

## **Impacts of Pentecostalism on Modern China's Christianity**

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### **Keywords**

Pentecostalism, Chinese Christianity, House Churches, Religious Persecution, True Jesus Church, Boss Christians, Wuhua Pentecostal Reform, Crucifixion, Spiritual Revival

### **Introduction**

The year 1997 marked the historic handover of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China. Alongside this political transition, the Chinese government made public commitments to pursue greater openness and integration with the international community. In light of these developments, the period from 1997 to 2024 has been selected as a distinct analytical window through which to observe the trajectory of the Chinese Christian movement. This timeframe allows for a focused examination of how shifting political, social, and cultural dynamics have shaped religious expression and organizational development within China's Christian communities.

From 1997 to 2024, Pentecostalism underwent a period of significant growth and transformation in mainland China, reshaping the landscape of Chinese Christianity and exerting a powerful influence on Chinese society, culture, and, to some extent, its politics. This essay explores the development of the Pentecostal movement during this critical era, focusing particularly on the rise of house churches, the integration of local cultural elements, and the movement's adaptive strategies in the face of state control and religious restrictions. These factors reveal how

Pentecostalism not only has become a dynamic force within China but also has contributed to global Christianity through its unique expressions.

In this analysis, four primary case studies will be examined to offer a comprehensive exploration of Pentecostalism's impact and evolution within China. These include: (1) the True Jesus Church (TJC), that serves as an early indigenous manifestation of Pentecostal theology, reflecting how Chinese cultural and religious contexts shaped its formative beliefs and practices; (2) Wenzhou's "Boss Christians," that highlights the dynamic integration of Pentecostal spirituality with entrepreneurship and economic prosperity, thereby revealing how religious belief can intersect with commercial success and contribute to regional development; (3) Shanghai's Wanbang Urban Intellectual House Churches, that underscore the movement's active engagement with civil rights advocacy, intellectual discourse, and struggles for religious freedom, thus positioning Pentecostalism at the forefront of contemporary social and political issues; and (4) Wuhua's Chinese Pentecostal Reform ("Wu" means "five" and "Hua" refers to "Chinese"), that emphasizes the eschatological imagery of Christ's wedding in its theological vision and leads Charismatic practices within the broader global Chinese Christian community.

Collectively, these case studies illuminate different dimensions of Pentecostalism in China, including its complex relationship with state authority, its role in economic transformations, and its interaction with civil society. Furthermore, they demonstrate a historical progression in Chinese Pentecostalism, tracing its trajectory from early indigenous forms toward more recent expressions, characterized by an increasing emphasis on biblically grounded theology rather than purely experiential spirituality, as well as a movement increasingly oriented toward global rather than exclusively local contexts. Through these examples, the essay shows how Pentecostalism has become a powerful and resilient force in Chinese Christianity over that 1997-2024 period.

### **Rise of Pentecostalism in Modern China**

Pentecostalism first took root in China in the early 20th century, but its significant growth came in the years following the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). After Mao Zedong's death, China's new leadership, under Deng Xiaoping, began to open the country to economic reforms and allowed limited religious activity under state supervision. This period of relative religious tolerance created fertile ground for the revival of Christianity including Pentecostalism—the latter, with its emphasis on

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miracles, healing, and direct encounters with the Holy Spirit, appealing to many who were seeking spiritual solace after years of political upheaval.

During the 1990s, Pentecostalism gained momentum within China's burgeoning house-church movement—house churches being a network of unregistered, independent fellowships that operated outside of the state-controlled Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). As noted by Liu, many Christians found in Pentecostalism a form of spirituality that was not only deeply experiential but also empowering, particularly in its ability to withstand persecution (Liu 2023, 215-235). These underground churches (also referred to as family churches) became centers of Pentecostal worship, characterized by speaking in tongues, healing, and other Charismatic practices.

### **Social Engagement and Economic Development**

One of the most striking aspects of Pentecostalism's influence in China has been its role in fostering social and economic development, particularly in rural areas where access to education, healthcare, and social services is often limited. Pentecostal churches (both registered and underground) have provided essential services to their communities, offering not only spiritual guidance but also practical support, such as medical care, disaster relief, and education (Golf 2013, 87-102).

