

COMMUNISM AND CHRISTIANITY: MISSIONARIES AND THE COMMUNIST  
SEIZURE OF POWER IN CHINA

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## Introduction

In July 1946, the President of the United States appointed John Leighton Stuart as U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of China. This appointment was a surprise to many, particularly General Albert C. Wedemeyer, who was so sure of the appointment for himself that he had bought a new civilian wardrobe in preparation. Both men had experience in China, Wedemeyer as an advisor to Chinese President Chiang Kai-Shek and Stuart as a career missionary. The choice of Stuart over Wedemeyer was not meant to symbolize a shift in US policy, but was tacit recognition that the missionary presence in China was a large asset in a chaotic situation. President Truman's personal envoy to China, General George C. Marshall, recognized that he needed Stuart's knowledge and personal contacts across China to prevent a Chinese Civil War.

Prior to World War II, the American presence in China was largely made up of missionaries. The United States Government had a very small presence on the ground in China, so missionaries like Stuart were largely better informed on the day-to-day life of the Chinese people, as well as the political climate of the country. When Marshall and Stuart later failed to prevent the Chinese Civil War, American reticence to become involved in the conflict further reduced the official American presence, putting missionaries in a surprisingly important position.

These missionaries represented the front lines of the Sino-American relationship, but they were very different from the average American. Many of them had been in China for decades. A few, like Stuart, had been born in China during their parents' time as missionaries. Despite this prolonged absence from their native land, many of them carried American assumptions with them, such as the importance of separation of church and state, the ideal of religious freedom and the value of

representative government. Yet they were also missionaries, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their primary purpose was to bring the Chinese to Christ, which their doctrine said they should do with no bias towards race or nationality. This put them in a position of being caught between the competing ideas of nationalism and religion. Nationality, by its definition, separates those in a nation from those outside of it. Because of its history as a nation of immigrants, American nationalism can be more inclusive than many forms of nationalism, but it still contains the belief that the American system is the best one. Christianity, at least in theory, is universally inclusive. American missionaries in China often struggled between their feelings of nationalism, which drew a distinction between themselves and the Chinese, and their devotion to Christianity, which had a more Universalist approach.

Of course, it is difficult to generalize about missionaries as a whole, especially Protestant missionaries. Their motivations, backgrounds and religious beliefs varied widely. Some were evangelicals who saw proselytization as their core mission. Others had a more liberal view of Christianity, which believed that putting Christ's work into action in the world was their primary duty. Each missionary was shaped by the churches or mission organizations that sponsored them, but also carried their own individual beliefs with them.

Even before World War II, these missionaries had faced decades of upheaval in China, but the Chinese Civil War created an unprecedented crisis for them. Unprecedented is not used lightly here. While their history had been a very rocky road, from early restrictions on their movement to repeated uprisings against their influence, the challenge of the Chinese Communists was something entirely different. Even so, most missionaries did not realize it immediately. Prior disturbances, even including the Japanese invasion, had been restricted in geographic scope and were

limited in duration. Although there were many casualties, missions were able to retreat to safe areas and wait the disturbances out. Missionaries had the backing of foreign governments and guarantees of protection through the “Unequal Treaties” of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, so the threats were always dealt with quickly. The Chinese Communists, however, presented an existential threat to missions. The Communists were avowedly atheist. Communist doctrine stated that religion was one of the many ways that capitalists distracted the poor from their exploitation. Removing religion was necessary for the class consciousness needed for a revolution. Previous Chinese organizations had been anti-Christian, some violently so, but unlike those groups, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was gaining the power to enforce it. By 1948, it looked poised to gain control of the entire country, something that no group had been able to do in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Just as dangerous, its program called for control over all aspects of Chinese society. The CCP was not only anti-religious, it was gaining the power to implement its policies.

This type of threat was something new to missions. If the CCP gained power, as looked likely by 1948, how would missions survive? This spawned some new questions: Was the CCP dogmatically Communist or was it a nationalist party with Communist leanings? How anti-religious was it? Experience from Eastern Europe showed that a Communist takeover meant wholesale persecution of the church. But if the CCP was really nationalist first, would it follow a different plan? Some reports from the areas it controlled in northern China suggested that it was less dogmatic than its Eastern European brethren.

This dissertation looks at how missionaries understood and reacted to the Communist victory in China. They were a key source for most Americans for understanding what was happening in China. This project is primarily interested in

how they interpreted the events of the Chinese Civil War and what they communicated in these interpretations back to the American public. What divisions of opinion were there among missionaries on how to deal with the Communists and what caused those divisions? How did their experience both before going to China and during the Chinese Civil War affect that interpretation? Finally, how did they participate in the larger American debate over Communism and China?

This dissertation has discovered that there was a forgotten voice among liberal Protestant American missionaries in China. Those missionaries went against what would seem conventional wisdom by seeking accommodation with the atheist Chinese Communists during and immediately after the Chinese Civil War. They were primarily from liberal denominations, usually doing service work rather than evangelization, and possessed an ecumenical perspective toward both religion and politics. They focused more on the universality of their religious beliefs than on the particularities of the nationality. Ironically, they were counting on the CCP's nationalist tendencies to be stronger than its Communist ones. In this judgment they were proven correct, but it did not get them the outcome they wanted. They did not understand that the hyper nationalism of the CCP would force them out of the country not because they were Christians, but because they were Americans.

Once they were back in the United States, they again took a less popular stance by remaining open to dealing with the Communists, both in terms of accepting that Chinese Christians must make accommodations to the CCP and then by advocating better relations with the People's Republic. Yet they were out of touch with mainstream America in the 1950's and their voices were drowned out. Even worse, their stories would be used by anti-communists for Cold War purposes even as they argued against it.

## **Scope**

This project focuses on American Protestant missionaries as the front line in the American relationship with China. I use the term missionary to refer to foreigners who were sent to China in association with a religious organization. As well as professional clergy, the term missionary includes teachers, doctors and development experts, most of whom were layman who were sent to China for their technical skills. They diverged in their religious beliefs and in their purpose for going there, but they were employed by mission boards in churches, hospitals and schools.

This thesis focuses almost exclusively on Protestants, only rarely including Catholics in its analysis. The Catholic Church had a significantly different relationship with the CCP than did Protestants. The Vatican took a strongly anti-Communist line in China from the beginning of the Civil War. Experience in the Communist occupation of Eastern Europe after World War II had convinced it that an attempt at accommodation with Communism was tantamount to surrender. In addition, the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church caused the CCP to see it as a potential rival political center. Loyalty to the Vatican, which the CCP believed that all Catholics must have, was incompatible with loyalty to the CCP and China. As a result, the Catholic Church was considered an enemy of the CCP even as the Civil War was going on, while the CCP was still showing moderation to Protestants.

A second reason for excluding Catholics was that the American presence in the Catholic missions in China was only a fraction of the overall mission. The American Catholic Church was still itself relatively new, only losing the classification as a missionary region at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Maryknoll Mission, the first mission of American Catholics to go to China, was founded in 1911, but its numbers were still minute compared to the thousands of Catholic missionaries from

Europe. Because this project is focused on Americans, Catholics will have only a minor part in it while discussing the missions in China.

Catholics do play a slightly larger part in the story after the expulsion of missionaries. While the missions were secure in China, cooperation between Catholics and Protestants was minimal. Many Protestants were suspicious of Catholics in a way that they were not of Protestants from other denominations. Despite disagreements between Protestant groups, there was a feeling that they were on the same team. Catholics, however, were largely viewed as competitors. But after missionaries were driven out, the lines between Protestant and Catholic softened as Catholics were brought into the Cold War consensus in the United States. Stories of Communist oppression of Catholics were useful to anti-Communist activists, so the previous hostility toward Catholics was lessened. As a result, their stories merged with those of Protestants as the American debate over China developed in the 1950's.

Nationality is also a tricky issue. Although this project focuses on American Protestant missionaries and particularly on how their American identity affected their reaction to Communism, the ties between American missionaries and those of other countries were very tight. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the United States provided the largest number of Protestant missionaries in China, but their missions were connected very closely with those of Canada and the United Kingdom. They shared information and staffed many mission organizations without regard for nationality. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to understand the American missions without including some discussion of Canadian and British missionaries.

### **Structure**

This project is divided into two parts. The first three chapters look at the experiences of missionaries while in China. They trace the development of missions



and how they reacted to the increasing threat of Communism. The last two chapters look at how missionaries and their churches participated in public discussion of China after their return to the United States. They look at religious and political questions that resulted from their expulsion from China.

Chapter 1 looks at the development of missions in the first half of the twentieth century through World War II. It examines the increasing division between conservative and liberal missionaries. Conservatives tended to focus more on evangelization while liberals focused more on the social gospel. This division dramatically sharpened in the 1920's and 1930's, reflecting a similarly growing division in the United States between fundamentalist and modernists Christians. The growing fissure in goals and methods paved the way for the disparate reactions to Communism after World War II.

Chapter 2 examines how American missionaries reacted to the Chinese Civil War. They divided largely along the lines of their primary work in China. Missionaries devoted to proselytizing were much more likely to support the Guomindang regime. They believed that a Communist victory would mean the end of Christianity in China. On the other hand, missionaries who were focused on the social gospel, i.e. providing services to the Chinese people, were more likely to seek accommodation with the Communists, generally viewing them as a better alternative to the corrupt Guomindang.

Chapter 3 looks at missionaries who chose to stay after the Communist victory in 1949. These missionaries typically put more emphasis on the social gospel by providing services to the Chinese people. They hoped their work would be useful enough to a new regime dedicated to strengthening China to be allowed to remain. They hoped that the CCP's nationalist tendencies would win out over its dedication to

atheism. What they did not anticipate was that the hyper nationalism that the CCP preached would not permit the permanent presence of foreigners who were so closely tied to imperialism. With the Korean War dramatically exacerbating nationalist tendencies, almost all missionaries had been driven from China by the end of 1951.

Chapter 4 analyses how missionaries evaluated their missions after they returned to the United States in the 1950's. Most important in their analysis was the health of the Chinese Christian Church they had left behind. This issue had the dual importance of deciding whether their missions were successful and establishing whether the United States could work with the Communists. If the church was healthy, then their missions had been a success despite their expulsion. It also showed that with foreign influence gone, the CCP could allow religious freedom. If the church had compromised itself by becoming an adjunct of the Chinese government, however, it reinforced that Communists could not be trusted while it also suggested that the previous century of missionary work had been in vain.

Chapter 5 looks at the same period as Chapter 4, but analyses how missionaries entered into the public debate on American relations with China. While many missionaries approved of the mainstream anti-Communist message, a significant portion of returned missionaries argued for a more nuanced view of China. They advocated better relations with China, arguing that despite their distaste for Communism, ignoring a quarter of the world's population was foolish. These missionaries came from largely the same ecumenical, social gospel groups that had advocated working with the CCP while in China. Ultimately, however, their voices would be drowned out by the Cold War consensus. Their stories would even be used to support isolating China, despite their opposition to it.

## Sources

This project relies heavily on letters and publications of missionaries in China. These letters were sometimes to friends or family members, but more often there were open letters to their home congregations. Some sent regular newsletters to keep their friends and family up to date on the progress of their missions. Some of these were painfully dry, discussing the difficulties of supply or logistics, but more often than not they were colourful and candid, at least before the Communist takeover. After the Communist victory, these letters became more circumspect because of fear of Communist censorship and retaliation. These letters were extremely useful, but they have some limitations. For one, not all missionaries wrote home consistently and those who did write did not always keep their letters to be archived. This makes it difficult to assess the real numbers of missionaries believing a certain way. There were, without question, a great number of missionaries who thought that the GMD was hopelessly corrupt. There were also very many who thought they could work with the Communists. But determining even approximate percentages of who believed that out the entire missionary population in China would be extremely problematic.

Mission board records were also very useful. Minutes, meeting notes and correspondence between board members provided some good insight into how they viewed Communism from the United States and how they interacted with the missionaries that they were supporting. The China Committee of the North American Board of Foreign Missions was particularly useful because it encompassed so many other denominations. It had the added benefit of showing the interaction between mission boards of different denominations.

Memoirs of missionaries in China were bountiful in the 1950's and copies of some of them can still be found. I had the opportunity to examine about twenty of them. They were curious sources to use because they were written years after the fact, used editors who had not been missionaries and had to be viable in the market. This meant that most published memoirs were strongly anti-Communist. Because of this inherent bias in the market, memoirs must be read with some caution.

I also use newspaper and magazine articles, mainly from the popular press but occasionally from Christian presses. Some of these were written by missionaries while others were written about them. These articles were useful in showing what message missionaries were trying to get out and how the public was receiving it. Most articles came from either large scale publications like *The New York Times* or *Newsweek*, but they sometimes came from smaller newspapers, especially if the article is syndicated across the country.

I was fortunate enough to be able to interview one surviving missionary, Mary Reed Dewer. A remarkable woman who still remembers China with an unbelievable clarity, Ms. Dewer was an invaluable source. She filled in many gaps on how missions worked and directed me to written sources that provided more information. She was also a prolific letter writer while in China, giving me her perspective from sixty years ago and then her perspective today. She also provided the biggest challenge to this project, which was resisting the urge to make it simply about her. I was able to stay on course, so her writing and her interview only appear occasionally in this work, but her influence is throughout.

Finally, I tried to incorporate US Government documents where possible. The government was not nearly as concerned with missionaries as it was about the survival of the Guomindang. More importantly, it was concerned with distancing itself from

the impending fall of Chiang Kai-shek's regime, so few government documents directly addressed missionary concerns. Even John Leighton Stuart's cables to Washington rarely directly referenced missionaries, despite his previous work as one.

Stuart himself was a difficult aspect of this project. He had spent a lifetime as a missionary before becoming Ambassador and his efforts as Ambassador were clearly influenced by that. Yet including the bulk of his Ambassadorial work as missionary work would side track the project away from the missionaries on the ground. As such, he is included as part of the overall discussion, but mainly within the context of the continuing missions on the ground.

### **Approach**

In the early 1970's, John K. Fairbank called on historians to include missionaries in their narratives. To that end, he edited *The Missionary Enterprise in China*<sup>1</sup>, published in 1974, which addresses a series of specific issues about missionaries in China that ranged from theology to logistics to missionary motivations. Fairbank's call did not spark a revolution to include missionaries when discussing relations between the United States and China. Most histories of US-China relations written since then give only minor mention to missionaries, preferring to stay within the more comfortable realm of state-to-state relations. Missionaries are more often discussed within the field of Religious History than international relations. This omission is frustrating because missionaries in China were the most frequent person-to-person contact between Americans and the Chinese.

Paul Varg's *Missionaries, Chinese and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement China, 1890-1952*, was probably an inspiration for Fairbank's

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<sup>1</sup> John K. Fairbank. *The Missionary Enterprise in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974)

call. Published in 1958, Varg showed that missionaries were a key mediator between the United States and China at the grass roots level in both countries and as occasional advisors to politicians. His work was much more focused on the pre-WWII era, most likely because of the availability of documents, but also because of the political climate the 1950's. His work, unfortunately, has only rarely been expanded by subsequent historians, hence Fairbank's frustration. There has been some very interesting work on missionaries, but it usually focuses on the role of missionaries in China rather than as a mediator between the two countries.<sup>2</sup>

The standard introduction for the history of US-China relations is Warren Cohen's *America's Response to China*. Originally written in 1971, it has been repeatedly updated as new information becomes available. The most recent addition (2010) included a little discussion on missionaries' impact on the ground in China. That impact was minimal, as Cohen and many others agree.<sup>3</sup> Cohen, however, does not look at how missionaries affected the American attitude towards China. He largely looks at the top levels of the relationship while providing only minimal discussion of grassroots connections.<sup>4</sup>

Nancy Tucker's *The China Threat: Memories, Myths and Realities in the 1950's* digs a little deeper into popular views of China, but focuses on how those views translated into political pressures on the White House. She includes some former missionaries who were among the most vociferous advocates for isolating Communist China, but still looked at the high levels of government, such as Congressman Walter Judd or Ambassador Stuart. Her main argument is that President

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Varg. *Missionaries, Chinese and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement China, 1890-1952* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958)

<sup>3</sup> See also Douglas Fairbank's *The United States and China*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Michael Hunt's *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985)

<sup>4</sup> Warren Cohen. *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010)

Truman and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles both believed that isolating China was futile and self-defeating, but were unwilling to pay the political price for shifting policies toward recognition. Her argument is compelling, but only includes missionaries and religion in a marginal way. She does not look at missionaries as a whole, but only those who were putting the most pressure on the administration.<sup>5</sup>

The most comprehensive work to bring religion into the early Cold War is William Inboden's *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment*. Inboden looks at how religion factored into early efforts of containment. He discusses containment globally, but spends one chapter just on China. Like Tucker, he brings in politicians like Judd, but he also brings in a few unofficial lobbyists who had been missionaries to China. He makes a powerful case that religion and former missionaries were very influential in shaping American policy towards China. His work and Tucker's complement one another nicely, but both are focused on the highest levels of decision making. Neither looks to the personal contacts that existed between American missionaries and the Chinese. Because of their focus, neither is concerned with missionaries who did not share in anti-communist fervour.<sup>6</sup>

There are some works that go in the other direction, looking exclusively at mission work in China. Some of these are arguing against Cohen's assertion that missionaries had no impact in China by pointing out the issues, although limited, in which they had some effect. Some historians have looked at how female missionaries in China spread their own ideas about women's roles. Jane Hunter's *Gospel of Gentility* looks at how female missionaries pushed American norms of womanhood on

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<sup>5</sup> Nancy Tucker. *The China Threat: Memories Myths and Realities in the 1950's*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> William Inboden III. *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

the Chinese.<sup>7</sup> Fan Hong's *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom* looks at how mission schools used physical fitness as a way to fight against the practice of footbinding.<sup>8</sup> Gael Graham's *Gender, Culture and Christianity* makes similar arguments by looking at how mission schools tried to elevate women's status in society by promoting literacy and condemning footbinding, while continuing to instill the idea that women should be in the home taking care of family.<sup>9</sup> These works examine how American cultural norms were transmitted to the Chinese people through mission schools, mostly focused in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Although each makes a case that missionaries had some influence in China, they are at least as much about the missionaries themselves and the values they took with them.

Some more recent work has touched on how missionary work changed while they were there. Jessie G. Lutz's *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions* looks at the anti-Christian movements in China during the 1920's. Those movements resulted from internal changes in China which were completely out of missionary control, but resulted in terrorizing missionaries so that many of them evacuated the country permanently.<sup>10</sup> Lian Xi's *The Conversion of the Missionaries* looks at how the modernist/fundamentalist split in Christianity in the United States affected the attitudes of missionaries in China. Modernist missionaries became more willing to accept Chinese culture and less aggressive in pushing American ideas on the Chinese.<sup>11</sup> Oi Ki Ling takes a similar approach, but for British missionaries after World War II. Ling looks at how British missionaries tried to deal with the Chinese

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7 Jane Hudson. *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

8 Fan Hong. *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern Sport*, (London, UK: Frank Cass Publishing, 1997).

9 Gael Graham. *Gender, Culture and Christianity: American Protestant Mission Schools in China, 1880-1930*, (New York City, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995)

10 Jessie Lutz. *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions: The Anti-Christian Movements of 1920-1928*, (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Cultural Publications, 1988)

11 Lian Xi. *The Conversion of the Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907-1932*, (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1997)



Civil War, which would lead to their eventual expulsion.<sup>12</sup> *United States Attitudes and Policies Toward China: The Impact of American Missionaries*, edited by Patricia Neils, provides a collection of essays that address Fairbank's call more directly. The subjects vary widely, from the arrogance of many missionaries toward Chinese culture to the role of former missionary John Leighton Stuart as the last US Ambassador to mainland China before the Communist victory. Despite the wide spread of topics, the collection as whole is one of the few attempts to show how missionaries were a significant part of the Sino-American relationship.<sup>13</sup>

Niels' volume shows the direction in which the field of Diplomatic History is slowly moving. As many diplomatic historians broaden their queries to include international relations beyond just state-to-state, they are recognizing that people and private institutions build relationships and influence one another across national boundaries. The emerging field of the US and the World incorporates non-state actors into our understanding of international relations.

This project is part of that trend by beginning to incorporate missionaries into the larger narrative of Sino-American relations. It seeks to bring religious history into the analysis of how China and the United States have interacted. . Missionaries played a primary role in that relationship until WWII, when the US Government became more entangled with China. Until WWII, missionaries were one of the only sources of information that most Americans had on China. Even after the war, they were still important interpreter of events in China for the American people.

This project is about the role of those missionaries in understanding Communism in China. It is about how many missionaries were becoming more liberal

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12 Oi Ki Ling. *The Changing Role of the British Protestant Missionaries in China, 1945-1952*, (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999)

13 Patricia Neils, ed. *United States Attitudes and Policies Toward China: The Impact of American Missionaries*, (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe Inc., 1990)

and tolerant of Communism at the same time that the American people were becoming less so. Missionaries' role as interlocutor for events in China had been unchallenged for decades, but as the threat of Communism emerged, they were overshadowed by the mainstream media that found direct and unambiguous news sold much better than the nuanced analysis coming from missionaries. The fact that many missionaries tried to stay in China to work with the Communists is one manifestation of how different their views were than most Americans. When they were forced out of China, many of these missionaries kept the view that the Communists were not evil, but were trying to improve the lives of their long-oppressed people. When they expressed these views publicly, they were ignored or castigated. Even worse, their experience of trying to work with the Communists and failing was used as evidence that accommodation with Communism was impossible. Their role as interpreter of China was usurped at the moment when it became most important.

## Chapter 1

### The Changing Nature of Protestant Missions in China in the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

When American missionaries began to rebuild missions after World War II, they were not starting from scratch. They were building on a legacy of more than one hundred years. It was a legacy that existed in the physical remains of mission buildings that had been abandoned during the war and in the minds of the missionaries and the Chinese people they sought to serve. The buildings could be repaired or torn down and built again, but the relationship between the missionaries and the Chinese people had momentum of its own. Missionaries returning to China after the war had to work with the foundations that they and their predecessors had laid during the previous hundred plus years.

Those foundations were mixed in the extreme. From their first entry into China in the 1830's, the Chinese people and the Chinese government often saw missionaries as imperialists or dangerous social deviants trying to undermine Chinese society. Their access to China was only achieved through the same gunboat diplomacy that Europeans had used to force China open to trade. Once they arrived, they challenged Chinese society and culture with their foreign religion, making themselves and their converts a dangerous heterodox population. Their recruits were often from the margins of Chinese society, reinforcing the view of many Chinese that they promoted deviancy. Yet they also created a legacy of aid by providing valuable services that the Chinese government did not. Their initial focus on evangelization gradually

developed into a more social gospel orientation. In trying to implement the gospel's message, they opened schools, hospitals, and tended to the poor. Even with these services, some Chinese considered them arrogant and condescending because of their disdain for Chinese culture and their insistence on the supremacy of their own ways. Beginning in the 1910's, some missions tried to repair this image of arrogance by bringing in better educated missionaries who were more accepting of Chinese culture. This was undoubtedly a step in the right direction, but was not enough to overcome nearly a century of Chinese suspicion and resentment towards missionaries.

This chapter looks at the changes in Protestant missions in China in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It highlights the hurdles for missionaries in anti-foreign sentiment and the rise of Chinese nationalism. It argues that although missionaries were slow to understand how they were perceived by the Chinese, the violent protests against them in China, coupled with changes in Protestantism in the United States, led the liberal denominations to adapt. The most obvious result was to split the missionary movement into two groups, modernist and fundamentalist, with the modernists moving away from evangelism, towards an emphasis on the social gospel. Modernists also tried to appreciate and incorporate Chinese culture into their version of Christianity when possible. Most mission work was interrupted by World War II, but when the missions were re-established after the war's end, the modernist shift in priorities and methods continued. Although they did not realize it at the time, these changes laid the groundwork for how missionaries reacted to the Communist threat.

### **Early Missionaries**

In China, the term missionary has usually applied to foreigners working with Christian organizations. It has been applied to those directly involved in religious activity, such as preaching or proselytization, or service fields such as teaching or

medicine. Some missionaries were trained as clergy, while others brought expertise in other areas.

Christian missionaries arrived in China as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, but had a negligible impact.<sup>14</sup> Catholics began arriving en masse in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They had initial success under Jesuit monks who brought technical knowledge and often served as advisers to Chinese officials. The monks, led by Matteo Ricci, adapted the Catholic message to its Chinese audience, allowing ancestor veneration and other traditional practices among Chinese converts. They also used established Chinese words for Christian concepts to make them more comfortable for the Chinese. Their influence at court (Ricci was an adviser to the emperor) and their flexibility in adapting to Chinese traditions succeeded in gathering converts over the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Pope Clement XI ordered that these accommodations be stopped because he feared they were creating a bastardized version of Catholicism. After that, if the Chinese wanted to convert, they had to leave behind traditional Chinese society. Most Chinese felt this was too high a price to pay and renounced their Catholicism, undoing the gains the Jesuits had made in the previous century. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church in China had only a very marginal impact as a whole.

