

The Globalization LSM's Ministry—Triumph or Tragedy?

Evidence from Google Trends 2004-2016

“Blessing in the 1st generation, Organization in the 2nd,...Degradation in the 3rd”—W. Nee

Watchman Nee had remarkable acumen. One example was his identification of a repeating cycle of restoration/degradation in Christian history. Watchman Nee observed a pattern that:

“A person receives much grace and blessing from the Lord...After his generation passes away, the second generation remains somewhat good. But...men...say, ‘...We should form an organization to carry on and maintain this grace.’ By the second or third generation, organization comes in...*They believe that God is the Giver of grace, but they do not believe that God is also the Preserver of grace...*As a result, human...ways and means are introduced in an effort to maintain the blessing...This cycle repeats itself: **blessing in the first generation, organization in the 2nd generation, and degradation in the 3rd generation.**”—W. Nee¹

Watchman Nee saw this pattern in Protestant Christianity and identified its fatal flaw. We ought to ask --Has the Local Church movement (aka the “Lord’s Recovery”) avoided this pitfall? The “Lord’s Present Recovery” began in the 1920s with W. Nee; the past 90-years encompass three generations. One could postulate that Watchman Nee represents the first generation, Witness Lee the second, and LSM’s “Blended Brothers,” the third generation. We ask—Has the Local Church movement replicated this tragic cycle from God’s blessing to human organization and its resulting degradation? Or has the “Lord’s Recovery” escaped this vicious cycle?

***“I’m the continuation of Bro. Nee; I’d like to have a continuation of me...this needs a corporation”*—W. Lee**

One does not have to look very far to find indications of such a cycle in the “Lord’s Recovery.” LSM’s “blended brothers” are on record, reporting that, prior to Witness Lee’s departure, “In a meeting with the brothers [responsible] for Living Stream Ministry, Brother Lee said,

‘My burden is for the recovery based on the interpretation of Brother Nee and me. I am the continuation of Brother Nee; I would like to have a continuation of me, and this needs a corporation...The Living Stream corporation will continue this ministry’ (notes of a meeting of Living Stream, July 12, 1996).”²

Notice that this statement refers to three stages or generations; W. Lee said, “*I am the continuation of Brother Nee; I would like to have a continuation of me...*” Watchman Nee was the first, ‘founding’ generation of the “Lord’s Present Recovery.” Witness Lee asserts that he is “*the continuation of Brother Nee,*” i.e., the second generation. The ‘third generation,’ is not an individual or even a group of people (as one might expect); rather, W. Lee asserts “*a continuation of me...needs a corporation...The Living Stream corporation will continue this ministry.*” Hence, ‘the ministry’ is transmitted from W. Nee to W. Lee, then to LSM; from two ministers of God’s Word to an organization, the LSM Corporation. We note that the formation of “an organization to carry on and maintain this grace” is exactly the degradation which Watchman Nee warned against. Indeed, this crass statement by Witness Lee ought to be a source of embarrassment; we suspect it was only made public in order to legitimate LSM’s blended brothers’ claim to be Witness Lee’s successors.³

Evolution—from Organic to Organizational

Ironically, after ministering for decades on “the organic Body” and insisting that Living Stream Ministry was simply a Levitical service with limited functions, Witness Lee ultimately gave primacy to a human organization--the LSM Corporation. Almost a decade earlier, in July 1988, Witness Lee resolutely declared that:

***“The Living Stream Ministry office is only a business office to serve my ministry for two things: to publish the messages in book form and to distribute these messages in both video and audio tapes. That is all the ministry office should do and nothing else...The ministry office has always had this specific function and no other function. This little office is a Levitical service serving my ministry to put out the word of God in print and through video and audio tapes...We do not have any organization. No one can control the local churches. No one can control anything because we do not have organization among us. I do not control, and the Living Stream office would not control.”*—Witness Lee⁴**

Evidently a dramatic evolution occurred between the time these words were spoken and Witness Lee's passing. In 1988 he adamantly asserted that "we do not have organization among us." Yet, ironically, the very next year Witness Lee founded a key component "institution...the Living Stream Bible Truth & Church Service Training, commonly known as the Full-Time Training in Anaheim (FTTA)," to quote Prof. Paul Chang.⁵ Acting Assistant Professor Chang (UC Riverside) documents its "remarkable success," saying

"In 1989... Witness Lee (Li Changshou) founded [the FTFA] that is now [in 2015] one of the largest post-graduate theological institutions in the US. The school [FTFA] currently enrolls well over 300 full-time equivalents. Bucking national trends, it shows healthy signs of growth...Furthermore these...are only one national manifestation of a larger phenomenon. Internationally, there are about a dozen such schools [FTFs] representing every inhabited continent, all of which trace their founding to the same Chinese-American minister...[the] major Asian-American theological figure"--Witness Lee.⁶

The covert trend of institutionalization meant that, by 1997, LSM was no longer (if it ever was) a "little office... a Levitical service serving my ministry...in print and...video and audio tapes." As Witness Lee contemplated "finishing his course," he asserted that "*the Living Stream Corporation will continue this ministry*" as the "*continuation of me.*" With these words Witness Lee finally acknowledged the "die that had been cast" a decade earlier. Against this backdrop Watchman Nee's words seem prophetic, "men...say, '...We should form an organization to carry on and maintain this grace'." In this case, the organization is the Living Stream Ministry [LSM] Corporation, including the FTFA and other LSM affiliates. W. Nee also identifies the underlying human failure—"They believe that God is the Giver of grace, but they do not believe that God is also the Preserver of grace. They believe in God's blessing, but they cannot believe in God's continual blessing. As a result, human ...ways & means are introduced."⁷ In Watchman Nee's view, relying on an organization (e.g. LSM) represents a departure from God's way. It repeats the "sin of Uzzah," using man's methods to further God's move.⁸

LSM's Globalization of Chinese Christianity

Two decades have elapsed since W. Lee's passing; what has been produced? Prof. Paul Chang chronicles LSM's success story, "Since his death, Lee's followers have continued to propagate & practice his theology. They have now established local congregations in every state in the U.S...Lee and his teachings have raised up indigenous leaders and congregations in many different countries, making him rather unique in Chinese Christianity...And finally, the institution...the Full-Time Training in Anaheim (FTFA), is [a]...remarkable success."⁹

Another sympathetic assessment is entitled "*The Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of Watchman Nee & Witness Lee's Ministry.*" The author, Dr. Yi Liu of Shanghai University, China, states that globalization of 'the ministry' was W. Lee's goal; "As an heir of Watchman Nee...[W. Lee] pushed the global expansion of the ministry to every main continent,"¹⁰ Professor Yi Liu writes. Specifically, "It is in the US that Witness Lee solidified his vision and purpose in building a global ministry."¹¹ Dr. Liu says the human institutions—the LSM Corporation—and its Asian affiliate, the Taiwan Gospel Book Room—facilitated the process of "a Chinese church becoming globalized."¹² "Under the direction of Taiwan Gospel Book Room [TGBR] and Living Stream Ministry," says Dr. Yi Liu, "this originally Chinese ministry has developed a global network of Local Churches across the five continents. It is a rare example of an Asian Christianity assuming global significance." This rare success story, the "globalization of Chinese Christianity," in the form of "W. Nee and W. Lee's Ministry" Dr. Liu attributes not to God's move through the Local Churches, but to the human organizations—LSM and its Taiwan affiliate. We ask: Is this a triumph or a tragedy? Wouldn't Watchman Nee view LSM's 'triumph' as a tragedy?

Substantiating LSM's 'Success Story'

What evidence substantiates LSM's successful globalization? Dr. Liu appeals to meagre statistics. He says,¹³ "There are no exact statistics, but it is estimated that there are about 80,000 to 100,000 followers in mainland China." Elsewhere, "In total, there are about 3,500 churches and 500,000 believers." Although, "The statistics may not be reliable," Dr. Liu, asserts, "one thing is sure: Local Churches are found in every continent. The fact itself is amazing: a church from the non-Western world has become globalized." Dr. Yi Liu's 'bottom-line,' in terms of the evidence of LSM's globalization, is that the Local Church has representation in all five continents.

Is it really “Global”?

Dr. Liu’s thesis is that Witness Lee’s ministry is “global” having spread to all 5 continents. However, we ask: is LSM’s Local Church really global? Take Africa for example. Dr. Liu reports that “there are 1,500 [LSM Local Church believers] in Ghana, 800 in Nigeria, and 200 in South Africa.”¹⁴ Is that all? No other African countries are listed. Plus the number for Ghana (1,500) is highly suspect.¹⁵ The grand total for the whole continent of Africa is 2,500 Local Church members! Global data indicate there are 487M Christians in Africa.¹⁶ So, in Africa, LSM’s Local Church members represent one-in-every-200,000 Christian believers. Africa has 1/4 of the world’s Christians & the highest Christian growth rate among continents. Can we really claim that LSM’s Local Church, with a microscopic share, a token presence in a handful of African countries, has a “global representation”?

Is it really “Local”?

Dr. Liu also contends (without offering any evidence) that “following the principles of the ‘Local Church,’ the converts in every locality are *mainly people of local origin* rather than Chinese immigrants.”¹⁷ I am not aware of any comprehensive data; however, anecdotal evidence suggests that in many countries outside Asia, Local Church membership is *not* representative of the local population. In many North American cities, LSM’s “Local Churches” are not “local” in the sense of being composed “*mainly [of] people of local origin.*” People of Asian-ethnicity & immigrant-origin are typically disproportionately over-represented. Caucasians (euphemistically called “typical Americans”)¹⁸ and Blacks (e.g. US Afro-Americans) are typically disproportionately under-represented in LSM’s Local Churches. Plus these imbalances are more evident in the larger Local Church congregations in major cities.¹⁹ Anecdotal evidence suggests this situation also exists in many LSM “Local Churches” in Western Continental Europe (e.g. Paris). So we ask, when the local population is severely under-represented, are they really “local churches”? Aren’t they merely western branches of an Asian church?

Evidence from Google Trends 2004-2016

The statistics offered by Dr. Yi Liu are inadequate to substantiate the global triumph of W. Lee’s ministry. A comprehensive analysis of these issues requires extensive data which is not immediately available to us. In the interim we offer some preliminary indications using Internet search data, specifically *Google Trends*.²⁰

Google Trends allows users to track the relative number of internet searches for key terms, phrases or topics conducted using the Google search engine over the period 2004 to the present. Interactive graphs and maps are generated depicting monthly figures relative to the highest month (scaled to 100). Hence the number of searches is presented relative to the peak month over the period. Multiple terms can be graphed, relative to the peak month of the most popular search item. Data can also be filtered by the origin of the search inquiry in terms of worldwide, specific countries, etc, plus state, metro-area and city origin, if sufficient data is available.

