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Reintroducing a Pioneer Missionary

THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN China has received increasing attention in recent decades, both inside and outside China, spurred by the evidence of Christian revival there. Many historians had viewed the missionaries' efforts solely in terms of cultural imperialism or colonial paternalism. While it is true the missionaries were a product of their own cultures, they did not all consciously seek to transfer their own cultures to the new context of China. Nor did they all seek to gain political advantage in China for their own countries. In fact, many endured great privation and sacrificed much, even their lives, to spreading the Christian gospel. In many situations, where they went "the gospel of good works" followed. They established schools for girls as well as boys; made available hospitals or medical services to all classes; engaged in social redemptive works, particularly for women; and created and distributed all forms of edifying literature in Chinese.

A closer examination of missionary contributions is now being undertaken by Chinese and foreigners alike. More studies are available in English and Chinese on individual missionaries or specific missionary contributions to China, such as educational institutions or technical services. Nevertheless, it remains true in the history of modern China that "Protestant missionaries are still the least studied but most significant actors in the scene."¹

Studies on the educational contributions of the Protestant missionary enterprise in China in particular are increasing, as evidenced by a 2009

1. Xu, "A Southern Methodist Mission," 1, cites the Dean of American Sinologists, the late John K. Fairbank, in 1985. Recent prize-winning quantitative research underscores Fairbank's point; see Woodberry, "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy."

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volume on China's Christian colleges.² Despite the interest in individual missionary schools, there have been far fewer studies in English on the Chinese government educational institutions, even though missionaries and Chinese Christians often played an important role there. Lund's dissertation on "The Imperial University of Peking" examines its development and impact on China during the last years of the Qing (Ch'ing) dynasty.³ Biggerstaff's survey of the earliest modern government schools chronicles the efforts made by the Chinese government prior to the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95).⁴ Chapters on various government educational institutions, including Qinghua (Tsinghua) University in Beijing, can be found included in other books.⁵

In 1992, Dr. Ruth Hayhoe, an expert on Chinese higher education, affirmed the importance of the query as to why the first modern government university of the twentieth century was located in the remote inland province of Shanxi (Shansi), and what might be its connection with the 1901 higher education reform edicts. She also encouraged further investigations into the key role played by Welsh Baptist missionary Timothy Richard.⁶

Richard had administered famine relief in the province 1878–80, and remained there for the next seven years.⁷ He witnessed the terrible suffering of the people as he tried to ease their plight by supplying food and money collected by Christians in China and abroad. He experienced firsthand the difficulties of transport in Shanxi in attempting to bring food to the starving. Often he had to endure resistance or maneuvers by various officials that impeded getting aid to the people. Worse, desperate famine

2. Bays and Widmer, *China's Christian Colleges*. See the review of the literature on Christian colleges in their Postface, 303–7.

3. Lund, "The Imperial University."

4. Biggerstaff, *The Earliest Modern Government Schools*.

5. Examples include the story of the Christian founder and successors at Qinghua University in Carol Lee Hamrin, "Tang Guo'an: Pioneering China's Rights Recovery Movement," in Hamrin and Bieler, *Salt and Light*, 13–29; Buck, "Educational Modernization," 171–212; Keenan, "Lung-men Academy," in B. Elman and Alexander Woodside, eds., *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

6. Personal communication between the author and Dr. Hayhoe in 1992, echoed in Hayhoe, *China's Universities*, 18–19. This conversation spurred a decade of research on Richard's work in higher education in China, culminating in Eunice V. Johnson, *Educational Reform in China, 1880–1910: Timothy Richard and His Vision for Higher Education* (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2001), from which this book is adapted.

7. See Bohr, *Famine in China*.

conditions fueled the elite's animosity toward missionaries as well as grass-roots anti-foreignism, prompting outbreaks of violent religious persecution that halted all Christian work. The root of these challenges he found to be ignorance, superstition, and a lack of basic understanding of the world outside China and its modern scientific principles.

Richard began to think that once Chinese officials understood the "laws of God" operating in nature, they would accept the Christian faith and seek the greatest benefit of their own people. He believed that the key to understanding these laws was education. Thus, during his time in Shanxi, Richard provided educational lectures and scientific demonstrations to the scholars and officials in Taiyuan. Out of his famine experiences and his contacts with these Chinese officials, a vision was birthed for educational reform as the principal means of Chinese "enlightenment," opening the door for the gospel as well as China's entry into the modern world.

The substance of Richard's vision went through several transformations, ultimately becoming one that encompassed all of China and its role in the world. While in Beijing in late 1895, for example, during meetings with several high-ranking officials, he offered suggestions for comprehensive reform in the economy, foreign relations, and policies for guaranteeing religious freedom, as well as recommendations for educational reform, which he viewed as the basis for all the rest. By then, he already envisioned a system of government-supported higher educational institutions located in the provincial capitals offering a curriculum of Western learning—including Christian values, to those scholars who had already achieved certain success on the Confucian education for the civil service. By 1888 this vision had expanded to include a three-tiered system with elementary as well as preparatory education for the higher educational institutions.

Through the years, some Chinese scholars and officials, who had been making their own efforts to effect change in the Confucian civil service examination system—which shaped all levels of education, became increasingly sympathetic to Richard's vision. Powerful Court reformers finally embraced it and eventually provided the necessary impetus for imperial edicts that ultimately brought about the creation of a system of modern government-supported higher educational institutions.

