Public Spaces and Public Spheres:
The Dismantling of Chinese Methodism in the Early People's Republic of China (1949–1953)

Shin-fung Hung

Graduate Program in Religion, Duke University

15th Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies

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Abstract

This paper explores the drastic decline of Chinese Methodism's public influence in the early People's Republic of China (PRC) from 1949–1953. Employing Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory and Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere, it examines how the Communist state's appropriation of public spaces and compression of public spheres marginalized the Methodist Church. The analysis includes case studies of the McTyeire School and rural churches in Xianyou County, illustrating the re-production of Christian spaces into Communist ones. Additionally, the study of *East China News* highlights the erosion of independent public spheres. This research fills gaps in Chinese Methodist historiography and contributes to understanding the broader implications for Chinese Christianity and public theology.

Keywords: Chinese Methodism, Public Spaces, Public Spheres, Henri Lefebvre, Jürgen Habermas

I. Introduction

Background

Methodism came to China from multiple origins, including Britain, the United States, and Canada. American Methodism (the focus of this paper) entered in 1847 and grew into one of China's largest denominational churches. By January 1950, the China Central Conference of the Methodist Church had four bishops, ten Annual Conferences, 815 churches, 68,845 members, 463 Chinese pastors, and 167 missionaries on the field. It was a socially engaged church. Embracing the Social Gospel, it devoted itself to both Christianizing and civilizing China. It had 66 institutions of learning (45 high schools, seven universities, four theological seminaries, six Bible training schools, two medical schools, and two normal schools; many of these are union institutions. There are also numerous primary schools). The Church also ran 28 hospitals and dispensaries, an orphanage, a publishing house, and an experimental farm.[1] Together with the institutional churches set up in major Chinese cities, which engaged in social and community works, the Methodist Church occupied and created important public spaces across the nation.

It was also a prestigious church during the Republican Era with strong political networks. The Head of State, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and the first lady, Madam Soong Mei-ling, were both Methodists. Madam Soong's father, Charlie Soong, was educated in the States and sent by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to evangelize China; he was also the father-in-law and a patron of the National Father Sun Yat-sen. Rev. Z. T. Kaung, who was later elected to the episcopacy, baptized Chiang. Bishop W. Y. Chen served as the General Secretary of the National Christian Council of China (NCC) throughout the Sino-Japanese War and chaired numerous international and national organizations allocating war relief funding and resources.

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[1] Frank T. Cartwright, *Methodism behind the Bamboo Curtain* (New York: The Methodist Church, 1950), 28.

He was also one of the parliamentary members who passed the Constitution of the Republic of China.

Apart from top-tier networking, Chinese Methodist organs at different levels published magazines and newspapers, reporting not only church news but also national and international news. These publications served as forums for information exchange and discussion of social and political issues, opening up and participating in the public spheres in Republican China. Methodist schools and church councils served the same purpose: they became spaces for members to practice and engage in public deliberations. Many Methodist school graduates and church leaders became national and local leaders. Ryan Dunch's *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China 1857–1927* has compellingly argued how the Methodists, alongside other Protestant groups, contributed to the building of the Chinese nation and civil society.[2]

Things changed when Mainland China fell under the control of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Not only were Methodist missionaries forced to leave, but Methodist schools and hospitals were forced to close or be transferred to the state. Some Methodist churches were closed, and others became part of the state-sanctioned Three-Self church. In 1958, during the Unification of Worship Campaign, all denominations ceased functioning. Christianity in Mainland China entered the post-denominational era; Methodism was officially gone in Mainland China. During the Cultural Revolution, all churches were closed, and Christians went underground. The outside world thought that God was dead in China, and secularization won. They were wrong. After the fall of the Gang of Four, churches, alongside other religious institutes, rapidly resurfaced in the late 1970s and experienced tremendous growth. Denominations, including Methodism, however, were not revived; although there are still

[2] Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China 1857–1927* (Yale University Press, 2001).

churches and Christians claiming to have a Methodist lineage, very few of them can tell what being a Methodist means.

Question and Thesis Statement

This paper asks a simple question: How did Methodism lose its influence and relevance in Mainland China? It argues that while the Unification of Worship (1958) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) were watershed moments ending Methodism's official presence in Mainland China, Chinese Methodists lost much public relevance before these events. During the early PRC, the totalistic Communist state-in-building quickly took over public spaces originally produced and occupied by members of civil society,[3] including the Methodist Church. It also eliminated public spheres, in which the Methodists actively participated. The Methodists lost their social arms, the hallmark of Chinese Methodism compared to their evangelical and fundamentalist counterparts. With its denominational character hallowed out, the tradition became dormant and existed only nominally or in frozen rituals.

Significance

This study fills a critical gap in the historiography of Chinese Methodism by extending the narrative beyond the officially documented period ending in 1948.[4] While I have previously written and presented on the beginnings of American Methodism in Hong Kong in 1953,[5] initiated by a group that migrated there from Mainland China, comprehensive histories of Methodist experience during the Communist takeover and subsequent decades remain sparse.