Pentecostalism's emphasis on healing and miracles has had a profound effect on communities where access to modern medical care is limited. The promise of divine healing through prayer and Charismatic rituals offers an alternative to traditional Chinese medicine and Western biomedicine, particularly in rural areas. This aspect of Pentecostal practice taps into China's deep cultural traditions related to health and spiritual well-being, blending Pentecostal theology with local understandings of healing and medicine (Inouye 2018, 235-260). Theologically, healing is viewed not only as a physical cure but also as evidence of divine presence and power, thus further solidifying the Church's role as a spiritual and social authority.

Economic development has also been influenced by Pentecostalism, particularly through what scholars describe as a 'Protestant work ethic' akin to that observed in early Calvinism. Pentecostal teachings on personal responsibility, ethical behavior, and divine blessing for hard work have encouraged entrepreneurial ventures, particularly among China's burgeoning middle class. This has created a link between faith and economic success, with Pentecostalism being increasingly associated with upward social mobility, particularly in urban areas. This success, in

turn, reinforces its attractiveness among Christians seeking both spiritual fulfillment and economic advancement (Golf 2013, 102-125).

In many cases, Pentecostal leaders have become local authorities, providing services that the government either cannot or will not provide. For example, in Wuhan, one pastor who was also a surgeon became a leader in his community, providing both spiritual and medical care (Aikman 2014, 48-55). Such stories are common throughout China's rural areas where Pentecostal churches often serve as the primary source of social support for the marginalized. This blend of spirituality and social service has allowed Pentecostalism to gain a foothold in communities that might otherwise have been resistant to Christianity.

### **Theological Adaptations and Cultural Syncretism**

Chinese Pentecostalism is unique in the way it has adapted traditional Pentecostal theology to the cultural context. One of the key theological innovations is its integration of certain Confucian values—particularly the concept of filial piety, which emphasizes respect for elders and for family loyalty. Many Pentecostal churches have incorporated this value into their teachings, framing it as a Christian virtue that complements the biblical commandment to “honor your father and mother” (Cheung 2004, 47-55).

The Charismatic nature of Pentecostal worship has also been shaped by Chinese cultural practices. Worship in Pentecostal churches often incorporates traditional music, dance, and communal rituals, creating a unique form of Pentecostalism that resonates with local cultural aesthetics. This blending of the spiritual and the cultural thus allows it to offer a form of Christianity that's not foreign or alien but rather deeply rooted in the Chinese experience. As a result, Pentecostalism has gained a broad appeal, particularly among younger generations seeking a form of faith that speaks to both their spiritual needs and their cultural identity (Inouye 2018, 260-274).

At the heart of this theological adaptation is Pentecostalism's focus on direct experiences with the Holy Spirit. Unlike traditional Protestant denominations that emphasize doctrine and intellectual assent, Pentecostalism offers a more experiential and emotional form of worship. This focus on the immediacy of the divine resonates with Chinese religious traditions, particularly Daoism and folk religion, which emphasize the presence of spiritual forces in everyday life. Pentecostal practices like speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy tap into these traditions, creating a form of Christianity that feels familiar to many believers (Land 2010, 35-75; Vondey 2017, 83-106). This syncretism

has allowed Pentecostalism to thrive in China, as it offers a form of Christianity that feels both familiar and deeply relevant to the lives of its adherents.

### **China's Urban Pentecostal Movement**

Urbanization has played a critical role in the spread of Pentecostalism. As millions of Chinese migrated from rural areas to cities in search of economic opportunities, they brought their religious practices with them. In many cases, these migrants formed Pentecostal house churches in urban centers to provide spiritual and social support amid the disorienting experience of city life (Aikman 2003, 129-148).

The urban Pentecostal movement has been characterized by a focus on personal transformation, social mobility, and pursuit of success within the context of China's rapidly growing economy. Pentecostal teachings of prosperity, hard work, and personal responsibility have resonated with urban professionals, particularly in the growing middle class. As these urban Pentecostals rise in social and economic status, they evince a strong sense of mission, both to evangelize fellow citizens and to influence broader societal change (Golf 2013, 125-145).

