Article

Neither Eastern nor Western: Jia Yuming’s Support of Independent Churches in the Anti-Christian Movement

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Abstract: The Chinese Christian church was accused of colluding with Western imperialism, and this led to the anti-Christian movement. The Chinese church responded by accelerating a movement of church independence. Discussions of this movement have often been incorporated into a discourse of aggression and resistance between East and West. Such discussions obscure the differences between individuals and the plurality of thought in the Chinese church. Based on the textual analysis of his writings, the article aims to reveal previously overlooked details within Jia Yuming’s justification of the independence movement by. On the one hand, Jia responded to nationalism by pointing out the ethnic and national identities and obligations of Christians. On the other hand, he avoided conflict with the Western missions in the process of independence, thus taking the church’s independence out of the context of East–West confrontation. Finally, he reconciled the conflict between national identity and the Western image with the ecumenical values of Christ and the Christian reformation of society, unifying both sides with ultimate spirituality. His justification draws attention to an attuned theological path of thought in the process of indigenization of the Chinese church.

Keywords: Jia Yuming; indigenization; Chinese Christian church; the anti-Christian movement; independent churches

1. Introduction

At the Ecumenical Missionary Conference of 1900, a consensus was formed that missionary societies throughout the world had agreed to accept the realization of independence as a basic principle, allowing church development everywhere to return to the spiritual life and offerings of the local Christians themselves, rather than relying on permanent subsidy funding from the mother church (Wu 2004). The Sinicization of Christianity is a historical process that has continued up to the present time, and while the self-reliance movement of the Chinese church shares in this law of development, it also carries with it a strong background of struggle at a particular stage of history. Chinese Christians had a strong drive for self-reliance because of the external environment. In the resolution formed at the Centennial Conference on Christianity in China held in 1907, it was clearly stated that the Chinese church had the right to establish independent churches according to its own views of truth and responsibility, and that it should not be under the control of Western missionaries. The Chinese staff had a strong incentive to compete with Western missionaries for control of the church (Wu 2004). The indigenization of the Church itself was in slow development, but the opposition to imperialist aggression directly accelerated the indigenization movement. Since the late Qing Dynasty, Christianity had never been able to get rid of its image as the Foreign Religion (洋教), and opponents believed that the Church was backed by the forces of Western imperialism. The manifesto of the anti-Christian Students’ Union (非基督教学生同盟), published on 9 March 1922, stated:

各国资本家……因而大起恐慌，用尽手段，冀延残喘于万一。于是，就先后拥入中国，实行经济的侵略主义了。而现代的基督教及基督教会，就是这经济侵略的
先锋队。各国资本家在中国设立教会，无非要诱惑中国人民欢迎资本主义；在中国设立青年会，无非要养成资本家底善良走狗。（Duan 2004, pp. 184–85）

（Author’s translation: The capitalists of all countries … are thus in a great panic, and are using all means in order to prolong their existence. Thus, they successively swarmed into China and practiced economic aggression. The modern Christianity and Christian churches are the vanguard of this economic aggression. The establishment of churches in China by the capitalists of various countries is nothing but to tempt the Chinese people to welcome capitalism; the establishment of YMCAs in China is nothing but to raise the loyal lackeys of the capitalists.）

The Union’s circular message to all schools in China further stated that the purpose of the West was to enslave the Chinese materially with gold and iron and spiritually with the Gospel (金铁奴我以物质，福音奴我以精神) (Duan 2004, p. 184). This wave of linking opposition to Christianity with opposition to Western imperialist aggression intensified after the May Thirtieth Movement (五卅运动). It led directly to the upsurge of nationalism throughout China and the outbreak of a nationwide anti-imperialist and patriotic movement, in which opposition to Christianity became part of the opposition to imperialist aggression.