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[3] Totalism: See Tang Tsou, *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms: A Historical Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
[4] See Richard Terrill Baker, *Ten Thousand Years: The History of Methodism's First Century in China* (Board of Missions and Church Extension, The Methodist Church, 1947); and Walter N. Lacy, *A Hundred Years of China Methodism* (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948).
[5] Shin-fung Hung, "Transnational Connectionalism at Work: The Founding of Wei Li Kung Hui (American Methodism) in Hong Kong," The Wesleyan and Methodist Studies Unit, American Association of Religion Annual Meeting, San Diego, November 26, 2019. (Unpublished)

Second, there is a noticeable lack of exploration of the interactions between Christianity and public spaces and spheres during the early PRC. By reconstructing how an era of Chinese Christian social engagement ended, this study provides the lost puzzle for understanding the evolution of public theology in China. As such, this study supplements contemporary-focused works like Alexander Chow's *Chinese Public Theology* and Zhibin Xie's *Moral Triumph*.[6]

Furthermore, this research offers important insights into how ecumenists—the more socially engaged branch of Christianity—failed in Mainland China. While ecumenists like Y. T. Wu became the public face of Christianity in Communist China, ecumenical Christianity lost its credibility, influence, and relevance among Chinese Christians compared to fundamentalist Christianity, which stresses separation from the world. Fundamentalist leaders like Wang Mingdao, who refused to cooperate with the state and maintained an enclaved faith, became heroes and role models in both Mainland and diasporic Chinese Christian circles.

Methodology, Sources, and Outline

The primary task of this paper is to reconstruct the history of how the Communist state and Chinese Methodism interacted to reshape Chinese public spaces and public spheres in the early PRC. While spatial theorists traditionally take up the task of analyzing public spaces and that of public spheres by social theorists, scholars in recent years have stressed interdisciplinary studies and begun to explore their interconnections.[7] Indeed, as shown in Robert Cassanello's analysis of black spaces during the Jim Crow era, what happened in and to public spheres

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[6] Alexander Chow, *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2018); Zhibin Xie, *Moral Triumph: The Public Face of Christianity in China* (Fortress Press, 2023).

[7] See, for example, Robert Cassanello, *To Render Invisible: Jim Crow and Public Life in New South Jacksonville* (University Press of Florida, 2013); Paul Hedges, "The Secular Realm as Interfaith Space: Discourse and Practice in Contemporary Multicultural Nation-States," *Religions* 10 (2019): 498, doi:10.3390/rel10090498; and, Harikrishnan, "Making Space: Towards a Spatial History of Modernity in Caste-Societies," *Social History* 47, no. 3 (2022): 315–340.

directly impacted the production of space.[8] And spaces, in turn, shaped the development of public spheres. In the following analysis of the re-production of public spaces, I rely on Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory. On the discussion of public spheres, I draw from Jürgen Habermas, and Nancy Fraser on the co-existence of multiple public spheres, as well as Catherine R. Squires on the creation of satellite publics.

I am cognizant of the fact that the production of the sources used in this study was shaped by particular ideological influences, and I have thus exercised caution in employing them to mitigate the impact of potential biases on my analysis. PRC records and laws are used to understand the Communists' governance tools developed and adopted. Chinese Methodist periodicals published before and after the Communist takeover are compared to trace editorial changes. Both missionary records and local church histories written in recent decades are used. The former, produced free from state control and including invaluable first-hand personal testimonies that could not be found elsewhere, are sometimes tainted by hearsay, delays, and other inaccuracies. Cold War politics might also influenced what and how materials were collected and interpreted. The latter were produced under state censorship, but such control also guarantees that they do not provide exaggerated descriptions of the church's hardships. The Romanization of names of Chinese figures and places is in Putonghua pinyin unless there are spellings commonly known in the West or by the church, e.g., Chiang Kai-shek.

This paper first provides the historical context of the changes that Chinese Methodism faced during the early PRC. Next, it details how Methodism was forced out of public spaces as the state expanded. Third, it surveys how the Methodists were disenfranchised from the

[8] Cassanello, *To Render Invisible*, chapter 5.

dissipating public spheres. Before concluding, this paper explores the enclaving of Methodism and its implication for the development of the denomination and Chinese Christianity.

II. Social, Economic, and Political Shifts Post-1949

CPC State-Building and the Civil Society

After decades of struggle with the Nationalists, the CPC won the Chinese Civil War in 1949 and took over China. Following the model of the USSR, the new regime quickly grew into a totalistic state, seeking to control every aspect of its citizens' lives at its discretion to both deepen the Communist revolution and stabilize the new state. Initially, the Party established military control, then gradually extended its grip over the administration by setting up its own government at all levels and incorporating administrators from the previous Nationalist regime. This expansion of control extended to businesses and different professions, aligning them with Communist ideologies.