Additionally, the urban Pentecostal movement has fostered development of informal networks that connect house churches across cities and regions. These networks serve as a vital support system for house church leaders and members, providing resources, training, and mutual encouragement. The networks also function as a form of resistance to government control, as many house churches operate outside of the state-sanctioned TSPM. The underground nature of these networks allows for greater flexibility in worship practices and theological innovation, further contributing to Pentecostalism's growth in urban areas (Yiwu 2011, 65-95).

### **Pentecostalism and the Chinese State: A Complex Relationship**

The rise of Pentecostalism in China has not been without challenges, particularly in the face of government repression. The state has tried to maintain strict control over religious expression; and as a result, many Pentecostal churches have been forced underground to avoid persecution. These underground house churches have become the primary centers of Pentecostal worship and evangelism in China.

Liu documents the extraordinary resilience of underground Pentecostal churches, particularly in their ability to withstand government

crackdowns. Despite arrests, property confiscations, and harassment, Pentecostal believers have continued to meet in secret, often in private homes or even in remote rural areas to avoid detection (Liu 2021, 581-600). State persecution has only strengthened the resolve of many, who view their suffering as a form of spiritual warfare and a testimony to their faith. As one pastor put it, “We are persecuted, but we know that through our suffering, Christ is with us” (Alexander 2009, 61-73).

An underground seminary movement is another important aspect of Pentecostalism in China. Operating in secret, the seminaries train new generations of Pentecostal leaders despite the constant threat of government intervention. Liu’s research highlights how these seminaries have become crucial in sustaining the Pentecostal movement, providing theological education and leadership training to believers otherwise cut off from formal religious institution (Liu 2023, 178-198).

The relationship between Pentecostalism and the state (i.e., Chinese Communist Party [CCP]) is marked by both conflict and cooperation. On the one hand, the CCP views the rapid growth of unregistered house churches (many being Pentecostal) as a potential threat to state control. In an effort to bring Christianity under its control and regulate religious practice, the government devised the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), a supervisory body that emphasizes self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation. However, many Pentecostal churches have resisted the TSPM, choosing rather to operate underground or semi-legally, outside of government oversight (Sovik 1952, 121-145; Vondey 2017, 225-241).

The resulting tension between Pentecostalism and the state has led to periodic crackdowns on house churches, particularly in urban areas, where surveillance is stronger. These crackdowns often take the form of arrests, fines, and destruction of church property (Yiwu 2011, 95-128). Despite the challenges, resilience of these house churches has been remarkable. Many continue to grow, fueled by the belief that persecution is a sign of their faithfulness to God and the righteousness of their cause.

In recent years, some Pentecostal churches have found ways to co-exist with the state by actually registering with the TSPM. These registered churches often downplay their Charismatic practices and focus on social engagement, such as providing disaster relief and community services. By aligning themselves with the state’s social objectives, they feel they can maintain a degree of autonomy while avoiding the harshest forms of government repression (Liu 2020, 581-592). Although this delicate balancing act reflects a pragmatic approach of those seeking to navigate the complexities of living out their faith in an authoritarian state, such a strategy has been met with mixed results, as the government continues

to tightly control religious activities, particularly of Pentecostals, whom it often views as subversive (Cheung 2004, 264-275).

Again, despite these challenges, Pentecostalism has continued to grow, with many believers seeing their faith as a form of resistance to government oppression. As one pastor put it, "We do not belong to the state; we belong to God, and we will continue to serve Him, no matter what the government says" (Alexander 2009, 131-150). This defiance has only strengthened the resolve of many Pentecostals, who equate persecution as a form of spiritual warfare and a sign of faithfulness to God.

### **True Jesus Church: A Resilient Pentecostal Movement**

The True Jesus Church (TJC) offers a compelling case study of how Pentecostalism has survived (even thrived) in the face of significant governmental and societal challenges. Founded in 1917, it became known for its distinctive practices, including healing and prophecy, which are central to the Pentecostal tradition. Unlike many other Chinese Christian movements, the TJC was established independently of Western missionaries, which allowed it to develop a uniquely indigenous form of Pentecostalism. This independence proved crucial in periods of intense anti-foreign sentiment in China, such as during the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution, when Christianity was often equated with Western imperialism (Autry 2013, 40-51).

