

Welcome  
2018

NOTE FROM THE  
DIRECTOR



DACB 2.0  
IMPROVING ACCESS TO  
AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY



CHINA'S URBAN  
PRESBYTERIANS  
TRENDS



RECENT  
PUBLICATION  
NEW TITLE

# CGCM NEWS

## Center for Global Christianity & Mission



### *Dictionary of African Christian Biography 2.0*

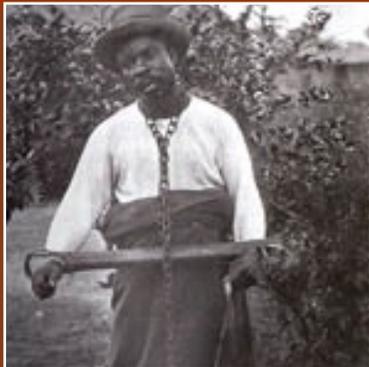
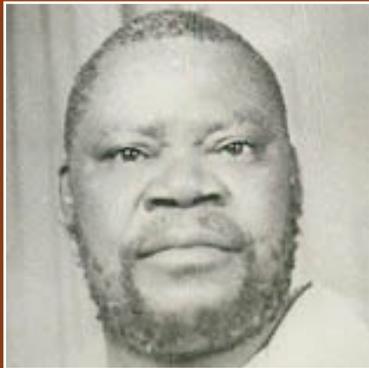
In September 2017, after over 20 years as a venerable Html-based website, the DACB underwent a complete redesign. Consultants at the Software and Application Innovation Lab (SAIL) at Boston University's Hariri Institute were incredulous that a website as large as the DACB, with over 4,700 files, had survived so long on an Html platform. In hushed tones, they said it belonged in a museum.

The chain of events that led to the DACB website redesign

#### *Note from the Director*

With the publication of our first CGCM News of 2018, we mark our 17th year. Founded as one of the first Centers in the United States to focus on World Christianity, we celebrate the past and anticipate the future. Over the years we have supported Theological Education in rural Zimbabwe, provided scholarships for advanced students in mission studies, and launched innovative digital research and documentation projects. 2017 was a special year under the directorship of Dr. Daryl Ireland. We are delighted to announce that we have received funding from the Luce Foundation's Asia Program for the project "Oppositional Art: Chinese Christian Propaganda Posters." With the able assistance

Continued on page 3



The DACB is now searchable using 20 different categories, including musicians, evangelists, persecuted Christians, and women.

began earlier that year. In March 2017, CGCM Associate Director Daryl Ireland and DACB Project Manager Michèle Sigg attended a conference on digital humanities projects on the recommendation of Dr. Vika Zafrin, BU Digital Scholarship Librarian. At the conference, they learned about the principles of minimal computing from Alex Gil, Digital Scholarship Coordinator for Humanities and History at Columbia University.

Minimal computing simplifies the design and function of a website in order to focus primarily on its content rather than offering complex features that rely on external databases, technologies, and software to make it run. Minimal design reduces the need for updating and maintenance and keeps data consumption low. The result is a standalone, fast-loading website that users can easily access, on multiple devices, even in areas where Internet is slow. It is even possible to design the site so that it can be distributed on flash drives in areas where there is no Internet access.

It turned out that the DACB project had already integrated the principles of minimal computing in its overall ethos. In order for the DACB to “make freely accessible biographical accounts and church histories” (DACB mission statement) to individuals and institutions in Africa, the website design had always included a lightweight, easy-loading interface that was also portable for use in areas without Internet access. The need to make DACB content accessible to a specific audience had always driven the site’s structure.

However, as the site had grown to include over 2,500 biographies in multiple sub sites, the Html interface made maintenance and updating very time-consuming. The DACB needed a new interface. Through contact with Gil, Sigg learned about Jekyll, an open-source software for website design created by GitHub, a platform that was launched in April 2008.

In May, the redesign project came together with the hiring of Alex Mayfield, 2<sup>nd</sup> year Ph.D student at the CGCM, as web developer. Because of the size of the site, the DACB subcontracted with SAIL to write a script that would transfer the bulk of the site files from the old interface to the new one.

After four months of intensive coding, Mayfield had created a new fast-loading site, with adaptive design for multiple size screens, and a standalone search engine that worked even without an Internet connection, making the site fully portable. In addition, he and Sigg redesigned the indexes and added new ones to enhance research opportunities on the site.

Visit the new site and try it out ([dacb.org](http://dacb.org)). If you have any questions or feedback, email Michèle Sigg at [dacb@bu.edu](mailto:dacb@bu.edu).

# China's Urban Presbyterians

## The True Heirs of the Reformation?

Chinese Christianity is undergoing a significant shift. For years, unregistered churches have flourished under charismatic leaders and been sustained by informal networks. A recent development is challenging that system. A high profile and media-savvy group of urban Christians in the western city of Chengdu is pushing churches to develop standards and structures for congregational life. Refusing to conform to strongman leadership and the lack of rule of law in Chinese society, they pursue the republican ideal epitomized in Presbyterianism. They also follow an entrepreneurial logic in building their churches and social momentum, contending with the government for moral authority. In 2013, three churches in Chengdu took the lead in forming the Western China Presbytery. Despite the name, they do not intend to ape western denominations. "Instead of making [this] city another Geneva, Geneva is made into [this] city," one informant told CGCM researcher Yongguang [Max] Xue.