Simultaneously, the CPC launched extensive economic and land reforms, which were accelerated by the geopolitical pressures of the Korean War. Key political campaigns during this period included:

- The Land Reform Movement (1950–1952), which redistributed land from landlords to peasants.
- The Suppression of Counter-Revolutionaries Campaign (1950–1953), which targeted perceived enemies of the state.
- The Resist America and Aid Korea Campaign (1950–1953), which fostered anti-American sentiment and suspicion toward any entities with perceived connections to the United States, including Christian organizations.

- The Three-Anti Campaign (1951) and Five-Anti Campaign (1952), which targeted corruption, waste, and bureaucracy, as well as bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts, and stealing state economic information, respectively.

These campaigns were crucial in consolidating Communist control and reshaping the socio-economic landscape. Methods to achieve this included political struggles, re-education campaigns, and the establishment of labor camps and prisons where individuals were categorized into different classes and often faced severe consequences for perceived disloyalty.

The state also appropriated civil society roles, claiming to be the true representative of the Chinese people and systematically eliminating other groups that made similar claims. Although the CPC allowed for the limited presence of different voices within the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), many members were purged during consecutive political struggles. Trade and labor unions, professional guilds, and educational institutions were restructured to align with Communist principles, and media and communication channels were heavily restricted. These measures involved mandatory registrations, shutdowns, and political struggles to ensure that all civil activities were under state control. Facing this quickly expanding state, the Chinese public sphere promptly shrunk.

CPC State-Building and Christianity

Regarding religion, the Common Program (the interim Constitution passed by the CPPCC in 1949) and later versions of the Constitution guarantee "freedom of religious belief" rather than "religious freedom." This means that one is legally allowed to hold certain religious beliefs; however, the freedom of religious assembly, conducting religious teaching, preaching,

evangelizing, running faith-based schools, or doing anything publicly in the name of religion is not protected and depends on the state's discretion.

Although the CPC classified Protestantism and Catholicism as religions tied to imperialism,[9] Christianity enjoyed a short period of relative tolerance between 1949 and 1950.[10] Zhi-yi Zhang, Deputy Head of the United Front Work Department, later explained that it was just "a matter of strategy"[11] because the young state needed time to take care of other, more urgent matters. On July 28, 1950, the "Direction of Endeavor for Chinese Christianity in the Construction of New China," commonly called "The Christian Manifesto," was published. It was drafted by a pro-CPC Christian leader, Y. T. Wu, under the guidance of and commented on by Premier Zhou Enlai, and initially signed by 40 top Chinese Christian leaders, including the Methodist Bishop Kaung. It recognizes that the Chinese church had been used by imperialism. It demands that "All Christian churches and organizations in China that are still relying upon foreign personnel and financial aid should work out concrete plans to realize within the shortest possible time their objective of self-reliance and rejuvenation."[12]

The time for more radical reform soon came when the US and the PRC both entered the Korean War. In December 1950, the US imposed a trade embargo on the PRC and froze all PRC assets in the US. This gave the CPC the perfect opportunity to execute the plans to cleanse

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[9] The Research Office of the Central Documentation of the Communist Party of China 中共中央文獻研究室 ed., *Zhou Enlai's Chronicle (1949–1976)* 周恩來年譜（1949-1976）, vol. 1 (Central Documentation Press, 1997), 49–50.

[10] See Frank T. Cartwright, *Methodism behind the Bamboo Curtain* (New York: The Methodist Church, 1950), 19–20.

[11] Jian-ping Liu 劉建平, *The Cross under the Red Flag: The Policy Changes of the Chinese Communist Party towards Protestantism and Catholicism and Its Impacts in the Early PEC (1949–1955)* 紅旗下的十字架——新中國成立初期中共對基督教、天主教的政策演變及其影響（1949-1955）(Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture Ltd., 2012), 85.

[12] Francis P. Jones ed., *Documents of the Three-Self Movement: Source Materials for the Study of the Protestant Church in Communist China* (Far Eastern Office, Division of Foreign Missions, National Council of the Church of Christ in the U.S.A., 1963), 19–20.

"American imperialist influences" faster than they initially expected.[13] In response, the PRC government froze all American assets in Mainland China and ordered all US-subsidized institutions, including all Methodist churches and institutions in the Mainland, to cut economic ties with the US and become self-supporting.[14]

Then, from 1951–1952, the PRC initiated the Denunciation Campaign to cleanse Christianity from American influence. This campaign involved mass re-education and denunciation meetings at national, provincial, and local levels. Many Christians were pulled down from leadership positions after being accused of being "running dogs" of the Nationalists and American imperialism. Meanwhile, under state sponsorship, Y. T. Wu gradually gathered forces that eventually crystallized as the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in 1954, replacing the NCC as the institutional leader of Chinese Protestantism. The Methodists' strong linkage with the Chiangs and the US made them a clear political target for the CPC. This targeting served a dual purpose: eliminating the influence of the Nationalists and US imperialism and setting up a role model of united front collaboration with the new regime.

