

# Introduction

NO ONE KNOWS HOW many Christians there are in China today, but most agree that the number is very large. Regardless of whether one accepts a “low” estimate of thirty million, or a “high” one of more than one hundred million, no one denies the fact that the aggregate total of crowds who throng worship services on any given Sunday morning in China exceeds that of church attendees in all of Western Europe. I say “aggregate” because one must include both Protestant and Roman Catholic, official and unofficial, registered and unregistered congregations, those assembling in designated buildings and those gathering in private homes. Add to that the uncounted, and uncountable, Bible study groups and prayer meetings, the private conversations taking place all over the country, the proliferation of Christian study programs, institutes, journals, and conferences for scholars of Christianity, plus the thousands of web sites, blogs, and publications of both registered and unregistered churches, not to mention the amazing interest in, and openness towards, Christianity among both intellectuals and ordinary folk, and you have a phenomenon that not even the most sanguine supporters of Christianity would have foreseen at the turn of the twentieth century.

Indeed, despite almost one hundred fifty years of dedicated Protestant missionary labors, when the door to foreign missionaries “closed” as the communists consolidated power in 1950, those connected with Christianity of any sort amounted to no more than three million, and their number seemed to dwindle almost to zero during the “Great” Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Outside observers opined that the Chinese church had died, as Marxist theory had dictated. Mao and his comrades had created a “new man” that did not need the opiate of religion to dull their pain or satisfy their souls. Eminent historian John K. Fairbank declared in 1974 that “the missionaries’ long-continued effort, if measured in numbers of converts,

had failed.<sup>21</sup> Now we know just how grossly mistaken these pronouncements were, for even in the darkest hours of the Cultural Revolution, stalwart believers in dank prison cells and desolate rural fields were refusing to bow the knee to “Caesar.” Choosing obedience to God rather than life itself, they persevered under unimaginable trials, whence they emerged after Deng Xiaoping’s Opening and Reform campaign started in 1978. Slowly, stories began to trickle out of brave Christians who had stood their ground throughout those long, lonely years. More than that, we began to hear about large-scale turnings to Protestant Christianity in rural areas where Mao’s movement had once been strongest.

We cannot help but ask, Where did this huge Christian movement find its roots? What accounts for the courage and conviction of the leaders and laymen who bravely followed their Lord under immense pressure to deny him? Why was the faith they espoused not erased by decades of atheistic indoctrination? How do we explain that vast preponderance of evangelical, even fundamentalist, believers and clergy among the Protestants even today, when the major government-sponsored seminary has been under the control of theological liberals? Why have so many country folk turned away from traditional Chinese religions to worship Christ?

The study of history, even if it cannot predict the future, should be able to cast some light upon both the past and the present. We can trace a mighty river like the Yangtze to its source, tiny and insignificant though it may appear high in the mountains. Likewise, today’s Chinese church takes its character and owes its durability and distinctive vitality to men and women who lived and labored more than a hundred years ago, and who laid the foundation for the church we see today.

## IMPERIALISM

Called by historian Kenneth Scott Latourette the “Great Century” of Christian expansion, the years between 1807 (when Robert Morrison arrived in China) and the 1920s (when the last missionaries studied in this volume departed from the scene) witnessed immense changes in virtually all arenas of human life. Science and technology progressed; the Industrial Revolution spread from Great Britain to the rest of Europe and America; wars and revolutions of all sorts changed the political landscape; new ideas transformed literature, art, philosophy, and theology; and the nations of Europe and the United States established their dominance throughout almost the entire world.

1. Fairbank, *Missionary Enterprise*, 1.

## LATE QING SCENE

Before we tell the stories of the outstanding men who helped to sow the seeds that would reap such an immense harvest, let us look briefly at the nation to which they came in the early nineteenth century.

The once-vigorous Manchus who had ruled since 1644 had become effete, their ruling dynasty decrepit and decaying, their elite classes increasingly besotted by opium.<sup>2</sup> Though outwardly committed to the Confucian heritage of previous generations and formally the “high priests” of a complex of Confucian rites that resembled religious worship, the Manchu emperor and his family were, behind the walls of the Forbidden City, adherents of Tibetan Buddhism. They were singularly unenlightened and totally unprepared for the onslaughts that shook the foundations of their rule throughout the century. Natural disasters, population growth, and scarce resources fed rebellions by Muslims, secret societies, and even the mid-century pseudo-Christian Taiping revolution, which devastated several provinces, took the lives of perhaps twenty million, and almost succeeded in toppling the throne.

In addition to these internal troubles, foreigners came in gunboats, blasting open the gates of the Central Kingdom in the name of free trade and equality among nations, but also bringing cargoes of opium. The Dutch had occupied Formosa (Taiwan) in 1622, but were expelled by the Ming loyalist Koxinga (*Zheng Chenggong*) in 1661. Bit by bit, the Portuguese gained what would become a permanent foothold on the island of Macao, which became a base for European trade with China. In 1636, British ships bombarded river forts guarding Canton (Guangzhou) before withdrawing. The British East India Company first traded mostly through the Portuguese in Macao, and then obtained trading rights in Xiamen (Amoy) and Ningbo, and finally concentrated their operations in the small tract of land in Guangzhou which China allotted to foreign merchants. China attempted to impose strict limits on commercial activity, both because its leaders were convinced that they did not need foreign goods and because the main import became opium. When the expense of ruling India exceeded income from tea, the British began to sell opium to the Chinese in return for silver, thus draining the coffers of the Empire, debasing the populace, and enraging an increasingly inept but invincibly proud and xenophobic government.

2. See Tiedemann, *Handbook*, 278–343, for a concise description of the late Qing scene. Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*, provides accurate and gripping narratives about the historical context at each point in the story. Standard histories of modern China include Spence, *The Search for Modern China* and Fairbank, *Chinese Revolution*.

After a futile ban on the import of opium, the Chinese government finally lost patience, as did the British, who had chafed under what they considered to be unfair trade restrictions and repeated diplomatic rebuffs. The governor of the Guangzhou region burned supplies of opium; the British retaliated by bombarding and capturing Guangzhou. The cycle of war had started, to be repeated several times, always issuing in defeat for a hopelessly-outgunned China and resulting in what the Chinese call “Unequal Treaties,” which granted increasing rights to foreign merchants, diplomats, and missionaries. To the Chinese, these treaties were a constant reminder of their weakness and of the steadily growing influence in, even control over, their nation by the aggressive “barbarians” from the West.<sup>3</sup>

In the First Opium War 1839–42, then again in 1856–60, British and French firepower overwhelmed the antiquated Qing defenses and wrested treaty rights to trade and reside in five ports (1842), then to trade more widely, travel within China, and even (according to one interpretation), purchase property. On several occasions, beginning with Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China, missionaries served as interpreters and even negotiators. Though they always sought to mitigate the harsher provisions of the terms imposed on the Chinese, their persistent efforts to see that missionaries were given increasing freedom to live and work in China forever linked the foreign religion and its agents with imperialism and opium. These treaties also “increased Chinese suspicion and fear of the West which resulted in an inward-looking, reactionary xenophobia which remained a dominating strain in the country for the rest of the century.”<sup>4</sup>

When at first the leaders of the Taiping rebellion mouthed Christian slogans, read and taught the Bible, and smashed all idols, some missionaries believed that they should be supported by Britain and France. Their allegiance shifted when the bizarre heresies and corrupt practices of the Taiping kings exposed fundamental errors, but this early advocacy, plus the perceived “Christian” character of the insurrection, further damaged the reputation of the Christian faith and the missionaries. As the China Inland Mission (CIM) took the gospel deep into the interior of China and other mission societies followed, the churches in the coastal cities were augmented by those in inland provinces. The scholars who served as both guardians of China’s literary, cultural, and ethical heritage, as well as local magistrates, correctly saw that the new religion, if consistently followed, would

3. Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*, vol. 1 provides a vivid narrative of the Western incursions and their implications for early missionaries; later volumes in his series on Hudson Taylor likewise set missionary advance and Chinese resistance in this conflicted perspective.