Previously we used *Google Trends* to document the declining Internet interest in the ministries of Watchman Nee & Witness Lee.²¹ We update that study by adding 24-months of new data for 2015-16. Plus, given Dr. Yi Liu’s emphasis on the role of LSM and its affiliates, we also examine Google searches for “Living Stream Ministry (non-profit corporation).” *Google Trends*’ analytical tools have also been updated making them more useful. Specifically we analyse “Watchman Nee” & “Witness Lee” as search *topics* and not merely search *terms*. Google “search terms” show matches for all terms in the query, *only in the language given*. A search “*topic*” is a group of terms sharing the same concept, *in any language*. So the *topic* ‘Watchman Nee,’ includes searches by his Chinese name, Ni Tuosheng (倪柝声) and related items, for e.g., his books ‘*Spiritual Man*,’ “*Sit, Walk, Stand*,” and “*Spiritual Authority*” (in Spanish, Portuguese, Korean, etc) plus W. Lee’s biography of W. Nee.

Lastly we note that *Google* is the dominant search engine. Globally 74% (Feb. 2016) to 82% (Dec. 2016) of Internet searches used *Google*. Bing is a distant second (6% to 12%). There are, however, notable exceptions; *Google*’s share of Internet searches is tiny in mainland China [Search engine market shares: Baidu: 55%; Qihoo 360: 28%; Sogou: 13%] South Korea [Naver: 77%; Daum: 20%] and (of course) N. Korea. Plus *Google* is a minor player in Russia [Yandex: 58%; *Google*: 34%] Hence our “global” results approximate the world *minus* mainland China²² and South Korea—an important caveat. (Google data from these countries is still included in the worldwide results, since they represent ‘valid’ *Google* searches.)

The Role of Living Stream Ministry (LSM)

Living Stream Ministry is a non-profit US corporation with various affiliates (e.g., Taiwan Gospel Book Room [TGBR]). It publishes Watchman Nee's & Witness Lee's books in many languages; its 'lead product,' the *Recovery Version Study Bible*, contains W. Lee's extensive footnotes. LSM also conducts conferences & trainings promulgating W. Lee's teachings. These include semi-annual 6-day trainings plus the "Full-time trainings" (FTT) for one or two years.²³ It also acts as a central HQ from which LSM's "blended brothers" direct the global network of Local Churches. Dr. Yi Liu's recent article states that.²⁴ "under the direction of Taiwan Gospel Book Room and Living Stream Ministry based in Anaheim, CA, this originally Chinese ministry [i.e., "W. Nee & W. Lee's Ministry"] has developed a global network of Local Churches across the 5 continents." Thus LSM & its Taiwan affiliate [TGBR] are credited with directing the globalization of 'the ministry.' We ask: Does *Google's* Internet data provide evidence of such "globalization" and indicate LSM's role in that globalization?

We postulate that 'W. Lee' and 'W. Nee' are more likely search topics for people making initial contact with LSM's Local Church. Since Watchman Nee is widely recognized and respected among evangelical Christians, his name is often used by Local Churches as an opening gambit when introducing "the Lord's Recovery"²⁵ to other Christians. Witness Lee is then introduced as a "faithful co-worker" of W. Nee. Curious newcomers may follow-up their initial contact with the Local Church movement via a Google search for the names 'W. Nee' &/or 'W. Lee.' Yet W. Nee's ministry has a widespread & abiding appeal, independent of W. Lee and LSM, hence only a fraction of 'W. Nee' searches reflect interest in W. Lee & LSM's Local Church. On the other hand W. Lee wrapped himself in W. Nee's mantle, presenting himself as his successor, so there is a link. We suggest searches for 'W. Lee' are more closely related to inquiries into LSM's Local Church than 'W. Nee' searches.

We posit that "Living Stream Ministry" is a more likely search item for existing members, already affiliated with the Local Churches. As the elders & members of the Local Churches seek to align themselves with LSM in order to be "one with the ministry" and "closely follow the ministry," this generates Google searches for "Living Stream Ministry." Local Church members inquiring about publications (e.g. HWMR), conferences & trainings (including the FTTA, FTTJ, etc) are more likely to search for 'LSM.' Plus workers, church-elders, trainees and translation teams laboring on behalf of 'the ministry' in various countries may communicate extensively with the LSM HQ and its affiliates as they carry out LSM's mission. We argue that Google searches for 'LSM' reflect LSM's Corporation role as "the continuation of Witness Lee." Meanwhile, searches for "Watchman Nee" and "Witness Lee" (especially the latter) more often reflect initial contact with LSM's Local Church. Plus 'W. Lee' searches are likely more closely connected with LSM's Local Church movement, than searches for 'W. Nee.'

Global Results

Figure 1 (below) gives global results for *Google* search topics "Living Stream Ministry (non-profit corp.)," (in blue) "Watchman Nee" (red) & "Witness Lee" (yellow) for the 13-year period, Jan. 1, 2004 to Dec. 31, 2016

'LSM,' 'W. Nee' and 'W. Lee' are all Declining

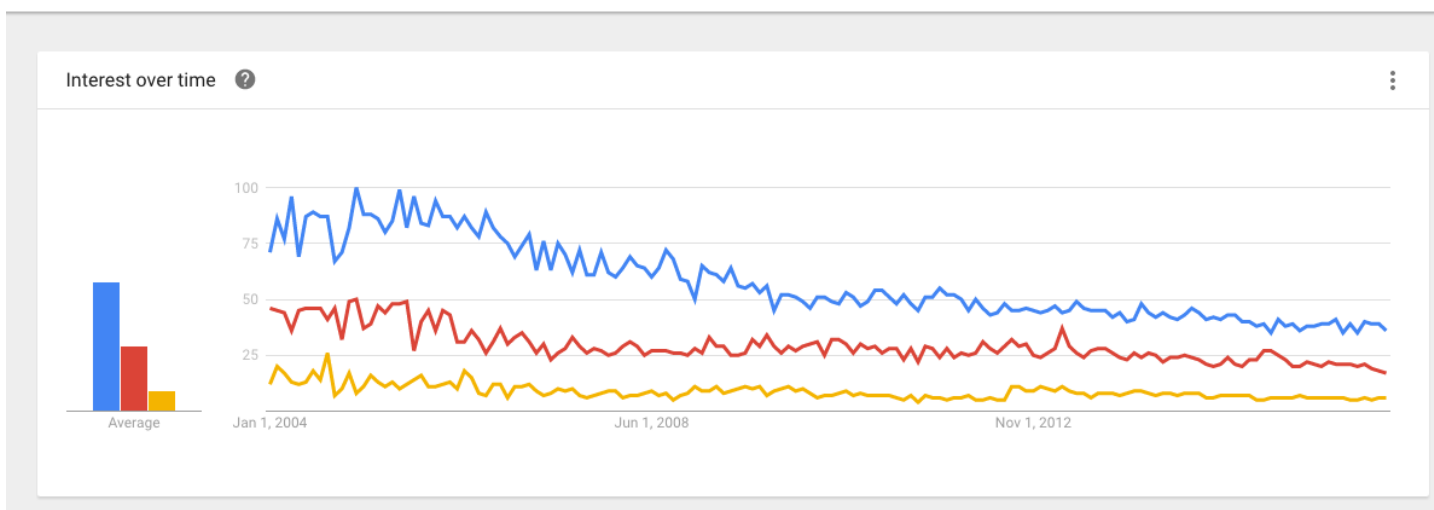
The most striking observation from the Figure is that all three measures--LSM, Watchman Nee and Witness Lee--display a similar pattern--peaking early in the era and declining thereafter (with fluctuations around that downward trend). We ask, looking at the "big picture" presented here, is this suggestive of a 'success story'? Certainly if these graphs represented (say) the total sales of a business, plus its major products, there would be serious cause for concern. Indications of declining interest in the 'lead products' of the LSM-corporation--"Watchman Nee & Witness Lee"--do not portend a bright future. Graphics like these generally depict "mature markets" for older products with heyday long-passed and characterized by declining market share. In this case, they suggest the days of growth are numbered for LSM's ministry; LSM's global success story is about to sour.

Declining Interest in the LSM Corporation

The world-wide *Google* data indicate that search interest in LSM peaked in Jan. 2005 and declined thereafter. Over the 13-year period interest averaged 56% of the peak; for the past 7 years (since Sept. 2009) interest has been below that average and declining. For the past year, Internet interest in 'LSM' has been consistently below 40% of the peak. At the end of the period (Nov./Dec. 2016) interest in LSM was only 35% of the peak.

● Living Stream Mini...
Non profit corporation
● Watchman Nee
Topic
● Witness Lee
Topic
+ Add comparison

Worldwide ▾ 1/1/04 - 12/31/16 ▾ All categories ▾ Web Search ▾



https://www.google.ca/trends/explore?date=2004-01-01%202016-12-31&q=%2Fm%2F02p_q8,%2Fm%2F026rwz,%2Fm%2F01lmcg

Interest in “Watchman Nee” continues to Decline

Interest in the topic “Watchman Nee,” (red) as measured by the Google metric, peaked in early 2004 and then declined. Over the entire 13-year period searches for ‘W. Nee’ averaged only 50% of its early peak. More strikingly, since March 2013 interest has been consistently below that level, on a declining trend. At the end of our observation period (Nov./Dec. 2016) “Watchman Nee” searches were less than 30% of the 2004 peak.²⁶

Interest in “Witness Lee” is declining

Over the whole period Google searches for the topic “Witness Lee” average 30% of those for “Watchman Nee;” ‘W. Lee’ searches (yellow) peaked in Sept. 2004. In the interval 2004-16 search interest in ‘W. Lee’ averaged only 37% of the peak. Since Jun. 2014 it was consistently below 37%. In 2016 interest averaged below 25% of its peak. The decline in Internet interest in both ‘W. Nee’ & ‘W. Lee’ has occurred roughly in parallel, with the result that ‘W. Lee’ has approx. 30% of the search traffic as ‘W. Nee’ throughout the period. Both have declined. Nevertheless the longevity of Watchman Nee’s appeal, some 65 years after his active ministry ended, is striking. Without establishing his own institutional legacy, with a ministry that ended 50 years before W. Lee’s finished, Watchman Nee still ‘out polls’ Witness Lee, in terms of *Google* searches, by a ratio of 3:1. That’s impressive!

‘LSM’ Internet Interest dwarfs ‘W. Nee’ & ‘W. Lee’

The left-hand-side bar-graph conveys a second striking fact--Internet searches for “Living Stream Ministry (non-profit corporation)” (the blue bar) dwarf searches for the topics, “Watchman Nee” (red bar) & “Witness Lee” (yellow bar). Watchman Nee searches are 1/2 (52%) of those for LSM; Witness Lee searches are 16% of LSM. In a pair-wise comparison, W. Lee searches are 30% of those for W. Nee; this is a recurring statistic.

