

Foreword

WHAT A JOY TO see the birth of this volume by Dr. Eunice Johnson on the eminent pioneer missionary Timothy Richard (1845–1919). My connection to this book goes back to the early 1990s, when Eunice came to Toronto to consult archives relating to the British missionary who was appointed by Timothy Richard to head the Western Department of the Imperial University of Shansi (now Shanxi University) at the time of its founding. I was working on a book about the development of Chinese universities over the twentieth century and the various Western influences that interacted with Chinese patterns of higher education in the evolution of China's modern universities. There was clear evidence of influences from the French and German models in the early years, followed by the American model, and finally the Soviet model after the revolution of 1949.

One fact puzzled me, however. Although Britain had been the dominant imperial power in terms of economic influence on China, the only institution that could be said to embody elements of a British model was the Imperial University of Shansi, and only for a short time. Within a decade after its founding, it had been integrated into the province's own higher education system. When Eunice told me during our brief meeting that she was planning to write a doctoral dissertation on its missionary founder, Timothy Richard, I could only give her the strongest encouragement, recognizing that here might be a unique and important story in the history of modern Chinese higher education.

Years passed by, and occasional phone calls or e-mails let me know that she had progressed through the dissertation research and defense, and had attended the university's centenary celebrations in Taiyuan, presenting a copy of her dissertation to its current leaders. Through these years, academic responsibilities took me away from my earlier work on the history of Chinese higher education. It was only in March of 2010 when I was in a mentoring program for current doctoral students at the annual meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society in Chicago that the

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story of Shanxi University once again captured my attention. A Chinese doctoral student at Oxford University was assigned to my group, with a thesis entitled “Competition and Compromise between British Missionaries and Chinese Officials: The Founding of Shanxi University in 1902.” She had focused her research on significant Chinese archival documentation, and explored the story of the university’s founding from the perspective of Governor Cen Chunxuan (Ts’en Ch’un-hsüan), an enlightened provincial leader who wanted to see his province benefit from modern higher education but was also concerned about issues of Chinese sovereignty and Chinese control over this important sector.

The first question I asked Aisi Li was whether she had read Eunice Johnson’s thesis on the role of Timothy Richard in promoting modern higher education and science in China and in the founding of Shanxi University. The answer was no, and she was eager to find an opportunity to connect with Eunice as soon as possible. My contact information enabled her to visit Eunice in Florida and compare notes from Chinese and English language archives on the founding and early development of this remarkable university. Eunice shared details of all that Richard had done in negotiating the Boxer Indemnity issues for the Protestant mission societies and his success in attracting outstanding missionaries such as Moir Duncan and William Soothill to carry forward the leadership work of the new institution. Aisi also visited the archives of the Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut, and then returned to Oxford to complete the work on her thesis.

For my part, I decided I must finally read the whole thesis and learn Eunice’s side of the story, so I invited her to visit me in our retreat home in South Florida in March of 2011. We were able to spend three days together, in part talking about the vision of Timothy Richard—that establishing a modern university in every province of China would support the development of scientific reforms and enable the country to solve its deep problems of poverty and recurring famine, while also bringing them into connection with a wider world that was changing dramatically.

As Eunice and I talked and reflected on the interface between Eunice’s scholarly understanding and Aisi Li’s emerging doctoral thesis, it occurred to me that Oxford might invite me to serve as external examiner on this work. At that moment, I turned to Eunice and asked her if she would be willing to accompany me if I were invited to Oxford in this role. She shared with me a longstanding desire to visit Richard’s grave in London in order

to pay respects to this Christian visionary, whose work had inspired her thesis. She also wished to take there several mementos from the grave of Moir Duncan, who had died in Taiyuan in 1906 at the early age of forty-five, just four years after taking up the leadership of the university's Western Department, and had been buried in the nearby mountains. Thus emerged the idea of a pilgrimage, which is recounted in the Epilogue.

I hope readers of this volume will journey with its author, as they explore the life of a man called by God to dedicate forty-five years of his life to the uplift of China through sharing his Christian faith, alongside a profound commitment to scientific knowledge and the creation of scientific and religious literature in China as well as to the development of institutions of higher learning in every province and region of the country. Coming from a family where Welsh, not English, was the first language and educated in a theological college where he struggled for a reform of the curriculum toward valuing living languages, natural science, and world history in contrast to the curriculum oriented to classical languages and the history of Greece and Rome that was prevalent in universities of the time, he had no desire to implant a British model of the university in China. No wonder then that he happily negotiated arrangements whereby the institution he helped to found would be fully handed over to Chinese administration and leadership in less than a decade from the date of its establishment. Richard thereby fulfilled his long-held vision for a university incorporating Western learning to train Chinese officials so they could benefit not only the province but all of China.

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