Protestant missionaries, led by Congregationalist Robert Morrison from Scotland, arrived in China in 1807.<sup>15</sup> The Qing Dynasty<sup>16</sup> restricted foreign access

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14 The first Christians to arrive in China were Nestorian Christians, who disagreed with the mainstream western Church on the relationship between Jesus's human and divine natures. Their status as heretics meant they received almost no support in their missions. They had very limited success in China, but had considerably more with the nomadic peoples of central Asia.

15 Because the British East India Company refused to take missionaries to China for fear of antagonizing the Qing Court, Morrison had to travel to the United States and book passage for India there. Morrison worked mainly in Macau and Guangdong. He died after 25 years in China having gained only ten converts.

16 The Qing Dynasty was the political ruler of China from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. In this paper, the term Qing is used for political issues, laws and treaties. The

until it was forced to open the country after the Opium Wars. The resulting Treaty of Nanjing, signed in 1842, included a requirement that British missionaries have increased access to China.<sup>17</sup> The United States and other western powers negotiated similar “unequal treaties” within a few years, allowing their missionaries to flood into the country.

Americans had been drawn to China as soon as there were Americans. Even before the Treaty of Paris was signed, prominent American merchants began to refit their ships for the long voyage to China. In addition to the riches that merchants could make with millions of Chinese customers, American missionaries saw China as an opportunity to bring millions of souls to Christianity. The reasons that missionaries chose to go to China are difficult to pin down, but most historians tie them to social changes in the United States. The classic works of Paul Varg and John K. Fairbank attribute the growth of missionary enthusiasm mainly to two factors: the imperial successes of the West around the world and the Second Great Awakening. The success that Europe had in dominating the world, particularly China, gave westerners a sense of superiority in their own culture. Even though that domination was achieved by force of arms, missionaries saw the advance of western civilization, which they usually referred to simply as “civilization”, as irresistible. Christianity was, from the missionary perspective, the central aspect of that civilization and should be spread across the world.<sup>18</sup>

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term China is used to describe interactions between missionaries and the Chinese people, until the Qing fall in 1911 and China began to reconstitute itself into a Westphalian nation-state.

<sup>17</sup> The clause including missionaries was at least partly because of domestic politics. The opposition Liberal Party called the Opium War unjust aggression and called the ruling Conservative Party immoral. The provision was added on to a clause opening four new treaty ports to British traders, most likely because it provided a moral justification for imposing the treaty on China. See Harry G. Gelber. *Opium, soldiers and evangelicals : Britain's 1840-42 war with China, and its aftermath*, (New York; Palgrave MacMillan, 2004); Glenn Melancon. *Britain's China policy and the opium crisis : balancing drugs, violence and national honor, 1833-1840*, (Burlington, VT; Ashgate Publishing 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Paul Varg. *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952*, (Princeton NJ; Princeton University Press, 1958); *The Making of a Myth: The*

The Second Great Awakening provided a spiritual push to missionaries. As the movement swept the United States in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, American religion was reinvigorated. Michael Hunt, who agrees that imperialism helped drive missionaries, argues that this religious revival was much more important to American missionaries, particularly those going to China. It gave them a new sense of purpose to spread the gospel, and China was the largest market. In addition to spreading Christianity, they were spreading the gospel of the United States, hoping to help the Chinese by showing them a better way to do things. Regardless of what was the most important factor in driving missionaries to China, the flow of American missionaries to China continued to grow throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps as many as one thousand American missionaries were in China. These came from many denominations, with Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist being the largest in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Americans were clearly hearing the call from the book of Mark: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”<sup>19</sup>

The increased movement of missionaries to China did not change the involvement of the United States Government in the region. It did relatively little to promote either Christianity or trade directly. It was happy to take advantage of the success of the British in forcing China open, but did not want to expend resources in an area in which it had no crucial interest.<sup>20</sup> Without a significant official presence in

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*United States and China 1897-1912* (Lansing, MI; Michigan State University Press, 1968). John K. Fairbank. *The United States and China* fourth edition, (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>19</sup> The numbers of missionaries are very difficult to know for certain because the organizations that sent them to China were so decentralized. There was not a central list of missionaries, forcing historians to estimate based on the partial records available now. Michael Hunt. *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914*, (New York City; Columbia University Press, 1983); Lian Xi. *The Conversion of the Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907-1932*. (University Park, PA; The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> The Treaty of Wanghia (1844) between the United States and the Qing was gained by riding the coattails of the British after the Opium Wars. The Chinese offered most western countries similar terms

China, missionaries and traders became America's eyes and ears in China and the frontline of Sino-American relations.

American businessmen and missionaries sometimes worked in harmony, such as when the Opium Wars led to increased missionary access to China, while other times they conflicted, such as when missionaries opposed the opium trade. Americans were the second largest importer of opium to China, which was illegal under Chinese law until 1860 when gunboat diplomacy by the British and the French forced the Chinese to legalize it. Missionaries continued to campaign against opium after its legalization. They had only a small effect but drew the enmity of American traders nonetheless. The two represented competing strains in American culture as well, commerce and morality. While many would argue that commerce was (and is) much more important in American society, missionaries' selflessness held greater appeal to the American public. Missionary stories, whether memoirs, articles or public talks, fascinated Americans in a way that recollections about trade rarely did. Missionaries became the largest voice for China, with most Americans knowing little about the country beyond that derived from missionary accounts.<sup>21</sup>

The success that missionaries had in influencing the American public was not duplicated with the Chinese public. The "unequal treaties"<sup>22</sup> gave missionaries access to China and protection from Chinese abuses, but did not guarantee a good reception

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as the British had forced as a way to promote competition and conflict between them. The United States was not averse to the use of force, as shown by several instances of American warships trying to teach the Chinese a lesson, but official policy rarely moved beyond the rhetorical level. See Warren Cohen's *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2000); Michael Hunt's *The Making of the Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1983); Charles Kitts' *The United States Odyssey in China, 1784-1990*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991).

21 Stuart Creighton Miller. "Ends and Means: Missionary Justification of Force in Nineteenth Century China", *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, ed. John. K. Fairbank. (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press. 1974).

22 "Unequal Treaties" is the collective name for treaties between China foreign powers in which China made repeated concessions while gaining nothing in return. Most negotiations were done at the end of a cannon. The Treaty of Wanghia was the first negotiated with the United States, but it was subsequently renegotiated many times.



among the Chinese. Rather than finding millions of eager converts, they found a populace that was largely hostile to their presence. Chinese who converted to Christianity would be separating from their traditional values and culture. Missionaries faced repeated reprisals, often violent, from the Chinese they sought to serve. The resentment towards missionaries and the foreignness of the religion prevented the mass conversions they had hoped for. The repeated violence against missionaries and Chinese Christians was a symptom of that resentment but it was also a severe hindrance to getting converts. The Chinese were even more reluctant when their conversion could result in their death or that of their family, as occasionally happened during anti-Christian riots.

The foreignness of Christianity, the violence against Christians and the lack of understanding of Chinese culture all contributed to severely undercut the conversion effort. The Reformed Church of American was in China four years before gaining its first convert in 1846.<sup>23</sup> American Methodists had an even harder time, spending ten years in China before they converted their first soul in 1857.<sup>24</sup> As more missionaries arrived in China, the rate of conversion increased. By the 1890's, the approximately 1300 Protestant missionaries in China, most of whom were American or British, had converted an estimated 60,000 Chinese.<sup>25</sup> Their successes continued to increase into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but their dream of a Christian China was far beyond their reach. During the missionary era in China, Chinese Christians never made up even one percent of the Chinese population.

Missionaries generally shared the goal of converting the Chinese to Christianity but they practiced different methods. When American missions began,

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23 Gerald de Jong. *The Reformed Church in China 1842-1951*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan; William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992) 20.

24 Hunt 27.

25 Fairbank. 202.

most missionaries looked to direct proselytization, while a smaller group looked to improve the situation of the Chinese people, which would eventually lead to conversion. The latter approach showed promise for converting the Chinese because traditional Chinese religion/spirituality was connected to success in life. For example, correct behaviour would be rewarded with good weather and a good harvest. Or sacrificing to one's ancestors could lead to having a son.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, some missionaries tried to demonstrate that Christian learning, both spiritual and practical, would help improve the livelihood of its followers.

The most common way to help raise the standard of living was education. Christian schools would initially teach Chinese children literacy, math, and science so they would have an economic advantage in their profession. They would also include religious courses, but the emphasis on Christian teachings varied widely from school to school. Missionaries also sponsored small development projects, such as helping with irrigation or teaching new farming techniques. These would help economically, again showing how Christian (western) knowledge could improve Chinese lives.

Even among those doing social gospel work, there were divisions on the best way to proceed. Some missionaries focused on literacy, believing reading was the key to rising out of poverty and barbarism. Literacy was also essential for gaining converts. Protestants generally focus on the individual's relationship with God, which requires Christians to be able to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Other social gospel missionaries worked on more social issues, hoping to bring Chinese society out of its "backwardness".

The terms "backwardness" and "superstition" were frequently used by missionaries, particularly before the 1930's. Missionaries inevitably took a portion of

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<sup>26</sup> Male children in China have always been much preferred in China. They are referred to as "Great blessings" while daughters are referred to as "little blessings". Kam Louie, *Theorizing Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

their own culture with them and looked down on China. Some challenged traditional Chinese practices, even though such positions would hurt their prospect at gaining converts. Most prominently, missionaries challenged the role of women in Chinese society. Female missionaries became influential in China as medical missions grew in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Because Chinese women refused to see a male doctor, missions quickly began to send female nurses and occasionally female doctors to China. Female missionaries also worked in girls' schools. As female missionaries arrived in large numbers (they would outnumber male missionaries by the 1930's) they became concerned that Chinese women were seen as nothing more than vessels for child bearing. Few, if any, of them would have considered themselves feminists. For these missionaries, being a wife and mother was a natural choice, but those roles did not need to be the entirety of their identity. They did not need to be merely adjuncts of men, but could be their own person. They eagerly shared this perspective with Chinese women.

Missionaries did not target Chinese laws enforcing women's status, knowing that they had almost no influence with the Qing government. Instead they focused on social issues where they could make a difference. The most brutal manifestation of women's status was footbinding, the breaking of young girls' feet to keep them small to fit the cultural norm of attractiveness among Chinese men.<sup>27</sup> The process was repeated as the girls grew up, with their toes folded under their foot. Because it inflicted life-long pain on girls, missionaries began a campaign in the 1870's to end the practice. Over the next six decades, both male and female missionaries pushed to

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27 Footbinding had become popular by the twelfth century. For reasons that are not clear, Chinese men thought that a "three inch lotus", meaning a foot three inches long, was the height of beauty. For almost a millennium, Chinese women of the upper classes repeatedly broke their daughters' feet and bound them tightly in cloth to keep them small and enhance their marriage prospects. In addition to attracting men, bound feet were also a status symbol. It made walking extremely painful for women with bound feet, demonstrating that they were wealthy enough to afford servants. Dorothy Ko. *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

enhance the status of women through education and physical fitness. They encouraged competitive physical games as a way to show that girls should value their healthy body. Most mission schools would not accept a girl with bound feet, putting a counter pressure on parents. There was no public education system in China at the time, so mission schools were the best that most Chinese could hope for. This added to the tension between traditional Chinese society and missions. Upper class Chinese were rarely interested in Christianity, but the successes of western imperialism in China had shown the value of western knowledge while the failures of the Qing government had weakened the credibility of the Confucian model. Christian education offered an avenue for advancement for upper class Chinese, making it appealing in a way that Christianity as a religion rarely was. Bound feet, while a necessity in the upper sectors of Chinese society, had a new drawback that parents had to take into account if they wanted their daughters to prosper.

The movement against footbinding was the most straightforward way in which missionaries challenged Chinese society. It also marked their most successful effort as footbinding was banned by the newly established Republic of China in 1912, although the practice continued in some parts of China until the 1930's. Yet there were other less direct ways that they made similar challenges. Female missionaries brought their own ideas of domesticity which accepted the role of women as primarily mothers and wives. Indeed, many female missionaries came with their husbands and children. Yet their presence in China demonstrated that those roles were not the limit of their capabilities. When they saw the extreme subservience of Chinese women, they began

advocating American values to China and, without thinking of themselves as revolutionaries, tried to instigate a social revolution in Chinese society.<sup>28</sup>

Missions also tried other ways to influence Chinese society. They tried to improve hygiene, care for the poor and teach scientific agricultural techniques. All of these issues were aimed at raising the Chinese standard of living and demonstrating the value of Christianity and Christian knowledge.<sup>29</sup> Although this approach to winning converts seemed logical in principle, it did not work as well in practice.<sup>30</sup> Christian schools and universities were generally well-regarded, but they did not lead to large numbers of conversions. The overall weakness of the country, as shown by western incursions, did cause the Chinese to look beyond their own traditions to strengthen their country. Mission schools gained more students because western countries were clearly stronger than China. Learning from foreigners could help the Chinese make better lives for themselves and regain the country's rightful place in the world. While missionaries were hoping western knowledge would lead to conversion, the Chinese saw mainly the practical side of education. One historian characterized the Chinese attitude as: "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>31</sup>

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28 Gael Graham. *Gender, Culture, and Christianity: American Protestant Mission Schools in China, 1880-1930*, (New York: Peter Lang Pub Inc., 1995); Fan Hong. *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China*, (Columbus, OH: Frank Cass Pub., 1997); Gerald H. Choa's "Heal the sick" was their motto; *the Protestant medical missionaries*, (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1990); Patricia Neils, *United States Attitudes and Policies Toward China: The Impact of American Missionaries*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe Publishing, 1990).

29 Ruth Rogaski. *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China*, (Berkeley, CA; University of California Press, 2004); Rebecca Karl. *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Century*, (Durham, NC; Duke University Press, 2002); Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. "The Missionary Enterprise and Theories of Imperialism", *The Missionary Enterprise in China and American*, ed. John K. Fairbank. (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1974).

30 This was similar to the practices of the Jesuits in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Many Jesuits became teachers in China, aiming at the highest levels of society. A few even became ministers in the Qing court. While preaching the gospel, they also taught the Chinese court about European advances in astronomy, agriculture and engineering. While the Qing court was grateful for the knowledge, almost none of its members converted to Catholicism.

31 John K. Fairbank. *The Missionary Enterprise in China and the United States*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

Efforts at gaining conversions were hampered by the Chinese image of Christians. The majority of Chinese converts were from the margins of society, such as tenant farmers or the homeless, who had less to lose by withdrawing from traditional Chinese society. The fact that the lowest rungs of society were drawn to Christianity made it even less appealing for Chinese who were even slightly better off. Many Chinese, particularly the upper and middle classes, viewed Christianity as a dangerous social deviancy. It disrupted society by making converts abandon tradition and social norms, such as ancestor veneration, concubines and footbinding. This feeling among the Chinese increased the social stigma for Chinese Christians, again reinforcing that only those with little stake in Chinese society would be willing to convert. The protection offered by the unequal treaties further damaged the Chinese opinion of Christians. To make matters worse, there were a few instances of Chinese who had committed crimes converting to Christianity simply to avoid prosecution. Local magistrates were often afraid to prosecute Christians, regardless of cause, because any hindrance of Christians threatened to bring retaliation from western powers. Missionaries' arrogance and disdain for Chinese culture, particularly prior to the 1930's, did not help. Wen Ching<sup>32</sup>, a prominent advocate of reform at the beginning of the twentieth century, published a book on the crisis China was facing. The book was aimed at the failings of the Qing government, but he strongly condemned missionaries as well. He wrote of missionaries: "Their Church is an *imperium in imperio*, propagating a strange faith and alienating the people from their ancestors."<sup>33</sup> Near the end of the nineteenth century, a Chinese woman who had

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32 Wen Ching was a pseudonym for Lim Boon Keng. Keng advocated returning to Confucianism while using western science and technology to strengthen the country. He was part of a reform group that succeeded in getting the Qing Emperor Guangxu to launch a massive reform movement in 1898, but was forced into exile after a palace coup reversed the reforms. He spent most of the rest of his life in Singapore, where he continued to write about saving China through modernization.

33Wen Ching. *The Chinese Crisis from Within*, (London, Grant Richards Publishing, 1901).

business dealings with missionaries took a more personal view. She said, “There seems little inducement to repent and be saved, if going to heaven would entail associating with foreigners for all eternity.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Missionary Organizations**

While missionaries were doing their work in China, they relied on a complicated network of organizations for their material support. Their parent organizations in their home countries, which were usually established along denominational lines, were their direct means of financial support, but policies and information were often run through coordinating committees that ran across denominations. To make matters more complicated, missionary organizations tended to follow national boundaries, but missionaries in China cooperated across those boundaries. For instance, the Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist<sup>35</sup> churches all had separate mission boards in the United States. Each denomination also had separate boards in Britain, Canada, Norway, and so on. Each of these boards was independent but often worked with the boards of other countries and denominations in an ecumenical spirit. In the United States and Canada, most Protestant denominations joined the Foreign Missions Conference of North America (FMC) in 1893, which was designed to help coordinate missionary activities across denominational divides. This coordination was very important not only for dealing with potential problems, but also to halt competition for converts. For most of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, missionary organizations would seek out any potential convert they could find, even if he or she

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34 Lian Xi. *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, (Yale University Press, New Haven CT, 2010) 7.

35 The Baptists split prior to the American Civil War over the issue of slavery when its convention banned slave holders from becoming missionaries. Most southern Baptists left the Baptist Triennial Convention, which was a loose coordinating organization which left the majority of decision-making in the hands of local Baptist churches, and formed the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Baptists who remained in the Triennial Convention would eventually adopt the name Northern Baptist Convention in 1907 until 1950 when it adopted the name American Baptist Convention (ABC) which is often confused with Anybody But Carolina.

had already converted to another Christian church. By the end of the century, most missionaries had arrived at a consensus that this was a waste of resources. There were not enough missionaries to cover all of China so each mission could operate in its own area without worrying about other Christians stealing their converts. The FMC helped identify the areas in need of missionaries, reducing competition and waste while expanding the missionary coverage of China.<sup>36</sup>

Because the FMC's members committed so many resources to China, they formed the China Committee to devote specific attention to the projects there. The China Committee was one of many committees set up by the FMC, but it was the first one devoted to a single country. China warranted its own committee because of the concentration of missionaries there. The reason for the fixation on China was most likely a combination of the size of the country and the American idea that the United States served as protector of China from European aggression.

The image of Americans protecting China comes from a few factors. First, the United States did not use large-scale gunboat diplomacy as the British and French did. There were some instances where American ships used force, but they were isolated incidents that the American public was mostly unaware of. As a result, the United States looked benign in comparison. The United States also gave rhetorical support to Chinese sovereignty and sponsored hundreds of Chinese students to study in the United States. These all had negligible impact in China, but gave the American public

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36 Daniel Bays. *A New History of Christianity in China*, (Hoboken, NJ; Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2012); Valentin H. Rave. "Evangelical Logistics: Mission Support and Resources to 1920", *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, ed. John K. Fairbank. (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1974).



the image that the United States was the champion of China. This idea no doubt played a major role in the resources mission boards devoted to China.<sup>37</sup>

Although this image was mostly a figment of American imagination, it helped motivate missionaries and their boards to send Americans to help save the Chinese people, both physically and spiritually. For example, by the 1920's, China represented the destination of almost a third of all missionaries from the Presbyterian Church of the United States (PCUSA).<sup>38</sup> The Congregationalists, Southern Baptists and Methodists had a similar commitment of personnel in China. The China Committee worked fairly well in facilitating cooperation between missionary organizations, but its work was hampered because of the chaos in China in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>39</sup> New York was too far away to deal with the constantly changing situation. Partially in response to that and partially in an effort to move from a mission-run church to a Chinese-run one, they established the National Christian Council of China (NCC) in 1922, which met in Shanghai. Missionaries were initially the majority of the NCC's members, but it also had a large Chinese membership that would become the majority by the 1940's.<sup>40</sup> Neither the China Committee nor the NCC had authority

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37 Paul Varg. *The Making of a Myth: The United States and China 1897-1912* (Westport CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1980); Paul Cohen, *America's Response to China*, (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2000)

38 Like many American churches, the Presbyterian Church divided over the issue of slavery around the time of the American Civil War. The PCUSA was the northern branch with a very large presence in China. The Presbyterian Church of the United States (PCUS) was the southern branch and had a presence in China, but it was not as large. PCUS focused more on the Philippines and Korea. The two groups reunified, for the most part, in the early 1980's. Unless otherwise noted, the term "Presbyterians" will refer to the PCUSA and their much larger presence in China.

39 In addition to the many anti-Christian movements in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, there was also enormous political upheaval. Qing Dynasty collapsed in 1911 to be replaced by the Republic of China (ROC) in 1912. The ROC exercised only nominal control until it too collapsed in 1916. The next ten years are known as the warlord period, which was ended when Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang Party at least nominally reunified the country. For all intents and purposes, there was no central government in China from 1911 until 1927. Even after 1927, the central governments control had direct control over less than a third of China.

40 Protestants had always struggled with creating a critical mass of Chinese Christians to make a self-sustaining church without the taint of foreigners. There had been many attempts to push for Chinese leadership in the Church and to reduce the need for missionaries, but they usually ran afoul of Church orthodoxy as well as Chinese government policy. The largest example was the Taiping Rebellion in the

over the individual denominations, but both were forums for discussing the problems they were facing in China and trying to find effective solutions. As is typical for Protestant Churches, decisions rested with the denominational boards in theory but with the individual missionaries in practice, meaning responses to new problems varied from missionary to missionary.

An additional complication was transnational cooperation. Most Protestants were open to cooperation across nationalities in some way, but the Anglo-American-Canadian cooperation was particularly strong. As noted earlier, most American mission boards worked through the FMC, which had very active participation from Canadian churches. British missionaries, while reporting to separate boards, cooperated so closely with North American missionaries that the only notable distinction between them was where their money came from. They worked closely together on the NCC as well as sharing information with their home mission boards. In one case, a British missionary named Victor Hayward became one of the most consistent sources of information for American mission boards through his role as Secretary of the NCC. While this chapter looks at American missionaries, it is important to remember how closely they worked with their British and Canadian brethren.<sup>41</sup>

Catholic missionaries, regardless of nationality, operated in a separate sphere than did Protestants. With a much longer presence in China, Catholics had gained

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mid-nineteenth century, but there are numerous other cases of Chinese converts preaching their own understanding of the gospel and being opposed by missionaries. See Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (Yale University Press, New Haven CT, 2010) and Paul Varg *Missionaries, Chinese and Diplomats* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958).

41 Oi Ki Ling. *The Changing Role of British Missionaries in China 1945-1952*. (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press., 1999); John K. Fairbank. *The Missionary Enterprise in China and the United States*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Paul Varg *Missionaries, Chinese and Diplomats* (Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1958).

more converts than all of the Protestant churches combined.<sup>42</sup> Yet their influence in China was less. This was because converts to Catholicism were almost entirely from the margins of society, even more than for Protestants. They also faced hostility from the Chinese government (or governments) particularly after Chiang Kai-shek came to power in 1927. Chiang's wife, Soong Mei-ling, was a Methodist and the daughter of a Methodist minister<sup>43</sup>. One of the conditions for the marriage was his conversion to Christianity. Chiang duly converted to Methodism and had adopted at least part of the Protestant fear of Catholicism.<sup>44</sup> Chiang also looked at the Catholics as a challenge to his power because of their loyalty to the Vatican and because of the property and wealth they had accumulated over the centuries in China.<sup>45</sup> While Chiang was often annoyed at Protestant missionaries because of their calls to reform, he showed outright hostility towards Catholics.

The Catholic Church was also a different type of organization than were Protestant churches. Although most missions for Catholicism were organized at a

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42 Estimates vary widely, but they are in the neighborhood of four million Catholics to less than a million Protestants in 1949. Foreign Catholic clergy was also much larger than Protestants, with an estimated five thousand priests and nuns to around two thousand Protestant missionaries. Bates, M. Searle. "Churches and Christians in China, 1950-1967: Fragments of Understanding", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer, 1968), 202.

43 Educated at Vanderbilt Divinity School.

44 The sincerity of his conversion is hotly debated by historians. His wife's family was very powerful in China, with Mei-ling's oldest sister marrying one of the wealthiest bankers in the country and her middle sister marrying the "Father of Modern China" Sun Yat-sen. Many historians, such as Paul Varg, Hannah Pakula and Shirley Stone Garrett, view it as a conversion of convenience, while others, such as Jay Taylor, Bae Kyoung-han and Laura Tyson Li, say he was sincere. Even if he did not fully implement Christian teachings in his life, he absorbed a great deal from Christianity and never appeared to have any second thoughts about his new religion. See: Fairbank ed. *The Missionary Enterprise in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); Jay Taylor. *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Laura Tyson Li's *Madame Chiang Kai-shek: China's Eternal First Lady*, (New York: Grove Press, 2007); Hannah Pakula. *The Last Empress: Madame Chiang Kai-shek and the Birth of Modern China*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010); Bae Kyoung-han "Chiang Kai-shek and Christianity: religious life reflected from his diary", *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 2009.

