

# Gatherings in Diaspora

Religious Communities  
and the New Immigration

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## 10 Tenacious Unity in a Contentious Community: Cultural and Religious Dynamics in a Chinese Christian Church

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*May they be brought to complete unity to let the world  
know that you sent me and have loved them even as you  
have loved me.—Jesus, The Gospel of John 17: 23<sup>1</sup>*

*致中和，天地位焉，万物育焉。  
Once Equilibrium and Harmony are realized, Heaven and  
Earth will take their proper places and all things will receive  
their full nourishment.—Confucius, Zhong Yong 1: 5<sup>2</sup>*

Unity is an appealing ideal in both Christianity and Chinese culture. According to the New Testament, Christians ought to become one organic body in Christ: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (I Corinthians, 12: 12-13). In ancient Chinese classics, unity and harmony are highly valued.<sup>3</sup> Many observers are fascinated by the magnetic unity of the heterogeneous Chinese people.<sup>4</sup>

However, history exhibits a different reality, one of numerous divisions, for both Christianity and Chinese society. In the history of Christianity, especially Protestantism, schisms are myriad. And Chinese society, especially in modern times, reveals the bloodshed of warlords, civil wars, and violent political struggles. Overseas Chinese communities are likewise notoriously fragmented (Lyman 1974, Chen 1992). When Christian religion and Chinese culture come together, as they do in Chinese Christian churches, will unity or division prevail? This question is pertinent to understanding the conflicts, unity, and cultural diversity in churches, as well as "the clash of civilizations."<sup>5</sup>

Christianity is growing fast among the Chinese in the United States and in China, but Chinese Christians remain a small proportion of the Chinese populations in both countries.<sup>6</sup> Research on Chinese Christian churches in the United States has been scarce, so I must draw my theoretical references mainly from studies of American Protestant churches and certain other ethnic churches.

Most studies of polarization among Protestants have focused on the denominational level. However, the dynamics at the congregational level can be different from those at the denominational level (see Warner 1988). Moreover, the problem of division may be better understood by a comparison with its opposite—unity. In this chapter I describe and analyze the religious and cultural dynamics in a Chinese immigrant church. I find that the most important sources of division were cultural group differences rather than socioeconomic factors (Niebuhr 1929), because church members are socioeconomically homogeneous. Status competition was more often between cultural groups than between deprived immigrant individuals (cf. Palinkas 1984, Shin and Park 1988). Furthermore, although theological disagreements are potential factors of division in this Chinese church, there were none of the contending parties of theological liberals and conservatives found in mainline American churches (Hoge 1976, Warner 1988).

The central findings of my study are as follows: (1) there was a complex, multidimensional diversity in this ethnic Chinese church; (2) even though the heterogeneous groups within the church were often contentious, the church itself maintained a tenacious unity; and (3) the forces that promoted this unity were the ideal of unity in Christianity and Chinese culture, a respect for diversity, and an emphasis on harmonious relationships.

### **The Ethnographic Field and the Plan of Study**

The church under study here, which I call the Chinese Fellowship Church (CFC),<sup>7</sup> is one of about twenty Chinese churches in a metropolitan area on the east coast, where the Chinese population has become substantial.<sup>8</sup> The CFC is typical of today's Chinese churches in many ways: it grew out of a fellowship group and is conservative, nondenominational, and mid-sized.<sup>9</sup> In 1995 weekly church attendance was about 270.

In 1992 I was baptized and became a CFC member, following more than three years of contact with members who were evangelizing to

mainland Chinese students and visiting scholars (like myself). A year and half later I decided to focus on this church for the New Ethnic and Immigration Congregations Project and my dissertation research.<sup>10</sup> I determined to be a watchful member,<sup>11</sup> a silent observer in church meetings, and an empathetic listener in informal conversations and formal interviews. I made it clear that my stay in this area would be transient and that I had no intention of becoming a leader or power-player in the church. I have been well received as both a participant and an observer. Beginning in September of 1993, I conducted (1) extensive participant observation in various gatherings and meetings; (2) many informal conversations and formal interviews with members, ex-members, and former pastors; and (3) a thorough search and close readings of several boxes of church documents.<sup>12</sup>

In this chapter I will provide a brief history of the church before demarcating the complex diversity of its members. Then I describe the various subgroups and their contentiousness, and compare the church's two pastors. Following this I offer a focused discussion of major factors promoting church unity. I conclude the chapter with a reflection on, or perhaps a hope for, the possibility of extending some principles drawn from this case study to the larger society. First however, let me start by describing an event at the church that vividly illustrates many elements of division and unity at work in the congregation, and the characteristically circumspect conduct of its conflict.

### **A Showdown After a "Love Banquet"**

It was the last Sunday of June 1995, sunny and humid. After worship services people crowded into the CFC's Fellowship Hall to have lunch. This had become a tradition of the church, fondly called the "Love Banquet." A dozen old men and women sat quietly at the tables in a corner, waiting to be served. Children were running around. About two hundred people, from teenagers to those in their sixties, formed a loose line winding around the tables and chairs, chatting as they waited. Voices buzzed in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English, mixed with laughter. Suddenly strong strokes of piano keys permeated the hall and brought the voices into a singing stream. Then a man stood up and called on people to bow their heads before saying grace. He particularly prayed for God's presence and guidance in the congregational meeting that afternoon. After the meeting was mentioned, conversations resumed in much lower tones, while the laughter faded away. One by one, everyone moved to the kitchen window, got a plastic plate filled with

rice, vegetables, and meat, and then sat at a table or wandered around. The Love Banquet was unusually quiet. I happened upon the chairwoman of the Ark Fellowship, one of several fellowship groups in the church. She was walking around with her plate in hand, informing fellowship co-workers that their planned meeting was canceled due to the sensitive timing, that is, before the congregational meeting.

Walking into the sanctuary well in time for the meeting, I had to search to find a seat. A man next to me remarked with a grimace: "There are more people now than in the worship service." The attendance was indeed unusually large. The last congregational meeting in January was attended by 56 members. This time there were at least 150.

A man in a dark suit, Mr. David Lee, the chairman of the Official Board, called the meeting to order. He asked nonmembers and junior members less than eighteen years old to sit to the back in the overflow area, and reminded them that they had no right to vote. Then he asked for two "brothers" and two "sisters" to say prayers for the meeting. This was followed by an awkward silence, after which Chairman Lee said: "Please don't waste time. . . . You may use any language, English, or Mandarin, or Cantonese, or any other. A one or two-word prayer is fine, as long as you are moved to." Upon repeated encouragements and urging, two men and two women offered short generic prayers with reluctance and overlong pauses. The air was tense.

As routinely done in congregational meetings, the pastor first presented his report. Reverend Daniel Tang, senior pastor for the past four years, proceeded to paint a rosy picture of church attendance and finance. "What we need," he concluded with confidence, "is to pray more in unity, to establish the Elders Board, and to make long-range goals." However, his contrived calm looked edgy.

Then Chairman Lee and several deacons reported on church ministries. Some of them presented proposals and asked for approval by vote. All this proceeded smoothly without much discussion.

