

THE COMING CHINESE CHURCH

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How Rising Faith in China
Is Spilling over Its Boundaries

Paul Golf
and
Kim Lee

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<dedication – still to come>

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Author's Foreword

Offering a faithful and representative view of the Chinese Church in the twenty-first century is no simple task. Many books have already been written on the spread of Christianity in China, and many differing and at times starkly contrasting interpretations have been offered.

My own position as an author is somewhat unusual in that I am not a missionary, China-watcher, sociologist, or even someone who has spent extensive periods of time with the Chinese House Churches. From very early on in my Christian life, something implanted itself deep in my spirit concerning this mysterious civilization on the other side of the world and what God might be doing there. Somehow I found myself with the conviction that whatever it was, it would be deeply significant and instrumental in shaping the world of the new millennium. Even so, no one was more surprised than me when I found God calling me to invest four years of my life in studying Mandarin Chinese at Oxford University instead of attending theological college as was my intention.

It was through connecting with Gordon Hickson in Oxford that I was first introduced to Pastor Lee, the director of Love China International, described to me by Gordon as a *world changer*. Since completing my master's degree in conference interpreting and translation, I have

had the privilege to work with Pastor Lee and his wife as both a translator and as a minister, seeking to create a bridge between the Church of East and West. The message and content of this book is an eclectic mix distilled from countless interviews, ministry trips, and late-night conversations with a wide spectrum of individuals, some of which have involved myself, but all of which have involved Pastor Lee.

This seeks to be a prophetic book, looking not only to examine China's history or even its present, but asking God to breathe His revelation on its future. Although I am honoured to lend my abilities as a writer in giving a voice to that message, the credit for its substance belongs to the thousands of Chinese Church leaders, Western missionaries, and to Pastor Lee himself who have all in unique ways laid down their lives in response to the call of God, and who in return have been entrusted with *those secret things of God*, each with different coloured tiles in the grand mosaic of revelation. For the sake of clarity, where the book refers to "we" or "us", it is talking about Pastor Lee and myself and unless otherwise stated, "I" or "me" refers to the author.

It is almost impossible to present a generalized picture of what God is doing among 1.4 billion people, and many differing opinions abound both within China herself and among the International Church community. In general terms, however, I believe it is fair to say that one of the key values of Chinese Christianity is the commitment to unity, or as Paul calls it *the Oneness of the Spirit*. We ask that you

read this book with an open heart and receive it with the spirit of humility in which we have sought to write it. It is impossible to give due time to all those whose lives and ministries have been used by God in His work in China, and so while the scope of this book may seem grand, it only seeks to be one piece of the puzzle. May Abba God bless you profoundly, explode your vision, and raise your faith in what He is able to do as you read it!

Paul Golf
March 2013

Pastor Lee's Foreword

I often go to China to give our brothers and sisters in Christ there training or support, but every time it is in fact me who comes away changed, having been humbled by their simple faith and devotion to ministry. My last few visits have been to support the writing of this book, conducting interviews and research with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Through the years I have been travelling there, I have come to believe that God has given the Chinese Church two main weapons, the first being praise and worship. In the churches there, instruments are seldom found, but hours of songs learned by heart can be heard in rousing a cappella voices. The Canaan Hymns series of over 1,000 songs was gathered by Xiao Min, a woman who is unable to read music, but has been blessed with a gift. Her story may be extraordinary, but it is just one example of God's work in China and his continuing blessing on their praise and worship.

Secondly, the Chinese churches have a strong prayer life that I have experienced at first hand. Every building used as a church will have a prayer room, and 24-hour prayer circles are commonplace; this is a weapon that brings breakthrough and miracles. I believe these gifts have been given by the Lord who knows that the power of prayer and

worship is needed to take the gospel into the hard lands of the Old Silk Road, and back to Jerusalem.

The Chinese Church can have this dedication partly because of the legacy left by the sacrifices of the early Western missionaries, some of whom gave their lives in the spreading of the gospel. The model that they left for the Chinese was one to aspire to, and we must not forget this. We want this book to link the Chinese and Western churches in the pursuit of the Back to Jerusalem vision. We believe the Western Church can be raised up and once more be linked with the Chinese Church to carry the gospel back to Jerusalem.