Throughout the period by this metric LSM’s Internet presence dominates that of the two ministers whom LSM promotes; an organization has eclipsed its ministers! Globally, over the 13-year period (2004 to 2016) Google searches for ‘LSM’ outnumber those of ‘W. Nee’ plus ‘W. Lee’ (combined) by a factor of 1.5. Worldwide, searches for ‘LSM’ occur twice as often (1.93) as for ‘W. Nee,’ more than six times as frequently (6.44) as for ‘W. Lee.’ The dominance of ‘LSM’ searches may reflect the abundant resources LSM devoted to promoting these two ministers, especially W. Lee. Yet, the fact that all three measures display a protracted declining trend suggests that LSM (despite its best efforts) has failed to offset an underlying decline in interest. This does not portend a bright future for LSM & its Local Churches; rather it presages slower growth, stagnation or decay.

Cross-Country Comparisons

Google data indicate the origin of searches. 58 countries have sufficient data on one or more index for country-specific analysis. 'LSM' searches register on Google's 'radar' in 50 (86%) of these countries; 'W. Nee' in 39 (67%), & 'W. Lee' in 13 (22%). Notably 8 countries (14%) in two major zones--central Africa & Central America, register for 'W. Nee,' but not 'LSM' or 'W. Lee;' here interest in 'W. Nee' seems independent of LSM & W. Lee. Of the 50 'LSM' countries, in 17 (34%) cases only 'LSM' appears; for 20 countries (40%) only 'LSM' & 'W. Nee' register, while 11 countries²⁷ (20%) yield data on these plus 'W. Lee,' so all 3 indexes are reported. In two cases (4%)--Taiwan & Japan--only 'W. Lee' and 'LSM' register. This is striking--'W. Lee' never registers above Google thresholds in the absence of 'LSM.' This suggests 'W. Lee's' prominence in a country is dependent on LSM's support and promotion. In contrast, 'W. Nee' registers in five countries across Africa (Ivory Coast, Ghana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya) & three Central American countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica), where 'LSM' does not register. This suggests 'W. Nee' has significant appeal independent of LSM and W. Lee. In Global trends (Figure 1) the three measures are positively correlated—they move in the same (downward) direction. However, looking across countries a different pattern emerges. In some major areas--South America (e.g., Brazil, Chile, Venezuela), Central America (e.g. Costa Rica, Guatemala) & Africa (e.g. Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Kenya, & Ethiopia)²⁸ search frequency for 'Watchman Nee' exceeds that for 'LSM.' Elsewhere, 'LSM' searches generally exceed 'W. Nee' (e.g. US, UK, Phil., Mex.). So, across countries, interest in 'W. Nee' & 'LSM' appear inversely related. Again, in no single country does 'W. Lee' exceed 'LSM.' Plus, every country where 'W. Lee' searches register, 'LSM' also registers on Google's 'radar.' Hence, 'W. Lee' appears *dependent* on 'LSM,' and has also been eclipsed by the 'LSM Corporation,' which W. Lee created to be the "continuation of me."²⁹ Does this represent successful globalization? LSM's professed goal is to promote W. Lee's teachings; it ought to raise his profile, not its own. "Witness Lee must increase and LSM must decrease" ought to be LSM's mantra.

Global Variations

Looking across countries, the most dramatic result is that the small Baltic country of Latvia dominates as the source of 'LSM' searches (see below). The 2nd ranked country is Taiwan with 16% of Latvia's volume. 'LSM' searches originate from all continents—Asia (China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan, India), Australia/NZ, Europe (Latvia, Poland, Germany, France, Spain, Belgium, UK), Scandinavia, Africa (S. Africa, Nigeria), N. America (Canada, US, Mex.) & S. America (Columbia, Argentina, Brazil). LSM also registers in predominantly Muslim countries, e.g. Turkey & Pakistan. Gauged by *Google Trends* the LSM Corporation has a global presence.

W. Nee's Ministry is Global; W. Lee's is Not Global

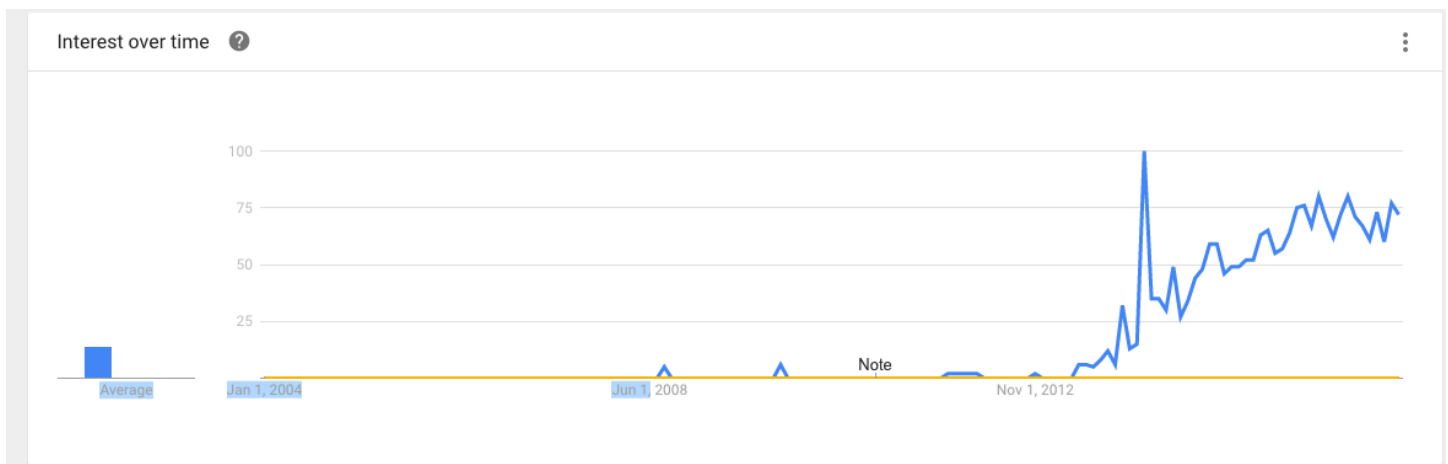
Nigeria generates by far the highest interest in "Watchman Nee." The countries, Columbia, Brazil & Mexico, each had 10-15% of Nigeria's search interest in 'W. Nee.' The US originated about one-tenth (9%) of Nigeria's search level. Canada (6%), India (3%) & UK (3%) also registered as search origins. Looking at global cities, Africa gains focus— Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Abidjan (Ivory Coast), Accra (Ghana) & Lagos (Nigeria) rank 1-2-3-4, then Nairobi (Kenya) in East Africa. This 'cut of the data' also adds Singapore to the mix.³⁰ The net result is that *Google* searches for the topic "Watchman Nee" are widely distributed around the globe; this suggests that, 45-years after his passing, Watchman Nee's ministry still has global appeal, although it is diminishing.

In this *global* three-way comparison, Internet searches for the topic, "Witness Lee" register above *Google's* threshold only for the US (in top spot) & Brazil (at 90% of US level).³¹ But, viewing individual countries adds 11 more—Columbia (S. America), Canada & Mexico, Germany & UK (Europe), Nigeria, China, Taiwan, Japan, Philippines & India (Asia). Google searches for 'Witness Lee' appear more concentrated than LSM or W. Nee.³² These results raise the issue—does Witness Lee's ministry have global appeal? There is little interest in Witness Lee's ministry from vast areas of major importance to global Christianity like Black Africa (from Ivory Coast/Ghana to Ethiopia/Kenya). Among Central African countries with sufficient data, only in Nigeria does 'W. Lee' register on 'the radar,' and then only just.³³ This confirms our doubts about Dr. Liu's statistics for Africa. We ask--if W. Lee's ministry does not generate significant interest across Black Africa, can it be considered 'global'?

In W. Europe, ‘Witness Lee’ only registers on *Google’s* ‘radar’ for the UK and Germany (the latter only just). Meanwhile ‘W. Nee’ registers in these 2 countries plus Netherlands, France, Italy & Spain. ‘LSM’ registers in all these W. European countries, plus 7 more. However, LSM’s activities don’t appear to have generated significant interest in Witness Lee outside the UK & Germany. Here again search interest in Witness Lee appears limited. While Watchman Nee’s ministry generates global interest, W. Lee’s much less so. China, India & Philippines display interest. But, only in two Asian countries—Japan & Taiwan—do Google searches for ‘W. Lee’ exceed those for ‘W. Nee;’ and, as far as global Christianity is concerned, these two nations are minor players.³⁴

Riga, Latvia--Hotbed of LSM Internet Activity

An interesting sidebar is results for the small Baltic country of Latvia. *The premier source of worldwide Google searches for ‘LSM’ is Riga, the capital of Latvia.* If Riga, Latvia is ranked highest, at 100% in terms of ‘LSM’ searches, Lublin (Poland) rates 21% of Riga’s level, followed by Da’an District, Taipei (Taiwan) at 14%,³⁵ Cape Town & Johannesburg (S. Africa) at 13% & 12%, Montreal (Canada) 10%. These results seem bizarre, until we realise that Riga (Latvia) is LSM’s center for its Russian-language work.³⁶ Likewise Lublin is LSM’s Polish center and Taipei’s Da’an district is site of the Church in Taipei Hall #3 (FTTT). Riga’s top ranking could be due to LSM’s Russian activities involving extensive use of LSM’s resources at their US HQ & LSM’s communication with representatives (‘full-timers,’ church-elders & local churches) throughout the Russian-speaking world. Figure #2 graphs the Google results for “LSM (non-profit corp.)” 2004- Jan 2017 for Latvia:³⁷