Finally, the real agenda for most of the day's participants—to vote on the proposal to reappoint the senior pastor—was discussed. Chairman Lee reiterated, in English and Mandarin, that, according to the church constitution and bylaws, the pastor's reappointment was subject to an anonymous vote in a congregational meeting every two years, requiring a two-thirds majority of positive votes. He then urged, "If you don't understand the issues, you may want to refrain from casting a vote." He added, "If you want to vote but don't have a clear opinion of either approving or opposing, you may choose a vote of abstention.

Abstention does not mean opposition, but the ballot has to be cast in order to be counted. However, only 'yes' votes will be counted as positive votes. Is this clear?"

An old woman called out, "Before casting the ballot, we should have a time of praying first. Let's follow what God wants us to do." This seemed a righteous request, even though a round of outspoken spontaneous prayers, as are frequently offered in group meetings, might trigger heated debates or occasion another awkward silence like the one at the beginning of the meeting. The chairman treated her plea as a motion, which was then seconded and unanimously approved. The assistant pastor's wife quickly suggested that everyone pray silently before a concluding prayer was offered by one person. Without going through another round of seconding and voting, Mr. Lee immediately appointed "Uncle Yao," the most senior member of the church, to conclude the silent prayer.

The sanctuary became very quiet. Rain was rustling on the roof, and muffled thunder was heard. It seemed that it was not until this moment that many people took notice of the storm. Mr. Yao slowly rose and prayed loudly in a husky voice: "This is the family of God. Pray to God our Lord. Give us power to make this church able to glorify your name in this region." Four assigned men immediately distributed ballots and, after the voting was done, collected them. While they were counting the ballots in another room, the deacon of the treasury presented a detailed budget report, but people paid little attention. They were anxious for the result of the vote. Finally it came. "Let's receive the result of the vote with calm," Mr. Lee admonished. "No matter what happens, we believe everything is under God's control." The result: one-third opposed the reappointment, and a large number cast ballots of abstention. The proposal to reappoint the senior pastor for another term failed to pass. Reverend Tang had to leave in three months.

This was not the first time a pastor was voted out in this church, although the proportion of negative votes was unprecedentedly high. The vote showed that church members were divided in their opinions. It reflected not only the dissatisfaction of many members with Reverend Tang, but also the contention among various groups in the church. Nonetheless, everybody acted with composure and great caution, and the chairman handled the proceedings firmly, avoiding open debate. These are indications of the length to which church members were willing to go to protect unity. To understand this situation, we need to take a look at the history of the church.

## A Brief History

The Chinese Fellowship Church is the second oldest Chinese church in its metropolitan area. The first, which I call the Interdenominational Mission Church (IMC), was incorporated in 1935 out of several denominational missions to Chinese immigrants under the leadership of the City Council of Churches. Its participants were immigrant laborers and merchants from rural areas of Guangdong Province who came to this city during the Chinese Exclusion period (1882–1943).<sup>13</sup> The lingua franca was Cantonese. CFC began with Chinese refugees<sup>14</sup> and students of the 1950s and early 1960s. Before coming to the United States, most had fled first to Taiwan or Hong Kong from the wars and the communists on the mainland. About a dozen new Chinese Christian immigrants and students formed a fellowship group in 1957. After a year of gathering in homes, they started a Sunday worship service in a downtown office building, which marked the birth of CFC. They adopted Mandarin as their official language and named their church *Guoyu Libaitang* (Mandarin Worship Hall). They also decided to make it independent, without denominational affiliation.

As Chinese students and immigrants continued to arrive, attendance at CFC kept increasing and reached a hundred by the end of the 1960s. In the early 1970s the church moved to a prime suburb, where it constructed its own sanctuary and education buildings. There followed a period of rapid growth during which the church received forty to eighty new members every year, nearly half of them newly baptized adult converts. Sunday service attendance peaked at more than four hundred in the mid-1970s. Then, in 1976, there was an abrupt split.

Beneath suspicions of financial mismanagement by pastors, the deep conflict was centered on church polity and the authority of the pastors. CFC was a lay-initiated church, and members were highly educated. Democracy and the equality of all members were the norms. Until the end of the 1960s, the congregation annually elected three to seven lay leaders, called “co-workers” or “deacons,” to take care of routine management. In 1969 Reverend Frank Chao became the pastor. He had a Presbyterian background and was a graduate of a conservative Presbyterian seminary in the Midwest. Reverend Chao pushed hard and successfully ordained three permanent lay elders; reduced the power of the Deacons Board; and reduced the frequency and functions of the congregational meeting. He pressed on to centralize power despite rising resistance from some lay leaders and active members. Finally, in 1976, some members openly confronted him. They

questioned his authority and asked to restore the democratic congregational polity. However, many others took the pastor’s side, arguing that mass democracy was not biblical and that pastors were sent by God to lead, rather than to be led. A series of special congregational meetings was held to “clarify” the controversies, in which heated debates and direct confrontations eclipsed any attempt to reconcile disputes. Eventually, Reverend Chao was forced to resign. A few months later, about half of the members suddenly withdrew from CFC and started another independent Chinese church with a church polity designed by Reverend Chao.

After the schism, CFC restored the highest authority to the congregational meeting, and explicitly limited the power and the term of the pastor. The revised constitution kept the clauses authorizing an Elders Board, but these positions have remained unfilled. It also adopted Robert’s Rules of Order for deliberations at congregational meetings to maintain order in the face of emotional arguments. After several years of instability, church attendance recovered and stabilized around 250.

In 1982 the church began to hold annual summer retreats for all members on a remote seminary campus, started a quarterly magazine as a public forum for church members, and hired Reverend Philip Hung as the pastor. After eight years of service, Reverend Hung resigned and left for a Chinese church in the South. During this period, twelve fellowship groups emerged one by one. These groupings, based on social and cultural backgrounds, had a profound impact on the church in the 1990s.

## Multidimensional Diversity

CFC is a Chinese church. With the exception of a very few Caucasians, its participants are all Chinese. However, behind this homogeneous appearance is a complex diversity with multiple boundaries defined by the very different religious, cultural, and social backgrounds of the members.

## Denominational Diversity

Because CFC is an independent evangelical church, it is open to any and every prospective member, including non-Christians, nominal Christians, and Christians with various denominational backgrounds. Thus, denominational diversity has been a characteristic of church members since the beginning. Over the years, the proportion of con-

**Table 1. Chinese Fellowship Church: Denominational Backgrounds of Members, 1976 and 1995<sup>a</sup>**

| Denominational Background   | 1976       |              | 1995       |              |
|-----------------------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
|                             | N          | Percent      | N          | Percent      |
| Baptized at CFC             | 145        | 32.6         | 170        | 58.4         |
| Transferred members         | 300        | 67.4         | 121        | 41.6         |
| Baptists                    | 58         | 19.3         | 24         | 19.8         |
| Presbyterians               | 35         | 11.7         | 11         | 9.1          |
| Lingliang Tang <sup>b</sup> | 18         | 6.0          | 2          | 1.7          |
| Episcopalian/Anglican       | 17         | 5.7          | 8          | 6.6          |
| Methodists                  | 15         | 5.0          | 7          | 5.8          |
| Lutherans                   | 15         | 5.0          | 8          | 6.6          |
| Little Flock <sup>c</sup>   | 13         | 4.3          | 6          | 5.0          |
| Other <sup>d</sup>          | 62         | 20.7         | 24         | 19.8         |
| Unknown                     | 67         | 22.3         | 31         | 25.6         |
| Total transferred           | 300        | 100.0        | 121        | 100.0        |
| <b>Total members</b>        | <b>445</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>291</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

a. Members in 1976 include all those who had joined the church by 1976 (some had left by then but there was no systematic pattern among them). Members in 1995 include all those who were marked as current members in the 1996 Church Directory (21 names had no membership record, but I found no systematic pattern among them).