Finally, we would like to use this book to express thanks for the support we have received throughout the years, without which we wouldn't be able to do this ministry. Thank you to the prayer warriors, to those who have aided our work in China financially, and of course to my family – my wife, son, and daughter – who are always my first and firmest foundation.

Pastor Lee

Endorsement by Brother Yun

The Heavenly Man would like to strongly recommend that you read *The Coming Chinese Church!* The Bible says, *God will save the descendants of Abraham.*

I am an elder from the Chinese House Church, known as “Brother Yun, the Heavenly Man”. I have also been involved in promoting the Back to Jerusalem vision around the world. I have been arrested and detained many times, and imprisoned for more than fourteen years on account of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Today I would like to earnestly recommend this book, *The Coming Chinese Church*, to you before God.

In former times God sent forth missionaries into China to sow the seeds of the gospel of love. Now it is time for China to do the same.

We, the “Coming Chinese Church”, not only want to thank and honour the Western missionaries who went out into China sowing in tears, paying the price for the gospel of Jesus Christ with their own blood, but also to give glory to God for the missionary vision handed down to us from Him through those Western missionaries many years ago – Go West with the gospel! *This gospel of the kingdom must be preached in all nations as a testimony to them.* This is the heart of the Back to Jerusalem vision! The Coming Chinese Church is now beginning to heed Christ's call to train and

send out squadrons of missionaries into East Asia and the Middle East, to take the message of true love into these regions and extend the kingdom of God, but there are also a great many young Chinese Christians who have fixed their heart on the call of God, and are studying hard to perfect their foreign languages and come as missionaries to Europe, America, and Great Britain. These men and women called by God believe that these nations are our spiritual Abraham. We are all just mere men formed from the dust of the ground, and the Western nations have misused religion, politics, and the power of man so that those ancient living wells of faith have seemingly been blocked up by dirt and stones. Because of their faith in Jesus Christ, the Coming Chinese Church is like your spiritual Isaac, come to help re-dig those ancient wells so that the living stream of life would once again flow freely!

Thank you Jesus! Many churches in the UK, Europe, and America have been awakened by God to work together with the Coming Chinese Church and the Back to Jerusalem vision to see the kingdom of God advance. I firmly believe that the publication of this book will have a great impact on many churches, even thoroughly changing the concepts of what mission means to the Eastern and Western Church to bring about a new movement of revival and reformation. I cannot recommend highly enough that anyone who has a heart for the kingdom of God or for missions would take the time to read *The Coming Chinese Church*!

A Leader from the Chinese House Church:
The Heavenly Man, Brother Yun



China's Kairos Moment

It was Easter 1942. Pastor Dai had divided us into groups and sent us to churches all over Shaanxi province. I had gone with Dr Mark and Brother Zheng Guang'en to Baoji city. Our plan was to hold some meetings for Easter. At Dr Mark's suggestion we rose before dawn and had gone down to the river to celebrate the Lord's resurrection. While we were praying, God showed us a vision concerning the future of the Church. In the vision was a huge lake. There were people from many nations coming to it: Americans, British, French, Swedish, Norwegians. The water of the gospel was pouring into the lake through a great many channels in a multitude of rushing streams. However, no matter how much water poured forth, the lake was never filled. Pastor Mark prayed, "Lord, what does the vision mean? With so many inlets of water this lake should

be full to overflowing, but it isn't! How can this be?" The Lord spoke to us clearly, "This is your Church, the Church of China." When we heard this we were stunned. How could this be? The Lord spoke again, "You take in the light, but there is no reflection. My word to you now is this: the Chinese Church must go out with the gospel."

Mrs He Enzheng, born 1916, of the Back to Jerusalem Evangelistic Band

On 6 May 2011, a man and his wife were checking in through security at Beijing International Airport. The border guard looked at the photograph in the woman's passport, running it through the electronic scanning machine linked to the government's national security database. After a few tense moments, he handed her back her passport. *You're clear to go through*, he said. Anxiously she waited on the other side of the security barrier, looking back at her husband. Another passport slid through the scanning machine, and again came those tense moments of waiting. Suddenly a frown came across the guard's face. *I'm sorry*, he said to the man. *Your name is on a list of people who are not allowed to leave the country. Your passport is invalid; you have to go home.*

In shock, Mrs Gao watched as the guard pulled out a giant pair of scissors and cut through the cover of her husband's passport. With only a short window of time to spare, Brother Gao spoke to his wife across the barrier. He encouraged her to go on without him, and with a

tearful goodbye she turned and in a daze proceeded into the departure lounge to board her plane. It seemed as if she would now have to go alone on the scheduled five-week ministry tour of Europe. Her first destination: Paris, Charles de Gaulle International Airport.