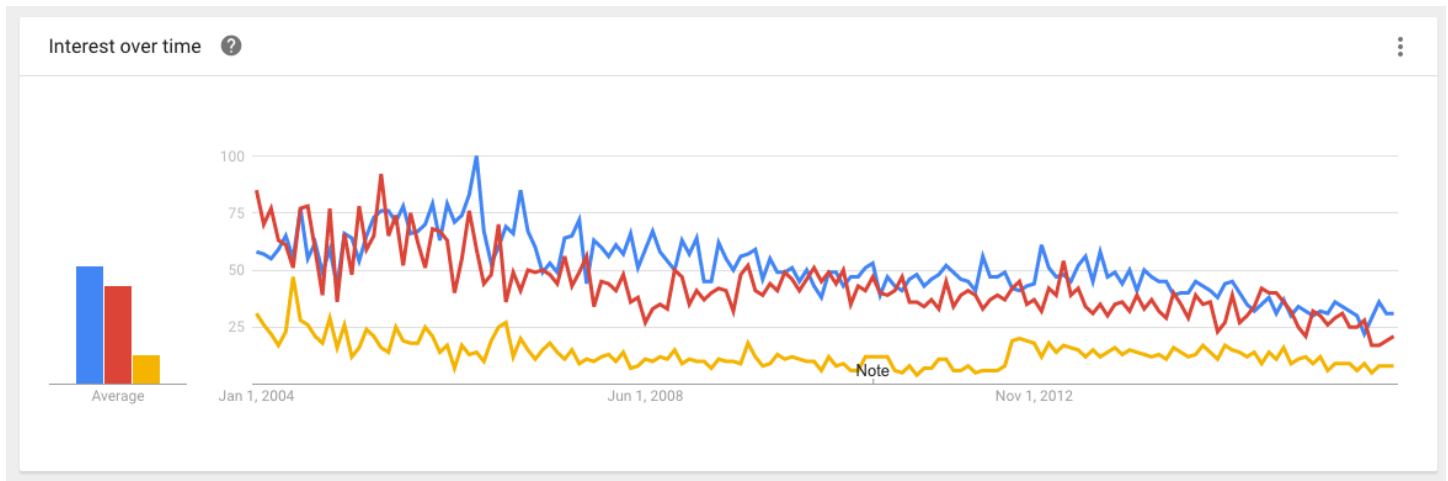
https://www.google.ca/trends/explore?date=all&geo=LV&q=%2Fm%2F02p_q8.%2Fm%2F026rwz.%2Fm%2F01mcb

The graph of Google search activity suggests that Riga, Latvia assumed its role as the hub of LSM’s Russian project from 2013 onwards. These results, linking ‘LSM’ searches with LSM’s centers—Riga Latvia and Da’an District, Taipei (Taiwan)--support our conjecture that this item reflects the organizational activity of people within the Local Church movement (including LSM’s & TGBR’s own personnel), rather than new ‘contacts.’ These results suggest that LSM continues to devote a huge proportion of resources to its Russian-language activities. In terms of countries LSM-related Internet searches linked to Latvia dwarf those from the rest of the world by a factor of 50%.³⁸ We deduce from this that the LSM Corporation continues to invest considerable resources to maintain its Russian-language activities. Indeed, if these Google results are indicative of LSM’s overall resource allocation, the Russian work (based in Riga, Latvia)³⁹ is receiving a disproportional share of resources. Yet *Google Trends* data suggest that the returns on this investment are meagre. In Eastern Europe (including Russia) the topic “Witness Lee” never registers on Google’s radar. In Russia, Poland, and Ukraine⁴⁰ ‘LSM’ and “Watchman Nee” transcend Google’s data threshold; but “Witness Lee” does not.

US Google Search Trends

Figure #3 (below) presents the US results for 1/1/2004 to 12/31/2016 with LSM (in blue), W. Nee (red), & W. Lee (yellow). If we focus on the US a similar picture emerges to the global results. The left-hand-side bar-graph indicates that LSM (the blue bar) received the most Google searches, followed by W. Nee (red bar; ~85% of

LSM), then W. Lee (yellow bar; 25% of LSM). A pair-wise comparison shows the search volume for W. Lee is only 30% of that for W. Nee; this ratio is the same as the global figure (see Figure 1 above).



https://www.google.ca/trends/explore?date=2004-01-01%202016-12-31&geo=US&q=%2Fm%2F02p_q8,%2Fm%2F026rwz,%2Fm%2F01mcg

‘LSM,’ ‘W. Nee’ & ‘W. Lee’ all in Decline

US Google searches for LSM (non-profit corporation) (in blue) reach an annual peak in July at LSM’s training; the highest peak was in July 2006. Since then it has trended downwards. Over the 13-years, interest averaged half the peak (47%). Since Aug. 2013 Internet interest has been consistently below that average. For the past year (2016) it has fluctuated around 1/3 of the peak. This suggests declining US search interest in ‘LSM.’

The data indicate that US Internet interest in all 3 search topics—‘LSM,’ ‘W. Nee’ & ‘W. Lee’—is declining. Since all three have declined roughly in parallel the ratios are (overall) little changed. Over the past 13-years interest in the search topic ‘W. Nee’ was 83% of that in ‘LSM,’ and searches for ‘W. Lee’ have averaged 25% of LSM. W. Lee searches were 30% of those for W. Nee. I see little in these results to encourage LSM-adherents. Perhaps a glimmer of hope it lies in the mid-2012 up-tick in W. Lee interest. By June 2012 W. Lee searches dipped to 42% of their average. Then from June to Sept. 2012 the index rose to 180% of its average—a fourfold increase. But after this dramatic up-tick W. Lee searches resumed their downward trend, ending 2016 at 2/3 the average; Hence, in retrospect, it was a temporary pause in the decline, not a reversal of the overall declining trend.

Impact of US Congress’ Recognition

The US Congress officially recognized both, Watchman Nee & Witness Lee, the former July 30 2009, the latter Sept. 27, 2014. Do the Google data indicate any impact? Recognition might have had a short-term effect. From July to Aug. 2012 Google searches for W. Nee rose by ~12%. However, the following month they fell 22%. The impact of W. Lee’s recognition is similar—a one-month boost, offset by the next month’s decline. No doubt there *was* an effect on the morale of LSM’s Local Church, but we can’t detect any lasting effects on our metrics.

US Geographic Variations

The regional distribution of ‘LSM’ searches is unsurprising; CA, WA, & TX rank 1-2-3. When sorted by city, Los Angeles & San Diego, CA. take the top two spots, in a virtual tie, followed by Dallas & Houston, TX; then SF, NYC and Chicago round out 7 US cities that register on Google’s ‘radar.’

Google searches for ‘W. Nee’ are widely distributed across the US, roughly matching the distribution of evangelical Christians. Twenty-one US states—including the most populous—register. Interest is highest in the SE states (Virginia to Florida), Texas follows, plus the mid-West states. On the West coast, CA & WA register, plus AZ & CO. The NE also registers (PA, NY, NJ, MD, MA). About 18 Metropolitan areas distributed across the US, led by Charlotte, NC, register as origins for ‘Watchman Nee’ searches, suggesting widely-dispersed interest. Again the picture for “Witness Lee’ searches is more concentrated; only four states CA, TX (72% of CA), NY (33% of CA) & VI (28% of CA) among 50 states, register above the threshold. Only six metro-areas: Sacramento (100%), LA (89%) San Fran./San Jose (52%) Dallas/Fort Worth (48%) DC (32%) & NYC (21%) register.

High Interest in W. Nee linked to Low Interest in LSM/W. Lee

When examining 'LSM' and 'W. Nee' jointly, an interesting pattern emerges. For the whole US 'LSM' searches exceed 'W. Nee'—100% to 83%. Of the 27 US states that register, 15 states exhibit greater search interest in Watchman Nee than in LSM; these 15 are concentrated in the SE (VI to AL, LA, FL, & TN) plus the line of states from PA to CO (excluding IL). Elsewhere, for 12 states 'LSM' searches exceed "W. Nee;" these include the US West Coast, TX, & the North East, plus Midwest states—WI, IL, MI. Thus there are regional differences, with the US SE, the "Bible Belt," more interested in W. Nee's ministry than LSM. Looking at 'W. Nee' searches by Metro area, Raleigh/Durham (NC) ranks #1, (100%), Columbus (OH) ranks #2, (95%) followed by Dallas/Ft. Worth, TX #3 (89%), Atlanta, GA (84%) & San Antonio, TX (82%). These Metro-areas traverse the "Bible Belt." Here again there's a suggested inverse relation—a high interest in W. Nee linked with a low interest in 'LSM.'

Turning to "Witness Lee" as a US search topic, while 24 states register for 'LSM' searches, only four register for 'W. Lee'—CA, TX, NY & VI. These 4 also register for 'LSM,' hence *there is no state where 'W. Lee' registers, but not 'LSM,' and no state where 'W. Lee' searches exceed 'LSM.'* Again this suggests dependence—interest in W. Lee is dependent upon LSM's support & promotion. Yet some regions where interest in LSM is high (e.g. the NW⁴¹) fail to register for 'W. Lee;' here it seems LSM has failed to generate interest in W. Lee. Prof. P. Chang observes "Lee's followers...have now established local congregations in every state in the U.S."⁴² Yet *Google* data suggests that in many states there is merely a token presence of LSM's Local Church. In 46 states searches for the "major Asian-American theological figure"--Witness Lee--fail to register on *Google Trends'* radar.

'W. Lee' is searched only 30% as frequently as 'W. Nee.' In some respects regions of high search interest for W. Nee or W. Lee are disjoint. The SE US states exhibit a high level of interest in 'Watchman Nee.' Meanwhile, the SE states don't register above the threshold for 'Witness Lee.' Plus 8 Midwest US states register for 'W. Nee,' but not for 'W. Lee.' Apparently in some US regions—for example, the SE & the Midwest—the two ministries are considered as alternatives, rather than as complements. Witness Lee always claimed to be Watchman Nee's continuation, but these US regions don't seem to treat him as such; rather a greater affinity for Watchman Nee seems associated with disinterest in Witness Lee.