In the face of the strong challenge from anti-Christian movements, it was difficult for Chinese Christians to argue, because Christians had obtained the right to preach in China through a series of unequal treaties. Many studies on the history of Christian self-reliance in China emphasize the significance of the self-reliance of the churches in resisting Western aggression, which has its value at the macro level (Chen 2008; Wu 2004; Luo 2000; Zhang 1998). For Chinese Christians, they did not want to carry such a heavy burden of national shame, so they wanted to isolate themselves from the Western churches, and it was the consensus of the majority of Christians that they should get rid of their identity as the Foreign Religion. This gave the indigenization movement greater motivation to develop within the church. How to isolate oneself from Western Christianity was a matter that needed to be carefully considered. Neither the globalization of Christianity nor the fact that the church in China was mostly in the hands of missionaries could be completely isolated from Western Christianity. When this history is reviewed in the context of revolutionary history, the grandiose background of this East–West confrontation seems to drown out the finer details. Chen Chang has pointed out the disputes over power and interests within the Church of Christ in China (中华基督教会) during the indigenization movement (Chen 2020). In a review of the early self-supporting churches, including the Zhabei Christian Church (闸北堂) in Shanghai, Zhang Hua reveals the games played and different attitudes towards independence held between Western missions and Chinese churches, as well as among Chinese Christians (Zhang 2014). This reminds us that the viewpoint of each individual within this historical trend will obviously have been pluralistic: if he unilaterally fought against this trend, he would be crushed by the social opinion; if he flagrantly severed his ties with the Western Church, a serious severance would occur both in terms of ecclesiastical survival and his personal beliefs. It is therefore worthwhile to examine the personal views within this trend, which can make the history of the development of religious thought more vivid.

Jia Yuming (贾玉铭, 1879–1964) was one of the theologians who was instrumental in indigenization and is known for his East–West fusion theology. Born in a rural village in China’s Shandong province with a strong Christian atmosphere, Jia was baptized at an early age. He was educated from primary school through to college at the church school of the Northern Presbyterian Church, where he was ordained as a pastor. Afterwards, he spent many years on the faculties of Nanking Theological Seminary (金陵神学院), Nanking Women’s Seminary (金陵女子神学院), and North China Theological Seminary (华北神学院) (Wang 2016). During this period, he published a large number of theological works and received a doctorate in theology from a Presbyterian seminary in the USA for his book Systematic Theology (神道学) (Liu 1989, p. 148). He also founded the religious newspa-
per *Spiritual Light* (灵光) and The Chinese Institute of Spiritual Formation (中国灵修学院). After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, he also served as vice chairman of the National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China. Jia is one of the representative figures of modern Christian fundamentalism in China and is also considered to be the most influential person on the faith of Christians in mainland China, apart from Watchman Nee (倪柝声) (*Xie 2008*, p. 3). The intention of this article is to discover his reconciliation of national sentiments and faith ties in the context of the indigenization movement. His justification of the independent church will help to show the plurality within the Chinese church in the context of the East–West confrontation in the context of the indigenization movement.

2. The Ethnic and National Identity of Christians

Jia’s middle and young adulthood took place during a time of great social change in China. Ever since Robert Morrison launched his missionary activities in Zhaoqing, Guangdong Province in 1807, Christianity’s determination to enter China had never been broken, despite all the difficulties. Protected through a series of unequal treaties, Christianity had more space and easier conditions for preaching in China at the end of the Qing Empire, and gradually developed and took root in Chinese society. However, what followed was a strong conflict between the Western identity of Christianity and the Chinese cultural environment and national sentiment, which successively led to a series of religious cases (教案).

This conflict culminated in the Boxer Rebellion, during which Christianity was severely impacted. The Xin Chou Treaty (辛丑条约), which required the Qing Empire to suppress the xenophobic activities of the Chinese people, provided new guarantees for the development of Christianity in China and gave Christianity the opportunity to develop rapidly. In the Republic of China, the conflict between Christianity and China’s cultural and social environment continued, and the anti-Christian movement that began in 1922 once again brought the issue of Christianity’s existence and development in China to the level of the entire society, and Christianity in China was faced with a severe test of cultural legitimacy. One of the core issues of the anti-Christian movement was Christianity’s collusion with imperialism, and therefore Christianity had to respond to the issue of Christian national and ethnic identity. As a theologian, Jia responded positively to this criticism of Christianity from the outside world.