b. Lingliang Tang is an indigenous Chinese church with Presbyterian influence.

c. Little Flock (*Xiaoqun*), also known as the Assembly Hall (*Juhuisuo*) or the Local Church (*Difang Jiaohui*), is an indigenous Chinese church with Plymouth Brethren influence.

d. Other denominations include the Adventist, Assemblies of God, Catholic, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Church of Christ in China (*Zhonghua Jidu Jiaohui*), Congregationalist, Church of Nazarene, Free Evangelical Church, Reformed, United Church of Christ, and some independent Chinese churches or protodenominations.

verts who were baptized at this church has increased. But the number of transferred members remains large, and their denominational backgrounds differ remarkably (see Table 1).

Among members with a denominational background in 1995, Baptists were the largest group, at 20 percent, with Presbyterians second, at about 9 percent. There were also significant numbers of people from such Western denominations as Episcopalian, Anglican, Lutheran, and Methodist, and from the indigenous Chinese churches of Lingliang Tang and Little Flock. Lingliang Tang had Presbyterian roots. Little

Flock was influenced by the Plymouth Brethren tradition, and had strong anticlerical and antidenominational tendencies. Watchman Nee, the founder of Little Flock who was martyred by the Chinese communists, has enormous influence among many Chinese Christians, and some non-Chinese Christians as well, through the wide circulation of writings by and about him.

Theologically CFC is dominated by fundamentalists and evangelicals. In rituals, the church follows the Reformed tradition with a Baptist accent. The main sanctuary has little ornament—no icons, sculptures, or stained-glass windows. The organ pipes are the most eye-catching feature on the front wall; below them is a recessed hollow, where a large metal cross hangs above the baptismal pool. Sunday services always center on the preaching. There is no recitation of a creed and no altar call. The church observes only two ordinances or sacraments—baptism and communion. Baptism is conducted only for adults or youths, and immersion is clearly preferred. However, transferees who received other forms of baptism, including infant baptism, are not required to be baptized again. Communion is celebrated once a month as a time of commemoration, reminding believers of Jesus' death and grace for sinners and of the need of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Denominational backgrounds are usually downplayed in this independent church, but when it is time to form opinions, the latent denominational differences can become crucial. This showed up in the frequent disagreements over the form of church polity. Baptists and Little Flock people favor a democratic congregational polity and emphasize the equality of all members. In contrast, Presbyterians and other connectionalists tend to endorse more authority for ordained pastors and elders.

Thus, it is hard to achieve a consensus in CFC due to denominational and other differences. Even if a consensus is achieved, it is difficult to hold it for long because of the constant flow of members. Only 17 percent of present members joined the church before 1976. Many have left the area to follow job opportunities, while many others came and joined. When new members arrive, they sometimes question polity and policies that are different from what they have known. The 1976 schism resulted in a *de jure* congregationalistic polity for the last twenty years. But every once in a while some members request the restoration of the Elders Board or challenge the system of congregational democracy. In the 1990s, Reverend Tang, with background in the Evangelical Free and United Methodist churches, pushed to select elders, but he failed. Today the Official Board, led by Chairman Lee,

a Presbyterian, is again making efforts to install lay elders. Will they succeed this time? No one can predict. Only one thing is sure—even if a consensus is achieved, it may not be long before challenges emerge in opposition.

### Linguistic Diversity

Language problems are common to immigrant churches. When the original language of the immigrant group is not English, eventually the American-born generation will bring up the issue of adopting English in the church. However, ethnic Chinese churches have not followed the straight-line evolutionary pattern of linguistic and cultural changes proposed by Mark Mullins (1987),<sup>15</sup> because, in addition to tensions between English and Chinese, there have been more complicated problems because of the numerous Chinese dialects. Although the written Chinese characters and grammar are much the same across the country, the spoken dialects are many and often mutually unintelligible.

Chinese Fellowship Church was established as a Mandarin church. Mandarin was chosen because it was the “national language” that every educated Chinese should be able to speak, a language that “signifies the unity of the Chinese and the importance of Chinese culture.”<sup>16</sup> After less than ten years, however, “Mandarin” was dropped from the name of the church, which became instead a more inclusive “Chinese” church.<sup>17</sup>

Among Chinese immigrants in the United States, there have been many speakers of the Taishanese, Cantonese, Swato, Hakka, Mandarin, Taiwanese (Southern Fukianese), and Shanghai dialects, among others. Some ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia speak none of these dialects but, say, Vietnamese or Indonesian. CFC has received members of most of these dialect groups, as the “place of origin”<sup>18</sup> data in church records indicate (see Table 2).

Probably no other ethnic group in the United States has experienced language problems on the same scale as the Chinese. American Jews are similarly heterogeneous, but at the synagogue there is the common ritual language of Hebrew. Asian Indians have multiple dialects or languages, but they do not hold an expectation that all Indians should stick together. Koreans and Japanese, like Chinese people, do hold such an expectation, but they are linguistically homogeneous compared to the Chinese in the United States. In Chinese churches, various dialect groups often become contentious about linguistic usages, yet they try to remain in the same church with their Chinese compatriots.

**Table 2. Chinese Fellowship Church: Place of Birth or Place of Origin of Members, 1976 and 1995<sup>a</sup>**

| Place of Origin               | Main Dialect       | 1976       |              | 1995       |              |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
|                               |                    | N          | Percent      | N          | Percent      |
| China (not specified)         | Mandarin(?)        | 17         | 3.8          | 15         | 5.2          |
| Guangdong <sup>b</sup>        | Cantonese          | 95         | 21.3         | 32         | 11.0         |
| Hong Kong                     | Cantonese          | 31         | 7.0          | 25         | 8.6          |
| Taiwan <sup>c</sup>           | Mandarin/Minnan    | 48         | 10.8         | 40         | 13.7         |
| Fujian                        | Minnan/other local | 26         | 5.8          | 11         | 3.8          |
| Zhejiang                      | Local <sup>d</sup> | 34         | 7.7          | 24         | 8.2          |
| Jiangsu                       | Local              | 27         | 6.1          | 8          | 2.7          |
| Shanghai                      | Local              | 24         | 5.4          | 13         | 4.5          |
| Shandong                      | Local(Mandarin)    | 18         | 4.0          | 1          | 0.3          |
| Sichuan                       | Local (Mandarin)   | 12         | 2.7          | 3          | 1.0          |
| Other provinces <sup>e</sup>  | Various            | 69         | 15.5         | 34         | 11.7         |
| Diaspora Chinese <sup>f</sup> | Various            | 16         | 3.6          | 12         | 4.1          |
| USA and Canada                | English            | 23         | 5.2          | 69         | 23.7         |
| Unknown                       |                    | 5          | 1.1          | 4          | 1.4          |
| <b>Total</b>                  |                    | <b>445</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>291</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

a. Either birthplace, ancestral place, or place from whence one came to the United States (see n. 18).