4. Barr, *To China With Love*, 13.

undermine much of their power and prestige. We should not be surprised that they frequently fomented popular rumors and riots that endangered foreign and native Christians alike, which finally erupted into the madness of the Boxer Rebellion at the end of the century.

As they gradually came to realize, “Christian” Westerners were not only seizing territory and forcing opium down their throats, but were also heralding a message that contradicted the inherent humanism of Confucianism, the worship of popular gods, and the established social order, which included the utter subordination of women. Later, when missionaries and others promoted Western science, industry, education, and even political reforms, it seemed as if the entire fabric of China’s ancient civilization was being shredded. The Christian faith was revolutionary in the deepest sense of the word, for it questioned almost every article of the Chinese worldview, even if the missionaries themselves had no intention of fomenting actual rebellion.

As a consequence, from the beginning, Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries were subject to vilification in countless tracts and placards composed by the literati and given full credence by the general populace. The best-known of these “attributed to missionaries just about every obscene practice that a race with very long experience of men and manners could dream up, cunningly combined with them modicums of truth and fragments of common hearsay,” and contained incredibly vile and baseless accusations that were nevertheless effective in stirring up violent hatred for the intruders.<sup>5</sup>

In particular, when Roman Catholics, who believed that baptized dying babies would be saved from eternal damnation, took in foundlings and cared for children in orphanages, wild rumors charged them with gouging out the infants’ eyes and other organs or even eating them. Priests and nuns were widely supposed to indulge in illicit sexual relations. When Roman Catholics used treaty stipulations to purchase land and build on it without the permission of local officials, and especially when Roman Catholic priests and bishops demanded equal treatment with government officials of similar rank, they challenged the established order and upset local customs and conditions. Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries who sought protection or exemption from local temple taxes for their converts disturbed the legal process and deprived communities of income needed for the maintenance of the public venues that temples provided.

After the terrible defeat by Japan in 1895, idealistic and zealous reformers, influenced by writings of W. A. P. Martin, Timothy Richard, and

5. Barr, *To China With Love*, 67–68.

others, and led by the brilliant scholar Kang Youwei, gained the ear not only of the Prime Minister and the tutor of the emperor, but of the young emperor himself. This crushing blow by a modernizing Japan had exposed the pervasive weaknesses of China and the ineffectual rule of the backward Manchus, and calls for drastic change sounded from all directions within the educated elite, and even within the government. In 1898, wide-ranging reforms were introduced in one imperial decree after another, all of them stunningly radical, such as: the ancient essay system of education was to be abolished; temples would also be used as schools for Western education; and young Manchus would be required to study foreign languages and travel abroad.<sup>6</sup> The movement was betrayed at the last minute; the emperor was imprisoned within the Forbidden City; many reformers were killed; and the Empress Dowager once again took up the reins of government. Martin, Richard, and others like them were utterly despondent at the failure of their efforts.

Meanwhile, not only did missionaries increasingly penetrate the interior of China, but foreign-controlled railroads lay down tracks in total disregard for “feng shui” (ancient concepts of which locations were most propitious), not infrequently violating cemeteries to achieve the shortest route. The enraged Chinese wondered whether the natural disasters that piled up in the last few decades of the century were the work of angry gods and ghosts. It was all too much, and long-brewing resentment and fear exploded into the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. Once again, foreign troops, this time from eight nations, defeated the Chinese. British and French had captured Beijing in 1864; this time, some of the allied troops went on an orgy of butchery, looting, and rape, and the Summer Palace was burned. A huge indemnity, the permanent presence of foreign troops in Beijing, further territorial concessions, and the humiliation of the Qing government dealt a death blow to a regime that had already been totally discredited by the shock of defeat by the Japanese.

For a variety of reasons, the violent actions of Chinese in the Boxer Rebellion actually benefitted the progress of Christianity in China and the position of its representatives. Despite the atrocities committed by some of the foreign troops, Chinese people were also shocked by the barbarity of the rebels and shamed by the virtuous actions and forgiving response of many Christians, including some of the missionaries who refused compensation for losses. Because of this, many officials completely changed their attitude. Even the Empress Dowager and her advisors saw that China must institute fundamental reforms in order simply to survive, and began to implement

<sup>6</sup> Richard, *Forty-Five Years in China*, 262.

many of the changes suggested by the defeated reform movement and its missionary friends. Not only so, but the courageous way in which thousands of Chinese Christians and Western missionaries had remained faithful in the face of torture and death made a powerful impression upon their former detractors, causing mass movements towards Christ. Jonathan Goforth reaped the benefit of this new climate towards the end of his career.

## REVIVAL AND MISSIONS

Throughout this tumultuous period, while Western nations were imposing their self-seeking agendas upon China, hundreds of missionaries from those same countries were pouring their lives out to bring God's love to the Chinese people. Amidst all the economic, social, and political movements, and sometimes embedded within them or carried along by them, religious revivals of equal magnitude transformed Protestantism. Charles Finney, Dwight L. Moody, and a host of other less-famous evangelists built on the foundation of the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century and were instrumental in sparking renewal in Great Britain, northern Europe, and North America.<sup>7</sup> Again, embedded within them, and sometimes carried along by them, but also frequently further fanning the flames, was an unprecedented upsurge of zeal for the spread of the gospel in foreign lands and cultures.<sup>8</sup> Missionary work in China counted for a major part of worldwide Christian outreach, and provides many examples of this symbiotic relationship between revival and missions.<sup>9</sup>

Griffith John and J. Hudson Taylor were profoundly affected by the “deeper” (or “higher”) life teachings connected with the so-called “Keswick” movement and its kin, but Taylor also played a major role as a speaker and

7. See Wolfe, *Expansion of Evangelicalism*, 45–94, 166, 171–72; Bebbington, *Dominance of Evangelicalism*.

8. For surveys of the nineteenth century mission movement, see Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 262–348; Moreau, Corwin, and McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 114–35; Robert, *Christian Mission*, 31–79; Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 71–131.

9. Helpful treatments of the Protestant missionary enterprise in China in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century can be found in Bays, *New History*, 41–120; Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*; Charbonnier, *Christians in China*, 350–64; Latourette, *History of Christian Missions*; Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 285–308, 463–501; Tiedemann, *Handbook*; major scholarly biographies of the men studied in this book; and the general works referred to in the previous note. Perhaps the best succinct survey is Lutz, “China and Protestantism.” Brief articles on hundreds of missionaries and Chinese Christians can be found in the online *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity* ([www.bdc-online.net](http://www.bdc-online.net)).

writer popularizing this sort of piety.<sup>10</sup> Taylor collaborated with Dwight Moody. The Welsh revivals of the early twentieth century inspired Jonathan Goforth and Griffith John to seek more fruit from their work in China. Missionaries were extolled as examples of a “higher” Christian experience because of their assumed greater faith and deeper dedication, while they benefitted from the support—in prayer, finances, and new recruits—of the revivals back home. Acutely conscious of all this, Hudson Taylor made the fueling of renewal flames in the sending countries a priority while seeking new workers to bring the gospel to China, fully convinced that only fully consecrated men and women would have any staying power or lasting effect in their missionary labors.

### A “HOST OF WITNESSES”

The following chapters contain brief biographies of nine major figures in the first century of Protestant Christianity in China. Seven were missionaries, while two were outstanding early Chinese Christian leaders who took what they had learned from the foreigners and blazed new paths in uncharted and often hostile territory. Why are so many missionaries featured in this volume, and so few Chinese? First, because, by the nature of the case, Protestantism was brought to China by messengers from the West, and these foreigners essentially laid the foundation upon which they expected Chinese to build. Secondly, for a variety of reasons, we have far more information about missionaries than we do about their Chinese converts, helpers, and successors, partly because many early Christians came from the lower classes and could not write their own story, and partly because the missionaries wrote so much. We lament the all-too-common habit the missionaries had of mentioning their Chinese colleagues only by a surname, and that often in Romanized forms that are very hard for us to decipher.