US vs. the Rest-of-the World

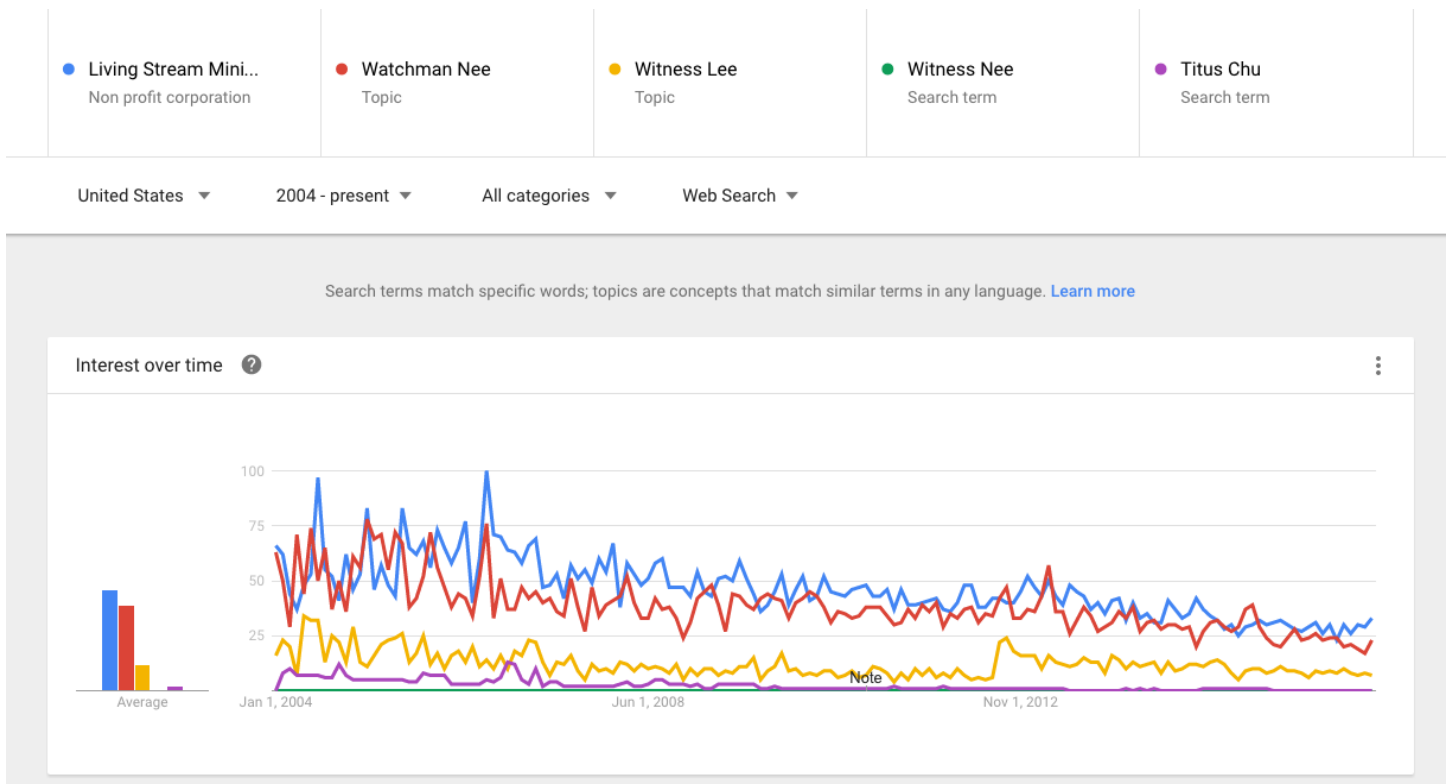
A major difference between the US and the global results (above) is a lower level of US Internet searches for 'LSM' relative to those for 'W. Nee' & 'W. Lee.' Globally, combining the searches for W. Nee and W. Lee equal approximately two-thirds (65%) of the 'LSM' search level. In the US the combination exceeds 100% (~110%) of the LSM search level. Stated differently, *Google* searches for 'W. Lee' were around 15% of 'LSM' searches worldwide; that number is almost double (26%) in the US. Likewise, the search topic, 'W. Nee' was around 50% (53%) of LSM searches globally; in the US, this number is around 80%. Hence, *Google's* Internet data imply that, outside the US, the LSM-corporation assumes a more important role than the 'one ministry' of W. Nee & W. Lee. In the US the opposite is true— *Google* searches for 'W. Nee' or 'W. Lee' are more important relative to 'LSM.' Despite this contrast, W. Lee's importance relative to W. Nee is the same—30%--for the US & the globe.

US—LSM vs. Titus Chu

Before leaving the US let's take a moment to analyse the effects of LSM's October, 2006, public quarantine [excommunication] of Titus Chu, a worker among the Great Lakes Area [GLA] Local Churches. Figure 4 (below) reproduces the graphs for the US adding the *Google* search term,⁴³ "Titus Chu" (in purple) to the three series tracked in Figure 3. It also extends the data by including Jan. 2017.

The graph for "Titus Chu" (in purple) tracks below the other series and also has an overall declining trend. Over the entire period "Titus Chu" was searched one-fifth (18.75%) as often as "W. Lee," and only 6% of "W. Nee's" search frequency. Interest in "Titus Chu" peaked in Oct./Nov. 2006, the date of LSM's "quarantine," declining thereafter. In recent years US *Google* search interest in 'Titus Chu' appears to be minimal and sporadic.

What were the effects of LSM's quarantine? We divide the data into pre- and post-quarantine. Before LSM's quarantine, interest in 'T. Chu' was about 30% (28.6%) of 'W. Lee,' and about 15% (12.9%) of 'W. Nee.' After LSM's quarantine (Oct. 2006 onwards), 'T. Chu' fell by one-half (to 14.3%) relative to 'W. Lee,' and by two-



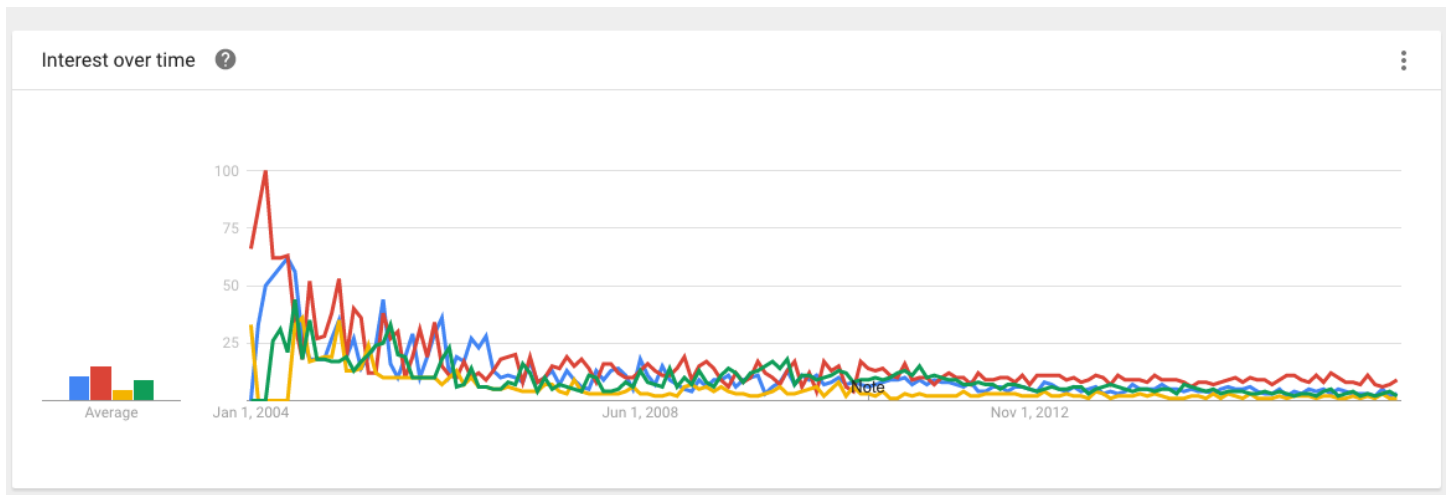
https://www.google.ca/trends/explore?date=2004-01-01%202017-01-30&geo=US&q=%2Fm%2Fo2p_q8,%2Fm%2Fo26rwz,%2Fm%2Fo1mcg,Witness%20Nee,Titus%20Chu

thirds (to 4.3%) relative to ‘W. Nee.’ Clearly in these data, quarantine seems to have had a sizeable negative effect on ‘Titus Chu.’ But this is not the whole story. The same data partition shows a negative effect on ‘W. Lee.’ Before LSM’s quarantine, search frequency for ‘W. Lee’ was 45% of ‘W. Nee’s’ frequency; after LSM’s quarantine, ‘W. Lee’ fell to 30% (29.5%) of ‘W. Nee.’ We conclude that LSM’s actions damaged both “brands”—that of ‘Titus Chu’ and also that of ‘W. Lee.’ Yet, the effect on Titus Chu appears greater—while ‘W. Lee’ fell by *one-third* (relative to W. Nee), ‘Titus Chu’ fell by *two-thirds*. W. Nee’s ‘brand’ appears unscathed.⁴⁴ We believe these asymmetric effects are due (in part) to LSM’s strength in terms of money, manpower & legal resources.

Brazil—LSM vs. Editora Arvore da Vida

Brazil’s situation is worth a closer look in view of the on-going conflict between Witness Lee’s LSM-corporation and Yu-Lan Dong’s *Arvore da Vida* [‘Tree of Life’] organization.⁴⁵ LSM’s ‘blended brothers’ also quarantined [excommunication] Yu-Lan Dong (along with Titus Chu of the US Great Lakes area) in Oct. 2006. In 2009 they further revoked *Árvore da Vida*’s right to translate W. Nee’s and W. Lee’s writings into Portuguese.

The search term “*Editora Arvore da Vida*” [Editor Tree of Life] is used to proxy Yu-Lan Dong’s organization.⁴⁶ Figure 5 (below) displays 4 items—“LSM” (in blue), the topics ‘W. Nee’ (red), ‘W. Lee’ (yellow) and the search term “*Editora Arvore da Vida*” [EAdV] (in green) for Brazil. In a pattern now familiar to us, all four series peak early in the period (2004-5) and decline thereafter. Overall, as shown by the left-hand-side bar-graph, the most popular search topic in Brazil is ‘W. Nee,’ (red bar) followed by ‘LSM’ (blue bar, ~75% of W. Nee), “EAdV” (green ~60%) and ‘W. Lee’ (yellow bar, ~45% of W. Nee). The first half of Figure 4 is an interwoven profusion. However, later a clear ‘leader’ emerges. We note that comparing the last 5 years to the prior period, searches for ‘Watchman Nee’ have increased *relative* to both ‘LSM’ & “W. Lee;” thus the red line—‘W. Nee’—emerges above the others on the right-hand-side of Figure 5. Meanwhile the ‘W. Lee’ series ‘bounces along the bottom.’ The rival organizations—‘LSM’ (blue) & “EAdV” (green)—have remained stable relative to one another, while both have declined. We suspect the on-going conflict between W. Lee’s LSM-Corp. & Yu-Lan Dong’s *Editora Arvore da Vida* has damaged both their “brands.” Unfortunately, the “saints,” are treated as the “spoils of war” in this conflict between Yu-Lan Dong & LSM’s ‘blended brothers’ over who is W. Lee’s legitimate successor.



https://www.google.ca/trends/explore?date=all&geo=BR&q=%2Fm%2F02p_q8.%2Fm%2F026rwz.%2Fm%2F01mcg.editora%20Arvore%20da%20vida

Interest in ‘W. Lee’ has declined from about 1/2 of ‘W. Nee’ (47% 2004-10) to about 30% (32% 2011-16) which suggests damage to “W. Lee’s” brand from the conflict; thus the “spoils” accruing to LSM’s ‘blended brothers’ are less than anticipated. Meanwhile, Watchman Nee’s “brand,” which existed prior to both Yu-Lan Dong and LSM’s ‘blended brothers,’ is more resilient and has emerging relatively unscathed. These findings for Brazil are consistent with those related to Titus Chu in the US (above). Perhaps these two cases help explain why Witness Lee’s ‘brand’ displays only a fraction—typically 30%--of W. Nee’s search interest. We find that LSM’s predatory actions against T. Chu & Y-L Dong have damaged the ‘W. Lee brand.’ This suggests that Witness Lee’s prior predatory⁴⁷ initiatives—e.g. his ‘one publication’ policy vs. Bill Freeman (Seattle, 1986) & *Fermentation of the Present Rebellion* (~1990) vs. John Ingalls, Bill Mallon, John So, Joseph Fung—also damaged his own ‘brand.’

