

# Asia Harvest



Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe! (Joel 3:13)

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## Hainan Island

(Part 1 - Missions History & The Three-Self Church)

# ***From the Front Lines***

with Paul & Joy Hattaway

Often when we focus on one thing we lose perspective of the overall situation. This is certainly true of mission work. It's easy to lose perspective when hearing about the revival in China. In recent years one of the main themes of our newsletters has been to give reports and testimonies of what God is doing in various parts of China. It's a blessing to write these stories down, but just by focusing on the good can cause us to forget the fact that China remains the country in the world with the highest number of lost souls, and the largest number of people who have never once heard the Name of Jesus Christ.

In this newsletter we start a two-part series on the advance of the Gospel on Hainan Island, which is located at the southern tip of China. Part One focuses on how God used the Western missionaries prior to establish His church prior to the arrival of Communism, and how he has worked among the Three-Self Church believers on the Island since. The 'Three-Self' is the official, government-registered church in China. In the next issue we will focus on the advance of the Gospel among the unregistered house churches on Hainan Island.

We will share some marvellous testimonies of faith and courage from Hainan, but as you read about the tremendous growth of the church there, be aware that only four percent of the Island's inhabitants are Christians today. Let's not forget the 96% who have yet to receive Christ's salvation and are spiritually dead in their sins and trespasses.

Whenever you read or hear of stories about the revival in China, remember that China remains an enigma because of its huge size and diversity. While there are cities like Wenzhou where you can look out of your hotel window and see dozens and dozens of church buildings within a short distance, there are other places where you can travel for days through areas without a single Christian or church.

The heart of Jesus was continually seeking the lost. He taught that he would leave 99 sheep that are safe in order to go after the one that is lost. May our heart be like our Master's – thrilled at the successes but yearning for God's glory to be made known among more and more people every day.

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All of the colour pictures from Hainan Island in this newsletter are courtesy of Julian Hawken. The historical black and white images come from old missionary journals and *Bridge* magazine.



*A little girl from the Kim Mun tribe, in central Hainan Island.*



## Hainan Island - ‘Gateway to Hell’ now Receiving Heaven’s Blessing

Tropical Hainan Island is China’s largest Island (not counting Taiwan), and is home to about eight million inhabitants.

Located at the southern tip of China, Hainan (‘South Sea Island’) is warm and humid almost year round, with bountiful rainfall and a verdant landscape. Between May and October the Island is lashed with several severe typhoons. Thousands of lives have been lost over the centuries among the fishing-based coastal communities. In the past few years, however, a different kind of wind has been blowing through the communities on the Island — the wind of the Holy Spirit. What was a small and

struggling church has experienced tremendous revival and growth. In the next two issues of Asia Harvest we would like to examine Christianity on Hainan, from its beginnings to the present day.

Historically, Hainan Island was viewed as a miserable, dangerous backwater of the Chinese Empire. Rumors circulated that the tribal ‘savages’ who dwelt on the Island had tails and commonly captured and ate their Chinese neighbors. When Li Deyu was exiled to Hainan during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) he described it as ‘the gateway to hell’.

Hainan came into worldwide attention in March 2001, when an American spy-plane collided with a Chinese air-force jet and was forced to make an emergency landing on the Island, at a military airfield in Lingshui County. The incident, which cost the life of the Chinese pilot, led to a tense standoff as the Chinese held 24 American navy personnel for 11 days. The relationship between China and the United States was greatly strained for a time.

## A Sudden Change of Plans

The first ever mention of Christianity on Hainan dates back to 1630 when Jesuit priests came from Macau and constructed a Catholic chapel in Fucheng town.

The first known Protestant missionary on Hainan was an eccentric Danish sea captain, Carl C. Jeremiassen, who was employed by the Qing Dynasty government to hunt down pirates and smugglers on the high seas.

Upon reaching Hainan Island in 1881, however, the 34-year-old Jeremiassen changed his occupation and began to preach the Gospel all over the Island, “distributing Bibles in one hand and dispensing medicines with the other.” In his very first year on Hainan Jeremiassen made a complete circuit of the Island, visiting numerous towns and villages.

Jeremiassen was quite a sight to the locals, who had never seen a foreigner

before. His appearance was described as “a red-bearded giant.”

Jeremiassen settled down in Fucheng, where he gathered enough funds to purchase the Wu clan’s ancestral hall on Wenzhuang Road. After cleaning and remodelling the building, he turned the hall into a church. Later, he tried to preach the Gospel in Danxian but he was strongly opposed by the local Chinese, so he moved to the town of Nada and established a Gospel hall there.