b. Some people were from Hainan and Chaozhou (Swato), in Guangdong Province, and their dialects were unintelligible to Cantonese-speaking people.

c. Major Taiwan dialects are Taiwanese (Minnan, or Southern Fujian dialect) and Hakka. Many people from Taiwan were mainland-born Chinese who went to Taiwan in the 1940s and the 1950s. They may speak no Taiwan dialect but rather Mandarin and their original dialects.

d. Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Shanghai, and many provinces south of the Yellow River have unique and mutually unintelligible local dialects. Dialects in Shandong, Sichuan, and most provinces north of the Yellow River are distinctive variants of Mandarin.

e. Including southern provinces, with mutually unintelligible dialects: Anhui, Guangxi, Guizhou, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Macao, and Yunnan; and northern provinces, with local dialects of Mandarin variants: Beijing, Gansu, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Henan, Jilin, Liaoning, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Tianjin, and Xinjiang. Each of these provinces were represented by fewer than 10 CFC members in 1976 and 1995.

f. Including Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Peru, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Language problems go beyond linguistic differences. Some languages and dialects are associated with cultural and social status or political leanings. Before World War II, for example, Taishanese, as commonly spoken by the dominant immigrants from certain rural districts of Guangdong, was regarded as the *true* Chinese language in American Chinatowns. Later, "Standard Cantonese, as spoken in the cities of Hong Kong, Macau, and Guangzhou, replaced Taishan [dialect] as the common language," because it was thought to signify more genteel urban origins (Wong 1994, 238–241). As mentioned, Mandarin is the official language of China that every educated Chinese is expected to be able to speak. Since the 1970s the rising Taiwan independence movement has become associated with an insistence on speaking Taiwanese. Above all this, though, English fluency is indicative of an immigrant's success in entering mainstream American society. On the other hand, for second-generation Chinese, speaking Chinese may show the extent of their Chinese identity.

CFC changed its Sunday service from monolingual (Mandarin) to bilingual (Mandarin and Cantonese) in 1967, and to trilingual (Mandarin, Cantonese, and English) in the early 1970s. In the trilingual service, the sermon and announcements are all spoken or translated in three languages. Very often, the worship leader and the preacher speak Mandarin, which is translated into English, sentence by sentence, by a person standing side by side with the preacher behind the pulpit. Another person, invisible to the congregation, simultaneously translates every word into Cantonese, which is transmitted wirelessly to earphones in the designated pews.

Given the technical complications, three languages/dialects seem the maximum that a Sunday service can adopt; a fourth language translation is one too many. In 1973 some Taiwanese-speaking CFC members asked for a separate Sunday school class in Taiwanese, claiming that the existing classes in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English could not meet their spiritual needs. In 1975 and 1976, the church also hosted a Sunday service in Vietnamese for refugees from that country. Both experiments were short-lived.

The trilingual pattern can be found in Chinese churches across the United States today. Many churches started as monolingual, but in five to ten years, English and another Chinese dialect had to be added. The Interdenominational Mission Church in Chinatown was a Cantonese-speaking church. After half a century, however, instead of becoming an English-speaking church, it has turned into a trilingual church. Both English and Mandarin have been added. In the mid-1970s, a

Taiwanese-speaking church was founded in this area. When I visited it in 1994, the Sunday service was also trilingual—Taiwanese, Mandarin, and English. Continued immigration, a sense of peoplehood of all Chinese in spite of linguistic obstacles, and technical limitations may be the reasons for the dominant trilingual pattern of Chinese churches in the United States today.

One solution to the demands of various dialect/language groups would be to break the congregation into several Sunday services, as some large churches do. However, such differentiation requires an increase of staff, space, and facilities, and a relatively large membership. Even more importantly, it requires psychological adjustment to separate a church into two or more congregations, a step that is often resisted for various reasons. First, many Chinese church members as well as leaders fear that separate Sunday services may lead to a split of the church. Second, some parents want to sit beside their teenage children in the same service. Third, some members appreciate the bilingual translation, and find it helps them to learn English or Chinese.

At CFC, the first request for a separate English service was recorded in the early 1970s, but it did not become a reality until 1986. Since then, a combined Sunday communion service for all church members, intended to preserve and signify CFC's unity, has been held on the first Sunday of each month. In the combined service the sermon and announcements are all translated consecutively in Mandarin and English, while Cantonese has been sacrificed. Hymns are often sung bilingually with one stanza in Mandarin and the next in English, or simultaneously in Mandarin, English, Cantonese, or whatever language one chooses. After he was elected chairman of the Official Board in 1995, David Lee tried to recover the sense of being "one big family" that this church had once had. He pushed to make the English service bulletins available to Chinese service participants and the Chinese service bulletins to English service participants. Still, some English-speaking people feel the combined service is inefficient, whereas some Cantonese-speaking people are not happy about the absence of Cantonese. Nevertheless, most people participate in this monthly ritual of symbolic unity.

### **Sociocultural and Sociopolitical Diversity**

The vast majority of CFC members share a similar socioeconomic status. Most are highly educated, middle-class professionals. However, they do have different sociocultural and sociopolitical backgrounds.

Socioculturally, CFC members are from different provinces of

China and from various countries (see Table 2). In addition to linguistic diversity, these places often have distinctive cultural customs and social norms. These provincial differences and various diasporic experiences were *not* insignificant for many Chinese. In fact, most members wrote the name of their county in addition to the province for the "place of origin" item on the membership application form; some even gave their district or village of origin. This is an indication of their attachment to their specific ancestral locality.

Interestingly, this Chinese church has had a white, American-born assistant pastor since 1989. Reverend Allan Houston and his wife, both in their mid-thirties, grew up in the American South.<sup>19</sup> They have learned no Chinese and show little interest in Chinese culture, although they have been in this church for more than seven years. CFC also has a few non-Chinese members, who are married to Chinese.

The various immigrant cohorts also differ sociopolitically. For example, among the Mandarin-speaking members, there have been three cohorts of immigration. Most of those who came in the 1950s and 1960s were "sojourners," that is, they were born in mainland China but forced to go to Taiwan, Hong Kong, or other places due to wars and the victory of the Chinese communists on the mainland. They were followed by their children's generation, who were either born or raised in Taiwan or Hong Kong. People in both cohorts generally hold anti-communist views. Compared to the first cohort, the second cohort has less attachment to the mainland and mainland Chinese, although their Chinese identity may be similarly strong. Beginning in 1980, immigrants and students from the People's Republic of China arrived. While they are often sharply critical of aspects in Chinese society under the rule of the communists, they tend to resent the same comments when spoken by any member of the first two cohorts. Some church members who were born or grew up in Taiwan are sympathetic to the Taiwan independence movement or to the Kuomintang's position of resisting quick unification with mainland China. However, most mainland Chinese are deeply opposed to Taiwan independence.