Conclusions

20 years after his passing, academics recently discovered Witness Lee.⁴⁸ In their euphoria they declared the globalization of W. Lee’s ministry via his LSM Corporation & its affiliates (e.g. FTTA) an unparalleled success story. Their writings will be trumpeted among LSM’s Local Churches as a vindication of the “Lord’s Recovery.” Such celebration would be misplaced and premature. While announcing LSM’s “success story,” these scholars recognize the “globalization of W. Lee’s ministry” is the globalization of *an institution*--the LSM Corporation. Watchman Nee, the Recovery’s “founding father,” eloquently warned against repeating the cycle of “blessing in the first generation, organization in the 2nd generation, and degradation in the 3rd generation.”⁴⁹ Yet, Witness Lee not only repeated this cycle, he formally established it, saying, “I am the continuation of Brother Nee; I would like to have a continuation of me, and this needs a corporation...The Living Stream Corporation...”

We analysed *Google Trends* data to examine the scholars’ globalization hypothesis. We posit that searches for “LSM (non-profit corporation)” largely represent the activities of LSM & its affiliates (TGBR, trainees, elders, translators, etc) as it directs its personnel and interacts with existing Local Church members. The finding that ‘LSM’ searches identify Riga, Latvia and Da’an District, Taipei, Taiwan as LSM hubs supports this contention. We graphed *Google* search topics—Watchman Nee & Witness Lee--against the LSM data. Our key findings are:

1. Globally and for the US, *Google* searches for ‘LSM’ exceed those for ‘W. Nee,’ which (in turn) exceeds ‘W. Lee.’ All 3 series display overall declining trends (with fluctuations). These trends are not LSM’s friends.
2. Latvia is a notable exception--*Google* searches for ‘LSM’ rose sharply. It is the hub for LSM’s Russian work
3. Only in two small Asian countries—Japan & Taiwan—does search interest in W. Lee exceed that of W. Nee.
4. In all the countries with sufficient data, both Watchman Nee & Witness Lee manifest declining search interest. There is *not one significant country where Google search interest* for these 2 topics is growing.
5. We find evidence of globalization: Both LSM & W. Nee display a global presence. However, ‘W. Nee’ is not dependent on ‘LSM.’ ‘W. Nee’ search interest registers in Africa (Ghana, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya) & C. America (El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala) where ‘LSM’ doesn’t register on *Google*’s ‘radar.’

6. The volume & dispersion of ‘W. Lee’ searches is much more limited. ‘W. Lee’ registers in only 13 (26%) of LSM’s 50 countries. There is no country where ‘Witness Lee’ registers where ‘LSM’ does not; this suggests dependence. The results suggest LSM’s globalization has not generated a global interest in “Witness Lee.”
7. 65 years after his active ministry ended W. Nee retains his global appeal. He never established his own institution to perpetuate his legacy, yet W. Nee still ‘out polls’ W. Lee by a ratio of 3:1. Despite establishing the LSM Corporation as his continuation, ‘W. Lee’ searches are only 30% of ‘W. Nee,’ globally & in the US.
8. Witness Lee’s ministry has not been globalized, despite LSM’s global reach. Black Africa fails to register significant search interest in ‘Witness Lee.’ Plus Witness Lee’s appeal in continental Europe is minimal.
9. The 3 time-series are positively correlated (all exhibit downward trends) yet, across countries & US regions ‘W. Nee’ & ‘W. Lee’ seem inversely related; areas of high W. Nee appeal have low interest in W. Lee. W. Lee’s repeatedly claimed to be W. Nee’s continuation, but Christian ‘consumers’ do not treat him as such.
10. *Google Trends*’ data suggests that LSM’s predatory behavior—quarantining Titus Chu (US Great Lakes) & Yu-Lan Dong (Brazil)—has damaged the reputations of those attacked. However, it has *also damaged W. Lee’s reputation* (relative to W. Nee). Meanwhile W. Nee’s reputation has emerged relatively unscathed.

We are well aware that “statistics do not speak for themselves,” as Milton Friedman, Nobel Prize Economist, famously said; they require interpretation. While alternative theories are possible, we offer the following, guided by the principle of “Ockham’s razor”—simpler explanations are preferable to more complex ones.⁵⁰

We suggest reasons for the decade-long decline in the three metrics: LSM & its affiliates offer only two “product lines”—the ministries of W. Lee and W. Nee. These define LSM’s “brand;” LSM’s own teachings preclude them from ‘expanding their product line.’ W. Lee’s theology was “canonized in 1997;” his entire corpus has now been translated & published online & in print. It is fixed like the law of the Medes & Persians (Dan. 6:8, 15). W. Lee’s teachings define Local Church orthodoxy and its orthopraxy. Practices W. Lee endorsed are accepted; those he condemned are rejected. Contemporary Christian music & drama videos, for e.g., are anathema to LSM and its Local Churches.⁵¹ They have ‘painted themselves into a corner’ in terms of innovation & future development. LSM’s Local Church is a “one-trick pony;” it has W. Lee’s teachings and nothing else. No new hymns or worship songs were produced, besides unsingable “banner songs”—W. Lee’s slogans set to music.⁵² LSM’s unchanging ‘product’—Witness Lee’s teachings—in the context of a changing society is a recipe for decline.

Witness Lee claimed his ministry was ‘Joseph’s storehouse’ in the midst of Christianity’s ‘famine.’⁵³ Our analysis belies this myth. We find no evidence of a huge pent-up demand among ‘starving Christians’ for W. Lee’s teachings. Only in two Asian countries, both with small Christian populations—Taiwan & Japan—do we find interest in ‘W. Lee’ surpassing that of ‘W. Nee.’ Elsewhere, despite LSM’s concerted efforts to promote his ministry, search interest in Witness Lee falls far short of Watchman Nee, both in volume and global reach. Without established his own institution to perpetuate his legacy, W. Nee still achieves a level of influence far greater than W. Lee. Conversely, despite establishing the LSM Corporation as his continuation, Witness Lee’s influence is substantially less than W. Nee—‘W. Lee’ searches are only 30% of ‘W. Nee,’ globally and in the US.

LSM’s Widening ‘Relevance Gap’

LSM’s teachings & practices haven’t changed for two decades. Meanwhile, the issues confronting Christians have changed; the “relevance gap” between LSM’s publications and Christians’ concerns has widened. LSM’s publications do not address issues raised by Islam & radical jihad, for e.g.⁵⁴ where does radical Islam fit in LSM’s prophetic scenario? To cite another e.g., searching LSM for “environment, climate change, global warming,” produces no significant results. Homosexuality,⁵⁵ gay rights, and same-sex marriage are never addressed; yet these are ‘hot topics’ which Christians in 21st-century N. America are being forced to address. Neither W. Lee nor W. Nee addressed these issues, since they were not ‘front and center’ during their era. Perhaps the indexes’ declining interest reflects the principle espoused by Watchman Nee—“David served his own generation [Acts 13:36], he could not serve two.”⁵⁶ If W. Nee and W. Lee were indeed “ministers of the Age,” that “age” was the 20th century, not the 21st. Their destiny is decline, a destiny which organized institutions, like Witness Lee’s LSM Corporation, can temporarily forestall, but cannot prevent long-term.

Nigel Tomes,
Toronto, CANADA,
January, 2017

Notes

Thanks are extended to those who commented on earlier drafts. The author alone is responsible for the contents of this piece. The views expressed here are solely the author's and should *not* be attributed to any believers, elders, co-workers or churches with which he is associated.

1. W. Nee, *Messages for Building up New Believers*, Vol. 3, Ch. 11, Sect. 7 (emphasis added). The quote in context reads: "Another phenomenon among Protestants is this cycle: A person is raised up during a certain generation. This person receives much grace & blessing from the Lord; much blessing is manifested in his generation. After his generation passes away, the 2nd generation remains somewhat good. But by the end of the 2nd generation, men begin to pay attention to other things. They begin to say, 'We have received so much grace from the Lord; we should think of some means to preserve this grace. We should form an organization to carry on & maintain this grace.' By the 2nd or 3rd generation, organization comes in. Sometimes organization comes in even by the end of the 1st generation. *They believe that God is the Giver of grace, but they do not believe that God is also the Preserver of grace. They believe in God's blessing, but they cannot believe in God's continual blessing.* As a result, human creeds, regulations, & ways & means are introduced in an effort to maintain the blessing. When the fountain is closed, the water in the pool dries up sooner or later; the water level no longer rises. By the 3rd generation, the condition becomes quite dead, & everything reverts to the same condition as before, a condition which they originally came out of. Then God has to go to another person or to a few persons who will seek new vision, new blessing, new separation, & new grace. This will bring in another period of revival. This cycle repeats itself: blessing in the 1st generation, organization in the 2nd generation, & degradation in the 3rd generation." [W. Nee, *Messages for Building up New Believers*, Vol. 3, Ch. 11, Sect. 7]
2. The quote in context reads: "... In a meeting with the brothers to whom he committed the responsibility for Living Stream Ministry, Brother Lee said, 'My burden is for the recovery based on the interpretation of Brother Nee and me. *I am the continuation of Brother Nee; I would like to have a continuation of me, and this needs a corporation ...The Living Stream corporation will continue this ministry*' (from unpublished notes of a meeting of Living Stream, July 12, 1996). He placed the direction of this corporation for the continuation and publication of the ministry in the hands of a group of blended brothers, who labor to fulfill this charge before the Lord..." [Emphasis added] This quote might be considered an embarrassment to Witness Lee & LSM's "Blended Brothers." However, LSM's "Blended Brothers need this statement (or something similar) to establish the validity of their claim to be the legitimate successors of Witness Lee & his ministry.
3. Witness Lee always claimed his ministry was the same as Watchman Nee's, that they had the same ministry. For e.g. W. Lee said, "In the Lord's recovery today there is not only my ministry but also Brother Watchman Nee's ministry. *These are not two ministries; they are one ministry and one speaking.*" [W. Lee, *Crucial Principles for the Proper Church Life*, Ch. 4, Sect. 2] He also asserted that "It is also a devilish, subtle lie to say that...Witness Lee is different from Watchman Nee...We need to see...the real ministry that the Lord has given us through Brother Nee. His [W. Nee's] ministry was... the ministry of Christ for the church...eventually this becomes our ministry." [W. Lee, *History of the Church & the Local Churches*, Ch. 8, Sect. 8]
4. W. Lee, *Timely Word*, Ch. 3, Sect. 3 & also *Elders' Training, Bk. 9: Eldership & the God-Ordained Way (1)*, Ch. 5, St. 5 (emphasis added)
5. Paul H. B. Chang, "Multiple Invisibilities of Witness Lee," *Journal of Asian/North American Theological Educators (JANATE)* Vol. 2, #1 (2016) p. 97
6. Paul H. B. Chang, "Multiple Invisibilities of Witness Lee," *Journal of Asian/North American Theological Educators (JANATE)* Vol. 2, no. 1 (2016) p. 93. The quote in context reads: "In 1989...Witness Lee (Li Changshou) founded [the FTTA] that is now *one of the largest post-graduate theological institutions in the US.* The school currently enrolls well over 300 full-time equivalents. Bucking national trends, it shows healthy signs of growth, recently opening an extension campus in Boston to complement its main campus in S. California. Furthermore, these N. American campuses are only one national manifestation of a larger phenomenon. Internationally, there are about a dozen such schools representing every inhabited continent, all of which trace their founding to the same Chinese-American minister...a major Asian-American theological figure." [Paul H. B. Chang, "Multiple Invisibilities of Witness Lee," *Journal of Asian/North American Theological Educators (JANATE)* Vol. 2, no. 1 (2016) p. 93] Regarding the FTT "full-