## The U.S. Presbyterians

The very first missionaries sent out by the U.S. Presbyterian Mission Board after its formation were Dr. and Mrs. Charles McCandliss, who arrived on Hainan Island in 1885. They were excited at the potential they saw among the Island’s people, declaring, “the whole island is open to missionary work.”



***A meeting of all the Presbyterian missionaries on Hainan Island, 1918***



**Young Chinese Christian women at the Presbyterian school on Hainan, 1920s**

Dr. McCandliss commenced his work by caring for and treating leprosy victims near Haikou, the capital city of Hainan. Local people could not believe a Westerner would come and “stoop so low” as to give his life for the despised lepers. McCandliss helped build the Haikou Gospel Hospital (now renamed the People’s Hospital) and established the Haikou Church in Yanzao village in 1887, just two years after his arrival.

McCandliss lived on Hainan for forty years and labored sacrificially for the people of Hainan, giving a tremendous witness of faithfulness, integrity and hard work. Many of the elderly pastors who endured the persecutions of the Cultural Revolution had been disciplined by him.

Other missionary families joined the McCandliss’. Many of them were servants of God who had been broken, but not crushed, by life’s experiences. God used their

sacrificial service to establish His Church on Hainan. One such family was Frank Gilman and his wife Mary. Searching through an old missionary magazine (*Chinese Recorder*, January 1918), we found the following obituary to Mary Gilman:

“Mary Gilman was born at Perth Amboy, New Jersey, August 26, 1849. In October 1880 she was married to the Rev. Wellington J. White in New York City, and shortly after sailed for China. While in China three daughters were born. In July 1891, while on furlough, Mrs. Gilman passed through a tragic experience. While driving across the Erie Railroad tracts in Elmire, New York, the wagon in which she and her husband and their three children were riding was struck by an express train. Mr. White and the oldest daughter Lillian were instantly killed and all the other

members of the family severely injured. She had barely recovered from this nervous overstrain when in 1892 her youngest child Mary died.

As a consequence of this, Mrs. Gilman was unable to engage in any work for several years; the shock prostrated her for a time. Later, however, the buoyancy of her nature asserted itself and she was able

remembered as a faithful worker who shared with others their every burden. Not only was she faithful in her work, but Mrs. Gilman's temperament was conspicuous by its buoyancy and brightness. She was especially attractive to young people. In conversation and public appeal everyone recognized the reality of her call and her devotion to the mission cause. It was not infrequent after she had finished her addresses for audiences to ask her to continue, and always at the close



***A group of tribal Christians in central Hainan, 1922.***

to visit churches and societies and make missionary addresses....

On November 26, 1903, she was married to the Rev. Frank P. Gilman, at Amsterdam, New York, and sailed for Hainan, China.... Her work was characterized by conspicuous devotion, unwearied activities and an intensity of purpose that led her to put herself constantly at the disposal of the people to whom she was ministering, and also the missionaries with whom she was associated. Mrs. Gilman will be

people would gather around her for further conversation.... Her home was open to everyone—the new missionary, the tired missionary, and the missionary who needed counsel and advice.... In the latter years much of her work was done in spite of physical and nervous troubles to which others would have yielded; but her missionary enthusiasm was irrepressible and one cannot help but rejoice that without a long invalidism she was called home in the midst of her work. It was as she would have wished.”

## God Works among Three-Self Church Believers Despite Corrupt Leadership

China-watchers sometimes presume the laid-back atmosphere on Hainan Island means Christians there do not suffer much for their faith. The facts however suggest otherwise. Indeed, considering the size of the church, the level of government opposition seems to be worse than in many other provinces with much higher populations.



On Hainan, not only have the house churches come in for strong persecution instigated by the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), but even their own pastors who appeared too zealous for the Gospel came in for harsh treatment!

According to the Three-Self Church in China, there are 37,000 Christians in their churches on the whole of Hainan Island. In

the mid-1990s the two largest government-controlled churches on Hainan were blessed to have two decent pastors. These men loved the Lord and endeavored to honor God's Word within the context of the government system. Because these two pastors were genuine believers, Rev. Li Xunru, the provincial Three-Self Church leader, continually gave them grief and pressurized them to submit to the Communist Party line.

Li Xunru considered the pastor of the TSPM church in Danzhou too evangelistic in his sermons. Li had him arrested literally out of the pulpit on a Sunday morning during worship. He was handcuffed and dragged away in front of the congregation. This faithful pastor was placed in prison for a long time, and was replaced by a preacher who was considered less of a threat to Li and the TSPM's objectives.

In Haikou, a Three-Self pastor named Chen was also removed during worship service and placed under house arrest for a long time. Chen wanted to send a coworker to the Chinese Mainland for theological training. The government however refused to let the worker go. Instead, the police in Haikou appointed two men to attend seminary. Neither of these men were Christians, but were simply government employees.