### Fellowship Groups

Multiple diversity in CFC is inescapable. Over the years, leaders of the church have tried to deal with this fact in very different ways with very different consequences. In the 1970s they tried to suppress cultural pluralism. In spite of the increasing heterogeneity of the membership, or perhaps exactly because of it, Reverend Chao discouraged cultural

groupings, fearing that these might lead to division in the church and pose a contradiction to the spirit of Christian unity. With attendance up to four hundred in the overcrowded sanctuary, many people still resisted the idea of holding a separate, English Sunday service. In the whole church there were only two adult fellowship groups, one for women and one for men. Instead of groupings based on social and cultural background, informal prayer meetings based on residential neighborhoods were promoted. "The purposes of the regional prayer meetings," said the pastor, as recorded in the minutes of a congregational meeting, "are to get brothers and sisters acquainted with each other, to make people feel close in the family of the Lord, and to forge a sense of belonging to a group." However, a sense of intimacy and belonging was hardly achievable because people had very diverse backgrounds, in language, customs, and cultural habits. This policy of suppressing cultural pluralism ended in 1976 with the split described above.

In the 1980s, under the leadership of Pastor Hung, fellowship groups were encouraged based on language/dialect, age, sex, and social background (see Table 3).<sup>20</sup> There were twelve such groups by 1995.

Each fellowship group has its own leadership core, activity plans, and even an independent budget. Most groups have a biblical name. They hold meetings weekly, biweekly, or monthly for Bible study or social purposes at members' homes on a rotating basis. Fellowship members do not necessarily live in the same neighborhood, so often they have to drive a long way to attend meetings. The fellowship groups can be outspokenly contentious in church deliberation, but they also help to stabilize the church in critical times, such as during the unhappy process of voting out the pastor.

There are four Mandarin-speaking groups. The Evergreen Fellowship has about thirty elderly "sojourners" who came to the United States as immigrants or as family members of the immigrant professionals. Many speak little or no English. They do not hold deaconship positions on the Official Board and give little input on church affairs. Because elderly status itself is revered in the Chinese tradition, however, their opinions bear important weight when they do speak out. This was evidenced in a conflict with Assistant Pastor Houston about hiring a second non-Chinese-speaking pastor in 1990 (see below). Canaan Fellowship members are also "sojourners" who came to the United States in the 1960s and 1970s as students or as immigrants. They are engineers and government technocrats, speak fluent English, and live in affluent suburbs. Most of them joined the CFC before the 1976 schism, and have served as deacons and deaconesses; some even chaired the Official



**Table 3. Chinese Fellowship Church: Fellowship Groups and Their Characteristics, 1995**

| Fellowship           | Official Membership | Regular Attendance | Age Range | Social Backgrounds   | Dominant Language |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------|--|-------------------|
| Evergreen            | 31                  | 31                 | 65+       | China, "sojourners" <sup>a</sup>                                     | Mandarin          |
| Canaan               | 26                  | 26                 | 50-65     | China, "sojourners"  | Mandarin          |
| Living Water         | 20                  | 20                 | 30-50     | Taiwan or Hong Kong  | Mandarin          |
| Ark                  | 56                  | 100-200            | 20-60     | PRC <sup>b</sup> and "co-workers" <sup>c</sup>                       | Mandarin          |
| BSG <sup>d</sup> A   |                     | 20                 |           |  |                   |
| BSG B                |                     | 20                 |           |  |                   |
| BSG C                |                     | 35                 |           |  |                   |
| BSG D                |                     | 25                 |           |  |                   |
| Elim                 | 20                  | 15                 | 50-65     | Hong Kong, Guangdong, and Southeast Asia                             | Cantonese         |
| Carmel               | 33                  | 20                 | 30-50     | Hong Kong and Southeast Asia   | Cantonese         |
| Bethel               | 15                  | 15                 | 25-55     | Intermarried Couples, ABC, <sup>e</sup> ARC, <sup>f</sup> and others | English           |
| Couples <sup>g</sup> | 16                  | 16                 | 25-40     | ABC and ARC  | English           |
| Emmanuel             | 60                  | 40                 | 18-30     | ABC and ARC  | English           |
| Teens <sup>g</sup>   | 17                  | 25                 | 13-17     | ABC and ARC  | English           |
| Career               | 16                  | 16                 | 25-35     | non-U.S.-born young people   | English/Chinese   |
| Women's <sup>g</sup> | 2                   | 8                  | 30-60     | Women, single or married   | Chinese/English   |
| Nonaffiliated        | 77                  |                    |           | Varied <sup>h</sup>  |                   |

a. "Sojourners": people who were born in mainland China and fled to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and/or other places before coming to the United States.

b. PRC: People's Republic of China

c. "Co-workers": lay volunteers in the evangelistic ministry to mainland Chinese. They have various backgrounds, many from the Canaan and Living Water Fellowships.

d. BSG: evangelistic Bible Study Groups within the Ark Fellowship. Participants include prospective converts.

e. ABC: American-born Chinese

f. ARC: American-raised Chinese

g. The Women's Fellowship does not hold regular meetings.

h. Includes people born in Taiwan in the 1930s and descendants of Chinese immigrants who came to the U.S. before World War II.

Board. Many became dissatisfied with Reverend Tang, whereas a few people who had joined the church after 1976 dissented from the seemingly harsh treatment of the senior pastor. Living Water Fellowship members are a generation younger than Canaan people. Many have parents from mainland China, but they themselves were born or grew up in Taiwan or Hong Kong. Several come from families with a history of several generations in Taiwan or Hong Kong. Computer programming is the dominant occupation among them, and they speak English well. Except for one couple, all joined the church after 1976. Some have served as deacons, but their influence in the decision-making process is still limited due to the powerful presence of the older people. Several frustrated Living Water members openly dissented over the vote on Pastor Tang and indeed on any vote on a pastor. However, unable to criticize the older people, the dissenters pointed their fingers at the newcomers—mainland Chinese—accusing them of immature spirituality and lack of respect for the authority of the pastor. In response, some Canaan and other older members stood up for the legitimacy of the vote and spoke in defense of the newcomers.

There are two Cantonese-speaking groups, Elim and Carmel. In terms of age, time of immigration, career or employment, and English-language ability, the Elim members are comparable to the Canaan people, and the Carmel members to the Living Water people. Most can understand and speak at least passable Mandarin, but they value their Cantonese dialect dearly. Recently some members of each group requested an improvement in the use of Cantonese in Sunday services. Some also complained that the evangelism ministry to mainland (Mandarin-speaking) Chinese took too much time and money, while ignoring Cantonese-speaking Chinese. Mandarin-speaking people refuted this claim and suggested that the Cantonese speakers should do the evangelizing themselves instead of complaining about others' work. Some dissatisfied Cantonese-speaking members have also become inactive, so that the numbers of regular participants in these two groups are fewer than their official membership. In addition, some Cantonese-speaking members on the Official Board were contentious. When they complained loudly, others had to listen, and then would either yield to or pacify them for the sole purpose of maintaining church unity and harmony. Cantonese-speaking people were also disappointed with Reverend Tang for his poor sermons and his failure to visit church members, and some confronted him about his theological views. In self-defense Pastor Tang made what one member called "mulish" responses. One time he even stood up to exorcize the demons of a con-

fronting man. This action had grave consequences that affected the relationship between the pastor and many church members.