45 Chiang was obsessed with holding all the levers of power in the GMD. Several analyses of his life point to this obsession and his desire to create a cult of personality around himself to label Chiang a Confucian fascist. See Jay Taylor. *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the struggle for modern China*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Jonathan Fenby. *Chiang Kai-shek: China's Generalissimo and the Nation He Lost*, (Cambridge MA, Da Capo Press, 2005)

national level, the ultimate authority was in Rome, in contrast to Protestants, who were decentralized in the extreme. In addition, most Catholic missionaries to China came from Europe. American Catholic missionaries were a very small percentage of the Catholic mission in China. Americans, on the other hand, made up the majority of Protestant missionaries in China by the 1920's. Because of the large differences in longevity, structure and origin, Catholics in China were in a much different situation than were Protestants, so they will be treated only peripherally in this chapter.

### **Denominational Differences**

Each Protestant denomination brought its own theological approach to missionary work. For Americans, the most active denominations were the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists, and Southern Baptists. There were also non-denominational Christian organizations in China, the largest of which were the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the China Inland Mission (CIM). In major cities, there was often cooperation amongst the missionary groups even beyond the FMC and NCC. In smaller cities and villages, each denomination operated autonomously. There were no explicit territorial boundaries for what area was the province of which mission, but the FMC had helped coordinate between the denominations so that they would not compete with each other for converts. China was much too large for missionaries to reach all of it, so when a new mission was to be founded there was no shortage of virgin area.

The Presbyterians and Congregationalists had very similar backgrounds. Both came from the Reformed tradition and had strong Calvinist influences. They also took a similar view of the world. Both of these denominations arrived in China to evangelize the Chinese. Over time, however, providing service to the Chinese people took an increasingly large share of the resources. This change was what might be

called “mission creep” in today’s military jargon. For example, Protestants emphasized that Christians must be able to read and interpret the Bible, so missionaries established more schools for literacy. Partly because Chinese parents would only send their children to a school that offered a practical education and partly because of the call for charity and service in Christianity, these schools were expanded to include more practical subjects, such as science, math and physical fitness. Providing medical assistance also fit a twofold purpose as it demonstrated the value of Christian knowledge while also showing the Christian commitment to love and helping all of God’s children. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Presbyterians and Congregationalists had embraced the social gospel aspect of Christianity by devoting a much larger portion of their resources in China to schools and hospitals across China than to proselytization.<sup>46</sup>

The Methodists came from a slightly different tradition than the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, but they took a similar view of the mission work.<sup>47</sup> While many Methodists were full-time clergy, a large portion of Methodist resources went to services for the Chinese people, usually medical or educational. Their movement toward to social gospel was similar to the Reformed denominations. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were the largest American Protestant missionary presence in China. However, by the 1930’s, they were surpassed by the Presbyterians. Because of their similar approaches to missionary work, missionaries from all three denominations

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46 Gerald F. De Jong, *The Reformed Church in China, 1842-1951* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1992). G. Thompson Brown, *Earthen vessels and transcendent power; American Presbyterians in China, 1837-1952* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997). George A. Hood, *Mission accomplished? : the English Presbyterian Mission in Lingtung, South China : a study of the interplay between Mission methods and their historical context*, (New York: Verlag Peter Lang, 1986). Lawrence D. Kessler. *The Jiangyin Mission Station: an American Missionary Ccommunity in China, 1895-1951*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

47 While Congregationalists and Presbyterians came from a Calvinist tradition which included predestination, Methodists had moved to an Arminianist approach which emphasized each individual’s responsibility for his or her own salvation.

tended to view themselves as collaborators rather than competitors in the missionary enterprise in China.<sup>48</sup>

These three denominations also shared a long institutional memory in China (at least by American standards). Children of missionaries in the nineteenth century would often return to China for their own mission work. There were even a few cases of third generation missionaries in China. Because of this long term view and some of the difficulties suffered by previous generations of missionaries, riding out the storm seemed like a natural response to any new crisis. Their emphasis was to serve the Chinese people, regardless of who was ruling them.

The only major American Protestant denomination that remained outside of these coordinating organizations was Southern Baptists. There were several reasons for this self-imposed exclusion. Southern Baptists had only rarely participated in ecumenical efforts. While other American Protestants, as well as many American Orthodox Christians<sup>49</sup>, were working to form the World Council of Churches and its associated National Council of Churches of the United States, the Southern Baptist Convention charted a separate course.<sup>50</sup> Southern Baptists rarely participated in the FMC and maintained only limited communications with it. In addition, Southern Baptist missions focused largely on evangelization, with only a small portion of their resources going to education even before the modernist-fundamentalist controversies

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48 Paul W. Chilcote, ed. *Making disciples in a world parish : global perspectives on mission & evangelism* (Eugene, Or. : Pickwick Publications, 2011); Walter N. Lacy, *A Hundred Years of China Methodism* (Nashville Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1964); Darrell L. Whiteman and Gerald H. Anderson, ed. *World mission in the Wesleyan spirit* (Franklin, Tenn. : Providence House Publishers, 2009); Xiaoguang Xu, *A Southern Methodist mission to China : Soochow University, 1901-1939* (Thesis -- Middle Tennessee State University, 1993).

49 These were autonomous branches of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the United States. They were very small in number, but still active in the ecumenical movement.

50 The Southern Baptist Convention has traditionally resisted ecumenism, while embracing cooperation with other denominations. Its primary objection to ecumenism has been the compromises in theology and church mission.

of the 1920s and 30s. Their missionaries were rarely educated in seminary, instead being laymen dedicated to finding converts.<sup>51</sup>

The non-denominational YMCA was founded as a service organization and cooperated with other groups to whom service was a priority. It did have a strong proselytizing element, but it gave greater emphasis to providing a safe and wholesome environment for young men. Within the NCC, it was one of the strongest champions of promoting the social gospel. The structure of the YMCA was to keep control at the national level rather than at an international headquarters, but both the American and Chinese branches worked to some degree with the China Committee as well.<sup>52</sup>

The China Inland Mission, although also non-denominational, took a different approach to its mission than the YMCA.<sup>53</sup> The CIM actually had much stronger similarities to the Southern Baptists. It was devoted mainly to evangelism with little attention to social gospel issues. It preferred to recruit from the working class, meaning its missionaries were laymen. It also kept its distance from the FMC and other coordinating organization. The CIM's organization was significantly different from those of other Protestant missionaries. Its headquarters were in Shanghai rather than abroad.<sup>54</sup> Aside from the headquarters, its missionaries were located mainly in less populated cities and towns. They dressed and lived like the Chinese they were

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51 Alan Scot Willis, *All according to God's plan : Southern Baptist missions and race, 1945-1970*, (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2005); William Roscoe Estep, *Whole gospel--whole world : the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1845-1995*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994); Andrew Christopher Smith, *Flocking by themselves: fundamentalism, fundraising, and the bureaucratization of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1919-1925*, (Nashville, Vanderbilt University, 2011)

52 Mayer N Zald. *Organizational change; the political economy of the YMCA*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Jon Thares Davidann, *A world of crisis and progress [electronic resource] : the American YMCA in Japan, 1890-1930*, (Bethlehem, Pa.: Lehigh University Press, 1998).

53 The China Inland Mission was originally organized in London in 1866, but found more recruits in North America than in Britain. Its mission was to reach areas of China that had yet to hear the gospel. Its members received foreign funds only in emergencies, preferring to work and live like the Chinese people. Alvyn Austin. *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society 1832-1905* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007)

54 The CIM did have offices in England, Scotland, the United States and Canada, but these were branches that answered to Shanghai.

seeking to convert. They sought no funds from abroad to support their missionaries, instead making their own living in their parish. The remoteness of their missions combined with their missionaries' self-reliance made coordination with other missionary groups impractical and unnecessary.<sup>55</sup>

### **Anti-Missionary Violence**

Although each denomination had its own background and attitude towards missions, they shared similar experiences in China, particularly the difficulties. Besides their conspicuous lack of success in gaining converts, missionaries faced several severe challenges to their physical safety. As Chinese nationalism grew in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the injustices of the unequal treaties became a rallying point. Missionaries were often the only foreigners that Chinese in the countryside would ever meet. The heterodoxy they promoted, the protection given to them by local magistrates and their relatively luxurious lifestyle (although the missionaries considered themselves to be undergoing hardship) created strong resentment among most Chinese. Despite their pledge to help the Chinese people, they were an obvious symbol of foreign aggression and bore the brunt of movements against foreigners.

The most striking example was the Boxer Rebellion of 1898-1900. The Boxer uprising grew out of protests against the exemptions of churches and missionaries from certain laws and taxes. Frequent violent incidents eventually turned into a full-fledged rebellion in late 1898. Boxer leaders advocated traditional Confucian

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<sup>55</sup> Alwyn Austin, *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 2007); Isobel Kuhn, *Green Leaf In Drought: The Story of the Escape of the Last CIM Missionaries from Communist China*, (Littleton, Colorado: OMF International 2001); Rhonda Anne Semple *Missionary Women: Gender, Professionalism, and the Victorian Idea of Christian Mission*, (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2003); Howard Taylor, *The story of the China Inland Mission*, London: Morgan & Scott, 1894).



morality.<sup>56</sup> They utilized Chinese anger towards foreigners and foreign ideas by directing attacks against missionaries and Chinese Christians. The Qing government initially tried to crush the rebellion, but then reversed itself. The Boxers' success became an opportunity for the Qing to remove some foreign influence. Officials began to aid the Boxers materially while persecuting, and occasionally executing, foreigners (missionaries and others) and Chinese Christians. By the middle of 1900, the Boxers and their allies had completely surrounded the foreign legations of Beijing, hoping to drive them out. Later that year, a combined force of European and American troops broke the siege and destroyed the Boxer army.<sup>57</sup> During the uprising, missionaries and Chinese Christians bore the brunt of the violence, with almost 200 missionaries (including their families) and as many as 33,000 Chinese Christians killed.<sup>58</sup>

The Boxers were by far the largest and most dangerous movement directed against missionaries, but other nationalist movements targeted them as well. The May Fourth Movement that began in 1919 was an attempt for the Chinese to find new ways to strengthen their nation. The movement was sparked by news that the Treaty of Versailles transferred German concessions in China (Qingdao and Port Arthur) to the Japanese. Japan had used World War I as an opportunity to further exploit China's

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56 The term "Confucian" is a blanket term for traditional Chinese culture. Although it includes strong elements of Confucian teachings, such as filial piety and high value on education, it also encompasses areas of Chinese culture that Confucius's teaching never actually touched. Confucius focused almost exclusively on social behavior, but in the 2,500 years since his writing, Chinese culture had incorporated many spiritual aspects from Buddhism and Daoism that Confucius never addressed. That incorporation is often referred to by historians as Neo-Confucianism.

57 The term Boxer is applied by the westerners because one of the founding organizations of the uprising was a secret society dedicated to martial arts. They believed that with meditation and righteousness, western weapons could not hurt them. This approach worked well until western armies started shooting at them, when the discrepancies between theory and practice became apparent.

58 Paul A. Cohen. *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Larry Clinton Thompson. *William Scott Ament and the Boxer Rebellion: Heroism, Hubris and the "Ideal Missionary"*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2009); Lanxin Xiang. *The Origins of the Boxer War: a Multinational Study*, (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

resources while Europe and America were too distracted to intervene. The treaty did little more than recognize the already existing fact of Japan's hegemony in China. The Chinese, however, were shocked because Woodrow Wilson's rhetoric of national self-determination promised a just peace governed by international law instead of force of arms. When the treaty was announced on May fourth, students began rioting against foreigners. It led to one of the most remarkable intellectual movements in China's history. Chinese students questioned both traditional Chinese culture and the foreign models they had previously hoped would save China. It was not a coherent ideology but a series of competing dialogues that hoped to find a new model for Chinese salvation.<sup>59</sup>

The May Fourth Movement transformed an earlier popular effort against Confucian values into a larger program that confronted foreign influence as well. Again the most obvious face of the imperialists, missionaries became a prime target. The resulting Anti-Christian Movement of 1920-1922 blamed missionaries for undermining China. Students protested in front of missionary schools and harassed Chinese Christians. There was some violence, but it was limited in scale. Because the movement was based in large cities, it had only a small impact on missions overall. Missions in smaller cities and the countryside were largely unaffected during the movement. The longer term effects for the missionaries, however, were more dire. The movement appears to have primed many Chinese people in cities to see missionaries as subversive influences who were working to keep China down. When the Guomindang (GMD) tried to reunify China by force of arms, anger towards

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59 Erez Manela. *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anti-Colonial Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Rana Mitter. *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World*, (Oxford University Press, 2004).

missionaries would no longer be restricted to protests, but would manifest itself in large-scale violence.<sup>60</sup>

In 1927, only five years after the end of the Anti-Christian Movement, the Guomindang launched the Northern Expedition to reunify China under its leadership. It marched from its base in the southern province of Guangdong to the central region of Jiangnan.<sup>61</sup> The Guomindang, which translates roughly as “Nationalist Party”, used mass meetings to mobilize the Chinese people in its hyper-nationalist cause. When GMD forces conquered Nanjing and Shanghai, its followers began rioting against foreigners, particularly missionaries. Although Chiang had not yet converted to Christianity, he had already promised his new wife’s family that he would consider Christianity. It is unlikely that he meant to put missionaries in danger, but having whipped his followers into an anti-foreign frenzy, missionaries became collateral damage for his movement, with dozens of missionaries being killed and many more fleeing the country.

Part of the GMD’s agenda was to remold Chinese society and strengthen it into an image after its own ideal.<sup>62</sup> Christianity was a hindrance to this. Although the GMD had to tolerate Christianity because of the unequal treaties and because some of its leaders were Christian, GMD policies tried to exploit mission work to further its

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60 Jessie Gregory Lutz. *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions: The Anti-Christian Movements of 1920-1928*, (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Cultural Publication, Inc., 1988); Shirley Stone Garrett. “Why They Stayed: American Church Politics and Chinese Nationalism in the Twenties”, *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1974).

61 The Northern Expedition meant to conquer all of China, but ended up stalling in Shanghai, partly over a split between the GMD and its Communist allies. It ended the GMD controlling about a third of China and negotiating with the remaining warlords for control (at least nominally) of the rest of the country.

62 This ideal had strong ties to fascism, which Chiang Kai-shek had an outspoken appreciation for. It would eventually be launched as the “New Life Movement” in 1934. Its program that he would introduce would be highly nationalistic with himself as the focal point for national pride. It included some aspects of Christianity but was largely disparaged by missionaries because of its authoritarian aspects. Paul Varg. *Missionaries, Chinese and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China 1890-1952*, (Princeton University Press, 1958).

agenda. The GMD government also imposed new rules on missionaries, forcing them to teach GMD propaganda and accept government regulation. Some historians have referred to this crisis as the end of the Golden Age of missionaries in China. Many missionaries returned to China after the GMD had restored some order, but what had been a constant increase since the 1880's leveled off and then declined.<sup>63</sup>

### **Internal Crisis**

The 1927 attack on missionaries was not the only reason for the weakening missionary presence in China. Also important was a crisis within the missionary movement that questioned the very basis of their missions. Missionaries were at the forefront of a larger conflict within Christianity about how their faith aligned with reason and science. With the advances of science in the second half of the nineteenth century, most notably Charles Darwin's publication of *The Origin of the Species*, Christians began to question the literal truth of the gospel. If the Bible is by contradicted scientific evidence, it raised difficulties in believing its word-for-word accuracy.<sup>64</sup>

This was compounded by a movement called "higher criticism" that questioned the authorship of the Bible. Higher criticism gained strength in Germany in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, but it was its work in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that had a profound impact on Christianity around the world. Many scholars of higher criticism argued that the Bible had been written by multiple authors in different times

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63 John Fairbank, ed. *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 1974; Wayne Flynt and Gerald W. Berkley. *Taking Christianity To China: Alabama Missionaries in the Middle Kingdom 1850-1950*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1997).

64 In the United States, the most prominent manifestation of the division was the Scopes trial in TN in 1925. Although Scopes was found guilty of breaking state law by teaching evolution, his conviction was subsequently overturned and the publicity over the trial turned public opinion against fundamentalists for decades. Paul Keith. Conkin. *When all the gods trembled : Darwinism, Scopes, and American intellectuals*, (Lanham, MD; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers) 1998. J. David Hoeveler. *The Evolutionists : American Thinkers Confront Charles Darwin, 1860-1920*, (Lanham, MD; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007); Edward J. Larson. *The creation-evolution debate : historical perspectives*, (Athens, GA; University of Georgia Press, 2007).

and was assembled centuries later. Even though many of these ideas were published decades before Darwin, few people in the English speaking world knew of them before they were published in English in the early 1860's. Once they became well-known among the clergy of Britain and the United States, they caused a firestorm of controversy. This went beyond the Darwinian challenge of the inerrancy of the Bible and questioned whether it was divinely inspired at all. When higher criticism came to the United States at almost the same time as *The Origin of the Species*, American Protestants began to reevaluate their fundamental beliefs about the Bible and how they understood Christianity.<sup>65</sup>

As Christians (American and otherwise) reconsidered their religion in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, they roughly divided into two groups. Those who tried to find a common ground between religion and science were usually referred to as modernists. Others believed that if there was a conflict between the Bible and science, the Bible was the trusted source. Usually called fundamentalists, because they stuck to the fundamentals of Christianity (i.e. the Bible), they maintained their belief that the Bible was word-for-word accurate.

One unexpected effect of modernism in Christianity was a move toward a more ecumenical view of religion. If the literal accuracy of the Bible was questionable, there was no reason for Christians to fight over the finer points of the religion. Many Christian groups joined a worldwide ecumenical movement that sought to remove the divisions among Christian sects. The idea of ecumenism had been around since the times of Constantine, but it only gained momentum in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 1910 World Missionary Council in Edinburgh, Scotland marked a

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65 Reinhard G. Kratz. *The composition of the narrative books of the Old Testament*, (London; T&T Clark) 2006. Richard Elliott Friedman. *Who wrote the Bible?*, (New York; Harperone Publishing, 1987);. George Albert Wells. *Cutting Jesus Down to Size: What Higher Criticism Has Achieved and Where It Leaves Christianity*, (Chicago; Open Court Publishing, 2009).

tangible move towards creating a unified church. It was followed by the creation of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1921. The IMC was dedicated to fostering cooperation between missionary organizations. Other ecumenical councils followed, always with a large American presence and often American leadership. The ecumenical movement encouraged creation of cross denominational organizations like the National Council of Churches, which were organized on national lines, and eventually the World Council of Churches, which would be established in 1948.

Churches participating in the ecumenical movement generally accepted that the Bible might not be taken literally, but it held higher truths within it. They believed that unity within the Christian church was more important than fighting over the nuances of doctrine. Baptists, Anglicans, Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans were among the many churches that participated. The YMCA, having been founded on ecumenical principles in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also enthusiastically participated. Members of these groups were generally more liberal and often went so far as to question the uniqueness of Christ's revelations. As Stephen Niell writes: "The liberal [meaning an ecumenical] was by any means so sure that Jesus Christ was the *last* Word of God to man. He was repelled by the exclusive claim to salvation through Christ alone."<sup>66</sup> Niell also discusses how missionaries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century translated ecumenism into mission work: "The task of the missionary today, it was maintained, is to see the best in other religions, to help adherents of those religions to discover, or to rediscover all that is best in their own traditions..."<sup>67</sup> John Nurser strikes a similar tone: "To be 'ecumenical' was not

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<sup>66</sup> Stephen Niell. *A History of Christian Missions*, (New York City, New York: Penguin Books Inc., 1900) 418.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*: p. 419.

only to seek a reunited Christian church but also to see its gospel as requiring conservation of every human culture...<sup>68</sup>

This universalism did not sit well with more conservative religious groups. These groups generally refused to participate in ecumenical organizations, preferring to stand alone rather than compromise on doctrine. In the United States, the Southern Baptist Convention was by far the largest religious organization that stood outside the ecumenical movement.

### **Widening the Fundamentalist-Modernist Split**

The early 1930's saw two events that, while trying to find common ground between modernists and fundamentalists, substantially worsened the split. The first was a 1932 book titled *Rethinking Missions: A Layman's Enquiry after 100 Years*. This book, initially organized by a few Baptist laymen who had concerns about missionary work and funded by J. D. Rockefeller, eventually became a large interdenominational research project that encompassed most mainline churches. The impetus for the study was the basic question of whether missions were performing a positive function. Some ecumenicals believed that it was arrogance to push western religion on Asians who had no history of it. Others believed that spreading the gospel was important but ineffectively done.

The members of the commission went to study missionaries in India, China and Japan for the better part of a year and then returned home to compare notes and report their findings. No one working on the study had been a missionary and only one commission member appears to have gone to seminary or worked directly for a church. Most were prominent members of society, including the presidents of two universities, deans of two medical schools, and several businessmen. The head of the

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<sup>68</sup> John Nurser. *For All Peoples and All Nations: The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 22.

commission was a Harvard professor of philosophy. The study was a book on religious activity written by educated people who were not, for the most part, educated in religion. As such, it should probably not be surprising that the book avoided any sort of theological detail, but instead focused more on the broader philosophical issues and their application in the field. Missions provided a great opportunity to explore those issues because almost all Protestant denominations participated in missionary work. The study's goal appears to have been to find common ground between the modernists and fundamentalists, using missions as a way to bring the two sides together. If this was its goal, however, it failed spectacularly.

The book tried not to take sides in the split, but almost all of its conclusions were on the modernist side. In an early chapter, in an effort to give the appearance of balance, it made a reference to “the folly of ‘modernism’, so-called”, but only in a footnote. Its larger point was that missions needed to be rethought in a very fundamental (but not fundamentalist) way. It did not suggest ending missions. The missionary impulse was fundamental to Christianity so questioning whether missions should continue would be like questioning “whether good-will should continue”.<sup>69</sup> But missions needed to be conducted on a different basis than they had been for the previous century.

One of its most controversial arguments was that missionaries needed to open their minds to other religions. It was not suggesting abandonment of Christianity, but it was suggesting that other religions had some truth in them. Rather than refuting everything from native religions, it would be more effective to find the aspects of those religions that would be compatible with Christianity. It went so far as to say that

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<sup>69</sup> William Earnest Hocking. *Re-Thinking Missions: A Layman Inquire after 100 Years*, (New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1932) 4.



Christianity may not be the only legitimate revelation from God. It argued that the purpose of religion was to find ultimate truth. There may be many ways to find that truth. It went on to say the value of a religion is in how clearly it could present that truth, which made Christianity the best option for western culture, but not necessarily for everyone. “The final truth, whatever it may be, is the New Testament of every existing faith.”

Although the authors clearly considered Christianity the preeminent religion, their suggestion that it may not be the only way to know God was a shocking assertion to many Christians. If Christianity was not unique, why were missionaries necessary at all? Wouldn't they be better served by staying home and letting Asians figure out the truth with their own religion? The commission's answer was twofold. First, Christianity provided the clearest message to people in the West, so it is likely that there were people in the East who could benefit from it as well. Second, and more important from the commission's perspective, missionaries fought against “non-religion”. The authors stated that other religions were not the enemy of Christianity. The real enemy to Christianity, as well as to Islam and Buddhism, was the trend of people drifting away from religion in favor of science and reason. The commission argued that science and religion were not only compatible but complimentary, but many people saw them as mutually exclusive and moved away from God in search of a worldly truth. Missionaries should work to bring people back to God in all parts of the world. In this work, other religions were allies, albeit imperfect ones. Missionary work remained important in turning back the tide of secularism across the world.

A third important, but less controversial point, was that missions should be limited in duration. Missionaries were not eternally necessary to establish a church. They should plant the seeds rather than tend the plant as it grows. The eventual end of

missions was necessary because of the rising tide of nationalism in Asia. As long as Christianity was seen as a foreign religion, it would be limited in its growth. Resentment by locals would cause harassment and prevent potential conversions. Missionaries should work to create a thriving church and then allow the local churches to work on their own. Once it was seen as an indigenous religion, it could thrive even in a nationalist environment.

*Rethinking Missions* included many more specific conclusions, but these three were the most sweeping and had the largest repercussions. There was an explosion of criticism from the public and from religious groups, including some of the groups that had contributed to its findings. It led to a reshuffling of membership among the various denominations, with some members of the contributing churches leaving to join more fundamentalist denominations, while others remained but fought against the liberal movement of their church. Yet *Rethinking Missions* did not start this controversy. Most of its ideas had been discussed publicly in the previous decade, but the prestige of the commission's members and having J. D. Rockefeller as its sponsor put publicity and clout behind these controversial conclusions. It greatly exacerbated the widening gap between the two sides by bringing the debate into a public forum.

In November 1932, less than a month after the release of the *Rethinking Missions*, famed missionary Pearl S. Buck gave a speech at New York City's Hotel Astor called "Is There a Case for Foreign Missions?" that made many of the same points. Buck had been an honored guest at the release of *Rethinking Missions*, sitting beside J. D. Rockefeller. It is unclear how much Buck was influenced by the report, but it appears that her ideas had been building independently for more than a decade. Buck had grown up in China as a child of missionaries with fundamentalist views and a strong admiration for American culture. She returned to the United States

in 1911 to attend college, but returned to China immediately after completing her degree in 1914. Somewhere in this period of her life, she began to change her views. She saw aspects of Chinese culture that she found admirable, while she became frustrated with American missionaries. Because missionaries were the Americans she lived with, her attitude towards the United States as a whole soured. What bothered her most was their arrogance. She said, "I have seen the missionary narrow, uncharitable, unappreciative, ignorant....I can never have done with my apologies to the Chinese people that in the name of a gentle Christ we have sent such people to them."<sup>70</sup> By the time of her speech in New York, she had begun to question the entire missionary enterprise, wondering why Americans felt that they had the right to insist American culture and religion was superior.