For many years the House Churches of China have been almost legendary among the body of Christ in the Western world. Brother Yun's testimony as recorded in the book *The Heavenly Man* brought a fresh insight into the world of Chinese Christianity, highlighting especially the fierce persecution and incredible trials that thousands of believers have endured under the hostile Communist regime. Many others have been inspired by stories of tens of thousands of Chinese people being ushered into the kingdom on a daily basis, or have been touched by the testimonies of missionaries well-known and lesser-known, of how God has been moving in astounding and miraculous ways across this *nation of many nations*. All too often, however, these stories of a God who is transforming individuals, communities, and nations, a God of manifest glory and demonstrable signs and wonders, are relegated to the status of modern Christian mythology so far removed from the experience of many Western believers as to be alien to them.

The China of the 1940s was a place of great turmoil. Following the overthrow of the last Qing emperor in 1911 and the establishment of the new government, thirty years of chaos had torn the country apart through warlordism, Japanese invasion, and civil conflict. Against this uncertain

backdrop, Western missionaries had been sowing their lives for the cause of the gospel within China's fragile borders. A small but substantial contingent of Chinese believers had been built up in key areas around China. The vision they saw of the Church in China was not a vision of defeat, or of dependence upon foreign ministers to carry the torch of the gospel on their behalf, but of a great army of believers who would pour out from China in obedience to Jesus' commission to take His light *into all the earth*. They understood the biblical principle that *much is demanded from those to whom much has been given*, and seeing the sacrifice of so many foreign missionaries on their behalf, they came to recognize that God had placed a call and a responsibility on the Chinese Church to become like the church in Antioch, taking the gospel to the unreached world.

The China of today is almost completely unrecognizable when compared with the 1940s, but that same vision and passion to look beyond oneself to see the kingdom of God established on earth is still very much present, just as it was for missionaries such as Hudson Taylor and Gladys Aylward who gave their lives to China.

The technical term used by the Chinese government for believers such as Brother Gao and his wife who seek to obey the Great Commission is, like many Chinese terms, somewhat blunt and to the point: *Leaders of the Occult*. Brother Gao is the pastor of a network of churches in one of the bigger cities in China. He and his wife had been invited to preach in a series of churches and conference meetings

across Europe in May 2011. This was an unprecedented move. A national leader in the Chinese House Church had never before been able to minister openly in Europe in such a high-profile manner and return safely to China afterwards. Under the regime of the Chinese Communist Party, any religious activity is subject to a series of strict controls. It has now become quite well known outside China that the only *legal* way to be a practising Christian or church member in China is to be part of the government operated, or so-called *Three-Self* Church. Generally speaking, Christians in China who, for whatever reason, do not want to be subject to the restrictions in the state Church make up what is often termed the Chinese House Church. As an unregistered House Church pastor, it is unsurprising that Brother Gao encountered some problems leaving the country. What happened next, however, was quite unprecedented.

Halfway around the world, we were preparing to conduct our European ministry tour without our main speaker from China. It is generally received wisdom that bringing leaders out from the Chinese Church to preach in an open conference setting is at best risky and at worst impossible, but we had sensed that God wanted to shift something in the dynamic between the Eastern and Western churches and that there was something very spiritually significant in trying. Over the following two weeks, Brother Gao went into a period of fasting and praying while our network of ministry partners and intercessors began to pray for God to work a miracle. Amazingly, within a few days the Chinese government reversed their decision to block

his exit from China and issued him with a new passport. As his interpreter, I flew in to Paris to meet Brother Gao and bring him to London where we would conduct our first series of meetings at the famous Emmanuel Centre on Marsham Street.

As I sat with Brother Gao on the inter-terminal train to connect with our flight to the UK, he asked me if I knew why God had not allowed him to come two weeks earlier when he had been separated from his wife at the airport. I didn't know the answer to that question, but then he proceeded to tell me how during the previous two weeks, God had begun to speak to him about a great revival coming to the United Kingdom, which would spread throughout the whole of Europe. As someone who is very interested in revival, that really got my attention! While he was waiting for his appeal to be considered, he had felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to start studying the lives of the nineteenth-century missionaries who went out from Europe – and especially the United Kingdom – to China. He shared how astounded he was by their love for China and their commitment to the gospel. *God says that His gifts and His calling are irrevocable*, he told me.