There are four English-speaking groups—Bethel, Couples', Emmanuel, and Teens.' Bethel Fellowship is a loose group lacking internal uniformity and strength. The majority of members in the Couples', Emmanuel and Teens Fellowships are children of the older members. Emmanuel members are college graduates or graduate students. The regular attendance is lower than the official membership because many study or work far away from home, and only come back during holidays and vacations. Some teens bring their middle-school friends to the group, so their attendance figure is higher than the actual membership. These American-born Chinese or American-raised Chinese either prefer to speak or only speak English. Some members who are in their thirties or late twenties wanted more participation in the decisions of the church, but often found themselves alienated from the power center. In 1993 a frustrated young man who had once served as a deacon on the Official Board circulated a six-page letter among church leaders. He complained that young people had few opportunities to participate in church leadership and that their opinions were never taken seriously. He resented the "politics" of the older people on the board, and called for a separate and independent English board. Although the demand for an independent board failed, young people did achieve more autonomy and made significant changes in the English service with the help of Assistant Pastor Houston. During the recent controversies concerning Senior Pastor Tang, some of the English-speaking young people voiced their disagreement about the vote on a pastor, and argued that the authority of the pastor should be respected, not decided by church members. However, parents and church leaders asked these young people to refrain from voting due to their lack of knowledge about the church or the Chinese-speaking congregation. Some complied but expressed frustration and regret afterward.

Career Fellowship members are busy with their studies or jobs, and have not much time or energy for the church, and the Women's Fellowship likewise meets infrequently and is not really functional in the church.

There are seventy-seven members without fellowship affiliation. They either cannot find a good fit in any group or do not want to join one. These include descendants of pre-World War II immigrants and older Taiwan-born people. For example, the present chairman of the Official Board, Mr. Lee, and his wife, belong to no fellowship group. They were both born in Taiwan in the 1930s. They are the third or fourth generation of Christians in their families, which have had a long

history in Taiwan. Mr. Lee came to the United States as a graduate student and then became a university professor. Free from constraints of fellowship groups, he skillfully played a leadership role during the controversies surrounding the ouster of Pastor Tang.

The most recently formed group is the Ark Fellowship. This Mandarin-speaking fellowship includes the newly baptized mainland Chinese and the "co-workers," lay volunteers in the evangelistic ministry who have various social backgrounds. Several Canaan or Living Water members regularly participate in Ark Fellowship activities as well but still remain in the other groups. This evangelistic ministry for mainland Chinese was initiated in 1989 by Mandarin-speaking church members. They organized evangelism lectures, picnics, and festival celebrations. These activities attracted a hundred or more students and visiting scholars from the People's Republic of China. To make their evangelism more effective, regular participants are organized into four Bible study groups, each comparable in size to other fellowships.

Disillusioned with the communist utopia and trying to make sense of life in this new and strange land, these mainland Chinese are compelled toward new values and worldviews, which the church helps them to construct. Meanwhile, these newcomers also shape the church in new ways. The enthusiastic responses of mainland Chinese to Christian evangelism excited many church members, yet, the thinking and behavioral patterns of these mainland Chinese are challenging to the co-workers and others. For example, because they prefer sermons and lectures that provide rational explanations of the world and moral guidance for everyday life, they found Reverend Tang's preaching disappointing. He made blunt demands for money offerings, which were often out of context and regarded as vulgar. Once he led a Bible study group, but he was soon ejected by the annoyed participants who complained that his talks were monotonous, his Bible interpretations poor, and his attitudes arrogant. After that Ark co-workers effectively kept him out of the Ark Fellowship.

After experiencing Maoist ritualism during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), most of the mainlanders tend to detest rituals. They prefer informal discussions at fellowship meetings to Sunday worship service and Sunday school. They like dialectical debates and express more political and nationalistic concerns. As newcomers, they expect to be welcomed by other members. But these tendencies made other church members uncomfortable, who were hesitant and reluctant to befriend the mainland Chinese; some even blamed them for the ouster of Reverend Tang. However, the Ark co-workers and some other older mem-

bers spoke in defense of the newcomers, and tried to promote understanding and integration between mainland Chinese and others. As the emotions aroused over the removal of Reverend Tang diminish, some older members have begun to initiate integration efforts.

## Two Pastors in the 1990s

The Chinese Fellowship Church has had two pastors in the 1990s, one a white American, Allan Houston, and one Chinese, Daniel Tang. Their different backgrounds and different fates in the church also illustrate the cultural and religious dynamics of this Chinese Christian church.

Reverend Houston holds degrees from a small Christian college in the South and a conservative seminary in this metropolitan area; he also studied at Dallas Theological Seminary. In 1982-83, when he was a seminarian in this area, he served as a youth intern at CFC. He was also the English speaker at two CFC summer retreats in the mid-1980s. In 1986 CFC began the separate English Sunday service under the leadership of an American-born Chinese assistant pastor. When that young man resigned in 1988 to continue his graduate study, the Pastor Search Committee recruited Reverend Houston, who by then had been ordained and was working in the South.

One year after Reverend Houston came, Reverend Philip Hung, senior pastor since 1982, left for a Chinese church in the South. For a time, Assistant Pastor Houston became the only pastor of the church. To maintain normal operations, he assumed greater responsibility and pushed to hire another Caucasian man as the youth pastor. Chinese-speaking seniors, threatened by the increasing presence of non-Chinese-speaking pastors, voiced strong opposition. Subsequently, Reverend Houston was confined to ministering to English-speaking young people, and the second Caucasian man left the church after a few months' service without a pastor's title.

In 1991 the church hired Reverend Tang as the senior pastor. He could speak several Chinese dialects as well as English. With the backing of some members, and working on the basis of his own interest as the senior pastor, he tried to control both the English and Chinese Sunday services. He insisted on preaching at both on a given Sunday at least once a month, and he wanted Reverend Houston to act as his assistant. However, since Reverend Houston was hired by the congregation and thus was responsible to it, not to the senior pastor, he resisted Reverend Tang's push for authority and power.

Then, in early 1993, there was the six-page letter from the English-speaking young man, which Reverend Houston supported. In the name of the Couples' Fellowship, Reverend Houston drafted a proposal to establish an "English-Ministry Leadership Team" independent of the Official Board, and to change the place and time of the English service from before the Chinese service to simultaneous with it. Some older people worried about this apparently divisive move. One man commented that this proposal "is one of the most unbiblical documents I have ever seen," for it seemed to him that the authors were totally obsessed with being leaders. He questioned, "Where is the biblical teaching of stewardship?" He and some other members argued that the church was one congregation, although it had two Sunday services; that both pastors were hired by and for the entire church rather than one for the Chinese service and the other for the English service; and that many members were fully bilingual and could attend either service. The deacons held a special meeting to discuss how to stop the centrifugal development by helping the senior pastor to take control and uphold unity. However, by that time many lay leaders had either lost confidence in Reverend Tang or found fault with him.

Reverend Houston mobilized support from key members as well as from English-speaking people in the name of Christian evangelism. Representing the young people, he claimed that changing the start of the English Sunday service from 9:30 A.M. to 10:30 A.M. (thirty minutes before the Chinese service) would make it possible for members to invite non-Christian friends. Thus he successfully changed the time and space of the English service while also developing his own leadership team. Since the English service was now overlapping with the Chinese service, it was practically impossible for the senior pastor to preach at both services on a given Sunday. These changes worried many members.