- time training: in addition to Taiwan [FTTT], other centers were established in the Philippines in 1984; Anaheim, California in 1989; Moscow, in 1992; Hamilton, New Zealand, in 1993; Jakarta in 1995; Seoul in 1996; and London in 1997,” writes Yi Liu, “*Globalization of Chinese Christianity*,” Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 106
7. W. Nee, *Messages for Building up New Believers*, Vol. 3, Ch. 11, St. 7
 8. Concerning the case of Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:6-11), W. Nee says, “God did not allow man to uphold errors with fleshly hands. Perhaps you think that your idea is better than God’s ways. But God will not allow you to change anything. You can only work according to God’s design.” [W. Nee, *Collected Works*, Vol. 37, Ch. 34, Sect. 4] In this context W. Lee says, “David was indeed wrong in moving the ark according to the worldly way...” Then he asks, “Is your way by ‘the cart,’ or by the priests carrying the ark? Are you proceeding according to the worldly system, or according to God’s revelation?” [W. Lee, *Vision of God’s Building*, Ch. 10, Sect. 2] This question ought to be asked of LSM’s role.
 9. Paul H. B. Chang, “*Multiple Invisibilities of Witness Lee*,” JANATE, Vol. 2, #1 (2016) p. 97
 10. Yi Liu, “*Globalization of Chinese Christianity*,” Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 108
 11. Yi Liu, “*Globalization of Chinese Christianity*,” Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 111
 12. Dr. Yi Liu writes “Witness Lee’s journey exemplifies a *Chinese church becoming globalized* as a result of political, religious and international changes in the latter half of the 20th century.” (Yi Liu, “*Globalization of Chinese Christianity*,” Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 97)
 13. Yi Liu, “*Globalization of Chinese Christianity*,” Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 110. Elsewhere Dr. Liu writes, “The Local Church Movement initiated by Watchman Nee (1903-1972) & Witness Lee (1905-1997), is one of few Chinese Christian churches, which went global...” writes Dr. Yi Liu of Shanghai University, China. [Yi Liu, “*Building a Global Network of Local Churches: Vital Group, Home Meeting, & Corporate Body*,” International Journal of Sino-Western Studies (English translation of the Chinese abstract)] Regarding the statistics reported by Dr. Liu, he reports that in “the author’s communication with some leading persons of the [LSM] movement, there is no exact statistics of its members. *Sometimes, they do not even know where these numbers come from.*” [Yi Liu, “*Globalization of Chinese Christianity*,” Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 110, note 27]
 14. Yi Liu, “*Globalization of Chinese Christianity*,” Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 110
 15. About 5 years ago the author visited & ministered among the *non-LSM* local churches in Ghana (e.g. Accra, Kumasi, etc). During that 3-week visit, this author saw no evidence for the presence of significant LSM-linked local churches in Ghana. The local churches in Ghana were raised up by Brother Ransford Ackah. After the 1980s “turmoil” [John Ingalls (US), Bill Mallon (US), John So (Germany), Joseph Fung (HK) were excommunicated (‘quarantined’)] Ransford & the local churches in Ghana were “cut loose” by W. Lee & LSM, suspected of being too closely related to these 4 brothers. These local churches are the ones this author visited; they are not affiliated with LSM & reject such links. W. Lee & LSM have never restored their level of influence in W. Africa or (for that matter) Germany. We suggest that the number for Ghana is one case where “*they [LSM] do not even know where these numbers come from*” (n. 13 above).
 16. “*Status of Global Missions, 2012...*” International Bulletin of Missionary Research, Vol., 36, No. 1 (Jan. 2012) p. 29
 17. Yi Liu, “*Globalization of Chinese Christianity*,” Asia Journal of Theology, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 110 (emph. added)
 18. W. Lee said, “The Lord did not want me to work among the Chinese immigrants. Rather, He wanted me to bring His recovery to *the typical Americans.*” [W. Lee, *Rising up to Preach the Gospel*, p. 22 (emphasis added)]
 19. Even among the non-LSM Great Lakes Area ‘local churches,’ in many places the Asian presence is predominant. Among those I am somewhat familiar with, the “Church in Naperville” (IL.), the “Church in Ann Arbor” (MI), the “Church in Mississauga” (ON, Canada) & the “Church in Montreal” (PQ, Canada) are all essentially “Chinese-churches,” largely composed of people of mainland Chinese- (or more generally Asian-) origin. In these “Local Churches,” “Chinese-speaking meeting” attendants often outnumber the “English- (or French-) speaking meeting;” the latter being composed mainly of 2nd-generation, young people of Asian ethnicity. Moreover, these churches operate within an Asian-cultural milieu.
 20. <https://www.google.ca/trends/?hl=en>
 21. See my: “*Signs of Decline in LSM’s ‘Recovery’*” <http://localchurchdiscussions.com/vBulletin/showthread.php?t=5263>
It is important to note that the present piece is not merely a replication & up-dating of the previous article. Google Trends’ analytical tools have been significantly enhanced. Plus here we analyse the role of the LSM Corporation.
 22. Google Trends generates charts for China. However, given the tiny fraction of searches conducted via Google it is highly unlikely that Google data is representative of the country as a whole (e.g. foreign nationals are likely over-represented). Similarly charts can be generated for S. Korea, but are they representative of the whole country? “Worldwide” results incorporate the un-representative samples from China & S. Korea (They are legitimate parts of Google’s global searches

- for our indexes). Since these Google samples are unlikely to be representative of China (or S. Korea) as a whole we forgo any discussion of the *Google* country-specific results for China or S. Korea (we include them in country-counts).
23. Officially known as the *Living Stream Bible Truth & Church Service Training*, but, commonly known as the Full-Time Training in Anaheim (FTTA), the Full-Time Training in Jakarta, Indonesia (FTTJ) etc..
 24. Yi Liu, “*Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of Watchman Nee & Witness Lee’s Ministry*,” *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016) p. 96
 25. Professor Paul Chang notes Watchman Nee’s widespread reputation when he writes, Witness “Lee’s message [was] derived from [W.] Nee’s... In the context of the Cold War, Watchman Nee’s imprisonment was something of a *cause célèbre* in the evangelical subculture.” [Paul H. B. Chang, “*Multiple Invisibilities of Witness Lee*,” *Journal of Asian/North American Theological Educators (JANATE)* Vol. 2, no. 1 (2016) p. 94]
 26. These observations are based on a *Google Trends* pair-wise comparison of ‘W. Nee’ & ‘W. Lee’ (without ‘LSM’). That figure is not reproduced here)
 27. The 11 countries where all 3 indexes are above *Google Trends*’ thresholds are: [1] Americas: Canada, US, Mexico, Columbia, Brazil, [2] Europe: UK, Germany [3] Elsewhere: Nigeria, India, Philippines, China (Google data not representative for China). Surprisingly some countries (e.g. those with FTT trainings—NZ, Indonesia, etc) are not on this list.
 28. These observations are based upon analysing *Google Trends* for individual countries, rather than world-wide (global) results. The data thresholds imposed by *Google Trends* [indicated by “insufficient data”] appear lower for individual countries than what is displayed for various countries (in maps) when the data is analysed on a global basis. Due to these data thresholds *Google Trends* does not indicate the presence of Google searches for countries (cities, etc) where the search level is low. We don’t interpret this latter phenomenon as indicating the total absence of searches for LSM, W. Nee &/or W. Lee. Rather, we interpret it as representing only a “token presence” or “token level of interest.”
 29. If we add “Recovery Version (book)” as a search term [Figure not displayed here], its global search frequency equals that of ‘W. Lee,’ even exceeding it for the last 5-years (2012-2016).
 30. Relative to the top-ranked city -- Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (100%), Accra, Ghana (89%) & Lagos, Nigeria (75%), other cities registered include Nairobi, Kenya (30%), Singapore (13%); No city in the Americas registers over 10%.
 31. This last statement based upon extending the data into Jan. 2017. Data for W. Lee searches by city is not available at this global level. (A fact that is indicative of a low level of search interest relative to *Google Trends* thresholds.)
 32. Our previous study--“*Signs of Decline in LSM’s ‘Recovery’*”--found a similar pattern “Globally the top source of searches for “Witness Lee” is the US followed by Brazil (90% of the US figure) and UK (half the US figure). The metro-areas of LA, New York & London (UK) are the top 3 cities ranked by search origin.” It appears that Google has raised the data threshold required to report by city in 2016; so corresponding figures through 2016 aren’t available.
 33. In Nigeria the relative ranking is “Watchman Nee” (15); ‘LSM’ (4); “Witness Lee” (1). W. Lee only just registers on Google’s ‘radar.’ ‘W. Nee’ searches are triple the sum of ‘LSM’ plus ‘W. Lee.’ Looking at Nigeria’s urban centers, W. Lee only registers for Lagos (at ~10% of W. Nee), whole ‘W. Nee’ registers both for Lagos & the Federal Capital Territory/ Abija. Looking at the African continent, only in South Africa does LSM’s presence register significantly; the relative rank there is: ‘LSM’ (14); “Watchman Nee” (8); “Witness Lee” (0)
 34. Obviously the total population of Japan is not small, however the *Christian* population of Japan is small (2.3%). One might expect ‘W. Lee’ to ‘out poll’ ‘W. Nee’ in the Philippines given Witness Lee’s history of laboring there. However, this is not the case with these data. The 3 indicators’ relative importance is: LSM (17); W. Nee (11); W. Lee (8). Thus W. Nee’s level of search interest is 65% of LSM, and W. Lee is about ½ (47%) of LSM. Witness Lee’s search interest is about ¾ (73%) of Watchman Nee in this time period.
 35. Note also that this same location-- Da’an District (Taipei, Taiwan)--emerges for Google searches of “Recovery Version (book);” For this search term, if top-ranked Taiwan is scored at 100%, the US is 6% on this metric. When sorted by global city, Da’an District (Taipei, Taiwan) ranks 100 & LA (US) 14% for Google searches of “Recovery Version (book)”
 36. If we take a closer look at Latvia, at the country level, 3 Latvian locations of LSM-searches emerge—Riga (75%); Jelgava (100%) & Liepajas Pilseta (49%) on Latvia’s west coast. Note: Examined at a finer-level, Jelgava emerges top-ranked.
 37. Neither “Watchman Nee” nor “Witness Lee” register above *Google Trends*’ thresholds for Latvia.
 38. Searches for ‘LSM’ by country: Latvia (100%), Rest of the world, combined (67%). In Google searches sorted by global city: searches linked to Riga, Latvia equal about 90% of searches from all other global cities combined. Both these statistics imply a huge proportion of LSM’s Internet resources allocated to Riga, Latvia.
 39. The website of “The Local Church in Riga, Latvia,” <https://churcinriga.wordpress.com/author/jurisbergs/> contains an item: “**The Collector of Biblical Books**” –[is] a non-profit organization, whose main objective - **the publication**

