become evil characters. Not one of them knows how to reform himself. Besides, the native preacher calls himself Reverend (*Mu shih* 牧師) Hung Tao Tsung [Hong Daozong]. Indeed *mu* means the herder of cattle and *shih* the teacher of boxing.<sup>44</sup>

Hong Daozong was a major figure in the Chaozhou Baptist missionary movement. As early as 1894, he assisted the American Mission to establish a foothold outside the prefectural city. Then he founded a chapel inside the walled city and numerous congregations in nearby villages. In 1906, he secured a plot of land for erecting the Downtown Church on West Avenue (西馬路).<sup>45</sup> What the leader of the Western Shrine hated most was Hong Daozong's intervention into the intra-lineage affairs. Hong advised the Baptist lineage members to oppose the ancestral hall construction project, and this threatened the lineage solidarity. If Xu Dequan failed to rally support for building a new ancestral hall, he would easily lose control of the Western Shrine.

As a senior pastor, Hong Daozong commanded great respect in Christian circles. Missionary Ben L. Baker strongly supported Hong in this dispute. Both Hong and Baker worried about the growing attacks on the Baptists in the interior after the 1911 Revolution. They saw the treaty rights as the only guarantee of the Christians' safety. Therefore, they framed the dispute over the ancestral hall construction as an incident of religious persecution, in which Xu Dequan allegedly forced the Baptists to participate in rituals against their faith. As self-styled victims of religious persecution, they sought official protection. This strategy enabled Myrl S. Myers, the US Consul in Shantou, to refer to Article XIV of the Sino-American treaty of 1903:

Converts and non-converts, being Chinese subjects, shall alike conform to the laws of China; and shall pay due respect to those in authority, living together in peace and amity; and the fact of being converts shall not protect them from the consequences of any offense they may have committed before or may commit after their admission into the church, or exempt them from paying legal taxes levied on Chinese subjects generally, except taxes levied and contributions for the support of religious customs and practices contrary to their faith.<sup>46</sup>

Myers worried that the threat posed by Xu Dequan might set a precedent for other anti-Christian elements, and called on the county magistrate to punish Xu for

<sup>44</sup> Myrl S. Myers, Shantou to Magistrate Lan, Chaozhoufu, June 29, 1914, RG59, Box 4061.

<sup>45</sup> Chaozhou shi jidujiao sanzhi aiguo hui (The Chaozhou Municipal Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement) (comp.), *Chaozhou shi jidujiao jiaozhi chugao* (*The Preliminary Draft of the Gazetteer of Christianity in Chaozhou*) (Chaozhou, Guangdong province: Chaozhou shi jidujiao sanzhi aiguo hui, 1986), Chaozhou Municipal Library, B949-2-3342; Sun Yat-Sen Library of the Guangzhou Municipal Library, K-B979-2-C41(2).

<sup>46</sup> Myers, Shantou to Magistrate Lan, Chaozhoufu, June 29, 1914, RG59, Box4061.

demonizing Christianity and insulting the pastor. The magistrate was unsympathetic and ignored Myers' request. Outraged by the magistrate's inaction, Myers appealed to the provincial leaders in Guangzhou. At the same time, the magistrate was dismissed by the provincial government. On September 1, 1914, Myers called on General Wu Xiangda (吳祥達), who was appointed by President Yuan Shikai as the Commissioner of Defense for Chaomei Region. On September 21, General Wu took up this case and resolved it to the Baptists' favor.<sup>47</sup>

The reason for General Wu's quick action was to maintain collegial relations with the US Consul in Shantou. After his appointment as the Commissioner of Defense, General Wu suppressed the Republican revolutionaries in Shantou. On April 30, 1914, his senior officers suspected that some revolutionaries had an office near the American Baptist Mission headquarters in Rocky Corner. On May 1, they came to the US Consulate and informed Myrl S. Myers of the search for "political conspirators" alleged to be hiding inside the Baptist mission school. Then twenty soldiers entered the mission compound with their guns to search the suspects and confronted the missionaries.<sup>48</sup> Myers' Chinese interpreter arrived on time and asked Wu's officers to go to the Consulate. Myers warned the officers not to trespass the American property. In the end, the soldiers gave up the search. On May 2, Myers called for an apology from General Wu in person. Two days later, General Wu sent a staff officer to apologize on his behalf.<sup>49</sup> With the previous dispute in mind, Wu sought to stabilize the relationship with the American Consul.

General Wu's decision completely undermined Xu Dequan's position. Xu Dequan was now charged with two offenses: first, they forced the Baptists to support "religious customs and practices contrary to their faith;" second, they used "certain slanderous language against Christian teachings in their petitions to the Magistrate's court."<sup>50</sup> He were fined [Mexican] \$200, of which \$120 was to cover the Baptists' litigation expenses, \$40 indemnity for some Baptists' physical injuries and their medical expenses, \$30 indemnity for insulting the minister and school teacher, and \$10 for publishing an apology in the newspapers. In the public apology, Xu Dequan blamed Xu Qichang, the litigant, for not explaining his "filial piety in building the ancestral temple" and for accusing Ben L. Baker, Hong Daozong, and Liu Dizhou.<sup>51</sup> Throughout the litigation, none of the other lineage segments supported the Western Shrine. After losing the lawsuit, Xu Dequan abandoned the ancestral hall construction project and came to terms with the growing Baptist influence.