III. Forced out of Public Spaces

In his classic, *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre discusses communist revolutions. He asserts that "A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space."[15] The social, economic, and political changes in the early PRC indeed transformed spaces in Mainland China. This

[13] Liu, *The Cross under the Red Flag*, 130–131, n 4.
[14] See "Regulations Governing All Organizations Subsidized with Foreign Funds," and "Regulations of the Administrative Affairs Yuan on the Method of Controlling Christian Organizations That Have Received Financial Help from America," in Jones ed., *Documents of the Three-Self Movement*, 22–24, 27–28.
[15] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell, 1991), 54.

section evaluates how such re-productions of spaces impacted the socially engaging Chinese Methodism.

Henri Lefebvre's Spatial Triad

The spatial triad is a foundational concept in Lefebvre's understanding of the production of social space. The triad comprises three interconnected dimensions: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces.

- Spatial practice refers to the physical and material aspects of space, including the daily activities and routines that shape and are shaped by the environment. This dimension encompasses how people use and perceive physical space in their everyday lives.
- Representations of space, or conceived space, involve the conceptual and abstract aspects, such as maps, plans, and architectural designs. These representations are created by planners, scientists, and technocrats, reflecting the dominant ideology and control over space. This dimension is crucial in the organization and regulation of spatial practices.
- Representational spaces, or lived space, are the symbolic and experiential aspects of space, encompassing the meanings, emotions, and imaginations people attach to their surroundings. This dimension is deeply personal and often resists the formalized structures of conceived space, highlighting the potential for alternative and subversive uses of space.

This triad provides a multi-dimensional approach to understanding how spaces are produced, controlled, and experienced. It helps us look beyond the transfer of ownership or control of physical spaces during the early PRC and explore deeper power dynamics.

Competing for Spaces

Since they arrived in the Qing Dynasty and during the Republican Era, Christians have produced many spaces. To Christianize China, they did not just Christianize people; they also created Christian spaces. Believers of the Social Gospel, including the Methodists, rather than only staying in consecrated chapels or Christianized families, went to society to establish Christian schools, hospitals, and community centers (see Appendix for Methodist institutions by January 1950). As planners of these spaces, they produced Christian representations of spaces.

When the Communists took power, the young and totalistic state began nationwide spatial re-production according to Communist ideals.[16] Christian spaces, especially American-related ones, became primary targets of this re-production project. This section uses two cases, one from the city and one from the country, to illustrate the contention for and remodification of spaces. They are the McTyeire School (1892–1952), a famous Methodist girls' school in urban Shanghai, and a group of rural churches in Xianyou County, Fujian.

The McTyeire School

Established by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1892, the McTyeire School was one of China's most prominent girls' schools. It was located in the Shanghai International Settlement, the heart of the most globalized city in China.[17] It maintained high academic standards, and its strong alum network included the powerful Soong sisters. It was the jewel in the crown of missionary education. However, its occupation of such a prime geographical and social location also made it a target of the CPC in its effort to revolutionize public spaces.

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[16] See Chang-tai Hung, *Mao's New World: Political Culture in the Early People's Republic* (Cornell University Press, 2011), Chapters 1 and 2.

[17] Its current address is 155 Jiangsu Road, Jing'an District, Shanghai, China.

Before 1949, McTyeire was a highly Christianized space. It had Bible classes in its syllabus and Christian literature in its library.[18] It held Sunday Schools, prayer meetings, and hosted a Y.W.C.A. chapter.[19] The Annual Conference also established the Haygood Memorial Church in the school, which was mainly run by McTyeire teachers and students.[20] For many, "the church is the school, and the school is the church."[21] The Church organized charitable activities, including operating a volunteer village school and fundraising for orphanages and schools for the blind.[22] These spatial practices produced Christian spaces within and beyond the school site.

To re-produce this space, the CPC began by developing McTyeire students as underground Party members in April 1949. When Shanghai was "liberated" in May, these CPC members had already established a 20-member-strong branch of the Chinese Democracy Youth League, a secret periphery organization of the CPC.[23] Similar organizing was done among the teachers.[24] In August and September, during a negotiation of school fees with the School Board, these groups mobilized students and parents against the church-appointed school authority.[25] On the face, these were all unofficial and bottom-up acts to subvert the Christian space; in fact, they were top-down and state-orchestrated acts to re-produce these spaces according to Communist values. They were acts of both representations of space and representational space.