He illustrated the attributes of the Christian’s national identity from a hermeneutical perspective. Jia interpreted the book of Romans and argued as follows:

基督徒原是天上的国民, 虽在世界, 却不属世界, 他在这世界的时日, 不过是客旅、是寄居的, 但是按着肉体说, 也不能无国家的关系。*(Jia n.d.b)*

*(Author’s translation: the Christian is a heavenly inhabitant, in the world but not of the world. His time in this world is but a guest and a sojourner. But according to the flesh, he cannot be without a national identity.)*

On the issue of whether Christians should love their country, Jia’s response was very clear: they not only have a duty to the church but also have a duty to the government. For him, the church or the believer was not outside the state. Christians were part of the spiritual kingdom as well as citizens of the secular state. He described the relationship between the individual Christian and the state in several ways: First, the Christian submits to the government on the theological basis of the Apostle Peter’s statement, “submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme” (*1 Pet. 2:13*), and the Apostle Paul’s statement, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (*Rom. 13:1, 2*). Second, they are expected to serve their country on the basis of “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s” (*Mat 22:21*). Third, Christians should be patriotic, again based on biblical references such as Moses’ willingness to be removed from the Book of Life for the sake of his nation, and Paul’s willingness to be separated from Christ for the sake of saving his countrymen. Fourth, Christians should pray for the nation, which he regarded as the church’s highest
duty to the nation. This is an allusion to Paul’s asking Timothy to pray for the nation and Daniel’s praying for the nation three times a day. Finally, Christians are to work for the well-being of the nation and to promote the development of the state, society, and the people (Jia 1949, pp. 718–20).

In the Bible, Paul presents a clear model for Christians to be patriotic and to love their fellow man: “that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom, 9:2–3). Jia thought that Paul, as the apostle of the gentiles, was often regarded as unpatriotic, but in fact, from Romans, it can be seen that he had a strong love for his own countrymen and was willing to perish alone to save them from sinking. Jia used Paul as an analogy for the current situation in which Christian believers were considered unpatriotic because they believe in the Foreign Religion.

He also used cases such as Daniel and Nehemiah and others weeping for their country, Isaiah and Ezekiel and others shedding blood for their country, and Jesus weeping bitterly in the presence of the Holy City when he came to Jerusalem for the last time to illustrate the emotions of the biblical characters for their fellow countrymen and to prove the patriotic fervor of true Christians (Jia n.d.a). The establishment of the Holy City is recorded in the Book of Nehemiah. In Jia’s view, the establishment of the Holy City actually referred to the establishment of a Christian nation, and Nehemiah was a type of Christ. In the process of establishing, Nehemiah demonstrated patriotic fervor, patriotic practice, and sacrifice. Based on this, Jia suggested that Christians should be burdened with patriotic responsibilities.

尼希米等不但为国家废寝忘食，撒热泪，且是高举双手，以尽爱国爱民的本分。我们教会中人，岂能对国家人民之痛苦危亡置而不顾呢？(Jia 1992, p. 246)

(Author’s translation: Nehemiah not only fasted, prayed and wept for his country, but also lifted up his hands with all the people in order to fulfill his duty of loving his country and his people. How can we in the church turn our backs on the suffering and peril of our country and people?)

Fasting and praying for the nation is the attitude part, and lifting up one’s hands is the practice part. Jia’s Christian view of patriotism not only involved outlook, but also required real application in practice. Jia further proposed a program of how spiritual Christians should be good citizens of their nation on earth. The most important thing about being a citizen to the nation was to assume responsibility for the nation. Therefore, Christians were to submit to the government and fulfill their obligations to the state. In addition to these external requirements, they must also be subjectively patriotic like Moses, Paul, and others, and care about the destiny of their country and their fellow citizens. In terms of action, it was necessary to promote social unity and development, national civilization, civic morality, and national intelligence through love. The most important patriotic duty and action for Christians was to intercede for the nation (Jia 1949, pp. 718–20; n.d.b). The patriotic stance was expressed first and foremost in the love for one’s fellow countrymen. Jia even believed that Christians had an extra obligation to their fellow man to take the initiative to help people, because Jesus did not come into this world to be served, but to serve (“主耶稣来世”不是要受人服事，乃是要服事人) (Jia 1992, p. 246). He then illustrated the way of Christian patriotism through Esther’s fasting and intercession for the people of Judah:

真爱国不在口中说些爱国的话语，面上显出爱国的精神；乃在有爱国的实行。虽此实行不必各都身列行伍，作个赳赳武夫，但能如本处以斯帖等，为国族禁食祈祷，就是真正爱国，也就是最切要最有效的爱国了。(Jia 1992, p. 305)