Almost all missionaries readily acknowledged that the Chinese evangelized, taught, and shepherded their own people far better than foreigners ever could, and they rejoiced to see “native” leaders rise up and spread the gospel far and wide. By no means did they consider Chinese believers inferior to themselves as Christian workers; they simply did not give us much information about them. Two notable exceptions are Liang Fa (or Liang

10. The role of awakenings and revivals in spurring foreign missions is briefly treated in Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 89, 90, 92–93. Hudson Taylor’s connections with the Mildmay Conferences, Keswick, and Moody, are discussed at various points in Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*, vols. 3–7. See also Wigram, *Bible and Mission*, 58–64, 95–97, 107; Bebbington, *Dominance of Evangelicalism*, 188–90.

A-fa) and Xi Shengmo (Pastor Hsi), who are addressed in this volume. Both could read and write, and both were memorialized by missionaries who knew and respected them greatly. Other Chinese we could have featured include Dai Wenguang and Wang Tao, indispensable helpers and translators for missionaries, and the evangelists and preachers Che Jingguang and He Jinshan, as well as the educator Rong Hong (Yung Wing), and many others. We have selected Liang and Xi because of their representative nature and their fundamental contributions to the Chinese church we see today.

The seven foreign missionaries were chosen out of a potential pool of hundreds of outstanding men and women who went to China at great personal cost in order to share the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ with people who had never heard it before. Dozens of foreign workers deserve the same kind of attention bestowed on the ones whose stories are told here. Among the pioneers are William Milne, Samuel Dyer, David Abeel, Walter H. Medhurst, Sr., Elijah C. Bridgman, and Samuel Wells Williams.<sup>11</sup> The incredibly full, highly controversial, ultimately tragic, but broadly influential career of Charles (Karl Friedrich August) Gutzlaff has been ably narrated by Jessie Lutz, and only his unusually intimate link with opium traders and British imperialists kept him out of this volume.<sup>12</sup> Dr. Peter Parker, the first medical missionary (though not the first to use medicine to heal Chinese friends), is said to have “opened China at the point of the scalpel” and later became an American ambassador to China.<sup>13</sup> Many more could be mentioned, such as the Stronach brothers,<sup>14</sup> J. Lewis Chuck, Issachar J. Roberts, and William Boone, the first bishop of the American Protestant Episcopal Church in China. For the second half of the nineteenth century, another group of outstanding names come to mind, including William Burns,<sup>15</sup>

11. The careers of these early missionaries are ably recounted in Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*, vols. 1 and 2. Milne, vol. 1: 131–37, 143–49, 155–59, 172–73, 378–80, and elsewhere. Bridgman, Dyer and Medhurst: often in both vols. Williams, vol. 1: 137, 176, 216–17, 222, 334–35, 237, 362, 409.

12. Lutz, *Opening China*.

13. Peter Parker’s effective missionary work is described in Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*, vol. 1: 9, 137, 234–35, 237, 269, 273, 280, 362, 404; vol. 2: 19–20, 135, 162, 371, 386, 405.

14. On the Stronachs, see Cheung, *Christianity in Modern China*, 39–40, 67, 74, 129–32, 153.

15. Mostly because of his intimate association with Hudson Taylor in the early years, Burns figures prominently in Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*. See vol. 1: 10, 286, 306–7, 340, 342, 345, 390, 393; *Over the Treaty Wall*, 53, 128, 162, 237–38, 295, 301–2, 309, 312, 319–25, 327–43, 347, 359–60, 364, 366–71, 385–86, 402; vol. 3: 23, 25, 27, 29, 34–36, 44, 53, 87, and often; vol. 4: 48, 71–73, 76, 94–95, 101–3, 113, and often. See also Cheung, *Christianity in China*, in which Burns appears frequently.

Tarleton Perry Crawford,<sup>16</sup> and Calvin W. Mateer.<sup>17</sup> John Livingston Nevius<sup>18</sup> famous methods were worked out by both Timothy Richard and J. Hudson Taylor, and later took root in Korea and influenced Gilbert Reid, who strongly supported the more liberal views and strategies of Timothy Richard and W. A. P. Martin.<sup>19</sup>

No less notable were the wives of these men and many single women who made a huge impact on Chinese Christianity. These women include the redoubtable Mary Ann Aldersey, schoolmistress and acknowledged ruler of the foreign community in Ningbo,<sup>20</sup> and Lottie Moon, famous among Southern Baptists.<sup>21</sup> What shall we say of such saintly, longsuffering, and supremely helpful companions to their more-famous husbands as Mary Morton Morrison, Eliza Morrison, Maria Tarn Dyer, Maria Dyer Taylor, Jennie Faulding Taylor,<sup>22</sup> and Rosalind Goforth,<sup>23</sup> but that they were people “of whom the world was not worthy”?<sup>24</sup>

## MAIN CHARACTERS

The principal subjects of these chapters now need to be introduced:

*Robert Morrison* (1782–1834) deserves to be called the father of Protestant missions to China, for he arrived earliest and, almost single-handedly, provided the first generation of missionaries with the essential tools for communicating the message of Christ. With help from Chinese and William Milne, he translated the entire Bible and portions of the *Book*

16. See Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 3–41, and Flynt and Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China*.

17. A short study of Mateer can be found in Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 139–237.

18. On Nevius, see Hunt, “Nevius,” and Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*, vol. 2: 144–45, 188, 273; vol. 3: 23, 29, 41–42, 46–47, 88, 100–101, 150–52, 183–84, 264–65, 361–62, 373–74, 408–9, and often.

19. On Gilbert Reid, see Tsou, “Christian Missionary as Confucian Intellectual.”

20. On Mary Aldersey, see Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*, vol. 2: 86, 96, 162, 273, 274, 347, 349–50, 361–62.

21. In addition to full-length biographies, brief and balanced sketches of Moon’s career can be found in Allen, “Lottie Moon,” and Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 68–136.

22. Maria Dyer Taylor and Jennie Faulding Taylor receive extensive coverage in Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*.

23. Rosalind Goforth naturally includes a great deal of information about herself in her book *Goforth of China*; see also Rosalind Goforth, *Climbing: Memories of a Missionary’s Wife*.

24. Heb 11:38.

of *Common Prayer*; composed a grammar and a massive dictionary of the Chinese language, which was also virtually an encyclopedia of everything Chinese; and translated or composed many tracts and other books. These achievements are no less significant in the light of new research that has shown how Morrison adhered faithfully to the template of pioneer missionary work which he learned at the London Missionary Society's Gosport Academy under David Bogue.<sup>25</sup>

When Morrison arrived in 1807, Roman Catholicism had been proscribed by imperial edict since 1724. Foreign missionaries stayed constantly on the run, subject to arrest, torture, and death, while their Chinese converts maintained their faith in homes and private gatherings at great danger to themselves. Portugal, the Netherlands, Britain, and America had tried to establish normal diplomatic and economic relations with China, but in vain, for the "foreign devil" was feared, despised, and increasingly hated. Thus, in the early nineteenth century, foreigners were allowed to live nowhere but Canton, and that for only the six-month trading season each year, after which many returned to Macao, a pattern Morrison followed for most of his career. Fearing subversion by clever foreigners, the government forbade the teaching of the Chinese language to foreigners under penalty of death, so Morrison and his brave helpers worked under the most adverse and trying conditions.