When the totalistic CPC developed stronger grips on state apparatuses, it began to transform McTyeire more directly. In September 1950, all Bible classes were replaced by

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[18] Jinyu Chen 陳瑾瑜, *McTyeire School (1892–1952)* 中西女中（1892～1952） (Tongji Press, 2016), 98–99.
[19] Chen, *McTyeire School*, 139.
[20] Chen, *McTyeire School*, 194.
[21] Chen, *McTyeire School*, 195.
[22] Chen, *McTyeire School*, 140.
[23] Chen, *McTyeire School*, 58–59.
[24] Chen, *McTyeire School*, 60.
[25] "Teachers, Students and Parents from Various Schools Discuss Tuition Fees 各校師生家長商談學費," Jiefang Ribao 解放日報 (Shanghai), August 18, 1949; "Students of McTyeire School Resolved the Tuition Fee Issue by Arguing with the School Authority 中西女中同學與校方據理力爭解決了學費問題," Wen Hui Bao 文匯報 (Shanghai), September 5, 1949.

political education.[26] By the end of 1950, due to the Korean War trade embargo between the US and the PRC, American subsidies stopped, and all missionary teachers left as they were not allowed to stay.[27] Meanwhile, in the name of separation of church and education, Christian fellowship and the Haygood Memorial Church were forced to stop; many students were absorbed by the Youth League.[28] The school space also gradually hosted more and more Party and state functions, including the inducting ceremony of the Youth League and Anti-America Aid-Korea exhibitions.[29] Finally, on July 5, 1952, McTyeire was merged with St. Mary's Hall, another prestigious girls' school in Shanghai of Anglican background, and became a public school—No. 3 Middle School of Shanghai City.[30] The McTyeire Christian space was thus essentially revolutionized into a Communist space.

Xianyou County Churches

Apart from spaces belonging to the social arms of Chinese Methodism, the CPC also targeted chapel spaces for spatial re-production. These spaces were taken from the Methodists mainly in three different stages: the Land Reform (1950–1953), the Unification of Worship (1958), and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Since this short paper focuses on 1949–1953, this section discusses only the first stage.

The Land Reform (1950–1953) was one of the early PRC's three major state-led mass movements. Claiming to end economic exploitation, rural lands were redistributed from

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[26] Chen, *McTyeire School*, 65.
[27] Chen, *McTyeire School*, 69.
[28] Chen, *McTyeire School*, 140.
[29] "The First Training Class of the Youth League of Jing'an District Working Committee Graduated Today; The Inducting Ceremony Was Held at McTyeire School 青年團靜安區工委會首屆團訓班今天結業入團典禮假中西女中舉行," Wen Hui Bao (Shanghai), November 20, 1949; "Shanghai Anti-America Aid-Korea Campaign Expands 上海抗美援朝運動擴大," Renmin Ribao (Beijing), March 19, 1951.
[30] Chen, *McTyeire School*, 70.

landlords to tenants. Violent means were often involved resulting in deaths.[31] Lefebvre once commented: "As for class struggle, its role in the production of space is a cardinal one in that this production is performed solely by classes, fractions of classes and groups representative of classes… the class struggle is inscribed in space."[32] The Chinese Communist Land Reform provided the perfect footnote for this statement.

While numerous research studies have been conducted on land reform, its influence on Chinese Christianity, especially rural churches, has been understudied. This section uses the Methodist experience in Xianyou County of Fujian to illustrate how the Reform changed the local Christian landscape.

Xianyou is a county in the Putian region (formerly called Xinghua) of Fujian province. The Methodists first entered Xianyou in 1868. They established chapels, boys' and girls' schools, hospitals, and other social service institutions. The County fell into Communist hands in August 1949; Land Reform began in November 1950 and was completed in October 1951.[33] Like McTyiere, all church institutions were taken over by the local government by 1952.[34] But in this case, we see that not only were the social arms cut off from the church, but even churches and chapels were confiscated by the state.

According to *The Methodist History in Xianyou County*, by 1949, there were 39 Methodist churches plus meeting points.[35] While all ceased to run during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), many stopped operating during earlier mass movements. Of the 39 premises, at

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[31] Frank Dikötter, *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution 1945–1957* (Bloomsbury, 2017), 207–225.
[32] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 55.
[33] "A Century of Tidal Surge 百年潮湧，經天緯地," Xianyou Jinbao 仙游今報 (Xianyou), July 11, 2021.
[34] Xianyou County Methodist History Editorial Committee 仙游縣基督教衞理公會教會史編委會編 ed., *Xianyou County Methodist History* 仙游縣基督教衞理公會教會史 (Xianyou, 2012), 10–11.
[35] Xianyou County Methodist History Editorial Committee, *Xianyou County Methodist History*.

least 22 stopped or were occupied by state organs since liberation until 1953. The Land Reform is mentioned in the historical accounts of 16 churches. Some churches lost their farmlands, fruit trees, and other properties,[36] of which could be legally requisitioned according to Article 3 of the 1950 Agrarian Reform Law. Although the word "requisition" was used, scholars suggest that "confiscation" was what actually happened, as there is no evidence of compensations made.[37] Some lost their chapels—Article 21 protects the buildings from being damaged but not from being requisitioned.[38] Some pastors chose to stay in their churches to look after the properties.[39] Some were forced out of their churches during the Reform,[40] some went home to receive redistributed land,[41] and some fled to avoid violent political persecution.[42] Some actively participated—they cooperated in turning over church land to the local government for redistribution.[43] Confiscated church properties were occupied by Party-state institutions, including clinics, storage houses, the People's Communes, agricultural production cooperatives, and food rationing stations.[44]