Buck was by far the most famous American missionary in China or elsewhere. She had lived most of her life in China and wrote the best-selling novel *The Good Earth* only two years before. Earlier in 1932, she had won the Pulitzer Prize for that book and published its sequel, *Sons*, which was also a best seller. Both books tried to present a realistic view of the difficulties and nobility in Chinese society. Between the books and her long-time service in China, she was a celebrity with a great deal of gravitas, so when she began questioning mission work, it generated a lot of attention.

Buck's speech demonstrated a sea-change in her approach to missionary work. While her overall answer to her question was yes, she qualified it so much that she appeared to be saying no. She believed that missionaries and missions suffered from an abundance of problems. She couched her language as politely as she could, but essentially said that missionaries were too arrogant in a field where humility was necessary. Missionaries should try to work out a dialogue with the Chinese instead of

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70 Pearl S. Buck, "Is there a Case for Foreign Missions?" reprinted in *Harpers Bazaar*, Jan. 1933.

insisting that the Chinese way was backward and the American way was the only correct one. She went on to suggest that just as Confucianism would not work in the United States, it was folly to assume that Christianity would work in China.

Within the next year, her publisher had printed a pamphlet of the speech. Many newspapers and magazines published excerpts, with *Harpers* publishing it in its entirety. The reaction was strong in both directions, with many editorials praising her, but many others condemning her, including the president of the Presbyterian Mission Board, which was her nominal sponsor in China.<sup>71</sup> Many Americans, and a few Chinese in the United States, wanted her brought before the Presbyterian Mission Board for charges of heresy. The Board tried a moderate course, hoping the storm would blow over. Buck made this impossible by continuing to defend her views in speeches and articles. In one interview, she said: “There may be humble Christians, but there never were humble missionaries or priests. It is a contradiction in terms.”<sup>72</sup> In late 1933, Buck resigned as a missionary. She returned to China briefly but then moved back permanently to the United States in 1934.

Buck’s speech and *Rethinking Missions* had very similar themes and combined to create a massive controversy. While the two had some differences in both substance and tone, historian Lian Xi has noted that they articulated a fundamental question that had been lying underneath the mission question since the beginning of the modernist-fundamentalist conflict. Should missions be Christ-centric or God-centric? Christ-centric missions would be bringing a unique revelation for salvation. God-centric missions would try to implement God’s work on earth, helping foreign

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71 Buck married another American in China in 1917 whose income initially supported them both more than her missionary salary. By 1932, the royalties from *The Good Earth* were her primary income, so she had not been dependent on her mission board for more than a decade.

72 Grant Wacker. “Waning of the Missionary Impulse: The Case of Pearl S. Buck”, *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home and Abroad*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003) 198.

peoples raise themselves up both physically and spiritually. This question, as much as any other, would be the dividing line for missionaries in the coming decades.<sup>73</sup>

*Rethinking Missions* and Buck's speech threw gasoline on a fire that had been previously under control, causing both sides to begin focusing more and more on what they saw as their first priority. The divide was neither sharp and nor quick.

Missionaries from "mainline"<sup>74</sup> churches did not give up on Christ or stop seeking conversions. Missionaries from fundamentalist churches did not focus exclusively on evangelism to the exclusion of good works. Yet the divide between the approaches grew wider and wider. Fundamentalists often called modernist missionaries

"accommodationists" because they were willing to dilute Christian beliefs to bring in more converts and were more interested in the social gospel than evangelization.<sup>75</sup>

More liberal denominations, such as the Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Baptists accepted the modernist view, but not without internal struggle. Many fundamentalist members of those groups withdrew from their denomination's mission boards to promote a more fundamentalist approach to overseas missions. More conservative denominations, such as Southern Baptists, accepted the fundamentalist approach, but also had internal splits. By the early 1940's most denominations had arrived at a rough internal consensus on how their missions would work, with many dissenters leaving for other churches.<sup>76</sup> Fundamentalist denominations would enhance their commitment to proselytization while mainline churches would put an even

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73 Lian Xi. *The Conversion of the Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907-1932*. (University Park, PA; The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

74 The term "mainline church" was coined in this time period to differentiate liberal denominations from fundamentalist ones. Mainline churches include Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Congregationalists and Baptists (northern).

75 This is another parallel to problems faced by early Jesuit missionaries. They sought to accommodate Chinese practices to encourage conversions. When the Vatican realized that the Jesuits were making watered-down Catholics, the Pope suppressed the Jesuits in China and supported more orthodox orders there.

76 William R. Hutchinson. *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

higher percentage of missionaries in service work. Those priorities would be reflected in the resources that mission boards applied to their task.

### **The Sino-Japanese War**

Events in China continued to affect missions, usually negatively, even while the modernist-fundamentalist battle heated up. The year before Buck made her speech, Japanese pressure on China turned from exploitation to outright aggression. Japan had been encroaching on China since the Sino-Japanese War of 1895. In 1931, the Japanese manufactured an incident that they blamed on the Chinese so they would be “forced” to respond. That response was an invasion of the northern region of China known as Manchuria. In 1937, the Japanese army fabricated a similar incident as a pretext for additional aggression, this time into China proper, initiating the Second Sino-Japanese War.<sup>77</sup>

Foreign missionaries had three choices. The first was to stay where they were. The second was to flee to “Free China” under Guomindang control. The third was to leave China, usually for home. The majority of American missionaries preferred to stay where they had established missions, but early reports from Japanese occupied areas suggested that they would face difficult times there. Missionaries were rarely directly assaulted, but the Japanese army made no attempt to accommodate them and often harassed them into leaving. As a result, most missionaries who were faced with the possibility of Japanese occupation chose to leave the area. There are no exact numbers for where the missionaries chose to go, but it appears that the majority returned to the United States or for reassignment outside of China.

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<sup>77</sup> Because the Manchurians were not Han Chinese, Manchuria was considered part of China, but also separate. This was reinforced by Chinese nationalism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that portrayed the Qing Dynasty as foreign because it originated in Manchuria. When the Japanese invaded Manchuria, Chiang Kai-shek ordered the armies there not to oppose the Japanese, hoping to avoid provoking them into an advance further into China. In 1936, he was forced to change his policy, but did not actually declare war on Japan until the 1937 invasion into the rest of China.

Missionaries who stayed in Japanese territory had little protection except that they were citizens of a country that the Japanese did not want to antagonize needlessly. Japan's aggressive moves in China had been successful in part because American support for China was almost completely rhetorical. No good could come from provoking the United States to action, so there was no orchestrated policy against missionaries. Their lives were difficult under Japanese rule, but there was little danger. That changed dramatically on Dec. 7, 1941. After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and was at war with the United States, all Americans in Japanese occupied territory were sent to internment camps. Conditions were difficult, with limited clothing, food and fuel for warmth. They were essentially prisoners of war. A few died and most saw their health deteriorate.

The United States, along with many other western countries, did make one official change in missionary status in China during the war. As part of the war effort, the United States abrogated the unequal treaties in 1943, which meant that missionaries were subject to Chinese law for the first time in a century. This was meant to demonstrate the justice of the war while also boosting the morale of the Chinese army. A side effect was that missionaries were no longer guaranteed access to China. This had no immediate effect, however. Because Japan controlled the entire Chinese coast, missionaries in Free China could not have left even if the Chinese government had wanted them out. Missionaries and mission boards were aware that the protection provided by the unequal treaties was a double-edged sword. The protection of the treaties was comforting, but it undermined their claim to try to help China while giving support to the charge that they were imperialist agents. Many welcomed the change in status, hoping it would give a boost to the success of their

missions. Few, if any, thought that the Chinese government would ever use its regained authority to limit the access of Protestant missionaries.

When the war ended in 1945, missionaries were released, but most did not immediately resume their missions. Instead they returned to the United States for rest and rehabilitation. Even missionaries who had gone to Free China wanted to return to the United States, having been cut off from it for almost eight years. Because there were no immediate replacements for them, many had to wait another year or two for their furloughs. It was not until late 1946 that missions began to return in large numbers to resume normal operations.

### **Conclusion**

From the signing of the Treaty of Wanghia until World War II, American missionaries operated under the shield of the unequal treaties. While they saw themselves as protectors of the Chinese people, their protected status and arrogance towards Chinese culture meant those they hoped to convert viewed them with suspicion. The small amount of converts and the occasional violent outburst against Christians is testament to the hostility missionaries faced. They had the advantages of providing good education and medical services, but that was not enough to overcome the deep rooted distrust most Chinese held for them.

Coupled with the hostility from the Chinese was the crisis of conviction among missionaries caused by the division between modernists and fundamentalists. This crisis was sparked by the publications of Darwin and of higher criticism of the Bible. It was exacerbated in the 1930's by Pearl Buck's speech and the publication of *Rethinking Missions*. Although most of the debate between modernists and fundamentalists took place in the United States, missions were at the heart of it. Churches and the missionaries they supported divided between focusing on



evangelizing to help the Chinese find salvation and serving their physical needs while helping them find God in a broader sense.

The result was that after the end of WWII, missionaries were in a very vulnerable position. They were no longer protected under the unequal treaties but the resentment those treaties engendered had hardly lessened. They were also divided amongst themselves by purpose, method and doctrine. Nevertheless, they returned to China after the war in large numbers and with great optimism, not knowing that their most difficult trial was waiting just around the corner. Chinese Communism would soon be on the march.

## Chapter 2

### **Protestants will be Protestants: The Split of Missionary Opinion on the Chinese Civil War**

In the Kurt Vonnegut short story, a recently retired man reunites with a college friend who has just returned to the United States after spending forty years as a doctor in China. The retired man, who had only ever left the United States for a cruise, says, “There’s nothing wrong with Asia that a little spunk and common sense and know-how won’t cure.” His friend replies, “I’m glad it’s that easy. I was afraid things were more complicated than that.”<sup>78</sup> This story, published in 1952, illustrates the limited understanding that Americans at home had of China. Americans in China saw a more complicated picture.

The State Department claimed to control relations between the two countries, but it was the Americans on the ground in China who manned the front lines of that relationship. Missionaries were most often the Americans on those front lines because of their presence across the countryside as well as the cities. As such, they were the most frequent point of contact between the two cultures.

Missionaries approached their relationship with the Chinese in a very different way than did the State Department. Although some were interested in Chinese politics, their main goal was the expansion of Christianity in China and so their decision making process focused on promoting their missions.

This chapter argues that from 1947 to 1949, missionaries split on how to choose sides in the Chinese Civil War with an eye to protecting the Christian

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<sup>78</sup> Kurt Vonnegut. “The Package”, *Colliers*. July 26, 1952.

enterprise in China. Siding with Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang (GMD), or Nationalist Party, seemed the obvious choice. It was committed, at least rhetorically, to representative government. During World War II, it had been closely allied with the United States because of its opposition to the Japanese during World War II. Perhaps most important was the fact that many leaders of the GMD were Christian, including Chiang, his wife, and her entire family. In contrast, the Chinese Communist Party was dogmatically atheist and was connected to the totalitarian Soviet Union.

Despite the seemingly clear choice to support the GMD, many missionaries chose the risky strategy of seeking an accommodation with the CCP. Their reasons were diverse, but usually fell in to one of three areas: pragmatism, frustration with GMD corruption, and optimistic views of how the Communists' egalitarianism would dovetail with the social gospel of Christianity. While backing the CCP might not seem to be pragmatic, continuing to back the GMD also carried substantial risk. If missionaries were to actively support it and then it were to collapse, as seemed probable, the CCP would likely become even more antagonistic towards missionaries. Finding accommodation with the CCP was the only way to avoid being driven from China. In addition, because of the GMD's endemic corruption and apparent apathy toward the welfare of its people, many missionaries saw the CCP as choosing the lesser evil. Communist policies were at least trying to promote equality and the Chinese people's well-being.

Missionaries' choice of whom to back tended to reflect the kind of work they did in China and their perception of their mission. Those whose primary work was gaining converts to Christianity continued their strong support for Chiang. Southern Baptists missionaries largely fell into this group, but missionaries doing evangelical work for other denominations joined them. On the other side, missionaries devoted to

the social gospel, meaning those doing service work for the Chinese people, were more willing to seek accommodation with the CCP. Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Methodists were the largest groups that emphasized the social gospel, so their members were much more likely to view the Communists sympathetically.

### **The Changing Crisis**

By the time Japan invaded China in 1937, American missionaries had been a presence in China for nearly a century. They had weathered many crises, but none was as prolonged or wide-spread as the Second Sino-Japanese War. For eight years, missions withered from lack of personnel, resources and freedom to operate. During the war, there was almost no mission work at all in the north and east. After the Japanese surrender in World War II, American missionaries rushed back to China to resume their interrupted work. By 1947, they were returning in large numbers, with an estimated 2,000 missionaries in China by the end of the year. Although China had been devastated by the war, missionaries hoped that those hardships would offer an opportunity to greatly expand the Christian enterprise in China.<sup>79</sup>

Missionaries' letters back to their congregations had a remarkably consistent form for 1946 and most of 1947. They describe the enormous progress they had made in a terrible situation where more resources were desperately needed. One letter from a mission in the interior of China described, "New life, new energy, new hope come with the Spring." It later described a sermon where the pastor "was cheered by the spirit of the loyal service on the part of all striving to carry on in the face of desperate handicaps." The author goes on to suggest how additional resources could accomplish so much. Quoting the pastor, he writes "Forgetting the things which are behind and

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<sup>79</sup> The cliché that the Chinese character for "crisis" is made up of the characters for "danger" and "opportunity" has been used ad nauseum in recent years. That assertion is not correct, as "opportunity" is not included in the character for "crisis". Nevertheless, the idea behind it is a popular one and is one that the American missionaries in China would have embraced.

stretching forward to the things which are before [let us] press on toward the goal to the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>80</sup> Dr. BJ Cauthen wrote to the Southern Baptist Convention that China had been so ravaged by the Japanese that if rebuilding China took only five years, “we shall be most grateful.” He then praised the Chinese Christians for assisting their fellow man, but called for more funds and manpower to ease their burden.<sup>81</sup>

Members of the China Inland Mission (CIM), one of the most fundamentalist missions in China, took a similarly optimistic view. Its General Director, Frank Houghton, wrote a pamphlet called “Not Chaos but Opportunity.” Houghton had been visiting the United States during the attack on Pearl Harbor and could only return to China in 1946. The pamphlet, which he wrote immediately after returning to China, argued that while the political situation was unstable, it had been unstable for the previous thirty-five years. Most of China was more stable in 1946 than at any time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. “I have just been reckoning that at least eighty percent of our work is unaffected by the political situation.” He suggested that only the missionaries' efforts in northeast were affected by the civil war. For the rest of China, the chaos of the war had reaffirmed the faith of Chinese Christians and opened many other Chinese up to hear the gospel. Missionaries were presented with a great chance to bring more people to Christ. Houghton used his discussions with other missionaries as evidence. “‘We have never had such opportunities’ is a phrase which constantly occurs in letters from missionaries in city and country, among men and women, literate and illiterate. It is not merely a time for seed-sowing; there is a harvest waiting to be reaped.”<sup>82</sup>

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80 “Rehabilitation Reaches Changli”, July 30 1947, RG8 Box 60, Folder 1.

81 BJ Cauthen. Letter to Southern Baptist Convention, 1947. Southern Baptist Convention Bulletin 1947, 82.

82 Frank Houghton. “Not Chaos but Opportunity”, 1947. WUA, BGC-A CN 215, Box 3, Folder 32.

Two others members of the China Inland Mission working in Anhui province, Herbert and Winnifred Kane, gushed with joy upon their return to China at the beginning of 1947. Winnifred writes about a trip she made to the countryside where, “Everywhere we have gone, with one or two exceptions, the story is one of perennial revival.” In the same letter she described a meeting. “The worship hall wouldn’t begin to hold the crowd that gathered; so we preached from a specially constructed platform in the open courtyard. Thinking most of the listeners were just curious onlookers, I gave a gospel message. Imagine my surprise when at the close of the service I discovered that they were all believers.”<sup>83</sup> A few months later, the Kanes looked more at physical reconstruction, describing the terrible ravages of the last nine years. They also described the great work that was being done by missions to repair the damage. They wrote that six new day care centers had been opened and ten million dollars in direct aid was distributed. They added, “Praise the Lord, the worst is over.”<sup>84</sup>

The reconstruction work the Kanes described was done in cooperation between missions and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA). Founded in 1943, the UNRRA was a rebuilding fund for Allied countries devastated by invasion.<sup>85</sup> It was largely funded and run by the United States Government although most Allied nations approved of it. Lacking sufficient personnel on the ground, the UNRRA usually worked with charitable organizations to distribute its aid. In China, which was the largest recipient of its aid, most of the charitable

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83 Winnifred and Herbert Kane. “Circular Letter to Friends”, Apr. 1, 1947. WUA, BGC-A CN 182, Box 3, Folder 2.

84 The Kanes wrote their circular letters under both of their names, making it difficult to determine who wrote a particular letter unless they tell a personal story that identifies them. Winnifred and Herbert Kane. “Circular Letter to Friends”, Jun. 1, 1947. WUA, BGC-A CN 182, Box 3, Folder 2.

85 It also provided funds for some Axis countries, but mainly for displaced persons rather than large scale reconstruction.

organizations recognized by the UNRRA were missions, so missionaries worked closely with the UNRRA on reconstruction projects in 1946 and 1947. The agency shut down for the most part at the end of 1947, with most of its funding being redirected into the Marshall Plan, so the alliance between missions and the UNRRA was short lived. The Kanes' optimism on rebuilding China was no doubt influenced by the extra resources they had through the agency's brief life.<sup>86</sup>

Ruth and Wesley Day returned to China in 1947 after evacuating in 1941. Day was the son and grandson of Methodist ministers. He earned a bachelor's degree in theology, but had not completed seminary before going to China as a missionary. He and his wife worked primarily in evangelization, although both worked in education as well. They were ecstatic to "be in our own home again" in northern China in the middle of 1947. They were impressed that the church appeared to have thrived in their absence. Chinese Christians and Norwegian missionaries who had remained in Kalgan<sup>87</sup> had kept the church going and began expanding it after liberation from the Japanese. They wrote "The Kalgan church, with excellent attendance and interest, and our Kalgan school, with over 300 students (more than ever before), speak of their industry and our mission hopes here."<sup>88</sup> Rather than needing to rebuild their mission, they could plan an immediate expansion of their church.

However, with every silver lining comes a dark cloud. Japan's surrender allowed missionaries to return to China, but also ended the truce between the CCP and GMD. They had agreed to form a common front against the Japanese during the war. In reality, neither side did much major fighting against the Japanese because they were saving their strength for the post-war showdown. One American adviser to GMD

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<sup>86</sup> George Woodbridge. *UNRRA: The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950)

<sup>87</sup> Kalgan was the name given to the city by Europeans. It is now known as Zhiangjiakou,

<sup>88</sup> Ruthlydian and Wesley Day, Letter to friends. June 10, 1947. DUA, China Missionary File, Missionary Letters, 2112-7-6,

leader Chiang Kai-shek said that he lost any desire to fight the Japanese on December 7, 1941. From then on, he was content to let the United States do the fighting so that he could focus on the Communist threat. As almost everyone expected, the united front lasted exactly as long as the Japanese threat. By 1946, there was open fighting between the two sides.

General George Marshall, President Franklin Roosevelt's chief military adviser during World War II, tried to negotiate a coalition government between the two sides throughout 1946. Unfortunately for Marshall's mission, the distrust between the two sides was too deeply engrained for any compromise or cooperation. In addition, each side thought that they had the upper hand in the impending conflict. Marshall's withdrawal from China in early 1947 was the last serious attempt to stop the Chinese Civil War from engulfing the country.

The renewal of the conflict was a disaster for missionaries' plans, but it was not a complete surprise, especially for missions in the northeast. Frank Houghton's publication, *The Days*, noted in their letters that most country churches were in Communist controlled territory. It argued that China was mostly safe and stable, but he acknowledged that the Northeast was more dangerous. Alice Reed, a Presbyterian missionary in Tungshien just outside of Peiping<sup>89</sup>, saw communist raids and destruction by the first week of 1947.<sup>90</sup> From a more removed position, the Presbyterian Secretary in Hong Kong, E.E. Walline, wrote to the head of the Presbyterian Missions Board in New York to describe the situation across China. In that May 1947 letter, he included a section on northern China: "...reports from communist held territories show an increasingly bad situation there."<sup>91</sup> Yet most of his reporting was on rebuilding missions and increased mission activity. For returning

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<sup>89</sup> Peiping is now called Beijing.

<sup>90</sup> Alice Reed. Letter to Friends of the Techow Mission Station, Jan. 19, 1947. PHS RG82-65-17.

<sup>91</sup> E.E. Walline. Letter to Lloyd Ruland. May 9, 1947. RG82-65-17



missionaries, the Communist insurrection was only a problem in one area, leaving the rest of China an open field for the expansion of Christianity.

As of early 1947, their initial assessment that the worst was over seemed reasonable, but that image would not last long. The actual fighting was restricted to the northeast, but the ripples from the fighting were already being felt across the country. By the end of 1948 the Civil War would devastate the country and destroy the stability that missionaries were counting on. Some missionaries were quicker than others to understand the depth of the crisis, but even those who realized the danger early on had almost no way to influence it. Most of them considered the missionary project in China to be so important that they could not withdraw to safety. Instead, they tried to use their few levers of influence to find a feasible way to continue their work.

This led many missionaries to support Chiang Kai-shek's GMD. Chiang had been a US ally against Japan and recipient of enormous U.S. aid during World War II. Although his war record was hardly covered in glory, he did tie up over a million Japanese soldiers in China, reducing the resistance the American military faced in the Pacific. The fact that Chiang was a Christian made him much more appealing to missionaries. Several key members of Chiang's leadership council, including two of his brother-in-laws, were also Christian. The GMD's Christian leadership was a powerful draw for missionary support.

Yet the GMD did not live up to its promises. Chiang professed a love for democracy, but did not tolerate any dissent among his lieutenants or expressions of anything but patriotism and loyalty from the Chinese people. His commitment to Christianity was similarly lacking in application. He developed a relationship with Christian leaders, but seemed to care more about destroying the Communists than

about improving the lives of the Chinese people. Besides the crushing taxes, the brutality of his police force was amply documented. In one well-publicized episode, he buried six dissidents alive, to which his sister-in-law Soong Ching-ling said, “There is Chiang’s supposed Christianity.”<sup>92</sup>

Many missionaries who were disheartened by Chiang still sought to support the GMD by condemning Communism. They usually emphasized that Communism was antithetical to Christianity and therefore must be resisted at any cost. They preached against Communism to their congregations, but their main hope for influence was in writing home to their friends and families. The Christian presence in China was very small so its direct influence within the country was very limited. However, missionaries could use their experience in China as a lever to encourage Americans back home to push the United States Government (USG) for a drastic increase in support for the GMD. Missionaries’ views carried weight because their presence on the ground gave them legitimacy while their charitable work gave them moral gravitas. Missionaries hoped that their exhortations might influence American policy which could in turn affect the future of China.

Even with seemingly clear reasons to support Chiang, many other missionaries believed that finding a way to work with the Communists was necessary. These missionaries tended to be those in service fields, which had frequent encounters with the sweeping corruption of the GMD run government agencies. They believed that the CCP had to be a better alternative than the massively corrupt and incompetent GMD. These missionaries grew in number as the tide of the war turned against the GMD. By 1947, missionaries in China knew that the CCP was unlikely to be eliminated in the

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<sup>92</sup> Ching-ling was the widow of Sun Yat-sen and had rarely gotten along the Chiang. By the time of this event in the mid-1930’s, she had been brought into cooperation with the GMD, but always treated Chiang with contempt. Hannah Pakula. *The Last Empress : Madame Chiang Kai-Shek and the Birth of Modern China*, (New York City, Simon and Shuster, 2009).

near future. Missionaries had to deal with them or give up on their vision of an established Christian community in north China. By the end of 1948, it looked as though the CCP would soon control most, if not all of China, turning the question of continuing to support Chiang from a rhetorical issue to one with concrete repercussions. Missionaries committed to the social gospel felt a sense of urgency to find an accommodation with the CCP, but they faced some serious obstacles.

### **Rose Colored Glasses and/or Blind Spots**

Missionaries understood China better than most Americans, but there were two areas where they consistently underestimated the problems they would face: 1) the Chinese people generally associated them with imperialism. 2) The Chinese had no tradition of separation between church and state. As Chapter One discusses, missionaries faced constant hostility from the Chinese people for being heterodox to traditional Chinese beliefs. Missionaries recruited from the margins of society, while better off Chinese generally avoided them. They were the face of imperialism attacking China. They were the only westerners many Chinese would ever see, so they represented western aggression. To the average Chinese citizen, nationalism aimed at restoring China's strength, while missionaries represented China's weakness.