<sup>47</sup> Myrl S. Myers, Shantou to Wu Xiangda, Shantou, September 1 and 23, 1914; Wu Xiangda, Shantou to Myrl S. Myers, Shantou, September 2 and 21, 1914; Myrl S. Myers, Shantou to the US Secretary of State, Washington DC, October 2, 1914, "Persecution of Christian Converts in Wu Le Ch'iao Village," RG59, Box4061.

<sup>48</sup> Lida Scott Ashmore, Shantou, to Edith Ashmore, US, May 3, 1914, Series II: Lida Scott Ashmore Papers, Box 6, Folder 4, The Ashmore Family Papers, Ax 564, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>49</sup> Myers, Shantou to the US Secretary of State, Washington DC, May 5, 1914, "Trespass Upon Premises of American Baptist Mission," RG59, Box 4663.

<sup>50</sup> Myers, Shantou to the US Secretary of State, Washington DC, October 2, 1914, "Persecution of Christian Converts in Wu Le Ch'iao village," RG59, Box 4061.

<sup>51</sup> "Translation of an Excerpt from the Kung Yen Press of September 20, 1914," RG59, Box 4061.

Coinciding with this case were several disputes over the payment of temple festivals. In Xu Mountain Village (徐隴), the Baptists were “annoyed, ill-treated, and threatened by the non-Christians” if they did not pay for local religious customs and practices.<sup>52</sup> Owing to the US Consul’s intervention, the local officials issued a public proclamation that prohibited any attempt to impose temple taxes on the Christians.<sup>53</sup> After the collapse of the dynasty, the Christians adhered to the Republican state’s discourse of secularism. They allied with the pragmatic officials and dogmatic party activists to declare war on superstitions, denouncing traditional religious customs and challenging lineage leaders. Secularism brought the Christians and the early Republican officials together in an all-out assault against popular religions, and the Christians celebrated the compatibility between faith and science and advocated freedom for proper doctrinal beliefs as opposed to superstitions. Thus, the Church and the state found one another irresistible allies in secularizing the religious sphere.

## CONCLUSION

In post-Boxer South China, the importance of power, both symbolic and real, had a far-reaching impact on the Church, state and community relations. The four case studies show that such interactions never took place in a vacuum. Throughout the late imperial era, the interior of Chaozhou was split by intra- and inter-lineage resource conflicts. In this deeply divided society, security and power could be gained only through the effective management of people along kinship, territorial and religious lines. Vertically, local society was characterized by different traditional organizations with extraterritorial links such as inter-lineage alliances and market associations. Horizontally, the landscape was filled with kinship, native place, temple and ethnic groupings. The churches needed to maintain their solidarity and differentiate themselves from the other organizations. Since affiliating with the foreign missions was crucial for accessing external power and influence, it behooved ambitious church leaders to cultivate strong relationships with the missionaries in Shantou. The best way to do so was to give immovable property to the foreign missions, to volunteer to build village chapels and schools, and to bring their families and friends to the church. The act of building churches and schools had political implications because it ensured direct access to the pastoral and worldly power of the missionaries.

In a reciprocal society heavily shaped by human networks, the church founders invested tremendous resources in pursuing this connection with the foreign missions. First they had to convert their families and demonstrate religious fervor and doctrinal knowledge to the missionaries. Then they purchased land and premises, construction materials, and furniture for the chapels. They hired full-time preachers recommended by the missionaries to administer the congregants. Such investment of time, resources, and efforts institutionalized the reciprocal relationships with the missions and ensured long-term political, economic,

<sup>52</sup> Myrl S. Myers, Shantou to Wang Yun-Chia, the Daoyin for Chaomei Circuit, Shantou, October 9, 1914, RG59, Box 4061.

<sup>53</sup> Wang Yun-Chia, Shantou to Myers, Shantou, October 12, 1914, RG59, Box 4061.

spiritual, and socio-cultural benefits. This was a consistent pattern of behavior among native Christians in post-Boxer South China.

Closely related to the politics of Church affiliation was a strong tendency for local Christians to invoke the treaty rights to safeguard their interests in crisis situations. When the Church leaders framed any disputes with non-Christians as resulting from religious persecution, they appropriated the Western idea of religious freedom—the freedom to believe in a religion, to change one’s belief, and to propagate one’s faith was a God-given right and should not be violated by the secular authority. Empowering and effective as it seemed, such action was highly problematic because it interpreted the outbreak of anti-Christian cases purely in religious terms, and it might mislead the missionaries to overlook the complicated reasons for the conflicts. Nevertheless, the Christians succeeded in appropriating this notion of religious freedom to strengthen themselves politically and socially. As a result, the distinction between religious freedom and specific group interests, and the boundary between pastoral and worldly power were blurred. This completely transformed the Church into a powerful political institution.

To the Christians, the persistence of conflicts over community resources revealed a sense of ambiguity toward the Chinese state. Most of the Christians were inclined toward political quiescence and took no action to challenge the imperial dynasty. When the county magistrates adopted a policy of indifference and refused to recognize their grievances, the Christians began to question the state’s legitimacy and turned to the Church as an alternative source of authority. Evidently, their approach of political engagement changed: they shifted from depending on the late imperial government for justice toward taking care of the conflict situation themselves. They aligned with foreigners to challenge the local officials’ decisions and utilized the church networks to empower themselves. These independent resources and external connections made it possible for the Christians to reject the legitimacy of traditional power holders and to assert themselves in the competitive sphere of rural politics.

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