For that promise to be fulfilled, Europe has to rise up again into her apostolic destiny. I myself am a spiritual descendant of those missionaries who gave their lives for China, and the Chinese Church has been grown from the seeds left behind by their service and their faith. If I had come two

weeks earlier I would not have been prepared for this trip, but God has used this time to show me the message I need to preach. The thing that the Chinese Church most needs right now is spiritual fathers, and we are looking to the Western churches with many generations of history to come alongside us.

Elijah and the Widow

In 1 Kings 17–19, we read about the story of the prophet Elijah having a showdown with the false prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mount Carmel over who was the true God. In 2004 I was spending time at Beijing University studying Chinese on an overseas programme that was part of my degree. Within a few weeks of being in the city, God had introduced me to Christians from a House Church in Beijing. One particular believer called Peter and I became good friends, and we began to meet regularly to pray. On one afternoon we were sitting in a park and I suggested to him that we go somewhere more private to seek God together. He paused for a moment and then told me he thought he knew a place where we could go. He took out his mobile phone and made a call to someone, although with my limited knowledge of Chinese at that time I didn't understand what they were saying. As we took a short taxi ride to another part of the city, he said to me that if anyone asks I should say that we have been friends for a long time. At that point I realized that the call he had made was to a

House Church pastor to see if they would be willing to risk having a white foreigner come to one of their meetings. When I suggested that we find a place to pray, I thought we might go to a quiet cafe somewhere, not to a meeting of Underground Church believers!

We arrived at a dilapidated old apartment block in a section of the city not commonly known for foreign faces. As we went up to a fourth floor apartment, Peter knocked on the door and was greeted by a pair of eyes peering around a chain lock. When they recognized him, the door closed again, unlocked, and they beckoned us in. I saw a group of perhaps fifty believers all crammed into a living room listening to a visiting preacher. When I walked in, I have to confess that I was absolutely terrified! I had heard that it was virtually impossible for Western Christians to be given access to underground meetings, and I reckoned that the believers who were in there must have thought I was some kind of important missionary to be allowed to come in. If it were not hard enough to keep a low profile as the only six-foot-tall white man in a room crammed full of Chinese, the only space for me to sit was right at the front next to the preacher, and everyone had to wait as I picked my way through the chairs to get to my seat. The preacher turned to me and asked me in an American accent if I understood Mandarin. Although my Chinese was fairly elementary I just nodded and said *yes. Good, then I don't have to translate*, he replied. For the next half an hour I sat there with my heart in my mouth, unable to understand virtually anything the preacher was saying

and half convinced that at any moment the Public Security Bureau might burst through the door. At one point a lady began to cry, apparently touched in some profound way by the message. I was struck by the love and compassion in his voice as he prayed for her, although I still didn't understand most of what was said.

At the end of the meeting, I was introduced to a mix of people. Migrant workers from poor backgrounds mixed with master's students from the nearby university. Several were not yet Christians invited by their friends to come and hear the gospel. Some commotion took place at the back, and the preacher was hastily whisked away from the apartment. The hospitality of the church was amazing, as the lady pastor invited me to join them as an honoured guest for dinner at a local restaurant after they had dispersed. My friend Peter told me how he had become a Christian after God raised him from the dead, and how as a young man growing up without a father, God had been the father to him that he so desperately needed. I asked him if they were not afraid of the government, and I'll never forget his answer as he looked at me with a wry smile and a slight squint: *If you fear God, you don't have to fear the government!*

A few days later, we sat together in a basement cafeteria in one of the big market malls common throughout cities in China. He asked me to share a message from God for him. Put on the spot, I asked the Holy Spirit what I should say, and instantly I sensed Him lead me to the story of Elijah. Taking out my English Bible and Chinese Bible,

I began to preach to my friend about the story of Elijah calling down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel. All of a sudden, Peter became very excited and jumped up out of his seat. *That's exactly what China needs!* he exclaimed in a tone loud enough to draw the attention of surrounding customers (not to mention the security guard with the automatic weapon a few tables away).