Over more than two decades, he set a standard of unremitting labor, profound appreciation of the Chinese people and their rich culture, and total dedication to the cause of Christ that has spurred on many of his successors. *Liang Fa* (1789–1855; Liang A-fa) began his career as a printer, assisting in the publication of books and tracts by Morrison and Milne, but went on to become China's first evangelist and writer of Christian materials in Chinese. He provided a pattern in other ways too, for he and his entire family suffered persecution, including physical abuse and incarceration, but persevered in their faith and in their ministry. One of his works had unforeseen effects on all of China.

*James Legge* (1815–97) preached, trained leaders for the indigenous church, and translated some of the Chinese classics while in China. This crucial "missionary" career has often been overlooked or underplayed because of his later contribution as a great Sinologist.<sup>26</sup> After returning to England, he entered into a second phase in which his lifelong interest in Chinese language, literature, and religion found expression not only in

25. See the excellent treatment of how Morrison and his associates put into practice the education which they received at Gosport in Daily, *Robert Morrison*.

26. Girardot, *Victorian Translation*, is the prime modern example of this unbalanced approach.

teaching at Oxford University, where he was the first professor of Chinese, but more importantly, in revising and completing the translation of virtually the entire Confucian canon into English, with notes and commentary. Not only the growing number of academic Sinologists, but missionaries themselves, prized his work as essential equipment for their understanding of the culture into which they were attempting to preach the gospel of Christ.

*James Hudson Taylor* (1832–1905), founder of the China Inland Mission (CIM), which soon became the largest foreign mission society working in China, exemplified the piety of the growing evangelical movement that arose in the English-speaking world in the mid-nineteenth century. On both sides of the Atlantic, and then on the Continent of Europe and in Australia, he called for a closer communion with Christ that would issue in total dedication to the evangelism of the world, including China. He traveled many thousands of miles all across China, mobilized and led a band of pioneer evangelists and resident missionaries, practiced medicine, opened schools, and emerged as a leading figure in the entire China missionary movement. Of all the missionaries who went to China, Taylor holds first place in the affections of today's Chinese Christians, and for good reasons.

*Xi Shengmo* (1835–96; “Overcomer of Demons”), also called Pastor Hsi, was converted through the ministry of a CIM missionary, and exercised a powerful ministry that was mostly independent of foreign supervision and certainly not under foreign control. Like many other scholars, despite his learning, he became a slave to opium, and his condition seemed hopeless until he encountered—or was encountered by—the living Christ through reading the New Testament, prayer, and a dramatic experience of the Holy Spirit. His powerful personality, brilliant intellect, knowledge of the Bible, preaching ability, organizational and leadership skills, and especially his implicit faith in a prayer-answering God all combined to create a movement that led to healing and deliverance for many opium addicts and the formation of churches that developed out of the opium refuges he founded and staffed with former addicts. Like Liang Fa, he became a paradigmatic Chinese church leader.

*Timothy Richard* (1845–1919) is currently a favorite of historians of missions for he exemplified all that is modern, progressive, “open-minded,” and tolerant.<sup>27</sup> A fervent believer in the uplifting power of Western scientific education, he successfully lobbied for the creation of a university and helped to produce an amazing amount of literature promoting progressive Western concepts, including political reform. He also sought to understand, appreciate, and even promote, the “worthy” elements in Chinese civilization,

27. Positive treatments of Timothy Richard include Ng, “Timothy Richard.”

including Buddhism, which he thought contained clear pointers to some fundamental Christian teachings.<sup>28</sup> A man of powerful intellect, forceful personality, and undaunted perseverance, he won admirers and friends in high places, even in the Imperial Palace itself. He aimed at nothing less than the liberation of China from ignorance through “the light of education—scientific, industrial, religious.” The descending order of those terms reveals his own priorities as his controversial career developed.

*Griffith John's* (1831–1912) long stay in Hankou—forty-five years—earned him the epithet, “John of Hankow.” Constantly preaching, he itinerated in a wide circle, always returning to the same point until he became a familiar figure: “The short, muscular body, the black springy beard, keen flashing eyes, and, above all, that impassioned and resonant voice.”<sup>29</sup> He believed that “grace, grit and gumption” were essential qualities for a missionary, and himself seemed to possess all three.<sup>30</sup> Unlike Timothy Richard, John found great success in preaching from an open chapel on a busy street. In time, his “large brick Gospel meeting Hall” would be filled with more than six hundred people. Though he would not speculate on the fate of those who never heard the gospel, he fully believed that the only sure way to heaven was through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior from sin.

*William Alexander Parsons (W. A. P.) Martin* (1827–1916) was one of the most influential modernizing missionaries of the century. An American, he became a noted Sinologist. *A Cycle of Cathay, Or, China, South and North*, and then *The Lore of Cathay, or, The Intellect of China* were major studies in the actions and thought of the Chinese which still repay careful reading. As with Timothy Richard, his deep knowledge of Chinese culture and society; strenuous efforts to introduce Western learning; and advocacy of economic, social, and political reforms won the admiration of the new generation of intellectuals and even government officials, among whom Martin exerted enormous influence. In particular, his writings in Chinese and his translations of Western books, along with his editorship of the *Peking Magazine* and service as a teacher and administrator in several government-sponsored schools, gave him a wide audience. Having served as one of the negotiators for the American delegation that produced the Treaty of Tientsin, he later switched roles and became an advisor to the Chinese government. He shared Richard's profound disillusionment after the failure of the 100 Days' Reform Movement of 1898. He too favored a more lenient approach toward rites of veneration of ancestors, but continued to adhere

28. See, for example, Richard, *The New Testament of Higher Buddhism*.

29. Barr, *To China with Love*, 155.

30. *Ibid.*

to orthodox Christianity and identified with evangelicals, though he stood on the more liberal side. He spent most of his career not in evangelism or Christian education, but in promoting the modernization of China.

*Jonathan Goforth* (1859~1936), the first Canadian Presbyterian missionary to China, presents a stark contrast to W. A. P. Martin and Timothy Richard. Much like the pioneer missionaries of the China Inland Mission, he became an itinerant evangelist and revivalist, taking his long-suffering wife Rosalind with him. He firmly rejected the incipient modernism and liberalism of Timothy Richard and others, and held strongly to traditional Christian theology and evangelical distinctives. He sought transformed individuals who would impact society as salt and light, not the “salvation” of China as a nation. After hearing about the Welsh Revival, he visited Korea and witnessed an amazing work of the Holy Spirit there. Taking those reports back through Manchuria to his field in Henan, he found an enthusiastic response and was invited to return to Manchuria. The great “Manchurian Revival” which broke out while he was there impelled him into a new ministry of evangelism and revival preaching. Unusual emotional reactions among both Chinese and Western missionaries evoked controversy, but Goforth saw these reactions as manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit. His wife’s biography of him made Goforth one of the most widely known of the missionaries to China, even today.

## CONNECTION WITH FOREIGN IMPERIALISM

Without a doubt, the most common charge lodged against missionaries was that they served as willing accomplices to the aggressive Western powers that imposed first the odious opium trade and then humiliating territorial and legal concessions upon China at gunpoint.<sup>31</sup> Robert Morrison worked for the East India Company (EIC), while his son and many other missionaries, including W. A. P. Martin, served as interpreters or even negotiators for the nations that imposed the hated “unequal treaties” upon a defeated Qing dynasty. They rode on ships carrying opium and benefitted from the treaty provisions that compelled China to allow merchants and missionaries to reside in “treaty ports,” then travel about the interior and purchase property. Though they detested the forced importation of opium and usually criticized Western aggression, they did not shrink from seeing the resulting

31. A. J. Broomhall’s *Hudson Taylor* follows this sad story in detail. For the standard Chinese criticism of the alleged alliance between missionaries and Western imperialism, see Luo, *Christianity in China*, especially 24–33.

treaties as actions of a divine providence that opened up this vast country to the gospel.