- of the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee in Russian.** Following in the footsteps of these two servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, who faithfully kept serving legacy received the church of the Lord, we see it as our goal is to spread the riches of Christ, supplying all believers with spiritual food that will give them the growth in the divine life for the sake of building up the Body of Christ.” [Translated from Russian to English] <http://kbbk.ru/>
40. For the country of Ukraine for the whole period (2004-2016) ‘LSM’ searches exceed ‘W. Nee’ by a ratio 5:2. However, during the last 5 years (2012-2016) Internet searches for ‘W. Nee’ exceed those for ‘LSM.’ [‘W. Nee’ (10); ‘LSM’ (7)]
 41. WA ranks second (~90%) only to CA (100%) in LSM searches for the US.
 42. Paul H. B. Chang, “*Multiple Invisibilities of Witness Lee*,” JANATE, Vol. 2, no. 1 (2016) p. 97
 43. The fact that “Titus Chu” is entered as a Google search *term* (rather than *topic*) probably leads to an underestimation of Google searches since it excludes Google searches based upon Titus Chu’s Chinese name. (*Google Trends* does not offer the option of “Titus Chu” as a search topic, which would include searches in Chinese.) In contrast “W. Nee” & “W. Lee” are included as Google “search *topics*.” With the current data this appears to be the best we can do. [The inclusion of “Witness Nee” in Fig. 4 is a simple means to generate the “Titus Chu” graph in purple (rather than green, for Yu-Lan Dong in Fig. 5)] It might be relevant to point out also that since 2007 a major portion of Titus Chu’s work has been conducted in mainland China. Evidently he feels the response to his ministry is greater there than elsewhere (North America, Taiwan, etc). Worldwide results (equivalent to Fig. 4) are essentially the same as Fig. 4 (scaled down). Titus Chu does not register on *Google Trends* for Canada, Ghana, or Taiwan (areas with past links to T. Chu.)
 44. These results appear plausible. Obviously Watchman nee had no involvement in LSM’s quarantine. LSM’s “blended brothers” repeatedly appealed to W. Lee’s 1986 “One Publication” policy decree to justify their own (Summer 2005) “one publication” policy decree aimed at Titus Chu & Yu-Lan Dong. As W. Lee’s presumptive successors LSM’s “blended brothers” adopted the stance—“whatever W. Lee did, we can now do.” They also quoted (in their ITERO denunciation meeting-- Whistler, BC, in Oct. 2006) Witness Lee’s private criticisms of Titus Chu, thus implicating W. Lee in their actions. Moreover LSM’s “blended brothers” extensive speaking, & publications (in print & on the Internet) against Titus Chu & the GLA churches quote Witness Lee extensively. In our view, it is not surprising therefore that “Witness Lee’s brand” was damaged as a result of LSM’s campaign against T. Chu & Yu-Lan Dong of Brazil (see below).
 45. That conflict involved LSM’s ‘blended brothers’ quarantine [excommunication] of Yu-Lan Dong (along with Titus Chu of the Great Lakes area) in late 2006. This was followed by the revocation of the right of Editora Árvore da Vida to translate W. Nee & W. Lee’s writings into Portuguese. LSM Portuguese reported that: “For many years Editora Árvore da Vida (EAdV) had permission from Living Stream Ministry (LSM) to translate, print, & distribute the ministry materials of Brothers Watchman Nee & Witness Lee as published by LSM. ...On December 21, 2009, LSM sent the letter below revoking these permissions to the brothers who oversee EAdV.” [<http://www.lsmportugues.org/eadv-en.html>]
 46. We can’t use “*Arvore da Vida*” [Tree of Life] the title of Yu-Lan Dong’s periodical because “Tree of Life” [*Arvore da Vida* in Portuguese] is the title of a 2011 epic, Academy Award-nominated, film starring Brad Pitt & Sean Penn. A Google search confounds Dong’s publication with the Portuguese version of this film. It is likely that the Google search term, “*Editora Árvore da Vida*” underestimates searches related to Yu-Lan Dong’s institutions in Brazil (e.g. it does not include his publication “*Alimento Diario* [Daily Food],” roughly equivalent to LSM’s HWMR.
 47. We use the term “predatory” in a social science sense. The manner in which a business organization seeks to monopolize a certain market (excluding competitors by various means) in order to reap economic profits can be described as “predatory economic behavior.” So, W. Lee’s “one publication” policy (of 1986) sought to exclude other ministers/writers from distributing their publications among the Local Churches (e.g. Bill Freeman of Seattle, WA), thereby creating a “monopoly” for his own publications, can equally be described as “predatory behavior.” The same applies to the 2005/6 application of the “one publication” policy to prohibit T. Chu, Y-L Dong & others from publishing books, articles, etc., by LSM’s “blended brothers.” There is no Scriptural precedent for such a self-swerving policy.
 48. We refer to the 2 published papers referred to above: [1] Paul H. B. Chang, “*Multiple Invisibilities of Witness Lee*,” *Journal of Asian/North American Theological Educators (JANATE)* Vol. 2, #1 (2016) [2] Yi Liu, “*Globalization of Chinese Christianity: A Study of Watchman Nee & Witness Lee’s Ministry*,” *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 30(1) (April, 2016). Note Prof. Paul H. B. Chang’s use of the term “success” in the following quotes: “Witness Lee & his teachings are not going away. Since his death, Lee’s followers have continued to propagate & practice his theology. They have now established local congregations in every state in the U.S., and may now have more active members than any other Christian group on the Taiwanese island. Lee and his teachings have raised up indigenous leaders and congregations in many different countries, making him rather unique in Chinese Christianity and even among Chinese religious leaders more generally. And finally, the institution referred to at the beginning of this essay, the Living Stream

- Bible Truth & Church Service Training, commonly known as the Full-Time Training in Anaheim (FTTA), is [a] almost completely unknown, *despite its remarkable success.*” [Paul H. B. Chang, “*Multiple Invisibilities of Witness Lee,*” JANATE, Vol. 2, #1 (2016) p. 97] “Part of *the success of the FTTA* is due to its extensive integration into a larger network of churches...*the success of the FTTA* is also due to the fact that it is not meant to produce professional clergy.” [Paul H. B. Chang, “*Multiple Invisibilities of Witness Lee,*” JANATE, Vol. 2, #1 (2016) pp. 98-99]
49. W. Nee, *Messages for Building up New Believers*, Vol. 3, Ch. 11, Sect. 7. Prof. Paul Chang notes that Witness “Lee argued that ‘Actually, according to God’s New Testament economy, there should not be any organization in the church. The church is not an organization but an organism.’ He went on to explain his understanding of the difference...: ‘An organism is an entity entirely of life. Nothing in our body is produced by organization. In contrast, in an organization nothing is living; every piece is dead. Everything in an organization is a human work arranged by human hands.’” [Witness Lee, *Crucial Principles for the Christian Life & the Church Life*, pp. 72-73 quoted by Paul H. B. Chang, “*Multiple Invisibilities of Witness Lee,*” JANATE, Vol. 2, no. 1 (2016) p. 95]
 50. Stated differently “Ockham’s (or Occum’s) razor” is the principle that “when you have two competing theories [explanations] that make exactly the same predictions, the simpler one is the better.”
<http://math.ucr.edu/home/baez/physics/General/occam.html>
 51. For more on this, see my article “*WWBLD—What Would Brother Lee Do? LSM’s Modus Operandi*” posted on www.LocalChurchDiscussions.com
 52. The last incident of creativity with regards to hymns & songs within the “Lord’s Recovery” that this author can recall is a set of songs from Howard Higashi & others of the Church in Long Beach, CA during the 1980s. The “Long Beach Song Tapes” were widely circulated among N. America’s local churches. That endeavor was terminated in 1986 ITERO when W. Lee instituted his “one publication” policy. Two of the Long Beach elders—Dick Taylor & Howard Higashi—publically apologized for the “Long Beach Song Tapes.” Evidently nothing, not even some innocuous Song Tapes, was allowed to “compete” with Witness Lee’s ministry. Since then musical creativity has been stifled among LSM churches.
 53. W. Lee, *Guidelines for the Propagation of the Lord's Recovery*, Ch. 1, St. 4
 54. LSM’s English publications refer to “Islam” about 85 times, “Muslim” about 70 times, the “Koran” less than 40 times & Mohammad 35 times—a very small number of citations given LSM’s voluminous publications. The term “jihad” never appears in LSM’s publications.
 55. Watchman Nee writes as if homosexuality does not exist. He says, “The stimulation one receives from the same sex is much less compared to that from the opposite sex...[So] people of the opposite sex are more approachable than those of the same sex. This kind of inclination is common, natural, and inherent.” [W. Nee, *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, Ch. 13, Sect. 4] The first sentence defines heterosexual attraction; homosexuality (the converse of this statement) is not even considered. We emphasize this to high-light the fact that this issue was simply ‘not on the agenda’ when W. Nee wrote.
 56. The piece, ascribed to W. Nee, says: “David served in one generation [Acts 13:36], his own. He could not serve in two! Where today we seek to perpetuate our work by setting up an organization or society or system, the Old Testament saints served their own day and passed on. This is an important principle of life. Wheat is sown, grows, ears, is reaped, and then the whole plant, even to the root, is plowed out. God’s work is spiritual to the point of having no earthly roots, no smell of earth on it at all. Men pass on, but the Lord remains. Everything to do with the Church must be up-to-date and living, meeting the present—one could never even say the passing--needs of the hour. Never must it become fixed, earth-bound static. God Himself takes away His workers, but He gives others. Our work suffers, but His never does. Nothing touches Him. He is still God.” [Watchman Nee, “*A Table in the Wilderness,*” Dec. 31]