Despite this kind of evil interference, God continued to work among those Three-Self Church members whose hearts were committed to him.

During the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, Christians continued to meet secretly in small groups, while all official church activities ceased for a 15-year period from 1966-81. Some believers had to

hide their faith not only from the authorities but also from some of the pastors who had aligned themselves with the Three-Self Church.

In 1981, five years after Mao Zedong's death, a small group of Christians gathered in Haikou and asked to be allowed to legally worship again. In 1983 the Haikou church building at Yanzao was returned to the church and meetings were recommenced. On 31 March, 1985, three church workers were ordained by the TSPM in a ceremony witnessed by more than 400 believers.

By Christmas Day, 1987, churches everywhere throughout the Island were overflowing, mostly with elderly people who were now emerging again, their faith refined from years of harsh persecution.

### Faithful Believers in Nada

Nada is the local name for what the Chinese commonly call Danzhou City. It contains about 80,000 souls, yet has just one official Three-Self church.

Yu Quanqiu, the former pastor of the TSPM church in Nada, was born into an ethnic-Hakka Christian family in 1918. On April 1, 1937, he gave his life to Jesus Christ at the age of 19. After studying theology at the Chongqing Theological Seminary in 1948, he was assigned to shepherd the flock in Nada.

The Nada Church had been established in 1914. Later, a devout local Christian named Deng Weiqing donated a large piece of land which remains the site of the Nada church to this day. A building large enough to seat 1,000 worshippers was constructed.

In the mid-1950s the church was seized by the authorities and turned into



***Pastor Yu Quanqiu in 1988.***

government buildings. In 1958 the believers boldly constructed a small chapel right across the street from the confiscated buildings and there they continued their services under the leadership of Pastor Yu.

Yu was threatened many times by the authorities, who instructed the believers to stop their meetings, but more and more people came. As many as 1,000 people came to the Christmas services each year, crammed inside and outside the small chapel. In June 1963, the authorities could not stand the provocation any longer. They arrested Pastor Yu and imprisoned him for seven years for the sake of Jesus Christ.

In September 1980, Yu recommenced meetings in his home. Once again people came to this faithful shepherd. In December 1983, worship services were permitted to take place in the small chapel once again.

In the Spring of 1986 the government decided to reopen the large Nada church, after 30 years of it being used as the local offices of the Bureau of Light and Water.

Pastor Yu Quanqiu has been criticized by some house church Christians for his decision to register with the Three-Self Church after his release from prison. Some have even said his years of incarceration were in vain because of this choice. Pastor Yu, for his part, continued to preach the Gospel and refused to abandon the flock that God called him to shepherd so many years before.

For several years all seemed peaceful in the Nada church. Suddenly, on July 4, 1993, Pastor Yu was forcibly removed from the leadership of the church by the Hainan Island Religious Affairs Bureau.

During the Sunday morning service government officials seized the pulpit and announced to the stunned congregation that Yu and all the staff of the church had been fired. It was announced that from that point on the government officials were in charge of the day-to-day running of the church and they would appoint speakers for church meetings. Pastor Yu tried to legally fight his dismissal, but his efforts were to no avail. In the eyes of the Communist authorities and their religious arm, Pastor Yu had for too long refused to bow to their wishes about how to run the church.

This man of God who had proclaimed the Gospel uncompromisingly for so many years continued to minister from his home to the many people who came to him for advice and counsel, but he would never again stand behind the pulpit of the church he had served in for 42 years.

## Sister Baowen's Tribulation

Pastor Yu's sister, Baowen, was a qualified nurse. She kept the Nada Hospital open during the War after the Japanese had placed many of the foreign medical staff under arrest.



***Sister Baowen after 20 years in prison. Dr. Wang, who was miraculously healed by God, is in the background.***

Baowen was falsely accused of being a spy for the West because of her contact with foreign medical doctors and nurses. She was imprisoned for 20 years.

Prison had not been a waste for Baowen. God's mercy and grace shone through the iron bars into her heart. It was during her twenty years' incarceration that Baowen met and married Liang Hanbin, who later became a faithful Bible study leader in the Nada church.

Baowen had adopted a homeless orphan

girl with a hare-lip disability. Little Lingen loved her new mother greatly. During Baowen's imprisonment Lingen was often able to slip past the prison guards unnoticed to bring food and drink to Baowen and other prisoners. Lingen grew up to be a dedicated Christian, and had three beautiful children.

Baowen did not dwell on the difficulties of the past, but looked forward to a bright future with the Lord. After her release from prison, she continued her ministry and medical work in Nada, seeing the twenty years she spent behind bars not as a punishment, but as the crowning glory of her walk with Jesus.