Looking back on the terrible price that generations of Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries have had to pay for the baneful consequences of their decisions, we may wish that Robert Morrison had been content to live outside of China rather than stain his work by his association with the EIC; that W. A. P. Martin and others had not so eagerly assisted foreign powers as interpreters; and that Hudson Taylor and other pioneers had not violated treaties by traveling beyond the designated treaty ports. At the same time, however, we should note the harsh condemnations made by most missionaries of the opium trade and, often, of Western aggression. Missionaries also made deliberate attempts to soften the terms of treaties and had genuine love for the Chinese people and their eternal destiny, which is what impelled these men to devote their lives to sacrificial service among a people whose total welfare they sought with all their might.

### THE “TERM” QUESTION

Almost all these men were participants in controversies that tested everyone’s patience and forbearance and sometimes led to open division. Beginning with Robert Morrison’s questions about the proper Chinese terms to translate Hebrew and Greek words such as “spirit” and especially “God,” a raging debate among missionaries of equal learning but strongly divergent opinions threatened unity for decades. Indeed, the matter still evokes disagreement, though with less intensity than before. Simply put, should one employ the name of the Supreme Being of ancient Chinese religion and late Qing imperial worship—Shang Di—to translate Elohim and Theos, or should the word of lesser deities, even sometimes ghosts and demons—*Shen*—be used? Sadly, differences tend to run along national and denominational lines, with Shang Di favored by the British and “mainline” denominations, and *Shen* favored by Americans and independent missionaries. James Legge, supported by other eminent Sinologists, including W. A. P. Martin and Timothy Richard, argued that the early Chinese knew and worshiped the one true and living God under the name “Shang Di.” Others with equal learning said that Shang Di was an appellation for a particular deity, while *Shen* corresponded almost exactly with the original generic Hebrew and Greek words and could, as in the Bible, be filled with new meaning.<sup>32</sup>

32. My own opinion can be found in Doyle, “Problems in Translating the Bible into Chinese.”

## ANCESTOR RITES

Legge and Martin were at the epicenter of another related argument about whether missionaries should encourage Chinese Christians to participate in ceremonies involving incense, prayers, and bowing to tablets of ancestors. Centuries before, Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits provoked a firestorm of criticism when they decided that the official rites of reverence to Confucius expressed merely respect and honor, and were civil, not religious in nature. The Franciscans and Dominicans countered that the common people always associated these ceremonies with worship of departed spirits and were thus idolatrous. Legge agreed with the Jesuits, and was in varying degrees joined by W.A. P. Martin and Timothy Richard, while Hudson Taylor and other more conservative missionaries, who constituted the vast majority, vigorously insisted that the common people would inevitably read religious meaning into these rites, which were, in their view, always connected with a sense of fear.<sup>33</sup>

## CLAIMING TREATY RIGHTS FOR MISSIONARIES AND NATIONAL BELIEVERS

Equally vexing, and of particular interest today, was the question whether, and when, missionaries should invoke the stipulations in various treaties wrested from the Qing government at the point of the bayonet. The legal and ethical questions were quite complex, but basically, the missionaries had to decide whether to seek consular, and perhaps military, support and protection for themselves, their property, and their Chinese converts. At first, Pastor Hsi demanded that his church members be protected and recompensed for damages in accordance with treaties, but later reversed that policy and taught his people to be willing to submit to persecution rather than try to assert their rights. Early in Hudson Taylor's missionary career, after an episode when he was highly, and wrongly, criticized for appearing to call in British gunboats after a riot in Yangzhou led to the destruction of CIM property and considerable personal injury, he resolved never to go to his consul for help and told his workers to rely entirely on God, although he did believe in seeking protection from the local magistrate in certain cases. Members and leaders of other missions, on the other hand, frequently called upon their consuls to intervene in cases when either they or their converts suffered loss of injury at the hands of anti-Christian mobs or were embroiled

33. Broomhall provides an excellent analysis of this controversy in Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*, vol. 6: 283–88; vol. 7: 139–43, 522–23, 632–33.

in personal disputes with Chinese neighbors. These “religious” cases, which ran into the hundreds, aroused great antipathy among the people and their magistrates.<sup>34</sup>

## EVANGELISM OR EDUCATION?

For the first fifty years or so, most foreign missionaries agreed on their priorities for reaching Chinese with the gospel. Beginning with the translation of the Bible and other Christian literature into Chinese, along with distribution by paid colporteurs, they relied on street preaching, then chapel and church meetings, to disseminate the Word as widely and deeply as possible. Interested persons would be invited to meetings for regular instruction in the Christian faith. When they seemed to understand, repent, and believe, they were baptized and formed into small congregations, which very gradually grew in size and number.

In addition to evangelism and edification of believers, missionaries very frequently provided medical care and primary education, viewing these as simple demonstrations of the love of God as well as opportunities to share the gospel verbally. How could they neglect the crying needs of the suffering masses around them? Missionaries gained medical skills because they wanted to spread the truth by both word and deed. Schools were opened to teach converts how to read the Bible, and to prepare young men for church ministry and girls to serve as their wives and helpers. When famines struck, especially during the great and horrible disasters of 1876–1881, missionaries dropped everything else and plunged into relief work. All the mission agencies joined hands to raise funds and distribute food and other necessities.

As the years passed, however, a sharp debate arose: Should education replace evangelism as the primary means of advancing God’s kingdom in China? Timothy Richard emerged from the harrowing experiences of the famine with one word etched upon his mind: “Education!” He had seen first-hand how ignorance had exacerbated the effects of natural disasters and hindered the efforts of officials to respond effectively. From then on, he devoted his energies to the education of China’s elite classes, in the hopes that they would institute lasting reforms that would not only reduce the frequency and severity of famine but also promote the general welfare of the entire nation. He went so far as to claim that direct evangelism was largely futile and fruitless, based on his own personal experience. Less strident in their rejection of traditional missionary methods, but joining with Richard

34. See Luo, *Christianity in China*, 24–33.

in the campaign to bring modern Western learning to China's leaders, were W.A. P. Martin and Gilbert Reid.

Other missionaries, however, including Griffith John, Hudson Taylor, and Jonathan Goforth, believed that the causes of China's troubles went deeper than the mind. The root problem, they argued, was the heart, which only God could change as the Holy Spirit worked repentance, faith, and transformation of life in the lives of individuals and then in communities of Christians through the verbal proclamation of the biblical message. The ignorance that they primarily sought to combat was the lack of the knowledge of God. Placing little faith in what they saw as superficial remedies to the fundamental source of corruption, self-seeking, superstition, and official incompetence, they focused on what they considered to be the wellspring of all these, the cause of the "disease" rather than the symptoms. They found biblical support for this emphasis in the words of the Great Commission, which mandated preaching that led to faith in Christ and commitment to him (baptism), and ethical instruction that would lead to obedience to all that Christ had commanded in Scripture.

Debates about the proper medium of education (Chinese or English) and the content of the curriculum also raged intensely during our period. Should English be used, in order to please the growing number of educated, elite families in mainline, urban churches who wanted their children to have the best possible Western education in order to get prestigious jobs in the modern professions that were opening up to them? Or should the schools use only Chinese, to discourage students and parents with such motives and to attract people who wanted an explicitly Christian education in order to be equipped for service in the church or, for girls, for marriage to Christian preachers. Should the Chinese classics be taught, or should the curriculum confine itself to scientific and practical subjects? How many courses on the Christian faith should students be required to take? Increasingly, the more liberal colleges decided to conduct most, or all, teaching in English. Chinese literature and culture were either de-emphasized or neglected entirely, and biblical and theological courses reduced in number. Finally, the Nationalist Government in the late 1920s required that attendance at chapel be made totally voluntary, and courses on Christianity turned into electives.<sup>35</sup>

In time, this divergence became not just personal but also institutional, as colleges were founded by the more liberal mission organizations while the more conservative ones continued to concentrate upon evangelism and biblical teaching, augmented by medical work and pre-college education.