TJC's resilience throughout the Cultural Revolution is particularly noteworthy. While many religious groups were suppressed, this and other house churches went underground. Elder Wang Qinru (a key TJC leader) used his personal experiences of divine healing to attract new converts and sustain the faith community during this period of repression (Autry 2013, 43). For many believers, the church's survival in the face of such harsh persecution was seen as a testament to the power of the Holy Spirit, reinforcing the central Pentecostal belief in divine intervention and spiritual warfare.

In the post-Cultural Revolution era, the TJC re-emerged as a significant religious force, often successfully negotiating with local authorities to gain a degree of autonomy from the state-controlled TSPM. Its leadership adapted to the political environment by balancing public displays of loyalty to the state with continued emphasis on private Charismatic worship (Inouye 2018, 212-214). Such adaptability allowed the TJC to be a significant religious force in the post-Mao era.

In addition to its indigenous leadership, TJC's theological emphasis on healing and miracles helped attract a large following. As Allan



Anderson notes, the Pentecostal focus on divine healing appealed particularly to those in rural areas, who had limited access to modern medical care (Anderson 2017, 17-20). Autry and other scholars also point out that by maintaining a delicate balance between resistance and cooperation, the TJC was able to secure significant legal recognition in some regions (particularly the Fujian province) while continuing to emphasize its core Pentecostal practices (Autry 2013, 45). This integration of traditional Chinese concerns with health and spirituality into a Pentecostal framework created a powerful draw for new converts, many of whom experienced physical and spiritual transformation through the church's healing ministries.

TJC's adaptability to the changing political and religious landscape underscores the following key theme in development of Chinese Pentecostalism—flexibility in the face of external pressures. Whether navigating government repression or leveraging opportunities for religious freedom, the movement has managed to sustain its core identity while growing its influence. It thrived despite significant obstacles, often by blending traditional Pentecostal practices with Chinese cultural and social norms.

As this movement continues to grow, it also serves as a model for other Pentecostal movements in China that likewise seek to navigate the challenges posed by an authoritarian state while maintaining their commitment to spiritual authenticity. TJC's emphasis on healing, prophecy, and personal experience with the divine resonates deeply with a wide swath of the Chinese population, particularly those facing personal crises or seeking spiritual fulfillment in a fast-changing society. The church's growth trajectory, rooted in a long history of survival and adaptation, provides important insights into the future of Pentecostalism in China.

### **Influence of Women in Chinese Pentecostalism**

One of the more progressive aspects of Chinese Pentecostalism is its treatment of women in ministry, with gender dynamics playing a significant role in shaping its development. The movement is marked by a clear division between male and female expressions of faith. Unlike many traditional Protestant denominations that restrict women's roles in leadership, many Chinese Pentecostal churches have embraced female pastors and evangelists. This openness to their leadership can be traced back to the early days of the Pentecostal movement, when women played key roles in revival meetings and missionary work.

Today, females continue to serve as pastors, preachers, and missionaries in Pentecostal churches across China. For example, Ruth, a Pentecostal pastor in Wuhan, left her successful career as a businesswoman to lead a thriving house church. Her story exemplifies the significant contributions that females have made in Pentecostalism's growth (Aikman 2014, 108-125). Empowerment of women within the church is a major factor in its continued rapid expansion, particularly in areas where they were traditionally accorded limited opportunities for leadership.

### Their Influence in Rural Areas

Women's leadership roles in rural Pentecostal churches are particularly prominent, one reason being that they commonly outnumber the men (Cheung 2004, 205-210). Often referred to as 'prayer-calling mothers,' they have been accorded significant spiritual authority. Known and respected for a Charismatic authority derived from healing and exorcism, their leadership is often taken to be a divine calling, particularly in communities where male leadership is absent or marginalized. Although some are illiterate or semi-literate, these women nonetheless draw on their personal experiences of suffering and divine intervention to inspire faith in their communities (Cao 2011, 165).