Pastor Tang was expected by lay leaders to harmonize group relationships. However, he failed to realize the complexity of the relationships in such an organizational structure. Within a short time he unwisely confronted the assistant pastor, the chairmen of the Official Board, and some key members.

Reverend Tang's theological views also caused concern to many people. Some believed that he was not conservative enough, pointing to his training at insufficiently evangelical seminaries, his previous pastoral service to mainline churches, and his calling for a greater role for women in CFC. Fundamentalist members also bluntly challenged his seemingly charismatic views on exorcism and spiritual healing.<sup>21</sup> The ouster of Pastor Tang in the summer of 1995 followed these events.

Given the structure of the church as well as his background and actions, it came as no surprise to me.

In the meantime, Reverend Houston, a non-Chinese who speaks no Chinese, has had his tenure renewed by four biennial congregational votes. Today (summer 1996) he remains in the position of assistant pastor, and he is the only pastor on staff. Both the church and he understand that he serves CFC not because it is a *Chinese church*, but because it is a *conservative Christian church*. He has been generously treated and well respected, not because he is a white American, but because of his theological match with the church and his effective ministry to the young people. On the other hand, he has only limited power. These limits are both imposed by church members and self-chosen by him, because he has shown little interest in Chinese culture.

### Tenacious Unity

Thus far I have elaborated the remarkable diversity and contentiousness in this church, but have only mentioned the tenacious protection of unity in passing. I will now closely examine the forces making for this unity in the final section of this chapter.

First, there is socioeconomic homogeneity among CFC members. Most adults are college graduates, many with master's or doctoral degrees, and work as professionals. Among the American-born or -raised youth, every one expects to attend college. Entrepreneurs and laborers are few. This is thus a uniformly salaried, middle-class church.

Second, unity as an ideal in both Christianity and Chinese culture is repeatedly invoked in Sunday services and fellowship meetings. These gatherings often highlight the condemnation of divisiveness in the New Testament and proclaim that true Christians should be united into one organic body in spite of, indeed exactly because of, differences among them. They emphasize in addition that Chinese culture has always highly valued unity and harmony, and believe that without unity and harmony little can be achieved.

Cultural heterogeneity is the most prevalent potentially dividing factor in the church. But cultural homogeneity is also CFC's strongest cement, for this is a *Chinese church*. The Chinese identity is clear. The Chinese (written) language and cultural values provide the base for a sense of peoplehood, without which the members would have not come together. Although the understanding of "Chineseness" may vary, the Chinese as an ethnic minority in the United States are indeed distinctive. Many church members are aware of the history of the Chinese

Exclusion Acts. They are also proud of being members of a successful minority in contemporary American society.

Interestingly, in this *Chinese Christian church*, the ideals of Christian unity and Chinese unity complement and supplement each other.<sup>22</sup> Both can be evoked at once in order to stress the need for unity. In the real world, an insistence on either certain Christian doctrines, such as the form of baptism, or certain aspects of Chinese culture, such as a particular dialect, might lead to conflicts. When divisive tendencies do occur due to sociocultural or sociopolitical differences, CFC members are reminded, by leaders or by themselves, that they are Christians. As Christians they should be united in the same God, the same Christ, and the same Spirit. Worldly differences should not become excuses for the very division the Bible condemns. On the other hand, when there are theological disagreements, they are reminded that they are all Chinese and thus should be united as a people. Myths of unity among Jews or Koreans are used to stress the need for unity among Chinese. Insistence on certain potentially divisive Christian doctrines is criticized as sectarianism and ridiculed as dogmatism. Some people have denominational backgrounds, but they have chosen to congregate with other Chinese despite any expectations of superordinate denominational loyalty.

Of course, both being Chinese and being Christian have limits. Because a majority of church members are adult converts to the Christian faith, they tend to emphasize Christian unity and often criticize aspects of Chinese cultural traditions. This may distance them from non-Christian Chinese. This Christian unity also helps inclusiveness extend to non-Christian Christians, although it is still quite limited at present. On the other hand, as evangelical Christians they are compelled to evangelize. Because of cultural affinity, their priority is to evangelize other Chinese first, both locally and abroad. In short, the sense of Chinese peoplehood and the will for Christian unity are mutually reinforcing forces for unity of Chinese Christians.

Third, the diversity within the church is respected. The groupings based on social and cultural backgrounds might appear to be manifestations of division against unity, tensions among groups that might seem to be dangerous, conflict-inducing forces. In fact, however, the subgroups actually help to stabilize the church and maintain unity. Exactly because these intimate groupings exist, people can achieve a sense of security and intimacy, out of which grows a need for reaching out to other people. This principle may also be extended to higher layers of society. As professionals, most of these Chinese work among

non-Chinese. Because their ethnic church meets their needs for intimacy and psychological security, they are able to be confident and comfortable with non-Chinese in their work and in the larger society. In contrast, the policy of discouraging cultural groupings before 1976 led to all kinds of anxiety and dissatisfaction, and eventually ended with the bitter split. A respect for cultural differences is thus important to uphold unity.

Of course, there is an actual danger of compartmentalization of the close-knit subgroups. To maintain cohesion, it is necessary to enhance the communication between the groups and to proclaim a higher level of universalism that reaches beyond the narrow boundaries. To promote communication across subgroups, the church has energetically promoted the Sunday "Love Banquet" and has held annual summer retreats on a remote seminary campus since 1982. These measures provide opportunities for church members to share life stories and to know each other better. The active and capable lay leaders also work to promote unity. Equipped with linguistic capabilities—fully bilingual or trilingual—broad understanding and sensitivities, and networking experiences, they are able to move across several fellowships. They participate in their meetings as members or guest speakers, weaving strings through the net of the church to help hold it together. Some family ties and friendship bonds that stretch across fellowship boundaries contribute to unity as well.

Lastly, cultural resources help maintain church unity. Chinese culture highly values harmony. Soft approaches and behind-the-scene maneuvers are preferred to direct confrontations and public debates. Writing about Asian American churches, Birstan Choy (1995) puts this metaphorically: "acupuncture is preferred to surgery." Because of this approach, there was no public discussion or debate during the 1995 congregational meeting before the vote. Everyone maintained an air of calm. To avoid any trouble, the Ark Fellowship canceled its planned co-workers meeting. When newcomers ask about the 1976 schism and other past conflicts, long-time members often respond with silence. They believe that the best way to protect unity is to forget the unpleasant past and look forward, that open debates and direct confrontations did not work in 1976 and would not work today. When being confronted, people may fear to lose face (*diu mianzi*), and consequently become emotionally stony. "We Chinese are often not large-minded enough to bear direct confrontation and open discussions," an Ark Fellowship co-worker said, "so a better approach is to keep a harmonious atmosphere and be considerate of others who need to save face."

## Reflection

Many Chinese American churches can boast of having successfully forged "unity out of diversity." Religiously, every declared Christian could be accepted in their congregation, regardless of denominational background or theological position. Ethnically, any Chinese could find a niche in the church. Probably no other type of ethnic Chinese organization or association in North America today has achieved such a unity of such a heterogeneous people. Within the boundaries of "Chineseness" and Christianity the church has realized a unity out of diversity.