35. For the debates about curriculum and English as a medium of instruction, especially in the twentieth century, see Bays, *China's Christian Colleges*, 80–82, and elsewhere throughout the volume.

Especially in the early years of the twentieth century, the educational effort consumed vast sums of money, but its goal was nothing less than the creation of a Christianized—which often meant “modern” and “Westernized”—society, in which democratic and scientific reforms would benefit the bodies and minds of millions. Evangelism and edification, on the other hand, pursued the dream of a nation in which the souls of millions would be saved from eternal punishment through faith in Christ and their lives so transformed by Christ that they could experience joy and peace and, incorporated into church communities of faith and love, express God’s grace and truth to those around them, amidst the inevitable trials of this life. In time, these people and the churches they formed would, it was believed, have a “salt and light” effect on the entire civilization.

### FROM “BELOW” OR FROM “ABOVE”?

Depending on their evaluation of the strategic and religious value of Western education, missionaries split also on whether they should aim their evangelism at the masses or whether they should strive to impact that small group of men who wielded enormous influence in Chinese society: the educated elite. One way followed the example of Christ teaching the common people, who gladly heard him while their leaders despised and rejected him as a threat to their culture, their customs, and their own social standing and power. This approach could also appeal to the example of Jesus, Paul, and Peter, who proclaimed a message focused on personal reconciliation to God requiring repentance from sin and faith in Christ, who had died on the Cross for our salvation, and leading to the formation of churches. Indeed, Paul explicitly rejected any attempt to appeal to the “wise” and educated elite of his time, determined to “preach Christ crucified,” and to “not to know anything . . . except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”<sup>36</sup> The other took its cue from Paul’s debating with the intellectuals on Mars Hill in Athens and Christ’s conversation with Nicodemus, a ruler and teacher among the Jews. Again, Taylor, John, and Goforth exemplify the focus on those who lived “downstairs,” while Martin and Richard sought favor with those who lived “upstairs.”<sup>37</sup>

36. 1 Cor 1:23; 2:1–2.

37. Richard found Scriptural support for his approach in Matt 10:11, where Jesus told his disciples to seek out one who was “worthy” in a town and reside with him. He seems, however, to have ignored the context of this instruction, which was training men to engage in widespread, public evangelistic preaching.

To be fair, we should note that from his earliest days Hudson Taylor and other missionaries like him constantly tried to bring his message to scholars and magistrates, while the women in the CIM frequently conversed with their wives. Throughout his career, Taylor and his coworkers in the CIM had found many high officials and their wives to be quite friendly and open to the gospel, and eager to hear of the saving work of Christ upon the Cross.<sup>38</sup> W. A. P. Martin and Timothy Richard hobnobbed with the rich and powerful, but did so with the aim of relieving the sufferings of the poor and downtrodden. No one would question the immense value of a truly converted elite—“Pastor Hsi” was the CIM’s “poster boy.” It was only a question of how best to reach these men. Nor did any doubt the necessity of taking Chinese culture and history seriously, as the rigorous language study course of the CIM made clear. The questions arose only about the proportion of time one spent mastering Chinese literature, and then in what way to seek points of contact with the educated class.

More traditional missionaries like Taylor, Burns, and Goforth, would agree with Richard that raising up a large number of Chinese evangelists and pastors was a high priority, for they could almost always be more effective in speaking to their own people. The debate between them dealt with whether more missionaries should be recruited, as Taylor and others thought, or whether most efforts should be directed towards the conversion and mobilization of the educated elite, as Richard proposed.

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Underlying the split over education and evangelism that widened into a chasm lay differing conceptions of the kingdom of God. Hudson Taylor and other evangelicals looked for a future kingdom, to be brought by the return of Christ, who would establish a realm of perfect justice, peace, and well-being on earth. Until then, they believed, our task was to make disciples by bringing them first to faith in Christ and then to maturity in Christ as members of churches. Conservative Christians thought that regenerated individuals would influence society through their own individual lives and also through the church, as we have seen. As Griffith John famously put it at the Shanghai Protestant missionary conference in 1877, “We are not here to develop the resources of the country, not for the advancement of commerce, not for the mass promotion of civilization, but to do battle with the

38. See, for example, Taylor, *Hudson Taylor*, vol. 2: 119; Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*, vol. 4: 377.

powers of darkness, to save men from sin and conquer Chinese for Christ.”<sup>39</sup> Especially towards the end of the century, many conservative missionaries held to a pre-millennial eschatology.<sup>40</sup>

Another vision, however, impelled Timothy Richard and thousands who came after him in the early twentieth century: the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth through the transformation of society. As Richard put it, he sought for nothing less than “the national conversion of China.”<sup>41</sup> For Richard and others, present ills seemed to be more pressing than the threat of future punishment in hell. Clearly, in their eyes, the crying needs of China’s millions were for food, health, just social relations, and better government, and these could be brought to a significant degree by education, better agriculture and industry, and political reforms, undergirded, to be sure, by a worldview shaped by Christian convictions.<sup>42</sup> By these means, God’s righteous rule would manifest itself in a more just and prosperous society.<sup>43</sup> The chief means by which they sought this transformation was education, especially through the colleges they founded. As John K. Fairbank wrote, “these institutions did a solid job of teaching modern subjects, and under the influence of the liberal trend within the Christian community, they increasingly stressed God’s kingdom on earth and dedicated service as the ideal of life.”<sup>44</sup> The advocates of education and reform also thought that by focusing on such tangible things they would win the confidence of China’s ruling class, who would then relax their firm opposition to the spread of the gospel.<sup>45</sup> Most of these proponents of social services, reform, and education believed in a post-millennial eschatology.<sup>46</sup>

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39. Quoted in Barr, *To China With Love*, 156.

40. That is, the belief that Christ will return soon to establish an earthly kingdom which will last for one thousand years, following which a new heaven and earth will be established, in which believers in Christ will live forever in resurrected and glorified bodies, and others will suffer eternal punishment in hell.

41. Ng, *Chinese Christianity*, 122.

42. For a brief explanation of Richard’s later vision for the kingdom of God, see Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process*, 256–57.

43. See Bays, *China’s Christian Colleges*, and Lodwick, “Good Works,” in Tiedemann, *Handbook*, 431–34.

44. Fairbank, *Missionary Enterprise*, 13.

45. For a conciliatory, even sanguine, comparison of these two approaches, see Pfister, “Rethinking Missions in China.”

46. Post-millennialism held out the hope that the world would be so influenced by the spread of the gospel that all sectors of all nations would be substantially transformed into the kingdom of God on earth. Many also thought that Christians should work in anticipation of that kingdom through reforms in education, society, and government.

## FUNDAMENTALIST-MODERNIST CONTROVERSY

The general evangelical consensus shared by missionaries for most of the nineteenth century began to show strains in the final decades. While W. A. P. Martin was considered by most to be orthodox, and thus could sustain warm friendships with men like Griffith John and Hudson Taylor, some doubted the soundness of Timothy Richard's theological developments.<sup>47</sup> Richard never denied the central tenets of traditional Christianity, though he employed "expressions and statements . . . that no traditionally minded Christian of that day would dream of using."<sup>48</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, however, the theological cleavage became clear, as what has been called the "fundamentalist-modernist" controversy spread from the West to the mission field, and then back again, when the more conservative missionaries complained that new arrivals were not sound in doctrine. Even at the end of the century, Hudson Taylor was aware of the growing influence of German higher criticism, but could simply ignore it. Only a few years later, however, Griffith John and Jonathan Goforth felt compelled to speak out against what they considered unorthodox beliefs of new workers arriving in China.