### Their Influence in Urban Areas

As it spread to urban areas, Pentecostalism become more institutionalized, one result being male leadership taking on more prominent roles in the church hierarchy (Cao 2011, 165). For instance, in Wenzhou and Beijing, women's Charismatic leadership has taken a backseat to a more intellectual, text-based form of Christianity led by men. This tension between experiential and theological expressions of faith reflects broader social changes in China, as the country continues to modernize and urbanize. While women's contributions to Pentecostalism are often celebrated, they are more apt to be confined to emotional and bodily expressions of faith, whereas men are seen as the rational leaders who guide the church's theological and institutional development (Cao 2011, 169).

The marginalization of women in urban Pentecostal communities reflects broader social dynamics in China, where modernization and economic development have often led to increased gender inequality. In Wenzhou, for example, the rise of 'boss Christians' (see next section) has reinforced traditional gender roles, with male entrepreneurs

taking on leadership positions in both the church and the marketplace, while women are often relegated to supporting roles. This division is particularly evident in the contrast between rational, text-based theology favored by male leaders and emotional, Charismatic worship practices led by women (Ng 2015, 79).

However, despite these challenges, women continue to play a crucial role in Pentecostal communities across China, particularly in rural areas where their spiritual authority is often unquestioned. As Pentecostalism continues to evolve, it will be important to consider how gender dynamics shape the movement's development, particularly as the church grapples with issues of modernization and institutionalization. The role of women in Pentecostalism offers important insights into the movement's potential for inclusivity and empowerment, even as it faces ongoing challenges in navigating gender inequality in a rapidly changing society.

### **Wenzhou's 'Boss Christians' and the Pentecostal Prosperity Gospel**

Wenzhou, often called China's Revival Center with over 25 percent of its population identifying as Christians, serves as a compelling case study of how Pentecostalism has intertwined with China's economic boom. The city is home to a unique class of 'Boss Christians'—wealthy entrepreneurs who have not only embraced Pentecostalism but also integrated it into their business practices. These individuals attribute their financial success to divine blessing, aligning closely with global Pentecostalism's emphasis on prosperity theology, which teaches that material wealth is a sign of God's favor (Cao 2011, 149-175).

Integration of Pentecostal practices into the workplace is a defining feature of Wenzhou's Christian community. Many of these business leaders build churches within their factories and organize daily prayer meetings and Bible studies for their workers (Ng 2015, 79). This blend of faith and business not only reinforces the idea of prosperity as a divine reward but also creates a religious ecosystem in which business success and spiritual fulfillment are intertwined. These practices have helped Pentecostalism gain a strong foothold in the region, particularly among the working class, which is drawn to the promises of both spiritual and material rewards.

The success of these 'boss Christians' has transformed Wenzhou into a hub of Christian activity, where faith is not just practiced in churches but embedded in daily business operations. This connection between economic success and religious belief has created a unique form

of Pentecostalism that blends traditional Chinese values of hard work and perseverance with Pentecostals' emphasis on divine blessings. As Wenzhou has grown into a major economic center, the prosperity gospel has become deeply ingrained in its Christian culture, with many believers viewing their business achievements as a direct result of their faith.

However, the rise of these entrepreneurial Christians has introduced tensions within the broader Pentecostal movement, particularly regarding gender roles. While male entrepreneurs dominate leadership positions and emphasize a text-based theology, female believers (particularly the 'prayer-calling mothers') continue to play a significant role in the spiritual life of the community through healing and Charismatic worship practices (Cao 2011, 165). These women, often marginalized in formal church leadership, are nevertheless respected for their ability to channel the Holy Spirit and perform miracles. Their role highlights the ongoing tension between Pentecostalism's traditional Charismatic expressions and the more institutionalized, male-dominated church structures that are emerging in Wenzhou.

Despite these tensions, Wenzhou's 'Boss Christians' have succeeded in building a robust Christian community that integrates faith and economics in unprecedented ways. This fusion of business and religion has not only contributed to the city's prosperity but also reinforced the idea that Christianity (and particularly Pentecostalism) can thrive in China's rapidly modernizing society. As a model for Christian engagement with the marketplace, Wenzhou's Pentecostal community demonstrates how faith can adapt to, and even flourish within, the structures of modern capitalism, offering important lessons for other regions of China and beyond.