(Author’s translation: True patriotism did not lie in the words of patriotism in the mouth or in the appearance; it lay in the actual actions of patriotism. These actions did not require everyone to be in the army and be a valiant soldier; as long as one could fast and pray for the nation as Esther did, this was true patriotism, and it was also the most important and effective patriotism.)
Jia here advocated that patriotism should be practiced instead of empty slogans, and he expressed his views on how to love the country through practice. On the one hand, he did not oppose joining the army to serve the country, but he also suggested that patriotism was not all about going to the battlefield and the way of patriotism was multidimensional. Any practice that was truly helpful in saving the nation from peril had its value. For Christians, then, who fully believed in the power of prayer, it was their conviction that praying for one’s country was also patriotic and was the most effective way for Christians to be patriotic. Through this argumentation, Jia gave his response to the concern that Christians were or were not Chinese. He made it clear that Christians also had a national and ethnic identity and a corresponding patriotic duty. Jia put his Christian patriotism into practice. During the Sino-Japanese War, he and the Institute of Spiritual Formation that he had founded followed Chiang Kai-shek’s government as it moved westward. At the founding of the People’s Republic of China, he refused the opportunity to stay abroad and returned to Communist China.

3. Neutral Interpretations of Independence Movements

The main reason for the rapid development of Christianity in China in modern times was undoubtedly the work of Western missionaries and the missionary societies to which they belonged. However, as mentioned earlier, the Western missionary societies were already tightly bound to the image of imperialist accomplices under the circumstances. In responding to the anti-Christian movement and promoting the church’s indigenization movement as patriotic Christians, the Chinese churches had to address the issue of how to relate to the Western mission. They could neither remain as they were and always exist as subordinate organizations of the mission, nor could they immediately cut themselves off and sever contact. In fact, the widespread poverty of the Christian community at that time prevented them from supporting a great deal of Christian public endeavor in China, and even many of the local churches were under too great financial pressure to function successfully on their own. The vast majority of the churches still depended on the stipends of the missionary societies for support. Therefore, although church autonomy was in essence a process of delinking from the Western mission, the Chinese church in practice had to handle its relationship with the Western mission carefully. They needed to emphasize their national identity and not allow themselves to be perceived as dependent on the Western missionary societies, but they also could not completely sever their relationship with the missionary societies.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, although the initial motivation of the mission and missionaries to promote the independence of the Chinese church was to reduce costs and increase the effectiveness of the missions, the primary aim for most Chinese Christians in the context was to be free from the control of the Western missionary societies. Nationalism and assertion of power over the churches were among the main reasons for this. In addition to demonstrating the patriotic stance of the Christians, the churches had to take practical action to prove that they had nothing to do with the Foreign Religion and that they were not under the control of the Western powers. So, it can be seen that the independence of the church was both an endogenous natural requirement in the development of the church and an active choice in the specific anti-Christian movement environment at that time. The movement of indigenization of the church gained more room for development in this context, the most direct manifestation of which was the independent church. Therefore, the independence movement of the churches in this period of time occurred against a significant background of competition with the Western missionary societies for control of the churches. Originally, most of the churches at that time were still under the charge of Western missionaries with mother churches in Europe and America. If the goal of Sinicization was to be achieved, it was inevitable that there would be conflicts with the mother churches. In fact, the historical movement to Sinicize the church had a strong background of East-West conflict. At the National Christian Conference in 1922, some Chinese Christian delegates publicly accused Western missionaries of using a policy of ignorance.
and enlistment, and of treating the Chinese leaders of the Church in a way befitting the hired servants they were (Duan 2004, p. 223).

The Presbyterian Church to which Jia belonged had an early start in the independence movement. The Reformed Church in America in Xiamen had already partnered with the Presbyterian Church in England to form the United Presbyterian Church in 1857, which in turn became the Chinese Independent Presbyterian Church in 1862. The Presbyterian Church in China also established the United Presbyterian Church of China in 1915, and then joined with the London Missionary Society and American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to form the Chinese United Church of Christ in 1918. Jia was one of the executive committee members of the Chinese United Church of Christ the following year (Kwok 2002, p. 66). Confronted with the dilemma of being caught between nationalism and the mother church, Jia recognized the reality that Christianity at that time had a reputation as a foreign religion. In the minds of the Chinese people, Christianity was always regarded as the church of the Westerners, and therefore they were ashamed to join the church and were unwilling to be servants of the Westerners. Therefore, he agreed that only when the Christian Church became completely independent, free from its image as a foreign religion, and became the Church of China, could it be accepted by the compatriots. From the perspective of a true believer, he criticized the past phenomenon of the Rice Christian (吃教者) under the Western missionary system, which relied on lure to join the church, and titular Christians, who were willing to be slaves of the Westerners but did not contribute to the development of the church in China (Jia 1999, pp. 348–61). Therefore, both from the perspective of compatriots and from the perspective of true believers in the church, there was sufficient motivation to promote the independence of churches and to build the Chinese Christian church. Looking at the reality of the current, after many years of development, the Chinese church had already developed to a certain level and had a considerable number of believers who made the church their home, were willing to serve the Lord, and were dedicated to serving the church; therefore, the mature conditions for independence were present.