The empirical findings of this study may have greater significance. The Chinese Christian church is one place where East and West meet. The church succeeds in integrating Chinese (Confucian) values and Christian beliefs, and this integration helps create a united community out of diversity. It shows that the East and the West, or the Eastern Confucian civilization and the Western Christian civilization, can be symbiotically integrated. "The clash of civilizations" prophesied by Samuel Huntington (1993) may be avoidable; the principles found at work in CFC may lead to hope for unity on higher levels. When diversity is respected, a vision of unity is held, and harmony is maintained, the United States of America, as the "nation of nations," and the world of diverse civilizations in which it exists can be similarly hopeful.

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## NOTES

1. All biblical verses in this chapter are from the Holy Bible, New International Version.
2. *Zhong Yong*, commonly known as the *Doctrine of the Mean*, is a central document in the Confucian tradition. This verse is my own translation based on James Legge (1893) and William Theodore De Bary et al. (1964).
3. See, for example, *Yi Jing (Book of Change)*, Qian: Zhuan; *Lun Yu (Analects)* 1: 12; *Zhong Yong (Doctrine of the Mean)* 1: 4.

4. Anthropologist James L. Watson (1993) described Chinese unity as “a question that has preoccupied Western observers since the early Jesuits first began to write about the Central Kingdom: What held Chinese society together for so many centuries? Put another way, how was it possible for a country of continental dimensions, inhabited by people who speak mutually unintelligible languages and exhibit an amazing array of ethnic differences, to be molded into a unified culture?” It is also well recognized that China has tremendous magnetism as a cultural center to both Chinese in China and in diaspora (see Tu 1994).

5. Samuel P. Huntington (1993) proposed that after the Cold War, “the clash of civilizations will dominate global politics.” He envisioned that the conflicts will be between “the West and the Rest,” that is, between “Western Christian civilization,” on the one hand, and Islamic civilization and Confucian civilization, on the other hand. This article has stirred up great debate.

6. No reliable data are available about the proportion of Christians among Chinese in the United States and other countries. In Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China, estimates put the proportion between 2% to 5%. Chinese Christian leaders estimated that Christians were 5% to 10% of the Chinese in America, whereas some surveys indicate that the proportion could be as high as 32% (Hurh and Kim 1990, 20).

7. Pseudonyms are used in this chapter for several reasons. First, the populations and the dynamics in this church are quite common among Chinese churches. The particularities in this chapter, although they are presented accurately and factually to the best of my ability, serve only the purpose of illustration. Second, many of the church people and some scholars may see personality conflicts as major determinants of church division, but I find that these conflicts were more likely results than causes and were secondary problems compared to other factors discussed here. Adopting pseudonyms will, I hope, minimize the attention given to the particular personalities of the subjects in this church. Third, pseudonyms protect the privacy of the church members.

8. According to the U.S. census, the Chinese population has doubled every decade since 1960 in this metropolitan area as well as in the whole country. The 1990 census counted 39,034 Chinese in this area, which probably did not include all Chinese students and visiting scholars. But these temporary residents on several large campuses in this area are important to the Chinese church because it recruits members from them too. In addition, many new Chinese immigrants have arrived since 1990. Taken all together, the Chinese population in this metropolitan area today can be as many as 80,000.

9. Most of the about 700 Chinese Protestant churches in the United States in 1994 were conservative in theology and about half were nondenominational. For a discussion of overall characteristics and trends of Chinese churches, see Fenggang Yang (1995).

10. One of the reasons I chose this particular church for in-depth research was its accessibility to me as a member. Being a sociology student from the

People's Republic of China, I had experienced some difficulties in my 1993–94 study of all Chinese churches in this area. After I introduced that proposed project at a monthly gathering of their pastors, one pastor immediately questioned, “How could we know that you are not doing the investigation for the Chinese communist government?” This pastor, who had served in the Chinese Nationalist (Kuomintang) army and seemed to have a continuing fear of mainland Chinese, later expressed reluctance to be interviewed and refused to show me any church documents. Some fundamentalist leaders often questioned the usefulness of a sociological study.

11. I, like many new converts from the mainland, was invited to be involved in “co-workers” meetings of the evangelistic ministry to mainland Chinese. In business meetings I refrained from initiating actions, but in Bible study or evangelism meetings, I did often ask questions. When I was approached to take up leadership responsibilities at this or another ministry I declined, but I did accept a volunteer task of editing the newsletter for the Ark Fellowship (see text below). I also contributed essays to the quarterly church magazine.

12. Interviews were conducted either in Mandarin or English. Most church documents were in Chinese. Many quotations throughout this chapter are my translation.

13. In 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited Chinese laborers from entering the United States. This was followed by several other anti-Chinese acts, which were not repealed until 1943. See Sucheng Chan (1991) on the life of Chinese immigrants during the exclusion period.

14. After 1943, the United States allowed 105 Chinese immigrants each year. However, many Chinese came in the 1940s and 1950s under special refugee acts (Chinn et al. 1969).

15. Mullins's theory was based on his research on a linguistically homogeneous group—Japanese in Canada—with a single, large immigrant cohort.

16. Quotations are taken from the official history of CFC, printed in a special memorial collection on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the church in 1988.

17. “Chinese” is used by the church to indicate a people, not the language. A “Mandarin church” may exclude non-Mandarin-speaking Chinese, whereas a “Chinese church” means to be open toward all Chinese people. This is clear in Chinese.

18. The item in the church membership record is “place of origin” (*jiguan*, in Chinese). It can be understood as either ancestral place, birthplace, or place from whence one came to the United States. People may choose whatever they want to put here, but the choice indicates a certain significance of the place to the person. For example, in Table 2 the numbers of people who recorded that they were born in or came from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asian countries would be higher if people had not been able to record their ancestral places. Similarly, not all those who listed their place of origin as Taiwan or Hong Kong were born there.

19. Reverend Houston is often referred as "the American pastor" or "the white American pastor" by church members, both immigrants and the American-born Chinese. Some Chinese immigrants habitually refer to any non-Chinese as *waiguoren* (person of foreign country or foreigner) and every Chinese as *zhongguoren* (person of the Central Country, or the Middle Kingdom). This distinction of us versus others is more cultural or ethnic than political (modern nation-state), just as Jews distinguish themselves from gentiles. This indicates a strong sense of peoplehood among all Chinese.

20. The church updates its roster every year. The 1996 Church Directory lists 392 people (not including preteen children), among whom 312 are members, most classified into one of the 12 fellowship groups. The fellowship names reported here are the actual titles, which are quite common in many Chinese churches. At the same time, they are carefully chosen and thus indicative of the members' intentions. For example, "Canaan" was selected because its members compared themselves to the ancient Jews who arrived in Canaan after 40 years of wandering in the wilds. This label may also reflect a self-perceived sense of assurance, maturity, and elder status. People who initiated the Ark Fellowship expressed a sense of urgency to save souls following the model of the righteous and obedient Noah.

21. Fundamentalists and charismatics, although both conservative in theology, hold different views on certain religious practices. Unlike charismatics, for example, fundamentalists frown on manifestations of pentecostal gifts, such as speaking in tongues and spiritual healing (see Warner 1988, 132-134, 170).

22. Many people perceive Chinese culture and Christianity to be incompatible with each other, and Chinese identity and Christian identity to be incongruous. However, I find that conversion to Christianity and the church seem to serve Chinese identity in many ways for Chinese in America (see Yang 1996).

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