### **Shanghai's Wanbang Church: An Example of Urban Intellectual Pentecostal House Church Development**

In contrast to both the rural and entrepreneurial expressions of Pentecostalism in China, the Wanbang Church in Shanghai exemplifies yet another perspective—development of urban intellectual house churches. Such 'communities' are typically led by university-educated professionals, including academicians, lawyers, and medical doctors, and are often more politically engaged than their rural and business-based counterparts. While traditional Pentecostal elements like healing and speaking in tongues are present, these churches tend to focus more on theological study and social activism, particularly regarding religious freedom and human rights issues (Patrick 2023, 127).

Wanbang Church was founded in Shanghai in 1999 by a Chinese pastor originally from northeastern China. The church experienced rapid growth, attracting a congregation composed primarily of Shanghai's middle- and upper-class residents. By the time of the government's crackdown in 2009, Sunday services regularly drew more than 2,000 attendees. Despite ongoing suppression by authorities, the church has remained active, often resorting to outdoor worship services when access to indoor venues was denied. In response to governmental pressure, the congregation strategically organized into smaller, decentralized units known as "seed groups," enhancing both their resilience and adaptability. This bold and public stance has garnered significant attention both domestically and internationally, positioning Wanbang Church as a prominent symbol in the broader struggle for religious freedom in China (Patrick, 2023, 129).

The political activism of Wanbang and other urban intellectual house churches is closely tied to their understanding of Pentecostal theology. For many members, the emphasis on the Holy Spirit's empowerment translates into a mandate to engage in social and political issues, particularly those related to justice and human rights. This engagement is seen as part of a broader spiritual struggle, with persecution viewed as evidence of the church's faithfulness to God. As a result, these churches often take a more confrontational approach to the state than other Pentecostal communities, challenging government restrictions on religious practice through legal means and public protests.

Understandably, urban intellectual house churches face significant challenges, particularly in balancing their spiritual mission with their political activism. While their commitment to social justice has attracted a dedicated following, it has also drawn intense scrutiny from the government, leading to repeated crackdowns on their activities. Nevertheless, these churches continue to serve as powerful examples of how Pentecostalism can engage with civil society, offering a model for religious communities that seek to integrate faith with social and political activism in ways that challenges authoritarian control.

### **Wuhua's Pentecostal Three Mission-Focused Initiatives**

#### **Its Back-to-Jerusalem Effort**

A central feature of Chinese Pentecostalism is passionate commitment to the Great Commission, particularly by participating in global missionary endeavors. Encapsulating this commitment is the Back-to-Jerusalem (BTJ) initiative, which aims for Chinese missionaries

to proclaim the gospel along the historic Silk Road, with the ultimate goal of reaching Jerusalem. This mission focus is deeply rooted in Pentecostal eschatology, where spreading the gospel is seen as crucial to hastening the second coming of Christ (Golf 2013, 145-175). The prospect of fulfilling this biblical mandate has captured the imagination of many Chinese Pentecostals, inspiring a movement that seeks to position China as a key player in global evangelism.

This vision for the Great Commission is anchored in a broader theological understanding of the Church's role in global transformation. Chinese Pentecostals view themselves as part of a larger Christian movement to evangelize and bring about spiritual renewal around the globe. Their unique experiences of practicing their faith under government repression and in culturally diverse settings provide them with a distinct perspective on missions, which allows them to engage with global Christianity in a meaningful, transformative way (Inouye 2018, 260-274).

Wuhua's Chinese Oneness Mission for BTJ, originated in the southwestern part of China in 2010 and now headquartered in the USA due to persecution, highlights the Chinese churches' growing international presence. This movement aims, by 2025, to hold revival conferences in fifteen nations and influence various ethnicities and tribes beyond the Chinese community reflecting a strategic shift from domestic to international evangelism (Liu 2023, ChinaSource). *Wu* (meaning five) *hua* (meaning Chinese) mission group, representing the Chinese Christian community across five continents, believes the time has come for that community to make a transformative impact on the world. They assert that Chinese churches should take the leading responsibility of sharing the gospel of Christ and preparing for the Parousia in the end times. According to the book of Revelation, Christ will marry his bride (the Church) after his Parousia. This conviction underscores the global mission and eschatological urgency that drive the BTJ movement and awaken the spiritual identity of Chinese Christians in Christ.