For many Chinese, missionaries were more than just symbols of imperialism. They were tools of foreign aggression, aiming to sap China's strength from inside. CCP propaganda claimed that it would restore China to greatness, contrasting its strength to the weakness of the GMD. Inadvertently supporting this message was the Christian credo, which preached love and peace. Chinese nationalists viewed this as encouraging weakness and passivity. If the Chinese adopted Christian values, foreign

powers could exploit China with no resistance. They argued that China could regain its place in the world only through forcefully evicting the foreign aggressors.<sup>93</sup>

Missionaries always had trouble understanding how they stood in regard to Chinese nationalism. They viewed themselves as trying to help the Chinese people save themselves. The Chinese took advantage of their education where they could, but saw their presence and their religion as an obstacle to China's greatness. Five years of missionaries working without the safety of the unequal treaties could not make up for the resentment inspired by a century of gunboat-enforced protection.

The second blind spot for missionaries was the assumption that the separation between church and state was a universal principle, despite the fact that it was unusual outside of North America. American missionaries took it as a given that this separation was applicable everywhere, not understanding how specific it was to the United States. European missionaries had a similar view. Although many European nations had an official church, their missionaries came from a tradition of religious toleration, which they also assumed would be best for China.

The Protestant Reformation itself was based on the primacy of the Bible over tradition, giving each person the right to interpret scripture for themselves. Implicit in that principle is that individuals, not the government, were responsible for their own salvation. Government interference could put that salvation in jeopardy. Most governments in Europe were very slow to give up power over religion, with a slow movement towards religious toleration over the course of several centuries. England allowed freedom of conscience but still persecuted dissenters into the twentieth century. Dissenters from the seventeenth century were the founders of American colonies. The American identification with those colonists remains so strong that they

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<sup>93</sup> Jessie Gregory Lutz. *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions: The Anti-Christian Movements of 1920-1928*, (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Cultural Publication, Inc., 1988)

are celebrated on Thanksgiving, despite having arrived in North America over a decade after earlier colonists who immigrated for economic reasons.<sup>94</sup>

In addition to the Protestant tradition of individual responsibility and conscience, American also inherited a philosophical tradition from England that reinforced the principle of church and state being separate. Although many philosophers have mused on the role of religion in society, John Locke is often credited as the first in early modern Europe to articulate that the government has no role in religion. He was not alone, as many other European Enlightenment thinkers offered similar views. Their influence was clear in the drafting of many of the United States' founding documents. Thomas Jefferson praised Locke as his inspiration when he wrote *The Declaration of Independence* and *The Virginia Statue on Religious Freedom*. When the United States Constitution was written in 1787, its authors were strongly influenced by both Enlightenment and Reformation ideas, enshrining the separation of Church and State in the First Amendment. That tradition has become so strong that American missionaries did not even question it. Most believed that it was a basic human right that all good governments must respect.<sup>95</sup>

Most missionaries did not realize that they carried this bias, just as they did not understand how they were viewed by the average Chinese person. These blind spots would continue to hurt them in both gaining converts and dealing with the chaos of the coming war. Even though missionaries in the 1940's were much more sensitive to Chinese culture and the feelings of the Chinese people than their nineteenth century

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94 Stephen M. Feldman. *Please Don't Qish Me a Merry Christmas : a Critical History of the Separation of Church and State*, (New York : New York University Press, 1997); James H Hutson. *Church and State in America : the First Two Centuries*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Stephen J. Stein, ed. *Cambridge History of Religions in America*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

95 Paul A. Varg. *Missionaries, Chinese and Diplomats. The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958); William R. Hutchison. *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

predecessors had been, they still did not fully grasp their position in China. As they mapped out strategies to keep the missions alive, they were operating from a fundamentally flawed assumption of how they fit into Chinese society.

### **Guomindang Economic Policy**

Houghton's assertion that the fighting was only in the northeast was true in 1946, but the effects of the war rippled across China long before the fighting did. By 1947, the GMD was bringing in between fifteen and thirty percent of the funds that it spent, forcing it to print more and more money. Inflation was soon out of control. The resulting economic crisis was a clear sign to all missionaries that the war would affect all of their missions and that the stability they hoped for in 1946 was fleeting.

By the middle of 1947, inflation was devastating to the Chinese economy. The Nanking University price index showed that prices in July 1947 were one million percent above prewar levels.<sup>96</sup> A year later prices had risen an additional 8500 percent.<sup>97</sup> All of China faced the problem of rising prices regardless of how close they were to the fighting. Missionaries suffered less than the Chinese because they were usually paid in US dollars, but they saw the effects on the people they were trying to help. One Southern Baptist missionary wrote that although "famine is no longer stalking the land", inflation could cause starvation just as easily.<sup>98</sup> Other missionaries wrote about how crushing inflation was to their workers, whom they could no longer pay a living wage. Mary Reed Dewar, a Congregationalist working in the interior of China, commented: "One wonders how high inflation can go."<sup>99</sup> She later expressed guilt for being able to afford food when most Chinese could not.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Report on Visit to Nanking, July 11, 1947. China Records Project, Yale University Divinity School. RG8 Box 60 Folder 2.

<sup>97</sup> Jonathan Spence. *The Search for Modern China*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000) 501.

<sup>98</sup> BJ Cauthen. "Defying Our Difficulties in China", *Southern Baptist Convention Bulletin* 1947, 82.

<sup>99</sup> Mary Reed Dewar. Letter to friends. May 14, 1947. CRP. RG8 Box59 Folder 3.

<sup>100</sup> Mary Reed Dewar. Letter to friends. June 8, 1947. CRP. RG8 Box59 Folder 3.

This economic crisis thoroughly undermined the GMD's credibility with the Chinese people as well as many missionaries. The government tried to stem inflation in July, 1948 by introducing a new currency, the "Golden Yuan", but rampant printing quickly undermined it as well. Two Methodist missionaries, Carol and Horace Dewey, complained that the government tried to halt inflation by setting prices, but then charged black market prices itself.<sup>101</sup> This was not surprising because of the endemic corruption among GMD officials. They could not afford to use the official rates because it would cut into their personal profits. With the failure of the Golden Yuan, the GMD financial system appeared doomed.<sup>102</sup> Victor Hayward, a British Baptist writing from Shanghai to the FMC in the summer of 1948, observed: "The cost of living has almost doubled in the last two weeks...No one has any confidence in the ability of the Government to stop the inflationary process, or to avert the final economic collapse."<sup>103</sup>

Missionaries like the Dewey's and Mary Dewar generally wrote back circular letters to friends and family to update them on their work. Their views on the Chinese economy would reach their home congregation, the sponsoring congregation, and a few others with whom the letters were shared. Hayward's carried a different weight to it. As the Secretary of NCC in China, he was writing to the Foreign Missions Board of North America to give a report on the situation. The Board's job was to use that information to plan for the future. Hayward was trying to give as accurate an impression as possible so that the Board could make informed decisions. His suggestion of an impending collapse was a large red flag for them.

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101 Carol and Horace Dewey. Letter to friends. October 19, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 2.

102 Jonathan Spence. *The Search for Modern China*, (W.W. Norton & Company, New York City, 2000) 503.

103 Victor Hayward. Letter to Foreign Mission Board of North American, DUA, China Missionary File , China Conference. 2112-6-5:10

E. E. Walline, the Presbyterian Secretary who was based in Shanghai in 1947, gave his board similar observations. He related a conversation between Bruce Copeland and U.S. Ambassador John Leighton Stuart. He said that Stuart “was not at all optimistic about the Nationalist cause and feared that there might be an economic collapse before many months unless large new factors entered into the picture.”<sup>104</sup> Walline became more flippant after a couple more months of inflation: “Today the exchange rate is approaching \$100,000 to one cent UC and \$100,000 notes are being put into circulation. Nuf sed!!”<sup>105</sup> Throughout 1947, most reports to the United States, like those of Hayward and Walline, focused first on inflation.

GMD taxes and conscription put an enormous burden on the average Chinese citizen. In the inland province of Shanxi, governed by a warlord affiliated with the GMD, farmers were taxed all of their product in 1948 as well as being conscripted for manual labor for fortifications.<sup>106</sup> Every person in the city of Taiku was forced to carry 50 bricks 5 miles each day to build fortifications for the city. Most people had to make the trip about 4 times a day because of the weight of the bricks. They scarcely had time or energy for their own work. In addition, they had to go to educational meetings about the evils of communism where they had to confess any ties they had to communists. Mary Reed Dewar, a Congregationalist, wrote that the warlord had “adopted so many of the Communists’ tactics that one hardly knows which is worse”.<sup>107</sup>

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104 The external factors were undoubtedly massive U.S. aid, which was extremely unlikely. E.E. Walline. Letter to Lloyd Ruland. Oct. 27,1947. PHS RG82-65-18.

105 . E.E. Walline. Letter to Lloyd Ruland. Dec. 17,1947. PHS RG82-65-18.

106 Yan Xishan was known as “the Model Warlord” because he advocated using western technology while still trying to protect Chinese traditions. He ruled Shanxi province, which was one of the poorer provinces in northern China, from 1911 until 1949. His transition from a progressive despot to a brutal tyrant is symbolic of the decline of the GMD and its allies. Bonavia, David. *China's Warlords*. (Oxford University Press, 1995); Gillin, Donald G. *Warlord: Yen Hsi-shan in Shansi Province 1911-1949*. ( Princeton University Press, 1967).

107 Mary Reed Dewar. Letter to friends. GRP. RG8 Box59 Folder 7. March 2, 1948.



## **Support for GMD**

Even with the economic problems of GMD policies, many missionaries were committed to supporting Chiang against the CCP. He was not ideal, but they remained convinced that he was better than the alternative. Most missionaries returning to China believed that the GMD desperately needed to reform itself to better serve the Chinese people and to fight the Communist threat. The NCC initiated a “Forward Movement” in 1947 that was aimed at the moral regeneration of the GMD and China. It planned to jump start that regeneration with an increase in evangelization. Christians in China were “to win men and women to Christ and to devoted membership of His Church, to purify and strengthen the moral life of the nation”.<sup>108</sup>

Moral regeneration had to be accompanied by reform in the government. Expansion of Christianity in China would have little impact if the GMD did not do something to implement the Christian ideals of its leader and end its endemic corruption. Even Congressman Walter Judd, who was a former missionary to China and was rabidly anti-communist, admitted that “No true friend of China denies the need for administrative reform...”<sup>109</sup> One China Committee report said that for the government to restore peace and prosperity to China it had to end corruption and special privileges and “demonstrate a genuine interest in the welfare of the people”, something it appeared to have no inclination to do.<sup>110</sup>

In July 1947, Christians in China, both missionaries and Chinese, held a conference to discuss how best to expand Christianity in China despite the increasing chaos in the country. Many of the speakers saw the primary impediment was not

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108 NCC of China – Three Years Forward Movement, 1947-1949. DUA, China Missionary File , China Conference. 2112-6-3:2.

109 “Blunder out of China: Remarks of Honorable Walter H. Judd of Minnesota in the House of Representative, Saturday, July 26, 1947” U.S. Government Printing Office, PHS, Philadelphia, PA. RG82-45-16.

110 “Notes on the China Situation, August 1947”. Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA. RG82-45-16.

Communism, but GMD corruption. Yet even as several of the speakers condemned GMD corruption, their aim was reform, not revolution. One Chinese observer wrote, “Many of the criticisms of the government are offered by well-wishers, people who detest the Communists but who do want to see an improvement in the Government.” The ideal outcome was a better GMD, not its replacement. He later wrote, “The people think the situation is hopeless... Yet some still cling to the faith that the government cause will prevail.”<sup>111</sup> Given the GMD’s previous failures to reform and the consistently derisive tone of the conference, faith in the government may have been more hope than expectation.

The one basis for hope, according to most of the speakers, was Chiang Kai-shek. Almost all of the calls for support for the GMD included effusive praise for Chiang. Judd was particularly generous with his praise, saying that Chiang will eventually be known as “one of the greatest men of his age”.<sup>112</sup> Many missionaries considered him China’s only hope. He was a hero for his political work in reuniting China and for his faith. His beautiful and charming wife, educated in the United States, helped him put on a remarkable front for Americans.

Soong May-ling, commonly known as Madame Chiang Kai-shek, was a key factor in swaying missionary opinion towards Chiang. Her father was a Chinese Christian educated at an American seminary before returning to work in China. Her sister had married Sun Yat-sen, often known as “the Father of Modern China.” Madame Chiang grew into a star in the Christian community in the United States. She was beautiful, elegant and witty. During World War II, she spoke on American radio shows and addressed a joint session of Congress to urge greater support for her

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<sup>111</sup> “Report on Visit to Nanking, July 11 to 12, 1947”, “But One Hope, An Appeal”, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 2, Aug. 8, 1947.

<sup>112</sup> “Blunder out of China: Remarks of Honorable Walter H. Judd of Minnesota in the House of Representative, Saturday, July 26, 1947” U.S. Government Printing Office, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA. RG82-45-16.

husband's regime. Her sophisticated manner and often-expressed Christian faith made her an icon of China's potential. Both in China and in the United States, Madame Chiang became the most important spokesperson for the GMD. Even missionaries who thought less of Chiang Kai-shek generally spoke well of Madame Chiang.<sup>113</sup>

The perception of the Chiangs was at the heart of missionaries' hope for a non-communist China. Their strength would regenerate China. Only through their leadership was it possible for China to rebuild itself. There was, however, an element of wishful thinking about Chiang Kai-shek. Missionaries who were the most anti-communist were usually those with the highest opinion of Chiang. Given their commitment against the CCP, Chiang provided the only possible hope for success. As such, they saw his qualities through rose-colored glasses.

### **Anti-Communism**

The fear of Communism was at the heart of many missionaries' support for the GMD. They dreaded what would become of the Christian enterprise in China if the CCP gained control. They believed that they could not negotiate with the CCP because the party's ideology was incompatible to Christianity. Even if the Communists said they were willing to allow them to continue their missionary work, they could not be trusted. The CCP believed only in force, not the rule of law or honoring its commitments. This fear was particularly strong for missionaries in northern China who were close to the front lines but still in GMD lands.

Frank Connelly had been a Southern Baptist missionary in China for over three decades. He had worked through the disturbances of the 1920's and evacuated during World War II, but he saw Communism as a much graver threat. He wrote that as

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<sup>113</sup> It is important to note that Americans who dealt with her on a daily basis had a much lower opinion of her, considering her shallow and hypocritical. Hannah Pakula. *The Last Empress : Madame Chiang Kai-Shek and the Birth of Modern China*, (New York City, Simon and Shuster, 2009); Karen Leong. *The China Mystique : Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the transformation of American Orientalism*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

“Communist bandits surround us. It is clear that there can be no compromise with them.” He went on to say that “Communists hate Americans and hate Christianity because they don’t like any ‘thought’ that considers the individual. Thus, while loudly professing democracy and freedom of religion, they deny it all in practice.”<sup>114</sup> Connelly’s fears were focused on the absolute incompatibility between Communism and religion, particularly Protestantism, where individual interpretation was so important.

Horace Dewey, a Methodist minister who had also spent three decades in China, had similar fears, particularly about Communist fanaticism. He said, “These Communists don’t believe in God. They don’t believe in anything. They know.” He went on to say that you cannot reason with a Communist because they cannot conceive that their knowledge is wrong. He finished with “You may theorize all you want about Communism from a distance, but when you contact Communists, you contact hatred and lies.”<sup>115</sup> Dewey viewed Communism as the antithesis of Protestant Christianity. There could be no faith or knowledge of God without independent thought. He feared his work with his congregation would be impossible under Communist rule.

Winnifred Kane had first-hand experience with “the Reds.” The Anhui province village, where she and her husband preached, was near the front lines in 1947. It changed hands repeatedly during the summer, with the CCP army taking it several times, but unable to hold it. Most of the battles were outside of town, so they rarely saw much fighting, but they did hear gunfire from time to time. After one Communist takeover in late June, she described the looting that occurred until the political officers arrived and promptly gave orders to shoot looters. Rather than view

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114 Frank Connelly. Letter to SBC. South Baptist Convention 1948, pp. 104-5.

115 Horace Dewey. Letter to friends. China Records Project, Yale University Divinity School. RG8 Box60 Folder 4. March 21, 1947.

the looting as exceptional, she thought it was more likely the norm. The political officers were simply putting on a good show. After a public meeting in their chapel, Kane wrote, "Of course, it sounded good; but nobody expects them to live up to their promises once they gain possession."<sup>116</sup>

The stories of what the CCP was doing to churches in "liberated" territory were replete with beatings, property confiscation and occasionally murder. Yet in typical rumor mill fashion, no one could quite say where the story came from or who said it. A report from Chefoo in CCP territory demonstrates this phenomenon. The report says that things were difficult under CCP control because of heavy taxes (which the church had been exempt from under the GMD), but that they were managing to keep the church going. Then it says that they are the exception and that rural churches were completely shut down. The report seems to take this as fact despite earlier saying that communications between churches were quite difficult so he had not gotten any first hand reports.<sup>117</sup> The unconfirmed stories always seemed to be worse than the reality, but that did not stop missionaries from accepting them as the Communists drew near. In reality, the majority of the rural parishes were, in fact, shut down, but some were left open. The more senior and educated cadres were assigned to newly liberated cities, leaving less experienced cadres to the rural areas. These more recent recruits to the CCP often had more enthusiasm than understanding of party policy, causing them to shut down Christian churches despite CCP calls for religious freedom. Other churches were shut down inadvertently when restrictions on missionaries' movements meant that there was no clergy available to minister to the more remote ones. There are almost no cases of American missionaries being

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<sup>116</sup> Winnifred Kane. Letter to Mother, July 29, 1947. WUA, BGC-A CN 182, Box 3, Folder 11.

<sup>117</sup> Report from Chefoo. China Records Project, Yale University Divinity School. RG8 Box 60 Folder 8, November 2, 1948.

physically abused until late 1950. Even then, direct abuse of missionaries was very rare.

There were some more concrete stories, however. One report described a Chinese Christian minister in Communist controlled territory who was hauled before the court for not producing his own food. The CCP did not accept having dedicated clergy living off contributions from their parishioners. The report quotes a cadre as saying, “You are not a productive worker. You have been living on the results of other peoples work. Now accounts must be reckoned. You must return to the church members what they have given you.”<sup>118</sup>

Victor Hayward represented a more measured, but still firm, anti-communist pose. Working in Shanghai, he was far from the front lines through most of 1948. He had no illusions about the GMD, but still considered them far superior to the CCP. In analyzing the immediate prospect for mission work in Shanghai, he wrote that despite “the ultimate collapse that seems increasingly inevitable”, the chaos of the situation is still better for Christian work “than would be likely under a stable communist regime.”<sup>119</sup>

These missionaries represent a particular point of view in China that drew less from their specific denomination and more from their main work. Connelly was a Southern Baptist, Heyward was a Baptist and Dewey was a Methodist. What connected them, and many other fervent anti-Communist missionaries, was the primacy they placed on evangelization. Although Heyward served in an administrative capacity as well as a minister, he, Connelly and Dewey believed that their primary goal in China was to convert Chinese to Christianity. Their biggest

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118 “Conditions in North Honan”, North Honon Mission, CRP, RG8 Box 60 Folder 2, June 1, 1947.

119 Victor Hayward. Letter to Foreign Mission Board of North American, Drew University Archives, China Missionary File , China Conference. 2112-6-5:10

concern was the CCP gaining control over their area and curtailing their proselytization and preaching.

They also shared another trait. By writing letters to the United States, the missionaries hoped to influence American support for the GMD and therefore affect the course of China. Heyward makes an interesting case for this because he was British but he wrote relentlessly to the FMC as well as friends in the United States about the dangers that Communism posed to the missionary enterprise in China. For most missionaries, their letters were read only by friends, family and members of their home churches. On occasion, letters would be circulated more widely and on a few occasions published. Heyward, however, had a direct channel of communication with the FMC, which had connections in American politics. Its members had personal relationships with several U.S. Senators and members of the House of Representatives. On several occasions in the late 1940's and early 1950's members of the board met with the Secretary of State. When Hayward wrote to the FMC, he was hoping to sway the board to use those connections. His biggest fear, along with other evangelicals like Dewey and Connelly, was that Americans would decide that it was not worthwhile to continue support for Chiang Kai-Shek, cutting off a vital lifeline for his struggling regime and practically guaranteeing a CCP victory.

Evangelical opinion on Chiang was mixed, but most of them believed he was the best hope for Christianity in China. They wrote home to tell their friends about how terrible the CCP was. Some urged their friends to write to their congressmen and the President to get more aid for the GMD. The Christian mission depended on Chiang and Chiang depended on the United States. Their best hope to influence their chaotic environment was to get Americans to realize the danger Communism presented.

## **Democracy and Christianity**

Missionaries who supported the GMD also promoted the idea that Christianity and democracy were intricately linked together. This idea was an obvious cultural import from the West but many missionaries regarded it as a natural connection.

Democracy, like Christianity, valued the personal dignity of the individual.

Democracy, in the American view, also allowed people a freedom of conscience and belief that was a prerequisite for any religious faith. Promoting democracy was the only way to promote Christianity.

Again using the rose colored glasses, some missionaries saw Chiang as the champion of Chinese democracy. They were aware of his autocratic tendencies, but preferred to see that as a necessary evil for the challenges he was facing. GMD corruption was not Chiang's fault. He was doing what he could to curtail it, but had to deal with political realities. U.S. promotion of democracy would not only assist an ally, but would also support the expansion of Christianity.

In a very optimistic address called "But One Hope: An Appeal", Christian leaders in Shanghai, mostly missionaries, called for peace as the only hope for China. Although claiming to favor neither side, the authors put much more blame on the CCP for its despotic tendencies. They claimed to speak for the majority of Chinese, including non-Christians, in proclaiming that democracy was the way forward for China. They said: "These measures have the approval of the public, for they embody what the people want: peace, unity, and democracy."<sup>120</sup>

"But One Hope" was not widely distributed outside of the Christian community. It did, however, show some of the assumptions that missionaries brought with them as they tried to work in China, shared by both liberal and fundamentalist

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<sup>120</sup> "But One Hope, An Appeal", CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 2, July 11, 1947.



missionaries. They assumed that there was a large liberal contingent among the Chinese who had remained silent, possibly out of timidity. That contingent had to join the battle for China's future. "Liberals must struggle for the freedom of speech, press and assembly, because until these are won, democracy can have no sure foothold in China."<sup>121</sup> The authors assumed that China wanted and needed these freedoms. They did not bother to defend that assumption.

While the missionary authors of "But One Hope" took the need for democracy as a given, Chinese Christians displayed more interest in proving the link between democracy and Christianity. At a meeting in Nanking, one Chinese Christian said: "The gospels are a message proclaiming freedom. The Christian religion progresses where freedom flourishes."<sup>122</sup> He then discussed what those freedoms were, which combined some American ideals with those more popular in China.<sup>123</sup> "China today especially needs freedom from disease, from ignorance, from superstition and from bad habits and customs. The power of freedom is needed if China is to have reconstruction on a democratic basis."<sup>124</sup>

Another Chinese Christian emphasized that the moral regeneration of China could only come about with freedom and democracy. He argued that to revive its morality and its fortunes, "freedom of speech and freedom of assembly were very necessary." He provided a practical reason for this. He did not think the GMD plan of national mobilization against the CCP would work, so they must openly discuss the alternatives. In addition, the process could prove an effective weapon against the Communists. "Our best approach is to point out that the best answers to Communism

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> "Report on Visit to Nanking, July 11 to 12, 1947". CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 1 August 1947.

<sup>123</sup> These ideas reflected some of the more popular writings of the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement. See Rana Mitter's *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005); Vera Schwarcz *China's Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement of 1919*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>124</sup> "Report on Visit to Nanking, July 11 to 12, 1947". CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 1 August 1947.

is something better.”<sup>125</sup> These Christians accepted that democracy went along with Christianity. They also accepted that democracy was best for China, but they understood something that American missionaries were still struggling with; the Chinese people would not flock to Christianity or western ways simple because they were told to do so. They had shown indifference towards Christianity for centuries. Christianity and democracy must exhibit practical value if the Chinese were to embrace them. By the late 1940’s, missionaries had spent decades trying to better understand the Chinese, but they still maintained some surprising blind spots. Chinese Christians were trying to help them get over that.

Chiang Kai-shek was far from a paragon of democratic virtue, as the authors of “But One Hope” tacitly acknowledged. Nevertheless, he was committed to democratic principles in theory, which was something that could not be said of the Communists. Missionaries spent more time condemning the Communist system than they did praising the GMD. These condemnations revolved around the CCP’s effort to suppress individuality and institute a group mentality. After visiting a Communist controlled area in 1947, one missionary described Communism as antithetical to democracy as well as Christianity. He wrote: “Communism is a religion – not just a political party. It is a Party dictatorship – men cease to be free-will agents.”<sup>126</sup> Other missionaries made similar observations. Missionaries in northern Hunan equated Communism with a lack of individuality. “People are thus bereft of freedom of thought, speech and action. Personality is shattered and life is reduced to an acquiescence in Communist regimentation.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> “Communist China” Field report by field supervisor of the American Advisory Committee. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 1 April 1949.

<sup>127</sup> “Conditions in North Honan”, North Honon Mission, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 2 , June 1, 1947.