Jia did not hold an attitude of struggle against or hostility towards the Western missions in the pursuit of autonomy but was instead grateful and rewarding to the missionaries and the mother churches. He abandoned his position of going toe-to-toe with the Western churches and missionaries. Instead, he turned to explain the necessity of the Sinicization of Christianity from an internal point of view, that is, it was natural that churches formed of Chinese people should be managed by Chinese people, which is logical and does not require special justification (Jia 1930, p. 252). Chinese Christians building Chinese churches, becoming the mainstay of church organizations, and adapting church organizations to the needs of the Chinese people were natural parts of the development of Christianity in the region. This meant that the building of Chinese churches was not a deliberate act but an inevitable result of the development of the Christian community in China. This interpretation was in line with his pursuit of spiritual faith. Though he may have made this argument purely from faith, it objectively brought two benefits: it conformed to the trend of church independence at that time; and it avoided a direct conflict with Western missionaries at that time. Jia selectively interpreted the movement in terms of the structure of the church, weakening the conflict between positions in the process of the Sinicizing of the church.

自马礼逊君布道中华以来……而我中华信徒，既不费而沾此厚惠，岂可终于领受，不思有以施于人乎。（Jia 1999, pp. 348–61）

(Author’s translation: Since Morrison preached in China, the European and American countries of the Missionary Society here donated a huge amount of money, sent a large number of missionaries. The achievements of these endeavors in our country have been very great and fruitful. …… How can we Christians in China, who have received such favors and help so effortlessly, simply enjoy them without thinking about how to give back to them?)
Jia believed that independence was not a way to draw a line in the sand away from the Western mother churches, nor was it blindly xenophobic, but rather it was a mutually fulfilling act of sympathy for the missionary work of the mother churches and a way to lighten their burden. For the mother churches, the independence of the Chinese churches could relieve their huge investment over the long term, just as children become self-sustainable and relieve the burdens of parents when they became adults. The fact that the Chinese church was independent showed its maturity, and therefore the independence was in accordance with the expectations of the Western mother church. Jia did not resent the mother-child system. In reviewing the history of the church, he argued that from the beginning of the church in the Bible, there were developed churches branching out into new churches in the vicinity. The branched-out churches must have regarded the old churches as their mother churches, and the pastors of the new churches must have honored the pastors of the old churches as their elders (Jia 1949, p. 682). The independence of the church was independence in Christ, which was the foundation shared by the Eastern and Western churches. The self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation involved in the independence of the church were all formal manifestations. They all referred to the ability of the churches to independently undertake the pastoral work of evangelization, with the aim of reducing the burden on Western churches.

Such carefulness in his handling of the relationship between the East and West churches was more clearly reflected in his article “The Issue of Independence of the Chinese Church”, which states as follows:

以自立二字论及中国教会, 或疑与母会冲突, 有排外之心……第此自立之义, 乃言不受母会之供给与裨助……我母会对于已经成立之教会, 可稍卸仔肩, 各留余力。从事推广开垦之工。 (Jia 1999, pp. 348–61)

(Author’s translation: to use the word independence to talk about the Chinese church may lead to suspicion of conflict with the mother church, and make us be regarded as having a xenophobic mind …… In fact, what we mean by independence is to say that we are not to be supplied and aided by our mother church …… Mother churches can take a little of the burden off their shoulders from already established churches. Let the mother churches reserve their strength for other endeavors, for missionary work.)

Although he was talking about the independence of churches, the text reveals that he was thinking of the mother church and interpreting the independence from the perspective of alleviating the burden of the mother church. Finally, he explained that a so-called Chinese Christian church did not mean that it was different from the other churches of the world. He objected to the title Chinese Christian church, which carried a strong national connotation, and thought that the China Church should be used, drawing on the Biblical practice of calling churches by the names of places. Therefore, he proposed that the Chinese church should keep in touch with and identify itself with all denominations of Christianity in the world and treat the Christian church in the world as a community, of which the Chinese church was a branch.