Emphasis on global missions, exemplified by initiatives like Wuhua's Chinese Oneness Mission, reflects this eschatological urgency. Chinese Pentecostals see themselves as part of a larger global narrative of Christian witness to spread the gospel to all nations before the end times (Liu 2023, ChinaSource). Wuhua advocates that the installation of prayer houses and consistent intercession will help the Church to experience a great awakening. Further, restoration of the five-fold ministry (apostolic/prophetic/evangelistic/pastoral/teaching; cf. Eph 4:11-16) is deemed critical to ensuring the Church's comprehensive function. Christians need to believe that all five elements are as available to today's churches as

they were to the 1st-century churches. This broader vision has provided a sense of purpose and direction, linking their individual faith journeys to a larger, global church revival. As asserted by Wuhua, Chinese churches need to be transformed in the five-fold ministry for the global mission and bring the gospel Back to Jerusalem.

#### Its HAKA Prayer Movement for a Great Awakening

Derived from the Hebrew meaning ‘to wait for divine encountering’ (Isa 30:18, 33:2; Lam 3:25), the HAKA Prayer Movement, initiated by Wuhua in 2021, is an evolution of the Upper Room prayer model originated by the College of Prayer at Atlanta (USA). It focuses on five divine ‘miracles’—gathering, praying, receiving, serving, and harvesting. The movement emphasizes waiting on God to hear his voice and then carrying out his revealed will. It aims especially to rekindle missionary zeal in a country where Christianity has faced, or is facing, persecution.

HAKA distinguishes itself from the Revival Prayer Group prayer model during the Covid outbreak in Taiwan by adding elements of kingdom identity declaration, spiritual warfare, and purification, which make it more holistic for global mission. Through structured prayer, worship, and guidance of the Holy Spirit, participants are encouraged to embrace their role in the Great Commission, fostering unity and spread of the gospel across different nations and cultures. This expanded framework seeks to equip Christians for deeper spiritual engagement and missionary mobilization.

The prayer movement has seen rapid expansion through conferences and training in mainland China, Malaysia, Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, and North America. In Vietnam, conferences in October 2024 attracted Vietnamese and Chinese communities. In Malaysia, indigenous groups welcomed HAKA’s focus on spiritual warfare, identity, and unity; for example, a November 2024 conference in Kuching, East Malaysia, strengthened bonds among local pastors and revived indigenous engagement in missions (cf. Web Journal: United Prayer Renaissance, Dec. 16).

In South Korea (also in November), HAKA was introduced with the involvement of theology professors and church leaders. The conference focused on covenant identity, the role of prayer in spiritual revival, and the doctrine of justification by faith, which confirmed it as a transformative process where believers move from being declared ‘not guilty’ in God’s courtroom to being active participants in his household. This process requires ongoing sanctification, where Christians imitate

Christ, bear spiritual fruit, and prepare to meet him face-to-face. The covenant identity of believers was emphasized as essential for their entry into God's heavenly kingdom (cf. Web Journal: China Christian Daily, Dec. 2).

Golden Light Chinese Church, New Creation Chinese Church, and several other North American congregations have adopted HAKA prayer as their standard Sunday service format. They integrate HAKA prayer into each element of their worship services, seamlessly connecting worship, preaching, spontaneous waiting upon God, and closing prayers. This approach organically blends spiritual and biblical elements, offering a unified, holistic worship experience grounded firmly in sound Protestant theological depth.

Additionally, HAKA aims to mobilize Chinese Christians worldwide for end-time missions, while also prioritizing indigenous engagement. A key tenet of the movement is bridging generational divides in leadership. Elder leaders are called to mentor and bless younger generations, ensuring transmission of biblical wisdom and leadership skills. It likewise encourages youth to embrace their calling in missions, especially in the face of worldly influences and the rise of AI-driven evangelism. By 2026, the goal is to see ten million Chinese Christians engaged in HAKA prayer, driving a global revival and evangelistic mission. This vision echoes Count Zinzendorf's prayer movement in Europe in the 18th century, with the ultimate goal of sending the gospel Back to Jerusalem.