By 1953, at least 56% of the Methodist churches in Xianyou had disappeared. Some formerly Christian spaces have been converted to other uses. With the departure of pastors and the scattering of congregations, Christian presence in the rural public greatly diminished. By eliminating Christian spatial practices (of churchgoers and pastors) and representations of space

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[36] Xianyou County Methodist History Editorial Committee, *Xianyou County Methodist History*, 52.
[37] John Wong, *Land Reform in the People's Republic of China: Institutional Transformation in Agriculture* (Praeger Publishers, 1973), 75.
[38] Xianyou County Methodist History Editorial Committee, *Xianyou County Methodist History*, 52, 58, 66, 67.
[39] Xianyou County Methodist History Editorial Committee, *Xianyou County Methodist History*, 31–32.
[40] Xianyou County Methodist History Editorial Committee, *Xianyou County Methodist History*, 72.
[41] Xianyou County Methodist History Editorial Committee, *Xianyou County Methodist History*, 49, 60.
[42] See Matthew Noellert, *The Political Economy of Communist Land Reform in China* (University of Michigan Press, 2020), chapters 5 and 6.
[43] Xianyou County Methodist History Editorial Committee, *Xianyou County Methodist History*, 49, 53.
[44] Xianyou County Methodist History Editorial Committee, *Xianyou County Methodist History*, 46, 50, 53–54, 58, 65.

(set by church authorities) and introducing new representational spaces (through the occupation of Communist communities), the Xianyou government appropriated formerly Christian spaces and re-produced them into Communist spaces.

IV. Disenfranchised from the Dissipating Public Spheres

While Henri Lefebvre's spatial analysis helps us better understand how Communist spaces were re-produced from Christian spaces in the early PRC, Jürgen Habermas's theory on the public sphere provides the appropriate framework for examining discursive spaces. From the late Qing to the Republican Era, the socially engaging Methodists created and participated in many public spheres. These spaces included church meetings and conferences, schools, and universities. For many females, spaces like Sunday School and girls' school classrooms, as well as Woman's Foreign Missionary Society Conferences, were where they practiced and joined in deliberations on public issues. Church and school newspapers and periodicals were also important discursive spaces. Moreover, the Methodists did not just dialogue with Christians or focus on church matters. They established institutional churches in major cities in all conferences. These were social service hubs, relief centers, and spaces for public events like talks and lectures that welcomed non-Christians.[45] Methodist newspapers and periodicals also included national and international news on health information, social issues, and political affairs. Furthermore, Methodist leaders participated in non-Christian spheres. They published opinions in secular newspapers and led charitable and relief organizations at the national and community levels.

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[45] The Moore Memorial Church in Shanghai was one of the most prominent examples; see John Craig William Keating, *A Protestant Church in Communist China: Moore Memorial Church Shanghai, 1949–1989* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2012).

Chinese public spheres, including those the Methodists created, quickly dissipated during the early PRC. Nancy Fraser accurately points out the tendency for totalistic states to engulf public spheres, that there is a "longstanding failure in the dominant wing of the socialist and Marxist tradition to appreciate the full force of the distinction between the apparatuses of the state, on the one hand, and public arenas of citizen discourse and association, on the other. All too often, it was assumed in this tradition that to subject the economy to the control of the socialist state was to subject it to the control of the socialist citizenry."[46] Seeing themselves as the true representatives of the Chinese people, the Communists in the early PRC quickly compressed public spheres. This section illustrates such compression by comparing the pre-1949 and post-1949 issues of the Methodist *East China News* (Huadong Xiaoxi).

The *East China News*

East China News, a biweekly periodical that began in April 1947, was published in Songjiang (now part of Shanghai) by the Education Department of the East China Annual Conference of the Methodist Church. It continued to be published after the Communist victory (although issues were largely missing after no. 66, published on September 20, 1949). When the Education Department was closed "according to order and direction from above and approval from the government authority," the publication ended.[47] Its last issue was no. 208 (published on December 31, 1952). In the final six months, its circulation per issue was 1,400 copies.[48]

By 1949, issues featured news of the Conference, conference institutions, districts, individual churches, and individual church leaders. They also included short letters to the editor

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[46] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 1990, no. 25/26 (1990): 56.
[47] "Notice from the Christian Education Department 基督教教育部啟事," *East China News* 中華基督教衞理公會華東消息 208 (1952): 3.
[48] "Report on the Work of the Christian Education Department 基督教教育部工作報告," *East China News* 208 (1952): 7.