In other words, what had earlier only seemed to be different emphases—education rather than evangelism, reform rather than regeneration of individuals, accommodation to Chinese beliefs rather than clear distinctions, aiming to influence the educated elite rather than preaching to the masses, material rather than spiritual help, secular rather than religious education—now became hallmarks of two quite divergent approaches reflecting sharply disparate theological orientations. After the Centenary Missionary Conference of 1907, when essential unity of faith and practice was asserted, "the Protestant mission consensus in China began to face a serious challenge."<sup>49</sup> Under the impact of German higher criticism, the Social gospel, evolutionary theory, and liberal theology, "the progressive thinking of such missionary pioneers as Timothy Richard and W. A. P. Martin was developed into full-blown liberalism."<sup>50</sup> The huge shift in missionary personnel and

47. Martin, John, and Taylor posed together for a famous photograph in 1905, but Taylor and Richard became permanently estranged as a result of their deep disagreements over missionary methods and even theology. A number of Richard's fellow Baptist missionaries also thought his views too radical, and separated from him.

48. Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process*, 241. For example, he wrote that "in *The Essence of the Lotus Scripture*, as interpreted by Chinese and Japanese 'initiated' Buddhists . . . , we find the same teaching as in the Gospel of St. John in regard to Life, Light and Love." Richard, *The New Testament of Higher Buddhism*, 2.

49. Yao, *Fundamentalist Movement*, 36.

50. *Ibid.*, 39.

financial investment from evangelism and church growth to higher education and modern medical work mirrored an increased concern for the body rather than the soul.<sup>51</sup> One observer said of the new arrivals, especially after the First World War, “the missionary became difficult to distinguish from the social worker.”<sup>52</sup> Eventually, when most of the denominational missions had united to form the National Christian Council in 1922, most conservative mission agencies would either not join the organization or, like the CIM, would pull out in 1926 after its liberal theological stance became clear.

The more conservative missionaries formed the Bible Union in 1920 as a response to their growing apprehension about the liberal theology which was becoming more and more characteristic of what Daniel Bays has called the “Sino-Foreign Protestant Establishment” (SFPE), that is the extensive network of “mainline” denominational missionary societies and the institutions which they created and administered, along with the growing corps of Chinese Christians who had been educated abroad or in one of the Christian colleges.<sup>53</sup> The YMCA, a major player in the SFPE, had also become dominated by young people who had imbibed the new theology that reigned in many universities, churches, and theological seminaries in North America and elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> The Bible Union stressed the fundamental doctrines of Christianity: the saving work of Christ on the Cross and at the Resurrection; the necessity of individual repentance, faith, and regeneration; and thus the priority of preaching over all other forms of service.<sup>55</sup> At the first organizational meeting, Jonathan Goforth was elected as one of two vice-presidents.

## MISSIONARY METHODS: AN EVALUATION

A hundred years later, we are in a position to assess these debates and their different outcomes with a little bit more perspective, as we see how they played out in the twentieth century and up to the present.

On the one hand, there is no doubt that Christian colleges and publications exerted enormous influence on China, as increasing numbers of graduates went on to establish careers in education, medicine, publishing,

51. Ibid.

52. Valentin Rabe, quoted in Yao, *Fundamentalist Movement*, 41.

53. Bays, *A New History*, 92–120.

54. On the liberal theological turn of the YMCA, see Yao, *Fundamentalist Movement*, 37–38.

55. See especially Yao, *Fundamentalist Movement*, 57–99.

science, and politics. Girls were educated and their feet ceased to be bound; concubinage was outlawed. Modern methods of hygiene, agriculture, and healing improved the lot of millions. “Science” and “Democracy” became watchwords, even idols, in the early part of the century, leading to major changes in all sectors of society. Both the Nationalists and the Communists rejected many traditions that missionary-initiated higher education had shown to be deleterious to the welfare of the populace. Educated Protestants profoundly influenced the government of the Republic of China, particularly during the Nanjing Decade (1927–37) and then later on Taiwan.<sup>56</sup> Even the communist government pursued policies that sounded very much like the program of reforms advanced by missionaries.<sup>57</sup> Overall, there is no doubt about the benefits of Western education, which has led to longer life expectancy, better health, technical and scientific advances, and the elimination of much that hindered Chinese from enjoying the basic benefits of modern life. Missionary-founded institutions of higher learning definitely played a key role in the modernization of China.

Furthermore, the contributions of foreign missionaries, and later Chinese Christians, in building a better society did deflect, and even disarm, some of the hostility that the literati and rulers of China had felt towards Christianity, for they saw both the good will of some of its representatives and the beneficial effects of many of their efforts to ameliorate deplorable conditions, particularly in light of their own ineffectual efforts. They also valued Christianity as a means of strengthening China against its external enemies, who were on the verge of slicing up their nation. Even today, government officials as well as many intellectuals credit Richard and others with helping to bring China into the modern world, and thus see Christianity in a more favorable light than in official communist propaganda. They are seen as having “played a very significant role in the introduction of Western ideas, institutions, and values into China.”<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, considering that the goal of these institutions was “to Christianize the national life of China,”<sup>59</sup> we should note that reforms resulting from Western education have not touched the systemic weaknesses of Chinese culture that render any changes in the political structure ineffectual and that vitiate many of the policies designed to improve the lot of the people. Elite graduates of Christian colleges usually did not accept the faith

56. See especially Barwick, “The Protestant Quest.”

57. See Fairbank, *Missionary Enterprise*, 2, for an impressive list of such programs.

58. Shen and Zhu, “Western Missionary Influence,” 155.

59. Dunch, “Science Religion, and the Classics,” 76.

of their zealous and well-meaning teachers.<sup>60</sup> As Fairbank expressed it, “‘I taught him English to bring him to salvation,’ says the missionary; ‘I learned English so I could help save China,’ says the convert.”<sup>61</sup> Those that did profess faith in Christ tended to assume leadership in the increasingly liberal denominations that ran the schools, and to imbibe the liberal theology that was already gaining ground in the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup> Their legacy can be found in the top echelons of the official Three-Self Patriotic Movement and among some of the “culture Christians” in academic circles. This is not surprising, since, as the curricula of missionary-founded schools became more and more secular, the education they provided looked increasingly like that of government-sponsored schools.<sup>63</sup>

Social reforms did alleviate the sufferings of women, whose feet had been broken and bound and who were treated as being of less value than men in marriage, family, and education. Even today, however, infant girls are still abandoned or killed in the womb; men often take a number of modern-day concubines, sex trafficking is rampant, and physical abuse of wives is endemic. It is a similar story in the political arena. Something like democracy was tried for a while, and has finally succeeded in taking root in Taiwan (at least partially), but mainland China has been under autocratic rule for decades, sometimes causing far more cruelty and oppression than the rule of the emperors, despite the technological, economic, and social advances that were initiated by missionaries and carried forward by their intellectual heirs in the past one hundred years.

Both Timothy Richard and W. A. P. Martin thought that if educated Chinese could be shown the superiority of Western civilization and its roots in Christianity, they would then abandon their resistance to the Christian message and its missionaries. In the event, however, as Peter Ng, in an otherwise laudatory chapter on Richard, wrote, “it turned out that even though Chinese people were willing to accept Western civilization, it did not necessarily imply that they would take Christianity accordingly. Worse still, Chinese intellectuals even turned against Christianity using Western weapons of Science and Communism.”<sup>64</sup>

60. See Lodwick, “Good Works,” 433.

61. Fairbank, *Missionary Enterprise*, 2.

62. See Fairbank, *Missionary Enterprise*, 13, and Hutchison, “Modernism and Missions,” 110–24.

63. This was the case even before the Republic of China forbade required chapel services and religious instruction after the Anti-Christian Movement in the late 1920s. See Bays, *China’s Christian Colleges*, 77–79.