The churches have gone about their project of transforming their city by establishing Christian schools for children, opening a liberal arts



**"Instead of making [this] city another Geneva, Geneva is made into [this] city."**

college, operating a seminary, and challenging the government in a variety of ways.

Despite being unregistered churches, these congregations intentionally refuse to operate underground. They meet with government officials, hold services in public spaces, are visibly engaged in various ministries throughout the city, and even mobilize to protest such things as abortion.

Chinese Presbyterians, Xue discovered, believe the Reformed tradition can help them accomplish their three-fold mission: "the

## NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR (continued from page 1)

of student assistants Yongguang [Max] Xue, Kexin [Maria] Ren, Alex Mayfield, and Visiting Researcher Man Hei Yip we are digitizing and captioning colorful Christian propaganda posters, housed in thirteen institutions on three continents. After scanning them, an online website will make them available for the public to study, appreciate, and enjoy.

Thank you to all the supporters and friends of the Center, who together continue to make our work possible. During 2017 I was on sabbatical as a Henry Luce III Fellow in Theology, researching cross-cultural friendship in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite war, colonialism, racism, and other social evils, Christians of different cultures and nationalities have cherished relationships with those unlike themselves. Friendships across boundaries of difference witness to worldwide community. May we continue to pursue the vision of the CGCM, to be "a community of learners, researchers and doers who live out their missional callings through critical reflection, faithful witness, and thoughtful engagement with multiple cultures around the world." Best wishes for 2018!

Dana L. Robert

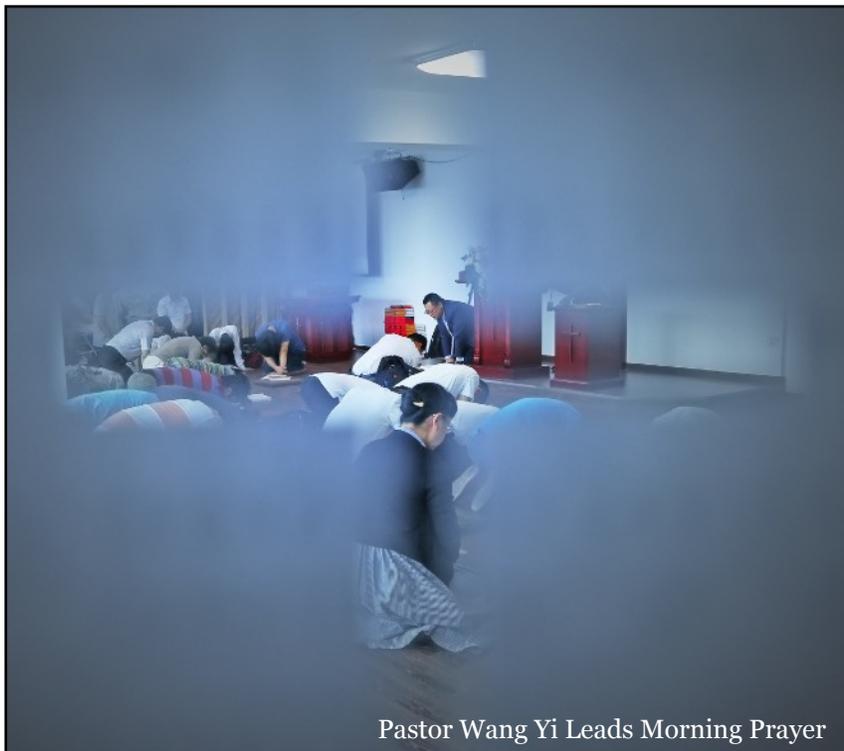
evangelization of China, the kingdom-ization of the church, and the Christianization of culture.”

Xue reports that church goers are engaged in a systematic study of Reformed doctrine. One of the churches uses the Westminster Catechism both in its liturgy and Sunday School, and teaches the Canons of Dordt at its mid-week Bible study.

Presbyterian polity is perceived as an antidote to the charismatic and strongman leadership of conventional house churches, providing a system of checks-and-balances. Advocates explained to Xue that Presbyterian polity prevents the church from sliding into congregational populism. But perhaps even more interesting, they see their church government as an example for the nation. China’s urban Presbyterians aim to be a City on a Hill. Their republican structure can show Chinese people a different and, they believe, better way to organize social life.

For some, this appears dangerously political. In his 95 Theses for the Chinese Church, however, Pastor Wang Yi declares it is not. His interests are ecclesial, but if Christian witness is genuine, then it will make the state uncomfortable. That, insists Wang Yi, is merely a byproduct of being “the true heir of the reformation.”

This article is based on the CGCM-sponsored research of Yongguang [Max] Xue in the fall of 2017.



Pastor Wang Yi Leads Morning Prayer

## New Book



European powers expanding into southwest Africa in the 17th century confronted a cunning and capable leader in Queen Njinga. Linda Heywood has been tracking and uncovering the story of this complex figure for years, teasing out how she ruled and what role her faith played in her kingdom. Earlier this year, Professor Heywood published *Njinga, History, Memory, and Politics and Culture: Angola and the African Diaspora* with Harvard University Press. The book has received outstanding reviews, and Dr. Heywood had a chance to speak about her project at the Library of Congress on November 9, 2017.