## **Social Gospel and Accommodation**

Not all missionaries were so vehemently anti-communist. Those less involved in evangelism tended to view the CCP with less venom. Few endorsed the CCP agenda or hoped for its victory, but they saw a possibility that the party would be better than the GMD. To these missionaries, the CCP was at least trying to improve the lives of the Chinese, while the GMD showed only contempt or indifference to the suffering of the masses. Missionaries committed to the social gospel could see some similar goals in the CCP and hoped that some accommodation could be reached. Even this sympathy with the CCP might have disappeared if the GMD did not appear on the brink of collapse. With CCP victory imminent, many missionaries thought that resisting the CCP would not affect the outcome of the war, but would turn the CCP against Christianity when they finally took power.

The clearest, and most powerful, example of this is John Leighton Stuart, long-time missionary and educator in China who became the US Ambassador there in 1946. Stuart must have seemed like the perfect choice to the Truman Administration at the time, particularly for George Marshall who was trying to negotiate a coalition government between the GMD and CCP. Stuart was born in China and had spent most of this life there as a Christian educator. He eventually became the first president of Yenching University in Peiping. He had strong ties to the GMD and supported its attempts to strengthen China. He also had contacts with the CCP because some of its leaders had attended Yenching. As such, he was ideally suited to help Marshall with his mission.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> John Leighton Stuart. *Fifty years in China, The memoirs of John Leighton Stuart, missionary and ambassador*. (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Yu-ming Shaw. *An American Missionary in China: John Leighton Stuart and Chinese-American Relations* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1992).

Marshall's mission would eventually fail because of mutual distrust between the two sides. The CCP accused him, with some validity, of supporting the GMD. The United States continued to provide aid to the GMD during negotiations, hurting Marshall's position as a neutral mediator. In addition, one of Marshall's motivations was GMD survival. He was convinced that the GMD had little chance of victory in civil war. He saw a negotiated settlement as the best hope for the GMD. When it became clear that the negotiations had failed, Marshall returned to the United States believing that the GMD's days were numbered.<sup>129</sup>

When Marshall went back to Washington to become Secretary of State, Stuart was left as the American spokesman in China. Stuart shared Marshall's pessimistic view about the GMD and immediately began advocating a more conciliatory policy with the CCP. Stuart was a second generation missionary in China, having been born there and spent most of his life there, so his knowledge of Chinese politics was not matched by his understanding of politics in the United States. He continued to push for talks with the CCP with little regard for the growing anti-communist fervor in the United States or Truman's sensitivity to looking weak. Truman's opponent for the 1948 presidential election, Thomas Dewey, was lambasting Truman for his weak support of Chiang. Dewey promised massive aid when he became President<sup>130</sup>. Although most media outlets believed that Dewey would win easily, Truman edged him out in the election. However, during the campaign, the last thing that Truman wanted was reports that his ambassador was negotiating with the enemy. Had Stuart been better versed in American politics, or perhaps less committed to providing honest

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<sup>129</sup> Ronald Specter. *In the Ruins of Empire: The Japanese Surrender and the Battle for Post-war Asia*, (New York City: Random House Publishing, 2007); Tang Tsou. *America's Failure in China 1941-1950*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

<sup>130</sup> Warren Cohen. *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations*, (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2010) 176.

council, he might have understood the futility in continuing to push for negotiation.<sup>131</sup>

Stuart was not an admirer of the CCP, but he was a practical man. He wanted to ensure missionary access to China if it came under CCP dominion. His cables to Washington argued that the policy of small amounts of aid was the worst possible approach. It would not save the GMD but would alienate the CCP. Washington should either send massive aid, as suggested by Dewey and others, or cut it off entirely and start figuring out how to work with the CCP. Neither was politically feasible in Washington, so Stuart's advice was ignored.<sup>132</sup> To add insult to injury, Stuart was then used as a scapegoat for the "loss of China" when the CCP finally established the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Stuart's Presbyterian background is evident in his practical approach to dealing with the CCP. Of all Christian groups, they were the most uniformly interested in continuing their missionary work regardless of who controlled China. A missionary briefing of the Presbyterian Mission Board on the political situation in China asked questions that got to the heart of Washington's dilemma. It asked:

- a) is it really worthwhile to save the present Nanking Government?
- b) is the primary factor in the plans of the U.S. Government in relation to China the world struggle between the U.S. and Russia?
- c) if the State Department can decide upon what seems to be the best policy, can public support for such a policy be secure in view of the political maneuvering before the next election?"<sup>133</sup>

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131 Yu-ming Shaw. *An American Missionary in China: John Leighton Stuart and Chinese-American Relations* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1992).

132 *Ibid.*

133 "Notes on the Chinese Political Situation, October 1947." Presbyterian Historical Society Archives, Philadelphia, PA, Apr. 15, 1948.

Writing to the Presbyterian Church Convention<sup>134</sup> in late 1948, the Mission Board said: “Certainly it would be wrong to tie the fortunes of Christianity to any one political party or a particular national party.” The Presbyterian board had obviously recognized the new reality in China.<sup>135</sup>

The Presbyterians were hardly monolithic in their world view, but they were remarkably consistent. One very prominent Presbyterian appeared to break with the church’s philosophy. John Foster Dulles became Secretary of State in 1953 with a decidedly anti-Communist vision. He would advocate rollback and massive retaliation against the Soviet Union and continued the American non-recognition of the PRC.<sup>136</sup> However, in the 1940’s, Dulles’s anti-communism was not so pronounced. He clearly had little sympathy for Communism, but he participated in several organizations dedicated to peace and ecumenism. He was instrumental in founding the World Council of Churches, which was dedicated to Christian cooperation and ecumenism. He was also a member of the Committee for a Just and Durable Peace, which contributed to the writing of the UN Charter and UN Declaration on Human Rights. He consistently worked for organizations seeking to establish dialogue rather than confrontation. The organizations placed a great emphasis on understanding reality and finding an accommodation with adversaries to prevent needless and destructive conflict. The 1940s Dulles appears to be a different person than the 1950s Dulles. Several historians have argued, however, that Dulles did not radically change his

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<sup>134</sup> The Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA) split from the Presbyterian Church of the United States (PCUS) shortly before the American Civil War along mainly regional lines. PCUSA was the northern branch and had a much larger missionary presence in China. In practice, there were very few differences between them and they reunited in the 1980s.

<sup>135</sup> PCUSA Convention 1949. Mission Reports. P.26.

<sup>136</sup> Rollback was a response to the passivity of Truman’s containment strategy. It advocated pushing back Communist gains rather than simply waiting for Communism to collapse from within. Massive retaliation was the threat to use nuclear weapons against any Soviet aggression toward the US or its allies. Both of these policies were much more aggressive and confrontational than Truman’s initial Containment policy. Both were also largely rhetorical as they were never acted upon.

convictions. Rather, the aggressive spread of Communism made him realize there were limits to compromise, as did domestic political considerations. While he was a private citizen, his views were for the most part consistent with those of his fellow Presbyterians.<sup>137</sup>

The *China Weekly Review*, a small English-language publication in China that was distributed mainly to missionaries, took a similar stance. In an editorial in 1948, they claimed that the Christian message was being disrupted by demands of the GMD. In their view, Christianity should be above politics. The GMD demand for Christian schools to teach its propaganda undermined the Christian message. After condemning GMD practices of “secret police” and “storm-trooper like Youth Corps”, it posed the rhetorical question: “Did any early Christian do something which he felt to be obviously contrary to Christ’s teaching, because it was Roman law?”<sup>138</sup> Even if the GMD supported Christianity, it would be a corrupt version.

That editorial also articulated the position of many missionaries in China. They wrote of the group of missionaries who, “while not exactly pro-communist, is certainly anti-Central Government.” It went on to discuss missionaries who collaborate with the GMD “who privately admit that they abhor the fascist tendencies of the present Government.” Its larger point was that even missionaries who worked with the GMD acknowledged its deficiencies. The *China Weekly Review* was non-

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<sup>137</sup> John S. Nurser. *For all peoples and all nations : the ecumenical church and human rights*, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005); Richard H.Immerman. *John Foster Dulles : piety, pragmatism, and power in U.S. foreign policy*, (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1999); Frederick W. Marks III. *Power and peace : the diplomacy of John Foster Dulles*, (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993); Stephen W. Twing, *Myths, models, & U.S. foreign policy : the cultural shaping of three cold warriors*, (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998); Anthony Clark Arend, *Pursuing a just and durable peace : John Foster Dulles and international organization*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); Mark G. Toulouse, *The transformation of John Foster Dulles : from prophet of realism to priest of nationalism*, (Macon, GA : Mercer University Press, 1985).

<sup>138</sup> “Missions Face Dilemma”. *China Weekly Review*, May 29, 1948. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 4.

denominational but was in accordance with the Presbyterian Board's view that bending mission work to political ends undermined the Christian message.<sup>139</sup>

Social gospel missionaries were quick to realize that the CCP was a growing force that must be dealt with. In early 1947, one field supervisor of a hospital mission said, "I feel that if we are going to continue to work in China, either in relief or regular church work, we must learn to get along with these folk....So I say let us try to understand and if possible reach a working basis with the leaders of communist China."<sup>140</sup> In 1948, with the CCP gaining ground, YMCA Director Sherwood Eddy, wrote that the GMD was doomed but that Christianity will go on during CCP rule. He even suggested that it was God's will that Chiang be ousted because of his corrupt and wicked behavior. Even if the CCP was atheist and would restrict Christianity, its policies followed a more Christian path towards the welfare of the people. He suggested that Christianity would end up thriving in China under Mao as it eventually did in Rome under Nero.<sup>141</sup> At roughly the same time, Presbyterian missionary G. Gordon Maby wrote that medical and educational missionaries "will be welcomed by the communists and will do much to build back the goodwill which has been lost because of Communist misunderstanding of American plans in the past". Maby did not say how he came to this conclusion, but seemed to be using his own common sense mixed with a healthy dose of optimism. If missionaries provided services that the Communists needed but could not provide themselves, why wouldn't they welcome missionary help?<sup>142</sup>

One particularly interesting attempt at showing the compatibility of Christianity and Communism was a report to the International Mission Board, which

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> "Communist Chefoo", CRP, GR8, Box 60 Folder 2, April 1947.

<sup>141</sup> Eddy, Sherwood. Open Letter to Christian Leaders, December 19, 1948, CRP, RG32 Box 1 Folder 2.

<sup>142</sup> G. Gordon Maby. Letter to Lloyd Ruland, Nov. 28, 1948. Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA. RG82-45-16.



was a branch of the WCC and closely connected to the FMC. In trying to show why there was no consensus among Christians about how to deal with Communism, the author argued that the two belief systems shared a similar world view. “Christianity and Communism come from the same root, namely Judaism, and share a common passion for justice and a certain formal eschatological framework.” He went on to suggest that understanding Communism rather than opposing it would be a more beneficial plan for the advancement of Christianity. “The character of the Chinese Communists is in dispute: are they full-blooded Marxists, under control from Moscow? Or are they liberal socialists taking Sun Yat Sen’s Three Principles a little further?” Understanding their character was essential to finding out if an accommodation could be reached. Cooperation was much preferred to conflict, because when there had been conflict between Christianity and Communism, “the crisis has been resolved – against the Christian churches.” He went on to say that because the issue was not black and white, Christians should make an effort to learn about the specific disagreements with Communism were and what possibility there was for finding compromises.<sup>143</sup>

These missionaries had two things in common. Their work in China focused on the social gospel rather than evangelization and they believed that their work could continue under Communist rule. Almost none of them believed that the CCP would allow them to continue their work unfettered, but it was definitely worth the attempt to try to find an accommodation with the Communists. Their decision to find compromise with the CCP proved prophetic as by mid-1949, it had become apparent that if Christianity was to continue in China, it would be under Communism. Similarly to evangelical missionaries’ views of the GMD, social gospel missionaries

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<sup>143</sup> E.J. Bingle, “Communism and the Younger Churches”, International Missionary Council. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 4, Nov. 18, 1948.

viewed the CCP with hopefulness based partly an assessment of the Communists' ideological stance and partly on desperation. As evangelicals glossed over the GMD's failings, social gospel missionaries excused some of the CCP's excesses. Also like evangelicals' view of the GMD, they viewed the CCP as the only hope of continuing their work in China. The Communists were taking control of China. The only alternative to working with the Communists was to abandon the missions and their life's work, something they were not prepared to do.

### **Conclusion**

American Protestant missionaries were faced with difficult decisions during the Chinese civil war. They sought a course that would allow them to continue the Christian mission in China, but, being from diverse Protestant churches, they could not reach agreement on how to proceed. Missionaries split largely along their lines of work. Evangelical missionaries essentially doubled down on the GMD. Although Chiang and his party had difficulties and were far from ideal, Evangelicals believed that they had to back the GMD completely. The survival of the GMD was the only hope for Christianity in China. Evangelicals viewed Communism as a religion in itself with fanatical devotees. It would not allow a rival to proselytize under its rule. Even the converts they had already gained would be in jeopardy under a Communist regime. Evangelicals believed that a communist victory would be an absolute disaster for the Christian enterprise in China.

On the other hand, missionaries emphasizing the social gospel took a much softer view of the CCP. These missionaries usually had a more modern view of Christianity. They were more willing to accept other philosophies as being compatible with Christianity, not necessarily in competition with it. The Communists offered a good alternative to the GMD, which they saw as hopelessly corrupt and having no

interest in the welfare of the Chinese people. The Communists were at least trying to improve the lives of the Chinese people and restore peace and prosperity to China as a whole. Although it was avowedly atheist, CCP policies were more in line with the social teachings of the New Testament. On a more practical front, social gospel missionaries believed that GMD corruption had already doomed its rule, making a Communist victory inevitable. If they wanted to continue their work, they would have to find an accommodation with the CCP. They hoped that the CCP would welcome their work because of the useful services they provided. Missionaries and Chinese Christians might provide a moderating influence on the Communists after they gained power.

Both sides were making decisions based as much on hope as on reason. All paths were fraught with danger, so they made the decision that they felt gave them the best odds. Their decisions were colored by how they viewed their missions and how they viewed the Chinese Communists. Evangelicals were swayed by the spirituality of the GMD and CCP, rather than their actions, and so sided with a Christian in Chiang over the atheists led by Mao. Missionaries devoted to the social gospel looked more at the practical policies of each side. They believed the CCP's effectiveness in governing was their most likely path to continuing their missions. The purpose of the mission ended up being the decisive factor in how missionaries understood and tried to navigate the Civil War in China.

## Chapter 3

### Communist or Nationalist: Asking the Wrong Question

Shortly after Shanghai was liberated, missionary leader Frank Price wrote: “A crucial question in whether the Communists will be more Communist or more Chinese.”<sup>144</sup> This was the key question for missionaries in China. They believed that if the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were more Communist, it would proscribe Christianity as an “opiate of the masses”. If the CCP put more emphasis on Chinese nationalism, they would probably want missionaries to stay because of the valuable services they provide. China had been destroyed by war with Japan and then the Civil War with the Guomindang. Missionaries provided medical services as well as education that would help return the country to prosperity and prominence. The answer to this question was the key to whether the Christian missions in China could continue, or so they thought.

These missionaries were swimming against the currents of the early Cold War on both sides of the Pacific. While many Americans, particularly those who were strongly religious, saw communism as a dire threat to the United States, the missionaries working in Communist China were trying to find common ground so they could continue their work. They acknowledged that the CCP had many failings, but they believed accommodation was the best way forward for Christianity in China. They were also fighting against the nationalist tide in China, which was raging against anything associated with imperialism. The CCP was built on the promise to unite

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<sup>144</sup> Frank Price Report on the Battle of Shanghai, May 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

China and restore its prominence in the world. Although the United States had been less aggressive than Europeans and Japan in encroaching on China during the previous century, its association with the corrupt GMD regime through the Chinese Civil War and its generous rebuilding of Japan had made it the primary foreign enemy in Communist eyes. Missionaries were not only associated with imperialism, by 1949 they were tied to what the CCP called the greatest imperialist enemy of China.

Despite this, they continued to fight a losing cause. Some of them maintained hope that missions would find a way survive in China. Others thought that missions were almost certainly doomed, but that they could not give up until defeat was certain. Some also hoped that the longer they stayed, the deeper Christian roots would go into Chinese society. Ultimately, missionaries were not officially expelled, but were constantly harassed by cadres and their followers. They stayed as long as they could, with the final missionaries leaving when they realized their efforts were hurting the Chinese Christians they hoped to help.

The Protestant missionary enterprise in China had lasted about a century and a quarter. Their successes had been on a small scale, making only limited impact on Chinese society as a whole, but they continued their struggle throughout. When the threat of communism loomed, they pinned their hopes on Chinese nationalism being a more powerful force in the CCP than was Marxism. As China fell under Communist control, missionaries realized that the CCP did have a strong nationalist streak, but it would prove to be as much of a problem to missionaries as orthodox Marxism. The presence of foreigners, particularly Americans, was unacceptable to a government whose legitimacy was based on overcoming imperialism and restoring China's greatness. Those foreigners, particularly ones preaching a foreign religion that encouraged passivity in the face of aggression, were a constant reminder of what

China had suffered. From 1949 to 1951 missionaries realized that they got the answer they wanted to Price's question, but that answer forced them to leave China all the same.

### **Initial Optimism**

As the CCP established control over most of China in 1948 and 1949, missionaries who had been completely against the CCP recognized the inevitable, with most choosing to leave the country. Some missionaries, however, decided that they had nothing to lose by trying to continue their missions under the Communists. They thought the CCP was far from ideal and failed to live up to many of its principles, but working under its regime would be a far superior option to giving up the missionary enterprise in China altogether.

There was significant optimism for many missionaries as they began work under Communist rule. Their optimism was based on the Communist pledge to allow religious freedom as well as the valuable educational and medical services that missionaries provided. Even with some rural cadres harassing Christians, many missionaries believed that their condition would improve as the CCP consolidated its power and enforced consistency in its ranks. James McCallum, who had worked in China for nearly three decades, dismissed the problem as temporary: "Such is to be expected during the first days of the revolution and can be attributed to the misunderstanding of the lower ranks of the political workers who do not have a full grasp of the real government policy in regard to religious bodies."<sup>145</sup> McCallum was educated at two liberal divinity schools, Yale and University of Chicago, and had slowly transitioned from working on evangelization to working in medicine and administration. Even more than most missionaries, he had seen terrible tragedies in

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<sup>145</sup> James McCallum, November 8, 1949. Quoted in "The China Statement" by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

China. He remained in Nanjing during the Japanese the infamous “Rape of Nanjing” in 1937, working to provide a safe zone for Chinese civilians. Like other veteran missionaries, he probably believed that their missions had survived a lot already and would survive communism as well.

Missionaries like McCallum were confident that they would be valued because of the services they provided to a shattered country. The newly established People’s Republic of China was devastated by years of war. Even the limited facilities that remained were inadequately staffed. They could not possibly meet the needs of all of the Chinese people. Missionaries believed that the Communists needed them, which gave them some power over their situation. They hoped that CCP pragmatism would allow missionaries some influence, which could temper Communist policies.

McCallum believed that stability would naturally bring moderation. “If they can ‘win the war’ and stabilize the economy in time, they may avoid any strong counter revolution and can proceed along the normal course of revolutions to become more mild and ‘constructive’ with time.”<sup>146</sup>

Frank Price offered a more modest yet similar appraisal. “Many hundred missionaries have decided to stay on in Communist-occupied China...Our eyes are open to all the difficulties and dangers ahead, but we believe there will be many compensations – in new lessons to learn and new opportunities to meet.”<sup>147</sup> Born in China, Price went to the United States and graduated from Yale Divinity School. When he returned to China, he was dedicated to evangelism, but, like McCallum, became more and more interested in raising China’s standard of living over the course of his decades there. Price argued that spiritual growth could only occur if physical needs were being met. Price became friends with the Chiangs in the 1930’s,

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<sup>146</sup> James McCallum, October 24, 1949. Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>147</sup> Frank Price Letter, May 16, 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

sometimes translating speeches for Chiang Kai-shek into English during the war. He was part of the Chinese delegation to the 1945 San Francisco Conference, which would lead to the founding of the United Nations. Unlike many of Chiang's Chinese subordinates, Price would routinely urge the Generalissimo to reform his regime. Despite his closeness to the Chiangs, he remained focused on his overall goal, which was to promote Christianity in China. When it became clear that Chiang had lost control of the country, Price was among the loudest to call for working with the Communists. His question that began this chapter and his assessment of the difficulties of working in Communist China show that he was driven by pragmatism much more than dogma.<sup>148</sup>

Missionaries largely agreed that no matter how dogmatic the CCP was, it would not eschew help that it desperately needed, especially given its pledge of religious tolerance. Oswald Goulter had been a missionary in China for over 30 years. He believed: "Any missionary who has some specialized practical skills would be most welcome here and now."<sup>149</sup> James McCallum followed up his earlier letter with a similar bit of optimism: "All are agreed that things are better than we expected and seem to have a way of working out through rather tedious processes."<sup>150</sup> Another missionary wrote: "We have letters from all our friends in Mukden. The main news is that things have turned out better than the most optimistic dared to hope."<sup>151</sup>

Some missionaries believed that Christianity would not only be of service to China, but it could help moderate CCP practices. The CCP required loyalty to the cause and to China over individualism or personal rights. Missionaries hoped that the

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<sup>148</sup> Bruce S. Greenwalt. *Missionary Intelligence from China: American Protestant Reports, 1930-1950*. Dissertation. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1974).

<sup>149</sup> Oswald Goulter, August 31, 1949, Quoted in "The China Statement" by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>150</sup> James McCallum, November 8, 1949. Quoted in "The China Statement" by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>151</sup> *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, June 1949. P10. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.



work they were doing would temper these tendencies and introduce the Christian (meaning American Protestant) principle of the importance of the individual. A report from Yenching University in Beijing said: “They [Yenching] will serve as a means of softening and modifying the rigors of the Communist program.”<sup>152</sup> The university was one of the first Christian institutions of higher learning in China. Its leadership was already mostly Chinese, but almost half of its faculty was still foreign. As an institution, it had no choice but to stay. As a place of learning, it should be valued by the Communists for the technical skills it could provide. That would also provide an opportunity to open the minds of its communist students. Frank Price, writing from Shanghai at the time of its turnover in the spring of 1949, argued that Christianity would provide a strong voice for human rights in Communist China. He said, “Christian groups will give strong support to the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and work for the application of this in China.”<sup>153</sup> After six months under Communism, Price’s hope had not diminished. Perhaps from reading scripture, he was feeling a bit poetic: “As the streams flow together, they will modify each other. Let us hope that Christianity, though seemingly burring now in the new dough, will yet leaven it and bring about a truly democratic rural society in China.”<sup>154</sup>

The chaos of the preceding decade may have given some extra optimism to missionaries and Chinese Christians. The possibility of stability must have seemed too good to be true, even if it came with a potentially hostile government. One missionary, writing from Manchuria three months after liberation, viewed the Communist victory as a grand opportunity for Christians. “There are to be great changes here—tremendous expansion of the medical college to accommodate

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<sup>152</sup> Stanley D. Wilson and Lucius Porter, “Conditions at Yenching and in the Peiping Region”, August 27, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>153</sup> Frank Price Report on the Battle of Shanghai, May 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>154</sup> Frank Price to John Reisner, December 12, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 7.

thousands of students, medical students of all kinds, technicians, nurses, public health workers, etc.” He later said, “there are wonderful opportunities here these days.”<sup>155</sup> Another missionary offered a similar view of Christianity under Communism. He wrote: “I believe that a church with strong Chinese leadership and a well-planned social program has a bright future in China....We need a church of witness, not a church in retreat.”<sup>156</sup> The 1950 Presbyterian Mission Board message to its convention had an even more optimistic tone saying, that there were little-to-no limits on religious freedom and that the only weakness of the church under the newly established PRC was from “timidity”.<sup>157</sup> It implied that churches were limiting themselves in a groundless fear of CCP reprisals.

H.W. Spillet saw the chaos as a golden opportunity for missionaries to prove their worth. “It should be noted that a national educational policy has yet to be worked out. This is a transitional period. Hence the importance of Christian schools ‘making good’ in this period.”<sup>158</sup> He made a similar claim for hospitals. “So, as in the case of schools, there is a ‘breathing space’ in which mission hospitals have an opportunity of demonstrating their value to the country.”<sup>159</sup> Spillet suspected that the Communists might take a more hostile view to Christianity once its regime was consolidated. That made it more urgent to prove the usefulness of Christian missions before that consolidation took place. A Chinese Christian, although less optimistic about the churches ability to rise to the occasion, believed that the church had an opportunity. He wrote. “Dangers and unprecedented opportunities to demonstrate the power of the Gospel, both stare in the face of the churches. The very fact of religious

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<sup>155</sup> *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, June 1949, p. 10. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>156</sup> *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, June 1949, p. 4, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>157</sup> PCUSA Convention 1950. 42.