and short articles or reports on church issues, such as how to strengthen theological and mission education. Furthermore, they shared funding requests and church notices and even asked for readers' opinions on particular issues. Unlike some other Methodist periodicals, this paper focused on church news and rarely included news on secular affairs. One reason might be that Greater Shanghai had enough secular news sources. It might also be due to the difficulty of commenting on current affairs when the nation and the church were divided during the Civil War. Adopting Catherine R. Squires' categorization of marginalized public spheres into counterpublics, satellite publics, and enclaved publics, the public surrounding *East China News* should be considered a satellite public, as it aimed to "maintain a solid group identity and build independent institutions" instead of desiring to challenge or having "regular discourse or interdependency with other publics."[49]

Although the editor remained unchanged, the contents of the 1952 issues of *East China News* vastly differed from those published before 1950. There was still church news, but the proportion largely decreased. There were reports on how the church underwent Three-Self reforms under the government's guidance. It contained political mobilizations, like "Religious Practitioners Should Quickly Join the 'Campaign of Hunting Tigers'" and "Suzhou Christianity Held the 'Five-Anti' Promotional Mobilization Meeting,"[50] which echoed state-led Three-Antis and Five-Antis Campaigns. News about the Korean War was included, and there were articles promoting Sino-USSR friendship; many of these articles were reprinted from CPC newspapers. Lastly, there were also articles sharing farming and health knowledge.

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[49] Catherine R. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres, *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (2002): 463.

[50] "Religious Practitioners Should Quickly Join the 'Campaign of Hunting Tigers' 宗教人士快來參加打虎運動," *East China News* 165 (1952): 1; "Suzhou Christianity Held the 'Five-Anti' Promotional Mobilization Meeting 蘇州基督教舉行「五反」宣傳動員大會," *East China News* 165 (1952): 2.

Editorial control and censorship are the best explanations for these changes. The first step was registration; by 1952, *East China News* had registered with the South Suzhou News and Publication Office. Registration and supervision guaranteed that state policies and Communist discourses would be propagated.[51] The spirits of democracy, freedom, neutrality, and rationality were considered "capitalistic" and inappropriate for news reporting in the New China.[52] Although this religious publication now included many more public issues than before, it did not allow for discourses other than state-sanctioned ones. Instead of "going public," it was, in fact, appropriated by the state. With this degree of censorship, the previously relatively independent satellite public sphere created around *East China News* significantly diminished and eventually vanished by the end of 1952.

The systematic elimination of public spheres by the Communist state effectively silenced the voices and marginalized the activities of Chinese Methodists. As demonstrated through the case of *East China News*, the transformation of a previously independent satellite public into a state-sanctioned propaganda tool exemplifies the broader strategy of the CPC to dominate all forms of public discourse. This erosion of independent public spheres stifled religious expression and dismantled the social networks and intellectual spaces that supported the Methodist Church's engagement with broader societal issues. Consequently, the disenfranchisement of Methodists from these public spheres marked a significant step towards their isolation and the eventual erasure of their public influence.

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[51] See Chang-tai Hung, *Politics of Control: Creating Red Culture in the Early People's Republic of China* (University of Hawaii Press, 2021), chapter 2.

[52] Ren-shan Zhang 張仁善, "The Press Policy of the Chinese Communist Party before and after 1949 and Its Historical Effects 1949 年前後中共的新聞政策及歷史效應," *Twenty-First Century* 二十一世紀 75 (2008).

V. Conclusion

This paper has traced the trajectory of Chinese Methodism from its influential presence in Republican China to its marginalization under the early PRC. Employing Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory and theories of the public sphere by Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser, and Catherine R. Squires, the study examined how the state's appropriation of public spaces and the compression of public spheres led to the Methodist Church's loss of social arms and public relevance. The case studies of the McTyeire School and rural churches in Xianyou County illustrated how Communist spatial re-production transformed Christian spaces into Communist ones. Additionally, the transformation of *East China News* from the satellite public sphere into a state-sanctioned propaganda tool highlighted the CPC's strategy to dominate public discourse and silence religious voices. It shows that Chinese Methodism had been much weakened even before the Unification of Worship in 1958, which marked the official end of denominations in China.

The erasure of Methodist influence from public spaces and spheres had profound implications for Chinese Methodism and Chinese Christianity. Such an erasure was detrimental to Chinese Methodism, a denomination characterized by social engagements. It led to the eventual dormancy of the Methodist tradition in Mainland China. For Chinese Christianity, the closing of the public marked the end of an era of Christian public engagement, halting the development of Chinese public theology, and contributing to a significant transformation in the religious landscape of China. This isolation also paved the way for a different kind of religious engagement post-Cultural Revolution, which might be an area for further research.