Jia fully supported the building of the indigenization church. He believed that although the truth of Christianity has universal value, there were differences in time, race, political culture, temperament, psychology, and learning environment when it came to geographical, and demographic differences. In these different environments, Christianity, when combined with local conditions, would produce different forms of expression. For him, therefore, the building of localized churches was not a passive response to anti-Christian movements but a major step forward for the church to actively carry out its evangelistic mission in China. It was a new stage for Chinese believers to say goodbye to their dependence on the mother church of the Missionary Society and move towards independent development. The China Church referred to Christianity in China. The indigenization movement was not to create another denomination or to cut itself off from the churches in other countries. The China Church, like the Ephesus Church, the Corinth Church, etc., was a localized church. All churches were the same in their belief. Jia had been very care-
ful to distinguish indigenization from xenophobia. Through this argument, he removed
the context of indigenization in opposition to the Western church and directed the mean-
ing of indigenization to the stage-by-stage progress of the church from being missionized
to independent development. His work normalized the concept of indigenization of the
church and took it out of the context of the East–West rivalry. Of course, this was not a
play on words on his part. He practiced it himself. He repeatedly emphasized in his faith
the spiritual and essential character of the church and the ultimate goal of the unity of all
churches in Christ.

4. Ecumenism and Christianization

Jia’s emphasis on the national identity of Christians and his explanation of the neutral-
ity of the independence of churches expressed a friendly attitude towards domestic public
opinion and the Western missionary societies, respectively. However, if his argumenta-
tion had gone only so far, this attitude would only have been wedged in between public
opinion and the Western mission. He also needed to answer the question of how the indig-
enization of the church could maintain good relations from a nationalistic standpoint with
the Western missionary societies that were linked to imperialism. In other words, how
could self-consistency be achieved within Christianity between the two completely oppo-
site perceptions of opposing Western aggression and maintaining good relations with the
mother church of the mission without splitting the church?

Jia chosen to dissolve this contradiction in the ecumenical nature of Christianity. In his
system of Spiritual Life Theology, Christians and churches were of a growing nature and
could grow from sinners to the level of Christ. In his view, on one hand, the reality of the
church was that it was made up of sinful people and thus inevitably carried all kinds of
non-spiritual elements; on the other hand, the church would ultimately grow into the Bride
of Christ as the spiritual life of Christians in it grew. Therefore, in the face of the division
between the world and the Eastern and Western churches, he responded in the direction
of the development of church unity, except that he believed that the focus of unity should
be on spiritual faith.

(信徒)勿作离群之羊, 乃要合而为一, 因为是一主一信, 一洗一神, 面一身……
今日中国信徒更宜在主内不分畛域, 划除会界, 使教会成为不带公会色彩有基督
生命的教会。（Jia 1949, p. 680）

(Author's translation: [Christians] should not be sheep that stray from the flock,
but should be one. Because it is one Lord, one faith, the same baptism, one God,
and ultimately one body. …… Today Chinese believers should not be divided
into regions in the Lord, and demarcate the boundaries of the church, so that the
church can become a non-denominational church that shares the life of Christ.)

He pointed out that the unity of churches advocated and promoted in those days was
mostly a vision without a practical foundation. Participants pursued only the superficial
and formal unity of the church, and involvement merely granted each denomination nom-
inal unity, without paying attention to whether their beliefs were compatible and whether
their pursuit of a spiritual life was the same. The essence of the unity he mentioned was
the same faith in Christ and the same spiritual life in Christ. At that, no matter whether
it was between domestic denominations or between the Eastern and Western churches,
true unity would be a state of conformity but not sameness and varied but conformational
(合而不合, 不合而合), as if it were the way of harmony and difference among gentlemen
(君子和同之道) (Jia 1949, p. 687).

教会宜避去西洋式等，吾人固极端赞成，但西洋之风味也，声势也，乃西洋之本
色，非基督教之真相也。教会宜吸收中国之文化，国性等，亦固其宜；但中国之
文化国性等，乃中国之本色，亦非基督教之真相也。（Jia 1930, pp. 254–55）

(Author’s translation: The church should be stripped of its Western appearance,
and we are of course very much in favor of this. However, these external aspects of
the Western church are characteristics of the West, not the essence of Chris-
Christianity. It is certainly beneficial for the church to absorb and adapt to the culture and national characteristics of China. But these appearances in China are only characteristics of China, and again not the essence of Christianity.)