In the late 1980s Baowen received a written apology from the prison authorities who had taken twenty years of her life. She gladly forgave them.

### The Miraculous Healing of Dr. Wang

One of the leading elders in the Nada Three-Self church was Dr. Wang. Some years ago he suffered a stroke and for eight months was unable to even sit upright. His condition deteriorated and it looked certain that he would never be able to walk again.

One day Pastor Yu Quanqiu suggested to Wang that they pray and ask the Lord to heal him.

According to *Bridge* magazine (May 1992), "Some nights later, Dr. Wang said he saw the Lord standing before him. 'Get up and walk!' Jesus said. 'Lord, I can't walk,' was his reply. 'Do you truly believe in Me?' 'I do.' Then the Lord placed his hand on Dr. Wang's shoulder and again said, 'Get up and walk.' He did and, from that night forward, was healed. Within a few months

he was able to undertake a four to five hour walking trip without any difficulty."



### People Clueless of Gospel in 'Most Evangelized' Area

A few years after the Communists came to power in China in 1949, all missionaries were expelled and the Church entered into its most difficult time. Many of the believers on Hainan went 'underground' as the visible church was dismantled.

In the early 1990s the government-sanctioned Three-Self Church on Hainan Island was very weak. Although the TSPM claimed to have 20,000 believers on the Island at the time, one foreign Christian visited

every single church and stated the total combined attendance of every church would barely surpass 1,000 people.

When he visited the one area of Hainan that is widely considered to be the most evangelized part of the Island and the place with the highest concentration of Christians, he checked into a local hotel in the town and (speaking Chinese), asked the workers for the location of either one of the town's two official churches.

"What is a church?" they asked.

"A church is where Christians' worship."

"What is a Christian?"

"A Christian is a follower of Jesus," the foreigner replied.

"Who is Jesus?" asked the workers.

In the end the confused hotel workers concluded the foreigner must be looking for the Buddhist temple, located about 20 km out of the town.

This was the spiritual state of people living in the most evangelized part of Hainan Island. No wonder the Lord was making His own plans to glorify His Name in a special way among the people there.

For several years Asia Harvest has been helping the house churches on Hainan Island, through several projects including the China Bible printing fund and Asian Worker's fund, as well as other printing projects.

We appreciate your help in bringing the Gospel to this little-known place.

**Please pray the Christians' lives on Hainan Island today will be Christ-like, unified, and zealous to preach the Gospel to those who have never heard.**

**Ask God to bring His kingdom to Hainan Island, and all of China, with great power and authority.**



*In the next issue of Asia Harvest we look at the work of the house churches on Hainan Island. Just ten years ago the total number of house church believers on the island was small. Today, respected researchers living in Hainan estimate there to be at least 360,000 believers! We will look at some of the ways God has expanded his kingdom there.*



## From our Mailbox

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Revival is breaking out in my home! Well, at least my husband and me are on-fire and that is a start! Your books "Heavenly Man" and "Back to Jerusalem" are answers to prayer!! I cried while reading both. I've prayed so long and so hard, that the Lord would please let me see men filled with the Spirit. I begged him, "Lord, you built Your church on the foundation of men filled with the spirit. Why are we having so much trouble?" We examined our motives in each painful church situation, prayed, kept seeking, cried many tears, fasted and prayed in desperation, over and over again. We've been crushed so many times by other Christians and American churches, we almost lost faith in God. After a few chapters of "Back to Jerusalem", I jolted upright — God spoke to my heart, "This is the answer to your prayer"! I don't CARE that these brothers and sisters are 10,000 miles away. Somewhere on this earth such people exist!

**Joy, Arizona**

I know that you are doing what you think best, but you must stop assuming that there is only one true way to worship. Religion is the concept of humans and, for that precise reason is flawed by our imperfect thinking and understanding. It is essential that whether or not we agree with the beliefs of other peoples, we must still respect them. It is the blind sureness about one's religion being the "true religion" that is the cause of so many of the problems in our world. Diversity is part of what makes the world a beautiful and wonderfully interesting place. Let people be to live in their own ways. It is not for you to judge.

**Patricia, received by email**

For me it is great pleasure to receive your newsletter, I'm from Bulgaria, and the story begun after my wife found your website on the internet some months ago, while she searched for information about the suffering church in Asia for our prayer bulletin. I remember the time when the post officer came to me and gave me the first newsletter from Asia Harvest. We read it in one breath, and shared the stories with our brothers and sisters, and they were so touched by these stories. My wife included some of the information in our prayer bulletin for the Christians here. Just when I thought that these wonderful magazines would not come anymore we received another issue - what a joy it was in our cell group when we read the testimony and powerful truth in your message. God touched the life of our group here. We pray for your work and projects. God bless you!

**Martin, Bulgaria**