<sup>158</sup> H.W. Spillet Review, October 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>159</sup> H.W. Spillet Review, October 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

freedom promised and guaranteed means a great fighting chance for creative Christian living and witness bearing.”<sup>160</sup>

Lewis and Margaret Smythe believed that the Communist interest in bettering the lives of the Chinese people dovetailed with Christian goals. They wrote: “There is so much idealism for the welfare of the people in both Christianity and Chinese Communism, and both have so often fallen short of their respective ideals that we hope they will interstimulate each other to better service of the common people in the New China.”<sup>161</sup> He had been educated at University of Chicago Divinity School, but they both worked primarily in education while in China. Their letters reflect a modernist view that accepts non-western views as potentially useful. Another missionary, Albert Stewart, working as a doctor and also showing some modernist tendencies, reported with great hope on the speech by a Chinese Christian doctor who had some contacts with the CCP: “Dr. Kiang says that in working out the relationships and problems between man and man we are on common ground with the Communists and should cooperate with them.” Dr. Kiang also suggested that, “as Christians we have the relationship between man and God. This is to our advantage and should enable us to do better work in meeting human need than anybody else.”<sup>162</sup>

Constance Buell had worked in education in northern China since 1919. She had been educated at Wellesley College, graduating a year before Soong Mei-ling would arrive. Buell was skeptical of the Communists, but believed their goals were similar to those of Christians and were much more trustworthy than previous Chinese leaders. In one letter she praised the Communists for carrying out at least some of their promises: “One thing they should be given credit for is the employment of

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<sup>160</sup> T.C. Chao “Christian Churches in Communist China”, *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, June 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>161</sup> Lewis and Margaret Smythe, November 11, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>162</sup> Albert Stewart letter, October 15, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

beggars, just where and how I don't yet know, but there are practically none to be seen on the street."<sup>163</sup> Buell's extensive diary shows that she was initially quite happy with CCP, but with reservations.<sup>164</sup>

Many missionaries believed that the CCP would accept Protestants because they worked for the good of China and had similar goals as the Communists. H.W. Spillet, when writing a review of the newly established PRC, noted: "The methods of Christians and Communists are obviously very different, but it is clear that many of the aims of the Communists are admirable and the idealism and the devotion which Communists display are praiseworthy. Without compromising on essentials, Christians can and should do their part in the social changes that are taking place."<sup>165</sup> There was hope that the Communists would embrace Protestant missionaries in their efforts for change because, "Protestant Christianity is regarded as the most 'progressive of religions and the most likely to be capable of 'reform'."<sup>166</sup> James McCallum argued that Christianity "has won the reputation of being by and large a movement for the essential welfare of the Chinese people. Consequently, the Protestant phase of the movement is to have a number of representatives in the new People's Political Council in Peiping this fall."<sup>167</sup>

The key issues for these missionaries were that the CCP shared similar goals for the people and that their desire to fulfill those goals would make them pragmatist instead of dogmatic Communists. An observer in China in 1949 noted that "the writings of Mao-Tse-tung say that education should be conducted in a democratic spirit, with the scientific method and for the benefit of the masses." The author did

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<sup>163</sup> Constance Buell letter to friends, August 24, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>164</sup> Constance Buell, Diary, CRP, RG140, Box 3, Folders 34-35.

<sup>165</sup> H.W. Spillet Review, October 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>166</sup> H.W. Spillet Review, October 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>167</sup> James McCallum, October 24, 1949. Quoted in "The China Statement" by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

not believe that the benefit of the masses was the driving force. The inclusion of democracy and the scientific method, however, suggested that the CCP educational program would be less dogmatic than the missionaries had feared. The author later said: “Concerning the group who has taken charge in Shanghai, educators feel that they may be reasonable and open to suggestions insofar as these do not conflict with the *fundamental objectives of the Chinese Communists.*” (emphasis added)<sup>168</sup> The ending phrase could be telling for what the observers, as well as many missionaries, were hoping for. Were the “fundamental objectives” more Chinese or Communist? If they were Chinese, there was much less chance that they would conflict with the “essentials” of Christianity that Spillet referred to. If they were Communist, common ground was going to be much more difficult to find.

The FMC tried to lay out guidelines for how missionaries should work under Communism in the short term. A policy paper noted that missions “should carry on its institutional work as long as teachers, medical staff and other workers are not required to participate in unchristian teaching and propaganda.”<sup>169</sup> They wanted missionaries to continue to work as best they can while remaining out of the political fray, hoping that the CCP would accept their non-political help. Joseph Smith, a missionary associated with the Disciples of Christ who worked mainly with reconstruction in China, offered some hope in his assessment of the CCP. Smith was nominally a Presbyterian, but was strongly dedicated to ecumenism.<sup>170</sup> After six months under Communist rule, he saw nationalism winning over Marxism. In a report on the state of

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<sup>168</sup> “First Impressions of the Communist Rule”, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 7.

<sup>169</sup> “Missionary Policy in the Christian Approach to Communism”, FMC paper, January 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>170</sup> Disciples of Christ, sometimes called the Christian Church, is a small liberal denomination with strong ties to the ecumenical movement.

missions under Communism, he wrote “Mao Tze-tung has already broken from his Russian advisors and will do so again if expedient.”<sup>171</sup>

Smith was somewhat unusual among the missionaries in China in that he believed that the CCP would be good for missions and for China, but he chose to leave China shortly after writing the report. His wife and son had left the year before because of the Civil War and were not allowed to return, so he left for the United States at the end of 1949. Upon returning to the US, he did not change his mind on the PRC. He became a very vocal proponent of recognition of the PRC throughout his career. Most missionaries who advocated working with the CCP stayed until the bitter end.

### **Reevaluation of Christianity**

The Communist victory became a moment for reflection for missionaries in China. The Communists had succeeded in building a national movement to save China in just twenty five years, while missionaries had failed to gain more than a toehold in over a century. Even with the unequal treaties of the mid-nineteenth century giving them unfettered access across China, the number of Christians in China was negligible compared to the overall Chinese population.<sup>172</sup> In addition missionaries had been the target of widespread violence on multiple occasions. The contrast between missionary futility and Communist success forced many missionaries and Chinese Christians to look at what the church was doing in China and why it failed. Many came to the conclusion that Christian missions in China had deviated from a Christian path. One report from Yenching University to the FMC said: “The chief effect of the new regime upon our religious life was to inspire a review of the

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<sup>171</sup> Joseph Smith, October 14, 1949, Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>172</sup> Counting Protestants and Catholics together, the highest estimates put Christians as less than one percent of the population in 1950.

essentials of the Christian message in forms adequate to meet the challenge of communist ideology. At the same time, Christians realized more clearly the need to revitalize the church in China.”<sup>173</sup>

Individual missionaries also questioned what they were doing. When one of her students became an ardent Communist after growing up in Church schools, Constance Buell wrote: “The question in my own mind was: “Where have we failed, that a boy of Christian (and especially Congregational) background can subscribe to such dictated policies?”<sup>174</sup> Ellen Studley, long-time President of the Women’s Union Bible School in Beijing, wrote to a friend about a sermon she had recently heard that was both critical of the church and optimistic. She whole-heartedly agreed with the preacher’s stance: “His stand is, ‘I love the Church. There are many things wrong with it, but I want to help change it from within.’”<sup>175</sup>

One missionary journal published an article that offered a critical assessment of missionary endeavors. It said, “If we are to scrutinize the Communist movement in China with the kind of objectivity just suggested, then we should be ready to scrutinize our own movement with the same degree of fearless objectivity.” It found that despite the good things missionaries had done in China, the missions had lost their way, saying “nevertheless, we have to admit that as the Christian movement has grown in magnitude, the old warmth of heart and zeal for the sacrificial service have degenerated into self-seeking.” It added shortly afterwards: “We have allowed ourselves to be weaned away from the common man, and allied ourselves more and more closely with the bourgeoisie and vested interests.” The article finished with: “We must recognize the nature of social revolution. Revolution comes when the needs

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<sup>173</sup> Stanley D. Wilson and Lucius Porter, “Conditions at Yenching and in the Peiping Region”, August 27, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>174</sup> Constance Buell letter to friends, August 24, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>175</sup> Ellen Studley letter to Louis Robinson, September 19, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

of the age are not being otherwise met.” The article was a very critical self-assessment of what had gone wrong with the Christian enterprise in China, trying to explain why the Communists had connected with the people in a way that Christianity never had. Its language shows an attempt to appeal to Communists or at least those who sympathize with them, offering a *mea culpa* for Christian failures possibly with an eye to finding an accommodation under Communist rule.<sup>176</sup>

Frank Price had a very similar attitude, albeit in private correspondence. He had no apparent ties to the publication, but he was so active in Chinese missions across the country that it is possible he had some connection. In a letter to a fellow missionary, he voiced that the success of the Communists was an opportunity to learn: “Surely there are points of contact to be found between the Christian Church and this tremendous revolutionary movement.”<sup>177</sup> Ever the pragmatist, Price sought the best way to advance Christianity, even taking a page from Communism.

Spillet argued that the Communist victory in China was not unique, but showed the weaknesses of Christian missions worldwide. He wrote: “Communism has exposed the weakness and the failures of the church. Churches in every land are failing in precisely the same way.” He noted the attitude of many Communists towards the Church: “Communists regard themselves as practicing their doctrines, in contrast with Christians who ‘only talk and do not practice’.”<sup>178</sup> His larger argument was that the church had lost touch with the poor, in direct contrast to Jesus’s teachings. He argued that the Christian church, and even the missionary segment of the church, “has

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<sup>176</sup> “The Challenge of Communism to Christians in China” *Christians Under the Chinese Communist State* (Shanghai, China, 1949).

<sup>177</sup> Frank Price to John Reisner, December 12, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 7.

<sup>178</sup> H.W. Spillet Review, October 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.



become predominantly middle class, and has little influence upon, or even contact with the workers. Communism is a 'judgment' on world Christianity."<sup>179</sup>

The problem was also noted in New York. The FMC was asking the same questions from a more distant perspective. The result was a January 1949 policy paper that suggested a new strategy to overcome that failure. Its strategy paper suggested reaching out to industrial workers, "not only doing everything possible to alleviate conditions through Christian social service, but also enlisting and guiding Christian capitalists and managers in applying the principles of Christ to the conduct of their industries."<sup>180</sup> The policy paper was intended to help strengthen the missions' support while undercutting the problems that made communism appealing. Unfortunately, it was sent too late. The CCP had already won the decisive battles and Chiang would retreat to Taiwan within a month. It was difficult to transition this strategy under Communist rule because it involved working with capitalists, who were not welcome under Communist auspices. Even had it been delivered in a timelier manner, it is unlikely to have had a significant impact, despite promoting what seems like a good strategy. Protestant missionaries generally made decisions for themselves with only the broadest of guidance from their organizations. This sort of broad strategy was usually implemented only piecemeal, depending on the convictions of the individual missionaries involved.

Chinese Christians were also concerned about the failure of Christianity. Two Chinese leaders, T.C. Chao<sup>181</sup> and Luther Shao<sup>182</sup>, wrote extensively on how the

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<sup>179</sup> H.W. Spillet Review, October 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>180</sup> "Missionary Policy in the Christian Approach to Communism", FMC paper, January 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>181</sup> Educated at the preeminent Vanderbilt University Divinity School

<sup>182</sup> Educated at the less prestigious, but certainly full of itself Yale Seminary.

Church of Christ in China<sup>183</sup> should see this as an opportunity to reform itself. Both were educated at seminaries of more liberal churches. Both were influenced by the ecumenical movement and saw the disunity of Protestants as a serious weakness. Like many Chinese, they saw the differences between denominations as minor disagreements that obscured the larger truth of Christianity. They spent decades advocating both unifying the missionary movement and removing western trappings of Christianity to make the Church of Christ in China truly Chinese. Shao actually saw the civil war as an opportunity for progress, writing: “Thank God for these crises. It is through crises that churches begin to learn to cooperate.”<sup>184</sup>

Shao, being Chinese, was not a missionary in the traditional sense, but performed a very similar function. He was educated at a missionary school in Nanking, before going to the United States for college. He returned to China in the early 1930s to take a position as secretary of the NCC in Shanghai. Shao was an example of the tension and cooperation between missionaries and Chinese Christians and missionaries. They did not always agree, but their views were often very similar.

T.C. Chao also urged the CCC to become more Chinese. When he returned to China, he became a professor and then the first Chinese Dean of Yenching University, replacing John Leighton Stuart who had just become US Ambassador to China. Chao also believed that the Communist victory should be a time of reflection and reform in the Church. He wrote: “Communism is man’s challenge to Christianity, but it is also God’s judgement(*sic*) upon flabby churches.”<sup>185</sup> Chao, like Shao, saw the disunity of the Church as one of its most serious weaknesses. In a published sermon, Chao said:

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<sup>183</sup> The Church of Christ in China was a broad umbrella organization established by many of the more liberal churches in China in 1927. It sought to unite all Protestant churches in China. Lian Xi. *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, (New Haven, CT; Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>184</sup> Luther Shao letter, August 31, 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>185</sup> T.C. Chao “Christian Churches in Communist China”, *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, June 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

“The various denominations have as yet not learned to co-operate with each other; they do not have much to do with one another, each being content to go on its own way. Any existing amount of self-criticism there is very small as compared with the need for it. A united front has therefore yet to be achieved.” He later writes: “Protestants may number above 600,000 and Catholics well above four million. Protestant divisions, for that tiny and scattered group, number about as many as in America, praise the devil!” Shao finished his sermon by suggesting that the Communists are doing God’s work and should be helped. “O time! O day! Who are those that hear the call of God to have a change of heart, to take courage, and to work together with the Communists for the coming of a new heaven and a new earth? Blessed are they who hear, and who obey their visions.”<sup>186</sup>

Shao and Chao were disillusioned with the complacency of Christians while China was being dismembered by foreigners and then by itself. Communism offered a strong alternative. One former Christian stated very bluntly: “Formerly I believed that man can only change from evil to good with the power of Christ: but Christians can only talk and do not act. Now the Communist Army has truly done it.”<sup>187</sup> Chao, while maintaining his Christianity, protested the gap between faith and action: “Nominally the Church is a fellowship of believers but when one tries to find it in the Church the thing is non-existent.” He went on to say: “The time calls for group service, while the Church drones its meaningless prayers and offers its objectless worship, bowing not before the Creator but revering idols that give false hopes and imaginary consolation.”<sup>188</sup> Shao criticized the church on similar grounds. He wrote: “The challenge of the present regime reflects the weakness of our Christian agencies. Let us confess our shortcomings and openly admit that we should put our theory of

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<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, June 1949.. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>188</sup> T.C. Chao Letter, February 1, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

religion into practice unswervingly and immediately. Let our Christian religion, the message and its manifestations, really go to the masses of the people.”<sup>189</sup>

The January 1949 FMC policy paper again echoes the ideas of missionaries and Chinese Christians, from whom it got most of its information. It said:

“The Christian should approach the philosophy of communism with humility and confidence: humility because he must acknowledge repeated failures of Christians to live up to the teachings of Jesus; confidence because he is strong in the faith that Jesus Christ we have the wisdom of God and the power of God and that in God’s good time truth and love will prevail over untruth and hate. True Christianity has nothing to fear from Communism.”<sup>190</sup>

The FMC was in a difficult position. It was criticizing the practices of the missionaries it was trying to support at a time when they were in the midst of a crisis. The policy paper outlined a way to success based on spiritual renewal and rededication. Christian failings had helped to open the door to Communist success, but if each missionary and the church as a whole began to live up to the ideals of Christianity, the negative ideology of Communism could be overcome. It was an argument that appealed to those of strong faith while also maintained a modernist tint. It emphasized the principle that living according to the spirit of Christ’s teachings (e.g. loving your neighbor, working to help others) would lead to the ultimate victory for Christianity.

The introspection of missionaries was sometimes dispiriting but it was also an opportunity to give the church some new vitality. For the first time in living memory, China would be unified under a stable government. It meant that, assuming they could work under the CCP, they would be able to expand and deepen the reach of missions

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<sup>189</sup> Luther Shao letter, August 31, 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>190</sup> “Missionary Policy in the Christian Approach to Communism”, FMC paper, January 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

in China. One missionary pamphlet discussed such an expansion, with an eye toward accepting CCP rules and demonstrating their usefulness. “We have added an industrial department to the school, hoping that the students can make a little to help themselves in school, and have a trade later, so that they can help to support themselves while they are preaching.” The CCP forbid full-time preachers in China, calling them leaches, making this approach necessary. “The present regime insists that everyone produce something, and that none can be drones; so they quite approve such a program.”<sup>191</sup>

Oswald Goutler implored his fellow missionaries to seize the opportunity presented by the Communist victory. He acknowledged that many missionaries were interested primarily in saving souls. But he went on to say:

“However, there are those who have a trend toward social and political liberalism and an interest in the economic equalization of society. If they are prepared to put their ideas into practice they would naturally feel more at home in a society with certain communist trends than those whose predilection is for a capitalist society. If one delights in associating with masses of common folk, like fishermen, carpenters, and tillers of the soil, the way Christ did, in spite of their ignorance, prejudice, disease and strong smell, and other distinguishing features, this is the place, the time and the need.”<sup>192</sup>

Some hope came from the Marxist analysis of religion. Spillet wrote:

“Communists regard religion as a temporary phenomenon. It is the direct result of unsatisfactory economic conditions. When these are put right, religion will naturally die out.”<sup>193</sup> Communists had no need to persecute religion because it would fade on its own as China prospered. A March 3 report sent from Shanghai to the FMC saw the

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<sup>191</sup> *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, June 1949. P18. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>192</sup> Oswald Goutler, August 31, 1949, Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>193</sup> H.W. Spillet Review, October 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

situation as a chance to eliminate one of the banes of the missionary enterprise in China – association with imperialism. The report, which appears to be a collaboration of several members of the NCC, argued that losing that privileged status would be to the benefit of Christianity. “We must, however, understand that with freedom of religion, there will also be freedom of opposing religion. But we may regard it as a blessing in disguise. Favouritism has made Christianity in China impotent to a very large extent.”<sup>194</sup>

### **Gutting it out**

Many of those who seemed hopeful or saw opportunity were probably clutching at straws. Some missionaries decided to stay, knowing that they would likely be forced out. Since it was very unlikely that they would be permitted back into China if they left, they decided to stay and work as long as possible. The March 3 report to the FMC tried to balance hopefulness with realism. It said, “So long as there is opportunity with which we can continue our work, it is our duty to carry on so far as we can.”<sup>195</sup> It said that there was no point in unwarranted optimism, “but nor should we develop a kind of defeatism attitude by just inclining to hear bad reports.”<sup>196</sup> The authors were clearly concerned about the missions’ future under Communism, but were also concerned that saying the missions were doomed would become a self-fulfilling prophecy. James McCallum, as eager as he usually was, acknowledged difficulties ahead: “The banner of Christ has never been easy to carry and it will not be easy in the new era in China.”<sup>197</sup> He follows up in a later letter: “It is the feeling of the mission in the field and of the Foreign Division that we must stay in China as long as

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<sup>194</sup> “Some Informal Notes of Joint National Student Staff Discussion on the China SCM Facing the New Situation”, March 3, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> James McCallum, November 8, 1949. Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

we are permitted to stay.” He goes on to write, “If we are forced out by the Communists, that is a different matter, but to leave because the going is rough would not be understood by the Chinese Church and would be fatal for the future.”<sup>198</sup> Oswald Goulter echoes this when writing an open letter to his missionary brethren, “Certainly for the Christian Church to hesitate now unless forced out, would be a tragic confession of a lack of faith in Christ’s power to draw all men unto him.”<sup>199</sup>

By 1949, most missionaries who had not already evacuated had decided to stay and take their chances. Joseph Smith reported to the mission boards in October of that year: “Missionaries now in China almost unanimously want to stay on as long as they can.”<sup>200</sup> Smith’s statement, perhaps ironically, was written within months of his departure from China. The certainty not being able to return to China drove Smith to leave, but it drove most other missionaries to stay. In a report to the FMC, one missionary stated how logistics drove the decision: “I understand it’s not too hard to get a permit to leave the country but almost impossible to get one to come in—so we’ll just have to stay put till we decide to go for good.”<sup>201</sup> Smith had only been in China for a year before World War II and two years after it. Missionaries like Goulter, McCallum and Price had been there for decades. They would not turn their back on their life’s work if they could possibly help it.

The Church of Christ in China was in a crisis. While some missionaries hoped for a strong relationship between the church and the CCP, the threat of persecution by the Communist authorities loomed large. If it had any hope to survive and flourish, its members had to rise to the occasion. Spillet saw the crisis: “It would seem that the

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> Oswald Goulter, August 31, 1949, Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>200</sup> Joseph Smith, October 14, 1949, Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>201</sup> *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, June 1949. P12. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

next ten years are of great importance to the future of the church.”<sup>202</sup> He overstated the time-frame, but given the CCP’s initial statements of toleration, it would be hard to foresee how quickly things would go bad for missionaries. Smith also saw a crisis, but acknowledged the limited influence church members could have on its outcome: “We can only wait and see what the good and bad results are, with our minds open and our methods of work flexible to meet changing conditions.”<sup>203</sup> Luther Shao echoed the fears of many, but continued to have faith and hope. Seeing the difficulties ahead, he said: “We know so well that we are going to face practical difficulties and even persecution in the days to come. No one could foretell that on the road to Damascus even the persecutor Saul was to be converted into the zealous Paul.”<sup>204</sup> Pre-Christian Rome was a frequent reference, even among the most pessimistic Christians, because it demonstrated the resiliency of Christianity and gave hope that they might overcome persecution should it come. Albert Stewart took a psychological view of missionaries’ attitudes: “Some friends feel that my view is largely wishful thinking...It is, I think, better psychologically and emotionally for me to live and work on the first supposition, even though many of my hopes may not be realized.”<sup>205</sup>

### **An Apolitical Christianity**

American missionaries, as well as their brethren from Canada and the United Kingdom, generally took freedom of religion for granted. For Americans, the separation between church and state was part of the foundation of civil society, enshrined in the Constitution. When missionaries went to China, they took with them the assumption that religion could exist outside of politics. They knew that the CCP did not accept religion in any form, but assumed that it would not attack if Christianity

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<sup>202</sup> H.W. Spillet Review, October 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>203</sup> Frank Price Report on the Battle of Shanghai, May 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>204</sup> Luther Shao, August 31, 1949, Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>205</sup> Albert Stewart letter. October 15, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.



did not pose a challenge to its rule. They believed that the good work done by missionaries would insulate them from criticism as long as they stayed out of politics. Frank Price wrote: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. The Christian message and mission is the same although in a very different setting.”<sup>206</sup>

They failed to understand that the CCP program required all parts of life to be political. If they had understood this, they would have realized that trying to get people to put Christianity in all parts of their life would be the very provocation they were trying to avoid. At a cross-denominational meeting in Shanghai, one participant said: “We think that religion and life should not be separated, and religion must permeate into our daily work. We must prove that the Y.M.C.A is for service and is not an agent of any group. We must also help the Church trying to be a bridge between church and society.”<sup>207</sup> Another participant believed that the CCP would support missions because, “they realize that the Y.M.C.A. is progressive and is doing some practical work.”<sup>208</sup>

Even as missionaries were trying to provide valuable educational services, they acknowledged that it was often a means to conversion to Christianity. An FMC policy paper said bluntly: “Most strategic of all in the present emergency is the vigorous prosecution of literacy campaigns in which the cooperation of many governments can be enlisted. Literacy opens the door to the Bible and other Christian literature.”<sup>209</sup> The CCP were happy to have missionaries teach Chinese people to read but did not want them converting anyone else. A missionary in a liberated city demonstrated the fundamental disconnect between the Christian and CCP point of view. He said:

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<sup>206</sup> Frank Price Letter, May 16, 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>207</sup> “Some Informal Notes of Joint National Student Staff Discussion on the China SCM Facing the New Situation”, March 3, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>208</sup> Chang I-fan, quoted in “Some Informal Notes of Joint National Student Staff Discussion on the China SCM Facing the New Situation”, March 3, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>209</sup> “Missionary Policy in the Christian Approach to Communism”, FMC paper, January 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

“These Communist soldiers are Chinese, they love their country; surely they can be appealed to – some of them – by the Christian message and program.”<sup>210</sup> This sort of appeal would run counter to Communist education programs, where independent thought took a backseat to orthodoxy. Any attempt to counter the Communist Party line among the Chinese people would pose a threat to the Communist program.<sup>211</sup>

Protestant Christianity and Communism overlapped on issues of social welfare, but diverged dramatically on the role of the individual and society. An FMC strategy paper for China pushed the idea that Communist ideology was long on coercion but short on compassion. Even though the PRC would probably be more stable than its predecessors, Communist practices meant that its people would still suffer spiritually. The FMC wrote: “The Christian church must recognize that the people in such areas are usually in even greater need of Christian loving service and spiritual help than they were before the change of government.”<sup>212</sup>

The hope for influence was given a boost with an August 1949 meeting of Christians in Shanghai to try to find a place for the church under Communist rule. The speakers appear to have made contact with the CCP prior to the meeting. Unsurprisingly, they generally praised the Communists as liberators in their speeches. More telling, however, was the way in which the CCP was reaching out to Protestants through them. One speaker said that “the Communist Party recognizes Protestant Christianity as a real social force, capable of cooperating in the new United Front, and therefore desires to win such cooperation.” He went on to say that since Marxists believe that religion “will in the course of time die a natural death when the need for it

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<sup>210</sup> Frank Price Report on the Battle of Shanghai, May 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>211</sup> For a look at early Chinese Communist education practices, see: Thomas P. Bernstein. *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-present*. (: Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010); Jane L. Price. *Cadres, Commanders and Commissars: the Training of the Chinese Communist Leadership, 1920-1945*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1976).