The independence of the Chinese church in his eyes would be an initiative taken within the scope of Scripture in order to promote the adaptation and preaching of Christianity in China, the most fundamental aspect of which was a return to the orthodoxy and pure faith. In Jia’s view, the integration of the church with the culture, customs, and spirituality of the Chinese nation was not to clothe Christianity in the trappings of Chinese cultural traditions, which was too superficial, nor was it to fill the framework of Christian doctrines and liturgies with elements of Chinese culture, which would be to abandon the essence of Christ. Christianity was neither Western nor Eastern. The fundamental beliefs of Christianity have no national or ethnic differences, but are ecumenical. The so-called getting rid of Western features was just to get rid of the Western characteristics that it had carried for a long time in the West to survive and develop, and the combination with Chinese culture was also to add Eastern characteristics to it, while its basic principles remained unchanged. However, the times, races, political cultures, temperaments, mentalities, and intellectual environments in which individuals lived were all different, and this led to the fact that the effects produced by individuals when they came into contact with the truth of the Church varied from one person to another (Jia 1949, p. 726). Therefore, the combination of Christianity and Chinese culture was to spread Christianity among the Chinese through taking advantage of their national nature, their cultural traditions, their religious equality, their curiosity about mysticism, and their good nature. In other words, the spread of Christianity in China should adhere unchanged to the core Christian beliefs, approach the preferences of the Chinese people, and preach to the Chinese people in the way they were accustomed to. The difference between this understanding and the direct replacement of Western Christian elements with traditional Chinese rituals and religious ideas at that time was that its core purpose was to spread Christianity, not to transform it.

Jia agreed that Christianity had to be active in society and promote the Christianization of the whole society via its own actions. Just as Jesus made his disciples the salt of the earth and the light of the world, Jia believed that the gospel of Christianity was also the gospel of society, and that it had itself contributed to the renewal of society throughout history. However, he also opposed the social evangelicals in the new theology of his time who over-emphasized the social values of Christianity. He believed that the so-called social gospel in the new theology was a gospel that Christianity had adapted to the trends of the hearts and minds of society, reflecting the synchronicity between Christianity and social innovation. According to Jia, they blindly conformed to the demands of the social environment only because they were afraid of being regarded as an obstacle to social development and of arousing the world’s disapproval, so they cut their feet to fit the shoes. The social gospel was a social-oriented gospel for the transformation of society, not an individual-oriented gospel for the salvation of human souls. The heart of Christianity was not the renewal or evolution of society. It was beyond the material, it belonged to the spiritual world, and it was not an ism of any kind (Jia 1930, pp. 252–62). In his view, the real value of Christianity to Chinese society lay in Christianity itself, that is, in the transformation that led to China being Christianized.

Transformation was manifested in three ways:

1. To make Christians leaders of social movements through the church’s social work of charity and schooling;
2. Through the church’s work for social improvement, the church became a model for society and attracted the imitation of society;

3. Ultimately, society gradually opened up and welcomed Christianity, leading to the Christian occupation of China. (Jia 1949, p. 709)

Through adopting the spiritual life of Christ as the ecumenical fundamental faith, Jia had set a framework for ecclesial coexistence and an ultimate direction of development for the churches of the world. Under this framework, the differences between the Eastern and Western churches were only the trappings of the current stage of development of the church, and its essence was singular. In the ultimate perspective, the Church was neither Eastern nor Western, but belonged to Christ only. Thus, there was no longer a conflict between Christians’ love for their country and their love for the church. The Western church that Chinese Christians loved was not the imperialist church, but the church that belonged to the spiritual life of Christ. In addition to providing this interpretive framework to dissolve the differences between the Eastern and Western churches, Jia also provided a practical path to Christianize China and the world in order to promote Christianity as an ecumenical religion.