This study opens several avenues for future research. One unanswered question of this study is where the Methodists went after being pushed out from the public. Did they create new

enclaved publics, for instance, in Christian homes? Another potential direction is a comparative analysis of different Christian denominations in the early PRC, exploring how various groups navigated the challenges posed by the Communist state. Yet another area of interest could be the study of how Chinese Christians in the diaspora, particularly those who migrated to Hong Kong and Taiwan, preserved and adapted their traditions in new sociopolitical contexts. Additionally, investigating the resurgence of Christianity in post-Mao China, how it interacts with contemporary public spaces and spheres, and whether it shows continuities or discontinuities with the previous Christian public engagement traditions, could provide valuable insights into the evolving landscape of Chinese religious life.

Appendix:
Major American Methodist Institutions in Mainland China by January 1950[53]

Conference	Educational	Medical	Others
Mid-China	**Chinkiang** - Olivet Memorial Girls' High School **Nanking** - Ginling College - University of Nanking - Methodist Girls' High School	**Nanking** - University Hospital and School of Nursing **Wuhu** - General Hospital and School of Nursing	**Nanking** - Nanking Theological Seminary - Women's Bible Teachers' Training School
East China	**Soochow** - Soochow University - Davidson Girls' School - Atkinson Academy - Laura Haygood Normal School **Huchow** - Virginia School (for girls) - Boy's High School **Shanghai** - Woman's Christian Medical College, Margaret Williamson Hospitakl and School of Nursing - Mctyeire School **Sungkiang** - Susan B. Wilson School	**Soochow** - Soochow General Hospital and School of Nursing **Huchow** - General Hospital and School of Nursing **Changchow** - Stephenson Memorial Hospital and School of Nursing	**Soochow** - Konghong Institutional Church **Shanghai** - Moore Memorial Institutional Church **Wusih** - Christian Social Center
Foochow	**Foochow** - Fukien Christian University - Hwa Nan College - Anglo-Chinese College - Hwa Han High School - Union High School - Tai Maiu Girls' School - Union Kindergarten Training School **Bingtang** - Lang Hwa Junior High School **Futsing** - Ming Ngie Junior High School	**Foochow** - Willis F. Pierce Memorial Hospital and School of Nursing **Futsing** - Lucie F. Harrison Hospital **Kutien** - Wiley Hospital **Lek-du** - Good Shepherd Hospital **Lungtien** - Woolston memorial Dispensary	**Foochow** - Union Theological Seminary - Woman's Bible Institute

[53] Reproduced and rearranged from Cartwright, *Methodism behind the Bamboo Curtain*, 28–30. Romanizations in this table follow the original.

	- Marguerite Stewart Junior School **Kutien** - Girls' School - Boys' School **Lek-du** - Girls' Junior High School **Lungtien** - Boy's School **Mintsing Hsien** - Tien Yu Junior High School		
Hinghwa	**Hinghwa** - Hamilton Girls' High School - Guthrie Memorial High School **Sienyu** - Frances Nast Gamble Memorial School - Boys' School	**Sienyu** - Sienuyu Christian Union Hospital	**Hinghwa** - Rebecca McCabe Orphanage
Kiangsi	**Kiukiang** - William Nast Academy - Rulison Girls' High School **Nanchang** - Baldwin Girls' School - Nanchang Academy	**Kiukiang** - Danforth Memorial Hospital - Water-of-Life Hospital **Nanchang** - Ida Kahn Hospital for Women and Children - Susan Toy Ensign Memorial Hospital	**Kiukiang** - Knowles Bible School
North China	**Changli** - Alderman Girls' School - Changli Academy **Lan Hsien** - Lanhsien Junior High School **Peking** - Yenching University - Mary Porter Gamewell School - Peking Academy - Peking Vocational School - New Light School for Women **Tientsin**	**Peking** - Sleeper Davis Hospital and School of Nursing - General Hospital - Hopkins Memorial Hospital **Tientsin** - Isabella Fisher Hospital	**Peking** - Peking Theological College - Union Bible Training School

	- Keen School - Boys' School (High) **Tsunhua** - Boy's School		
Shantung	**Taian** - Ts'ui Ying Academy (damaged and inactive)	**Taian** - Po Chi Hospital (damaged and inactive) **Tsinan** - Cheeloo University School of Medicine - University Hospital and School of Nursing	
West China	**Chengtu** - West China Union University - Methodist Girls' School - Union High School **Chungking** - Methodist Girls' School - Chiu Ching School **Suining** - Methodist Union Girls' High School **Tzechung** - Caldwell Girls' Junior High School - Fidelia DeWitt Training School	**Chengtu** - School of Midwifery and Lying-In-Hospital - Methodist Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat Hospital **Chungking** - General Hospital **Tzechung** - Chadwick Memorial Hospital	**Chengtu** - West China Union Theological College **Kienyang** - Rural Christian Center **Chungking** - Lewis Memorial Institutional Church
Yenping	**Nanping** - Chien Chin High School	**Nanping** - Alden Speare Hospital **Sha Hsien** - Methodist Hospital	