64. Ng, *Chinese Christianity*, 130.

We can see that the pietism of the more conservative missionaries and their Chinese converts often failed to teach Christians how to apply the fundamental principles of the Bible to all domains of society. They left this to the liberals, with their more optimistic, and thus ultimately disappointed, confidence in the goodness of human nature and the extent to which the visible rule of God would be manifested on the earth in this age. If these missionaries had brought more of a Reformed perspective to their work, they might have equipped Chinese Christians to make a more significant impact on society and culture, as Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng), a prominent Chinese theologian, argued in many of his works in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>65</sup>

At the same time, the focus on evangelism, church planting, and leadership training by Hudson Taylor, Griffith John, Jonathan Goforth, other missionaries like them, and thousands of faithful Chinese evangelists and pastors, led to the creation of a “Chinese church that would not die,”<sup>66</sup> despite all the ravages of war and persecution.<sup>67</sup> Many have claimed that the methods of their representative, Hudson Taylor, failed.<sup>68</sup> That judgment must surely be placed against the fact that by the end of his life, “the annual total of baptisms recorded by the CIM had risen from hundreds to thousands, . . . 2,500 in 1905” (the year he died).<sup>69</sup> Only a few years later, while Timothy Richard was still advising high government officials in hopes of promoting political and social reform, and engaging in friendly dialogue with leaders of the great Chinese religions, Griffith John and Jonathan Goforth were preaching the “old fashioned,” “confrontational” gospel and seeing thousands either converted or significantly revived in their faith. Contrary to what Richard believed about the best way to reach the literati, “many of the gentry,” “officials,” “leading men of the town,” and “prominent men” in various places asked Jonathan Goforth to explain the gospel to them.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, Chinese Christians have now begun to permeate all sectors of society, bringing both the gospel and a Christian world view to more and more people. Transformed lives are beginning to penetrate a rotten

65. See Chang, *Strategy of Missions; Critique of Indigenous Theology*.

66. A reference to a book by Wang and England, *The Chinese Church*.

67. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* showed long ago that a focus on institutions will not build a healthy Christian movement; evangelism, training of believers, and planting of indigenous congregations will.

68. See, for example, Ng, *Chinese Christianity*, 130.

69. For a most helpful comparison and contrast between Taylor and Richard, see Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor*, vol. 7: 524–29.

70. Goforth, *Goforth of China*, 245.

society with healing “salt and light,”<sup>71</sup> and thousands of educated believers are beginning to propose meaningful reforms and to demonstrate their care for the poor and oppressed in a variety of ways, such as education for the children of migrant laborers, care for the elderly, and relief for victims of natural disasters.

In other words, while W. A. P. Martin, Timothy Richard and other advocates of Western education and reform movements are to be counted among the builders of the liberal wing of Chinese Christianity, Liang Fa, Pastor Xi, Griffith John, Hudson Taylor, and Jonathan Goforth are recognized as among those who laid the foundation for the evangelical (and even charismatic) churches that account for at least ninety-five percent of today’s Chinese believers. (Robert Morrison and James Legge may justly be claimed by both types of Chinese churches.) Beyond that dichotomy, however, today’s Chinese Christians are also returning to caring for the crying needs of the larger society, which most nineteenth century missionaries would have approved. Leaders of the new urban unregistered congregations, as well as Christians in the academy, are also re-opening discussions of the proper ways in which the Christian faith should be fully indigenized, fulfilling the dream of the late Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng) for a comprehensive Christianity that would make its mark in every corner of Chinese civilization.<sup>72</sup> When we consider that the leaders of these urban congregations are mostly conservative and evangelical in their theology, perhaps the title of the two-volume re-publication of A. J. Broomhall’s biography of J. Hudson Taylor may be on the mark. Taylor and those like him indeed played a crucial role in *The Shaping of Modern China*.<sup>73</sup>

## THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

Partly under the influence of the “great man” theory of history, and partly reflecting the flowery and laudatory style of Victorian biography, especially Christian biographies, previous accounts of the lives of outstanding missionaries frequently focused on strengths and victories, not weakness and defeats. In the twentieth century, especially in the aftermath of World War I and the ongoing revelations of the moral and spiritual failings of political

71. Matt 6:16; title of three volumes in the series *Studies in Chinese Christianity*, edited by Hamrin and Bieler, published by Pickwick Publications.

72. See Chang, *Strategy of Missions to the Orient*, and *Critique of Indigenous Theology*.

73. Broomhall, *The Shaping of Modern China* a republication of the original seven-volume work, *Hudson Taylor and China’s Open Century*.

and even religious leaders, historians have tended to dismiss these accounts as mere “hagiography.”

Nor have missionaries been spared. Far from the altruistic saints of nineteenth-century lore, they are now seen as men and women with clay feet, portrayed as willing accomplices of brutal Western imperialism, despisers of the Chinese and their ancient civilization, and intent upon foisting both a foreign religion and a foreign culture on these poor “heathen” folk who were deemed to be sunk in darkness and devoid of redeeming qualities. Worst of all, the charge now goes, they meant to subjugate the Chinese church under their own benevolent dictatorship, and China itself under a social and political system of their devising, using the pretext that the benefits of modern Western science and democracy could replace a decrepit and dying society.

There is enough truth in these accusations to make them seem plausible to those who do not take the time to study the missionaries more carefully and broadly. Even some scholars who do read the sources bring such a biased perspective that they cannot accurately assess or describe reality, especially if they do not share the religious convictions of the more evangelical missionaries. Pat Barr’s portrayals of Protestant missions in the last half of the nineteenth century is one example of this genre. Alwyn Austin’s acerbic treatments of Hudson Taylor, Pastor Xi, Henry Frost, and others furnish other instances of seeing everything through a jaundiced eye and thus failing to perceive the very real competence, faith, hope, and love that the missionaries and their most eminent converts were almost universally said to have possessed to an unusual degree.<sup>74</sup>

In the chapters that follow, we hope to present a fair and balanced picture. The contributors were asked to be both appreciative and critical. After all, Christian teaching holds that “there is none righteous, no, not one,” for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”<sup>75</sup> At the same time, however, we have tried to show why these men exercised such great influence over others and have received such honor, not only in their own time but in ours as well.

As for previous “hagiographic” biographies being virtually worthless as historical sources, in at least a few cases this is not true, for two reasons. First, they typically contain quotes from letters and statements by contemporary

74. Barr, *To China With Love*; Austin, *China’s Millions*. For a review of Austin, see G. Wright Doyle, “China’s Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society 1835–1905,” <http://www.globalchinacenter.org/analysis/christianity-in-china/chinas-millions.php>. Girardot, *Victorian Translation*, furnishes another example of a supercilious attitude towards missionaries.

75. Rom 3:10, 23.

eyewitnesses. For example, the biography of Hudson Taylor by his son and daughter-in-law, while composed in a style we would certainly not employ today, does make convincing reading largely because of the generous use of descriptive comments about Taylor and others made by those who knew them well.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, Geraldine Taylor could call upon Dixon E. Hoste, who worked closely with Pastor Xi for ten years, as well as other missionaries, to give a rounded portrait of a complex man. In addition, these books do not entirely hide the flaws of their subjects. In the case of Xi, shortcomings are explicitly and frequently mentioned. Taylor's son and daughter-in-law do not criticize him, but they do tell of his inner struggles with faith, hope, and love. Rosalind Goforth's anguished reactions to her husband's radical demands come through loud and clear.<sup>77</sup> These earlier works deserve our continued attention and, because they were penned by people who shared the deepest convictions of their "heroes," may provide us with a more accurate assessment than hypercritical treatments by cynical modern debunkers who cannot seem to imagine that anyone could be that good.

We believe that these were truly great men, whose piety, passion, and perseverance, not to mention their labors, love, and suffering, merit our admiration and even emulation. In an age sorely needing real heroes, perhaps these men can give us some hope.

76. Taylor, *Hudson Taylor*.

77. Goforth, *Goforth of China*.