Jia not only expected to build a successful independent and united China Church (Christianity in China), but he also wanted China to convert to Christ, so that the whole of China would become a Christian nation. Ultimately, China Christianity would become a missionary center like the European and American missionary societies and would further radiate Christianity to its surroundings (Jia 1949, pp. 732–33). This ambitious goal once again echoed Jia’s understanding of the indigenization of the church, which in his eyes was not a struggle to gain control of the church from the Western missions, but rather a new stage in the development of the church in China, the starting point for the independent development of Christianity in China. The Chinese church shares a common faith and life with the American church, the Ephesian church, and other churches around the world.

5. Conclusions

The indigenization of the church is sometimes called the situationalization of the church, which refers to the adjustment and adaptation of the church to the local environment of the time. In this paper, Jia’s justification of the independent Chinese churches interprets this path of situationalization. As mentioned several times in this paper, in modern history since the end of the Qing Empire, Christianity’s development in China has always been accompanied by the reputation of being a “foreign religion”, which means not only that Christianity was a religion of a foreign culture, but it was also associated with imperialist colonial invasion in the public opinion of the anti-Christian movement at that time. This put the Chinese Christians in a difficult situation, as they did not want to be accused of being unpatriotic, but at the same time it was impossible for them to completely cut ties with Western churches in terms of their faith and social relations. Of course, a small number of Chinese churches with a financial base became fully independent, but the majority of churches were still closely related to the mother churches of the mission. This dilemma constituted a unique situation for Chinese Christians at that time, and how to achieve church development in this situation was precisely the issue that needed to be resolved in the work of indigenization of the churches. The independence of the church was a realistic path to resolve this contradiction, and Jia’s justification of the rationalization provided a theoretical endorsement for it.

Jia jumps out of the binary framework of either/or. He chooses to take the ecumenical character of Christianity as his entry point, arguing that Christianity itself is neither Eastern nor Western. Based on the teachings of the Bible, he argues that Christians have a national and ethnic identity and a duty to love their country, but that the nature of the church is spiritual, and spirituality has no national distinctions. Therefore, he does not want to associate the independence of the church with a “nationalism that cuts ties with the Western church”. Indigenization in his eyes should be an initiative to promote the adaptation and spread of Christianity in China within the limits of Scripture, the most fundamental impli-
cation of which is a return to orthodoxy and purity of faith. Therefore, he suggests that the independence is not a clear-cut distinction from the mother church, let alone a mindless xenophobia, but rather a sign of maturity of the Chinese church, a move of mutual fulfillment to sympathize with the evangelistic work of the mother church and to lighten the burden of the mother church. He emphasizes the national identity of Christians while trying hard to eliminate the national attributes of the church. On the one hand, he suggests that the current issue of church camps is a natural result of the church's natural growth and has its own realistic rationality. On the other hand, however, from the point of view of faith, those affected by these divisions should have faith in Christ as a common premise. More importantly, these divisions are due to the limitations of practical conditions, not the original intention of establishing the church. In terms of the ultimate goal, the churches should ultimately be united in Christ. The indigenization of the church is a process of adaptation that the church has to go through in order to develop in a new environment, but the essence of the church after indigenization does not change, and it is in Christ just like the church in other countries. With this argument, he removes the context of indigenization in opposition to the Western church and directs the meaning of indigenization to the stage-by-stage developmental progress of the church from being missionized to independent development. This normalizes the concept of indigenization of the church and removes it from the context of East–West rivalry. In the specific situation of the time, the most fundamental principle that Jia adheres to in the face of the challenges posed by the anti-Christian movement is faith in Christ, that is, the pursuit of a spiritual life. He expects that the current divisions among the churches will also eventually come together as one in the Christendom he looks forward to, resolving conflicts including, but not limited to, those between nations.

Unfortunately, however, in terms of practical results, his idea did not receive a very favorable response. On the one hand, he did not participate in social activities like Wu Yaozong (吴耀宗), Wu Leichuan (吴雷川), and others in the three-self movement but was more concerned with his own theological thinking, and thus did not have any organizational influence. On the other hand, his proposal to dissolve church divisions and conflicts through the pursuit of ultimate spirituality and Christianization was only a vision for the future and could not help in the ongoing practical affairs of the independence of churches. His ideas did not create widespread waves in this historical movement, but Jia’s justification of independence embodied his attempt to reconcile the situation of the church in a theoretical way, which is still worth reviewing and paying attention to. It provides an example of the plurality of perspectives within the independence of churches, which can show us that there was not simply a conflict between East and West in the development of the three-self movement, and that there is room for reconciliation between nationalism and continuity of faith.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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