China needs Elijahs! I used to be just like Elijah, but I'm not as on fire as I used to be. Once when I was reading the Bible, the light bulb above my head blew out and I was so angry with the bulb for obscuring the word of God that I looked up, and commanded the bulb to come back on in the name of Jesus – and it did! China desperately needs Elijahs! Next week, you and I have to go back to the church and preach this message to them!

Then he started preaching the gospel to the noodle lady serving food at one of the counters, again just loud enough to remind me of that security guard standing nearby!

Nine years later, and I have only recently understood the significance of that conversation. I believe that my friend spoke prophetically by the Holy Spirit when he exclaimed that China needs Elijahs. When I discussed with Pastor Lee how it would be best to begin this book, he shared with me the revelation that God had given him concerning the relationship between the Chinese and Western churches. In 1 Kings 17, God speaks to Elijah after the drought has

begun and calls him to go and visit the widow of Zarephath. Elijah is tired from his journey and worn out, but God has sustained him in the midst of massive spiritual decline in the nation. God didn't ask him to go to someone who had the means to support Elijah, but to someone who was desperately in need herself. She was poor, without anyone to help her, and with only one meal left. To human logic, it would seem totally counterintuitive to send Elijah to such a person. When he reaches Zarephath, he finds the widow gathering sticks to prepare a fire and cook the final meal for her and her son. He asks her first to make the sacrifice of giving him a small loaf of bread in faith that God would then provide supernaturally for her and her family. The widow agrees, and God is faithful in blessing them with an ever-replenishing supply of oil and flour for the duration of the drought.

The Chinese Church is still the fastest growing in the world, but spiritually speaking and in terms of the administration of the Church and the nation, they are desperately in need. They are faced with an uncertain future and a rapidly changing environment. Through many conversations with Chinese Christians, church pastors, young people, or families, it is clear that the excitement of revival in their country is mixed with a deep sense of feeling lost, without an identity or guarantee of provision. They are like the poor widow that God called Elijah to go and see. Meanwhile the Western Church is like Elijah, seeking to maintain their Christian witness in a secularized society. Many people in the West have a hunger to hear about

what God is doing in China. Is it simple curiosity, or an empathy with the stories of persecuted believers? Perhaps it is a growing desire for God to move in the same incredible ways once again in their own nations? Chances are if you are reading this book it is because something in you is drawn in faith towards what God is doing in China.

I think that to begin with, neither Elijah nor the widow knew why God had called them together. The widow was looking for outside help, but God would have her first look to Elijah's need. God is saying to the Chinese Church that, like the widow, they must look beyond themselves to meet the needs of others. While they are still looking for support, they themselves have something to give. A time is coming on the horizon when the drought of persecution and hardship will fully pass away in China, and God has planned for the Elijah of the Western Church to once again face down the false prophets in the land with a dramatic demonstration of the Spirit's power. In the account of the story, the widow's son dies and she gives him to Elijah for God to work a miracle. The future destiny of the Chinese Church requires the right relationships with the spiritual fathers of the Western Church in order to survive into maturity. We believe that in this hour, God is creating a bridge between the churches of East and West, to supply one another and encourage one another in what God is doing so as to prepare for what He is about to do next in the earth. May this book be a refreshment to the Western Church, and an encouragement to the Chinese to look beyond their own borders to the hills of their future.

Understanding the Times

Kairos is a Greek word that refers to a particular instance or strategic moment in time. When we are used to an overly individualistic spirituality, we can overlook the fact that God's move in the earth is all part of His grand design. In C. S. Lewis's allegory *The Great Divorce*, the people of the shadowy world argued with one another over the times and seasons in which they were living. Because the passing of one day in their world took many thousands of years, the people couldn't agree if the perpetual twilight they experienced was a sign that the sun was rising or setting. The two futures couldn't be further apart. One would be an era of daylight, while the other would be plunged into darkness. Their problem was that they could only see the moment, divorced from the continuity of history and blind to the revelation of the future. If only they were able to understand the narrative of their own story and the context of their moment in time, they would have been able to prepare successfully for the next season.

I am often asked by people what the secret of the Chinese Church is. What do they have that has allowed for such amazing growth over the past few decades? In case the China Miracle has passed you by, here are a few facts and figures:

When the Chinese Communist Party declared the establishment of New China in 1949, Christianity was effectively declared a criminal, counter-revolutionary ideology. One of the foundational tenets of Marxist