### Its Three-Heavens Biblical Worldview and Implications for Mission

Paul Hiebert (1932-2007), renowned missiologist from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School at Chicago USA, postulated the "'law of the excluded middle' theory (Hiebert, 1932, pp. 35-47). Prior to his academic career, he served as a missionary in India, where he encountered numerous supernatural phenomena. He observed that a purely scientific/rationalistic approach to missionary work failed to adequately explain these occurrences, which made it difficult for many Indians to embrace Christianity. Thus, upon deeper engagement with scripture, Hiebert recognized that the Bible explicitly addresses supernatural ministry, including Jesus' and later his disciples' acts of healing, exorcism, and spiritual warfare.

Paul Hiebert, an anthropological evangelical Christian scholar, described Three-Heavens worldview as a theological perspective supported by the Apostle Paul's reference in 2 Cor 12:2. This worldview asserts that God created multiple heavens, each serving distinct purposes and functions. According to this framework, the first heaven corresponds



to the observable, material universe that can be explored through scientific methods. The second heaven is the domain of fallen angels and spiritual forces described in Eph 6:12, representing the sphere of spiritual conflict. The third heaven, as mentioned by Paul, is understood as the sacred realm wherein the triune God resides, accompanied by saints, angels, and other heavenly beings. This biblical cosmological model was subsequently affirmed and further elaborated by evangelical biblical commentator Clinton E. Arnold (Arnold 2011, 255).

Wuhua has actively promoted this three-heavens framework among global Chinese churches since 2022, encouraging believers to read and interpret scripture through this theological lens. This perspective has been particularly well received by Chinese Pentecostal Christians, leading to an increased awareness of the spirit realm. Consequently, many believers have developed a deeper interest in understanding and engaging in spiritual warfare with strategic insight. This theological framework not only enhances biblical interpretation within Pentecostal circles but also equips global Chinese Christians with a more comprehensive grasp of the supernatural dimensions of Christian mission.

### **Conclusion**

The rise of Pentecostalism in mainland China has profoundly reshaped the landscape of Chinese Christianity, affecting its theological development, social engagement, and political dynamics. From the early days of indigenous Pentecostal movements, such as the True Jesus Church, to the more recent growth of entrepreneurial Pentecostal communities in cities like Shanghai and Wenzhou, the movement's adaptability has allowed it to flourish even in the face of significant challenges.

Pentecostalism's emphasis on personal spiritual experience (particularly via the baptism of the Holy Spirit, healing, and prophecy) has resonated deeply with Chinese believers seeking a faith that addresses both spiritual and material needs. From Chinese Back-to-Jerusalem mission, Wuhua plays the key role to initiate the global Chinese mission in unity and cooperation. The five-fold ministry is also key to transform churches for souls' revival and harvest.

The HAKA Prayer Movement, launched by Wuhua in 2021, builds on the Upper Room prayer model and incorporates five divine miracles—gathering, praying, receiving, serving, and harvest. In 2024, HAKA rapidly expanded elsewhere, especially Malaysia, Vietnam, and South Korea. By 2025, it aspires to see ten million Chinese Christians engaged in global prayer and evangelism, echoing Count Zinzendorf's

18th-century prayer movement in Europe and ultimately aiming to return the gospel to Jerusalem.

USA theologian Paul Hiebert's theory of the 'law of the excluded middle' highlights the limitations of a purely scientific approach in missionary work, as it fails to address supernatural phenomena that the Bible explicitly acknowledges. Building on his insights, Wuhua explores the Three-Heavens Worldview, which distinguishes between the material world, the realm of fallen angels, and the divine throne of God, as supported by biblical references. This framework has been widely embraced by Chinese Pentecostal Christians, fostering deeper spiritual awareness, enhancing biblical interpretation, and equipping believers with strategies for engaging in spiritual warfare.

Overall, Pentecostalism's impact on modern mainland Chinese churches is a testament to its adaptability, resilience, and global connectedness. It has transformed Chinese Christianity by providing believers with a faith that is deeply personal yet communally engaged and spiritually empowering yet materially relevant. As the movement continues to evolve, it is likely to play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of Christianity in China, influencing not only religious practices but also the broader social and political landscape.

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