In 1901, at the Chinese government's initiative, Richard was invited back to Shanxi to help settle the issue of compensation for damage and loss of life by missionaries and Chinese Christians during the Boxer Uprising the year before. In late May, Richard's proposed solution resulted in a

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decision to fund a college of Western learning, which was later combined with a college for Chinese traditional education to become the Imperial University of Shansi (now Shanxi University) in Taiyuan.

This volume will show how Timothy Richard's work in education—both formal schooling and mass popular education through the media, libraries, and societies—served as the central component of his larger and ever-expanding vision for a modern China. He had one grand passion—the Kingdom of God worked out intellectually, spiritually, and materially, ultimately leading to peace among individuals and nations.

Richard gradually developed his vision for China and the nations as a deep thinker and committed educator, finding his primary niche as a missionary doing Christian literary work, rather than more traditional itinerant evangelism and church planting, or even teaching. Over time, he disseminated his vision through every means available—writings, translations, memoranda of advice to government, personal mentoring and cooperation with Chinese and Westerners, public speaking in China, Britain, and America, and writing thousands of letters. All this while he served in various leadership capacities (1880–1912) in the Educational Association of China, as editor (1890–91) of the reformist newspaper *Shi Bao* [Shih Pao; The Times], and as General Secretary (1891–1915) of the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge among the Chinese (SDK). The SDK was also known as Christian Literature Society for China (CLS), which became the official name in 1906.⁸

The chapters following this introduction are ordered chronologically to highlight key phases in Richard's life. Chapter 2 notes some parallels between Wales and China in the mid-nineteenth century and examines early formative and educational influences in Richard's life while in Wales. The early emergence in Wales of Richard's reformist bent, aimed at achieving practical results, became apparent during his first years in China. By the beginning of his first furlough to England in 1885, Richard had already begun to articulate his vision for higher education as a base for comprehensive reforms in his interactions with other missionaries and Chinese officials.

Chapter 3 looks at Richard's first efforts to secure support from the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) for his educational project. Failing in

8. Hereafter in this volume, Christian Literature Society (CLS) will be used for the Society during Richard's whole tenure there. This reflects usage at the time by Richard and his missionary colleagues, reflecting the fact that the main funding arm of SDK was the CLS in Glasgow, Scotland, as well as the existence of an international network of like-named societies.

this, he returned to China determined to reproduce his vision in others. The remainder of the chapter explores the controversies in Shanxi and Shandong (Shantung) Provinces surrounding Richard's unique mission philosophy, with its focus on elites, and his insistence on the preeminent importance of his approach. Then it examines his efforts to disseminate his vision to Chinese after he (temporarily) suspended the connection with his missionary society to become editor of a reformist newspaper under the auspices of the eminent high-ranking reformer Li Hongzhang (Hung-chang). The refining of the man and his vision was completed by late 1891, when Richard became General Secretary of the CLS with the renewed support of the BMS.

Chapter 4 sets forth Richard's broad-based efforts and contributions on behalf of the welfare of the Chinese people over the ensuing period of almost twenty-five years. This was the most fruitful and influential period in Richard's life as he impacted nearly all aspects of life in urban China, directly or indirectly, through his literary efforts in the CLS and his personal relationships with Chinese and Westerners. Richard's contemporaneous efforts to disseminate his educational views through the Educational Association of China (EAC) shows how the relationships among its missionary members allowed for a fruitful exchange of information and ideas and—through their many networks—more opportunities for the dissemination of his vision.

Richard's influence on his peers as well as on “young China”—a rising generation of officials who prompted the emperor to launch the Hundred Days Reform—became very evident in 1898. The most dramatic educational reforms proposed were (1) the replacement of the stilted “eight-legged” essays on the Confucian classics by required essays on current affairs in civil service examinations, and (2) the establishment of schools in the provinces that included both Chinese and Western studies in their curricula. Both reforms were based on ideas Richard had propounded since the early 1880s and likely had discussed at great length with the young reformers during their visits together 1895–98.⁹

Chapter 5 documents the culmination of Richard's vision for higher education in China in the 1901 decision on the Imperial University of Shansi. The institution's inception played a major role as inspiration and practical model when the government promulgated edicts in September

9. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 375.

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and November 1901 to establish a national system of modern institutions of higher education teaching Western learning.

Concluding chapter 6 sums up the importance of Timothy Richard's work. Through his prolific writings, in English and Chinese, he exerted significant influence on China's elite scholars and officials, and thereby became a key figure in the modernization of late Qing China. His reform legacy extended beyond the aborted 1898 reform into the late Imperial and early Republican era and even beyond his retirement in 1915. His advice for ending China's isolation in the late nineteenth century—to send top scholars and leading family members abroad, introduce Western learning to government schools, and launch public discussion of world topics—sounds like a description of Deng Xiaoping's first actions to reopen China after the Mao era.

This book is intended to re-introduce Timothy Richard to the general reader as well as scholars interested in early modern China, the history of Chinese Christianity, and the impact of the nineteenth-century mission era on both. Amazingly, there has been no book-length overall study of Richard since 1945, the centennial of his birth. This volume, based primarily on materials in English available up to 2002—including his memoir, private notes and letters, and biographies by his contemporaries, extends an invitation to explore studies in English and Chinese, recently completed or forthcoming, related to the life and work of this remarkable man.¹⁰

10. Richard, *Forty-Five Years*. Many of the full biographies and studies use Richard's memoir as their primary source and therefore contain little new information. See the list of these sources in the Bibliography. Appendix 1 provides a chronology of Richard's life; Appendix 2 lists his major works in Chinese, in English translation.