<sup>212</sup> “Missionary Policy in the Christian Approach to Communism”, FMC paper, January 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

no longer exists, the Communist Party regards oppression of religion as such as a mistaken policy”. This was as much a peace offering as the CCP would make, saying that although it disagreed with religion, it had no reason to act against it, especially since Protestant Christianity could be a useful and productive part of the PRC.<sup>213</sup>

Another speaker made a similar appeal to Protestants. He said that most other religions in China were easily ignored by the CCP as superstitious or, in the case of Catholics, “reactionaries taking orders from the Vatican”. But they had higher hopes for Protestants, “for whom they gave a real respect, as being more liberal and capable of cooperation in the patterns of New Democracy”. The message of the conference appeared clear. Protestants would be welcomed in the New Democracy of China so long as they operated within Communist rules.<sup>214</sup>

Unfortunately, Christians in China did not understand those rules. They continually professed the apolitical nature of Christianity, not realizing that nothing was apolitical in Communist China. The CCP had sent enough mixed messages on Protestantism that some confusion was understandable. McCallum displayed some of this confusion of the Communist point of view by writing: “We are here as Christian missionaries and not as the emissaries of any political or economic order. We are here with a gospel of love which requires us to love and serve even those with whom we may differ politically, economically and nationally.” (emphasis in original)<sup>215</sup> Goulter wrote that Christians must demonstrate that their ideals of love and compassion can be applied in any political or economic situation: “That is we are not the slaves of

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<sup>213</sup> “Christian Emergency Council, Report of the Special Meeting held on July 4, 1949”, DUA, China Missionary File , China Conference. Aug. 26, 1949.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> James McCallum, October 24, 1949. Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

capitalism, or any other ism.”<sup>216</sup> Both of them believed that if Christians showed themselves as separate from their home country and culture, the Communists might allow them to continue working.

Even as they tried to show an apolitical church, some Christians spoke of wanting to influence CCP policies, apparently forgetting that involvement in politics was hazardous. Luther Shao said: “We expect that new and moderate policies will be formulated after the coalition government is formed.” Shao went on to call for Christians to actively take part in the new regime. “Christian Churches throughout China should not be passive and defensive in their strategy at this time. We should take an active part and our opinions be expressed and our voices heard before government policies are finally shaped.”<sup>217</sup>

The dangers to the missions in China should have been obvious at the end of the August meeting. During the question and answer session, the speakers made it clear that missionaries would not be allowed in leadership or management roles. The image of missionaries as agents of imperialism was still strong among the Chinese. If they were to remain in the PRC, they could not exert control over any Chinese people, meaning Chinese must be in charge of the church with missionaries working for them.<sup>218</sup> This caveat would prove to be a crucial issue for missionaries in the coming years. It seemed innocuous at the time, as the CCC had worked for decades at making itself independent of foreign support, but it indicated a distrust of missionaries as foreign agents. In the next two years, CCP cadres would come to see any connection to foreigners as a lack of patriotism, forcing Chinese Christians to cut their ties.

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<sup>216</sup> Oswald Goulter, August 31, 1949, Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>217</sup> Luther Shao, August 31, 1949, Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, in the middle of 1949, the mood among Christians remained cautiously optimistic. In September 1949, the China Committee drew up a strategy paper for how to continue teaching in liberated areas. The challenge was to create a curriculum that was acceptable to the CCP but still maintained its Christian character. Their strategy was to teach Communist doctrine while highlighting the differences between Christianity and Communism. Christianity, while valuing the common good, also values the individual. Christianity and democracy went hand in hand because of the importance of individual dignity and the sanctity of life. The FMC thought that this strategy could work because the CCP did not have nearly enough schools or teachers for the entire Chinese population. Christian schools should demonstrate their value by producing highly educated and prepared graduates who would contribute to Chinese society. They understood that there would be compromises on the curriculum but they still believed that there was room to present some Christian ideas within the Communist agenda.<sup>219</sup>

Christian leaders also wanted to create “an atmosphere of love” that would contrast the Communist use of power and fear. Communists made efforts to care for their fellow man, but they did not practice forgiveness or love for their enemies. The China Committee wanted to show the Christian alternative. It reflected the earlier strategy of a moral regeneration of China that was part of the Forward Movement created in 1947, but was now more surreptitious and directed towards the CCP.<sup>220</sup>

The strategy was meant to spread Christian ideals in China in a non-threatening way. For the CCP, however, it was the exact type of threat that they feared from Christians. The Christian message would subvert the CCP’s efforts to politically mobilize the people. The idea that any message contrary to the Communist Party line

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<sup>219</sup> China Committee. “What Contribution Can Christian Schools Make Towards Education in China?”, DUA, China Missionary File, China Conference. Sep. 14, 1949.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

would be acceptable appears in retrospect to be little short of fantasy. At the time, however, missionaries and their boards thought they had an opening to exert some positive influence in a difficult situation. Some moderate (non-Christian) Chinese thought the same thing as the CCP consolidated its power in 1949 and 1950. It soon became apparent to both Chinese and missionaries that the CCP would not tolerate any influence other than its own. Plans like those of the China Committee reinforced the Communist view that as Americans and as Christians, missionaries were a danger to the state they were building.

### **Recognition**

One aspect which had nearly complete agreement among missionaries who stayed in China was the need for the United States to recognize the PRC as soon as possible. There were two basic reasons for this, neither of which had much to do with geopolitics. The first was that lack of recognition by the United States could only hurt mission work in China. Missionaries were already accused of being imperialist agents. While trying to find a way to continue work under the CCP, they were still in a precarious position. Tension with the United States could turn the CCP against missionaries and Christianity. The second reason was that American aid, which had been squandered by Chiang, would be very useful in helping to rebuild China. For both the success of the mission and the success of China, these missionaries wanted immediate recognition of the PRC.

Most missionaries thought that it was absurd to even think about non-recognition. American enmity would strengthen the radical elements in the CCP and make it more totalitarian. Friendship would help moderates and allow America to help China as it had in the past. Frank Price wrote to a U.S. Government official to lobby for recognition and aid to the CCP at the beginning of 1949, before there was a PRC

but after the GMD had lost the decisive battles of the Civil War. He wrote: “Events are forcing upon us a reorientation of attitudes and policy toward China. The change is not easy for American friends of China, particularly for those who have cherished hopes of liberalization and reform in the National Government and of a positive answer to the Communist challenge.” He later says, “The Chinese people are here, whatever the government regime; their welfare is more important to us than the fate of any government.” In a bid to show that the aid could be more than altruism, he later wrote: “There is still in China a warm friendship for the United States and a large reservoir of good will for the American people.”<sup>221</sup> The FMC issued a public statement that also accentuated the perceived close bond between the peoples of the United States and China, saying: “the record of our nation, in the main, has been one of sincere friendship for the peoples of the Far East.”<sup>222</sup>

There was a fear, however, that hostility by the U.S. Government towards the PRC would destroy that friendship. Alice Margaret Huggins had been an educator in North China for most of her thirty-two years in China. She had a somewhat whimsical attitude in discussing the new Communist regime: She wrote: “It’s not a question of whether we choose to have the communists conquer China. They’ve done it. Then what? Do we allow ourselves to be driven into a cold war with them?”<sup>223</sup> Another missionary followed the same line of thought. She wondered if there “is room here for both Western Democracies and Communism. It seems to us there are just two ways to settle the question; one is by fighting and the other is by trying to understand each other and get along together. We are going to try to get along.”<sup>224</sup> Price made a similar

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<sup>221</sup> Frank Price, Letter to James P. Grant, January 5, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>222</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, the idea that they had been the protector of China was well entrenched among the American people. The Chinese people did not have the same understanding of that relationship. Federal Council of Churches Statement, December 6, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>223</sup> Alice Margaret Huggins, Letter to Friends, July 11, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6

<sup>224</sup> *The Watchman*, October 15, 1949 CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

plea in his letter to the USG: “Give the Chinese people time and they themselves will decide and act against extreme totalitarian forms of Communism. We cannot hurry this process.”<sup>225</sup>

Price was also concerned that a cold war with the PRC would hurt the good work that the Communists were doing. He wrote: “Our strategy in Eastern Asia should be democratic rather than military.”<sup>226</sup> In advocating what would later be termed “soft power”<sup>227</sup>, he went on to say, “our long-range policy should be deep interest in the poor and underprivileged classes of China more than in the upper financial class of the cities. We should favor a socialistic approach to China’s problems.”<sup>228</sup> The word “socialistic” was not unique to Price. Several missionaries used it when advocating a social gospel policy. Their use of the word demonstrates how disconnected they were from public opinion in the United States. Regardless of how accurate the term was or how much some books of the New Testament (particularly *Acts of the Apostles*) resembled socialism, anything connected to “socialism” was anathema. Spillet wrote approvingly of a similar plan, although he used slightly less dangerous terminology: “Land reform is to be thoroughly carried out. This is long overdue.”<sup>229</sup> Spillet continued: “The Nationalist Party has been too long in power, divided, corrupt, feeble, spoilt by foreign aid.”<sup>230</sup> Non-recognition seemed ridiculous, given the improvement in government with the Communist victory. Huggins even added in a bit of spite towards Chiang Kai-shek. “We Americans here hope the United States will be the first to recognize this new government, for several

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<sup>225</sup> Frank Price, Letter to James P. Grant, January 5, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>226</sup> Frank Price. Letter to James P. Grant Letter, January 5, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>227</sup> The term “soft power” was coined by Joseph Nye in a 1990 book to describe a non-coercive means of achieving desired results. Soft power comes must be built over time through good will, understanding or economic connections. It is contrasted with hard power, which is usually in the form of military action or economic coercion.

<sup>228</sup> Frank Price, Letter to James P. Grant, January 5, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>229</sup> H.W. Spillet Review, October 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid*



reasons, one of which is the not very pious one that it ought to put somebody's nose out of joint. You can guess whose."<sup>231</sup>

The FMC was more vocal on the matter of recognition than they were prior to the CCP victory. They issued a statement that was approved by all of its member churches that stated unequivocally that the United States should recognize the PRC. It said that the President should address a joint session of Congress to give an unequivocal message to China that the United States offers its friendship. Overall, the FMC was advocating a soft-power approach to dealing with Communism. It said: "We believe that the further advance of Communism in China and Asia cannot permanently be stopped by military action."<sup>232</sup> Using more politically correct language than Price, but advocating the same ideas, the FMC statement said: "The real issue is whether or not our government is prepared to advance the greater welfare of the peoples of Asia, with higher standards of living, and with cultural, social, and political institutions which will accord with the free choice of the peoples directly concerned."<sup>233</sup> It finished with a call to promote human rights: "We believe the United States, in cooperation with the United Nations, should labor incessantly for the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for the peoples of Asia."<sup>234</sup>

In this, the FMC was in step with the missionaries in China. They believed that both the United States and China would be better served by renewing their friendship and cooperation. Friendship would benefit American goals of liberty and human rights, while hostility would strengthen the CCP's totalitarian tendencies. Their pleas made little headway amid the increasingly hostile Cold War, foreshadowing their marginalization in the larger debate of the 1950s.

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<sup>231</sup> Alice Margaret Huggins letter, July 11, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>232</sup> Federal Council of Churches Statement, December 6, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

### **It's all fun and games until someone loses human rights**

The initial optimism of liberation proved to be fairly short lived. Missionaries were so fed up with the GMD that anything was preferable. When CCP rule did not prove as harsh as was feared, their enthusiasm for the Communist regime grew. But as the CCP began to settle in and exert its control over society, missionaries quickly became disillusioned. Missionaries who had felt that they could be fellow travelers with the CCP saw that the personal dignity and freedom essential to Protestantism was not only lacking under Communism, but were actively opposed. The government was taking control over all aspects of society, so while there was nominal freedom, the pressure for Chinese to conform was enormous. One missionary showed his extreme ambivalence, saying: "If the lack of freedom and intolerance could be done away with this new 'thought' would certainly have much to recommend itself."<sup>235</sup>

For missionaries working in education, the indoctrination of the Chinese people was very upsetting. Jane Leiper found the self-criticism meetings so absurd as to be entertaining. "These meetings are one of the more popular inventions of Communism. It assumes that by publicly announcing in a meeting that you've been naughty and forgot to brush your teeth, you will have some new power to correct your sin. Ah, how naïve is their understanding of the human will."<sup>236</sup> She would later write, "I think everyone after a while gets tired of it – you can't help but run out of ideas and the deeper into the barrel one digs, the funnier the confessions and criticisms."<sup>237</sup>

Not everyone took such a relaxed view. More missionaries saw this as a dangerous move to destroy independent thought, which was a cornerstone of Protestantism. In particular, there was a fear that Communism was being used as a

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<sup>235</sup> *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, June 1949. P12. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>236</sup> Jane Leiper letter, March 31, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>237</sup> Jane Leiper letter, March 31, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

civil religion. An FMC analyst clearly stated, “Communism is a type of ‘religion.’”<sup>238</sup> Earlier that year, E.E. Barnett made an address in which he warned: “In Communism we confront the articulate, organized and militant wing of that rival secular ‘religion’.”<sup>239</sup> Another missionary was dumbfounded by the devotion of the Communists: “There is something we can’t fathom about this Communist doctrine that gets these folks—and make them act as though it were a real religion.”<sup>240</sup>

Missionaries in China echoed this fear after being liberated. One report to the FMC said, “Communism is a religion – not just a political party. It is a party dictatorship – men cease to be free-will agents.”<sup>241</sup> Another said: “People are thus bereft of freedom of thought, speech and action. Personality is shattered and life is reduced to an acquiescence in Communist regimentation.”<sup>242</sup> In an eerily Orwellian scene, one wrote: “Family loyalty was suggested as an obstacle to the Com. Program. Against this obstacle, C-s [Communists] are depending on the indoctrination of youth.”<sup>243</sup> Alice Huggins made similar observation: “The Communist first grade primers used in Honan have this for the first lesson: ‘I don’t love father. I don’t love mother. I love China!’”<sup>244</sup> The FMC also recognized the dangers of Communism as a civil religion. In its policy paper on missions under Communist rule, it said: “Communism as a state power champions science as a successor to religion, godless humanism as a substitute for Christian ethics, and communist society on earth instead of the Christian hope in the kingdom of God.”<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> “The Future of Christian Missions in China”, Feb. 15, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>239</sup> E.E. Barnett address, January 5, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>240</sup> *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, June 1949. P12. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>241</sup> “Communist China” Field report by field supervisor of the American Advisory Committee. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 1 April 1949.

<sup>242</sup> “Conditions in North Honan”, North Honan Mission, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 2, June 1, 1947.

<sup>243</sup> “The Future of Christian Missions in China”, Feb. 15, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>244</sup> Alice Margaret Huggins, Letter to friends in the United States. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 3, July 11, 1949.

<sup>245</sup> “Missionary Policy in the Christian Approach to Communism”, FMC paper, January, 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

Alice Huggins' sense of humor seemed to desert her in a letter to friends that said: "They [the CCP] are working literally day and night, frantically trying by every means they know to convince the whole population. They use very cleverly every method we Christians have ever had, especially songs, plays, meetings, and an appeal to idealism and self-sacrifice."<sup>246</sup> The similarities, however, were superficial. Protestantism was founded on individual thought and conscience, and had a particularly strong tradition of dissent. Huggins lamented its lack in Communist education: "One of their most effective methods is repetition. If you hear a thing enough times it's hard not to remember it, whether you started out by agreeing with it or not. And there is no place in the regime for an adverse opinion."<sup>247</sup>

There were also more direct causes for concern. With the freedom to practice religions, there was also a freedom to oppose it. This led to an unofficial harassment and persecution. Constance Buell thought that it stemmed from the lack of education of the local cadres: "One cause for suspicion is the ignorance of the difference between Protestant and Roman Catholic beliefs and procedures, and the fact that the latter organization shares to some degree reliance on political power."<sup>248</sup> Catholics were particularly reviled by the CCP because of their allegiance to the Vatican and their large land holding in China. As such it was a greater political threat. Protestants missionaries were often indignant at being lumped in with them.

The harassment would often take the form of disrupting meetings and persecuting clergy. One missionary showed his frustration, writing: "We plan one thing after another and always the others [CCP] stick some meeting of theirs over the same time, so we have to call ours off. It's certainly disheartening, though I feel we

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<sup>246</sup> Alice Margaret Huggins, Letter to friends in the United States. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 3, July 11, 1949.

<sup>247</sup> Alice Margaret Huggins letter, July 11, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>248</sup> Constance Buell letter to friends, August 24, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

still can help and we are glad to be on deck.”<sup>249</sup> George Carlton Lacy, who would ultimately suffer more than almost any other missionary, was initially concerned about a Chinese pastor being much more directly harassed: “The letter he received, signed by the Assassination Committee, accused him of being a ‘running dog of American imperialism’ and demanded that he turn over the church properties to the people and himself find some productive employment within five days or his life would be forfeit.”<sup>250</sup> Lacy would not try to leave China until the end of 1951, but he would be denied an exit permit. He would die of a complication from heart disease while under house arrest in December of 1951. Yet in 1949, the threat to him seemed less than to his Chinese brethren.

One report, written from Beijing shortly after liberation, got to the heart of the missionary dilemma. It said, “I think that the present government has the wellbeing of the common people in mind to a far greater extent than any other previous government since I have been in China. But can a dictatorship and a police state by its very nature maintain such an attitude? Will they not soon be more concerned in their own perpetuation rather than the good of the whole?”<sup>251</sup> The authors of this report argued that even though there was significant overlap between the social gospel and Communist social programs, long term cooperation was very problematic. The Communist system was fundamentally flawed because of its dismissal of the value of the individual. Protestantism was destined to clash with it.

Indoctrination in the educational system conflicted directly with Christian plans to subtly introduce Christian values into the curriculum. Although the CCP was pragmatic about many things, it would not allow Christian education that countered its

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<sup>249</sup> *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, June 1949. P12. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>250</sup> George Carlton Lacy April 1, 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>251</sup> Stanley D. Wilson and Lucius Porter, “Conditions at Yenching and in the Peiping Region”, August 27, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

own dogma. As such, Communists allowed very little leeway in its educational system. They viewed religion as a relic of backward culture. One Chinese Christian in a liberated area reported on some of the classes he had been forced to attend. The cadre teacher said that religion was for primitive minds that could not accept life as it was. They could not resist “the oppression of the upper classes. Hence, they invent religious solutions to their dilemma leading to an other-worldly escape. Naturally, the upper classes encourage this process.”<sup>252</sup> It was used by capitalists to keep the people happy with their position. The teacher went on to say that although Christianity appeared to be progressive, its implementation was actually very conservative and reactionary.

This cadre’s lessons demonstrated several aspects of CCP attitude towards Christianity. First, it differentiated between Christian doctrine and practice. The cadre claimed that capitalists do not believe in God. If they did, “they would not oppress the people.” Christianity’s was a tool for capitalist control. “The purpose of all this is to keep the people away from social thought and social change.”<sup>253</sup>

Secondly, the cadre demonstrated the disparity between western style education and that of China. The Socratic method of asking questions and learning through dialogue is alien to Chinese culture. The importance put on age and wisdom in China manifests itself in the classroom with the teacher (known as the “old master” regardless of his age) imparting his knowledge while the students absorb his wisdom. The student may question the teacher on points he does not fully grasp and the teacher then elaborates so the student better understands. The CCP adopted this style with its Marxist theory as the ultimate authority. Some Christian university students were held back from graduation, despite completing all requirements, because they continued to

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<sup>252</sup> “China Situation: Informal Conference” China Committee. December 9, 1949. Drew University Archives, China Missionary File , China Conference. 2112-6-9:2.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

question the correctness of Maoist thought.<sup>254</sup> Another missionary recounted that she had to go to cadre-led information meetings that allowed the participants to speak freely. The cadres then corrected the participants on any deviation from the party line. The meetings would end when everyone agreed with the cadres' position.<sup>255</sup> In this environment of centralized indoctrination, the missionary hope of using education to promote Christian principles was doomed to failure.

Third, the cadre's lessons suggested the larger connection that Christianity, as preached in China, was actually a tool of foreign aggression. This would become a theme throughout CCP-missionary relations and would be the ultimate reason that missionaries would be driven from the PRC. The CCP explicitly stated that the missionary message was designed to weaken China. Missionaries preached universal love and brotherhood, but Christians in the United States had been exploiting their Chinese brothers for a century. Chinese Christians had to break ties with foreign missionary organizations or face persecution from PRC authorities. By decrying foreign missions, Chinese Christians sought to earn the trust of cadres and the security that came with it. One leader of the Church of Christ in China tried to prove that he was a patriot by claiming that the close friendship between the CCP and Chinese Christians has "caused the mission boards, those agents of imperialists, to be uncomfortable and jealous."<sup>256</sup> His goal was to show the Chinese Christians were willing to work with the CCP while acknowledging that mission boards had always been working to keep China down (which corresponded with CCP propaganda). Even the Church's attempt at maintaining an apolitical stance was viewed as an attempt to

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<sup>254</sup> "Religion in Communist China", US Joint Publications Service. 1958. p. 17. DUA, China Missionary File, China Conference. 2112-6-5:11.

<sup>255</sup> Interview with Mary Reed Dewey. August 7, 2011.

<sup>256</sup> "Religion in Communist China", US Joint Publications Service. 1958. p. 27. DUA, China Missionary File, China Conference. 2112-6-5:11.

weaken China's ability to mobilize its people. Collaboration with missionaries invited charges of assisting imperialist powers in undercutting China's strength.

The tone of Chinese Christians statements was clearly shifting to be more acceptable to the Communists. After the CCP had consolidated its rule, most adopted the rhetoric of the CCP that linked Christianity with imperialism. One Chinese Christian leader described missionaries' non-political assertions as "brutal plots in the past 100 some years" whose results were "to dig out the hearts of the Chinese Christians, destroying our patriotic consciousness."<sup>257</sup> A letter to Foreign Mission Boards from a group of Chinese Christians said: "The new philosophy considers that all phases of life must necessarily come under the influence of politics in contradiction to the traditional Protestant view of the separation between church and state."<sup>258</sup>

Missionaries were aware that they were vulnerable to charges of imperialism but they did not seem to understand the depth of the connection. The majority of missionaries remaining in China were devoted to service more than proselytization, so they believed that their good works would overcome the assumption of imperialist connections. One report to the International Missionary Council warned that missions were "in the areas of imperialism, of colonialism and foreign exploitation; in a word they represent that stage of the dialectic which was Lenin's specific addition to the Marxist canon. They are in areas of insurgent nationalism which offers opportunity for Marxist exploitation." The report demonstrates a blind spot that was shared by most missionaries in China. While recognizing the danger of being connected to imperialism, it stops short of saying why missionaries in China were so easily perceived as imperialists by many Chinese. Missionaries rarely acknowledged that their presence in China was a direct result of their countries' gunboat diplomacy in the

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<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25.

<sup>258</sup> "A Message from Chinese Christians to Mission Boards Abroad", Dec. 10, 1949. DUA, China Missionary File, China Conference. 2112-6-7:6.



19<sup>th</sup> century. They had taken advantage of the unequal treaties until the middle of World War II, when most western countries renounced the treaties as part of their support for China's war effort against the Japanese. After having lived under the treaties' protection for nearly a century, missionaries seemed to think they could escape the treaties' taint in less than a decade. When the CCP began whipping up anti-missionary sentiment, the missionaries did not understand how ready the Chinese people were to believe them.<sup>259</sup>

The CCP argued that the Christian message itself was meant to undermine China. Marxist orthodoxy strongly condemned religion, but nationalist arguments offered a similar critique of religion as an opiate. One missionary recognized how the CCP perceived Christianity. Christians had good intentions and an important message, "but such Christians must recognize certain facts about the social effects of Christianity, e.g. that it has been used in the past by exploiting classes to control the exploited, that it has prevented with other-worldly promises, the solution of this world's promises, etc."<sup>260</sup> Albert Stewart heard a clear answer on the compatibility of Christianity and Communism. He asked a Chinese colleague, "Can one be a good Christian and a good Communist at the same time?" His colleague responded: "No, if you are a real Christian the Communists do not want you."<sup>261</sup>

### **Anti-American Mobilization**

The question of whether the CCP was more nationalist or more Communist was still not settled, but missionaries were beginning to understand that the question was less important than they had thought. Although the CCP demonstrated a strong nationalist streak, it did not help the missionary cause. Part of CCP legitimacy was

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<sup>259</sup> Bingle, E.J. "Communism and the Younger Churches", International Missionary Council. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 4, Nov. 18, 1948.

<sup>260</sup> "Interview with a young Christian in a training school", quoted in "The China Statement" by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>261</sup> Albert Stewart letter, October 15, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

built on their promise to make China strong again after the “Century of Humiliation” at the hands of imperialists. American missionaries became lightning rods for anti-American activities. They were a convenient way to mobilize the Chinese people. The PRC did not expel missionaries, but used them to focus the Chinese people into nationalist causes. In this way, the missionaries provided a much greater value to the CCP than their educational and medical services ever could.

Chinese, whether Christian or not, who worked with missionaries were subject to intense harassment as collaborators. Joseph Smith described the urban isolation: “For the present, at least, the missionary can’t get into the country. If he could, his Chinese friends would not welcome him. It would present difficulties for them.”<sup>262</sup> One alternative was to send Chinese Christians instead of missionaries, but Smith showed that that would be much worse for the ones going: “But even when our Chinese go into the country they are asked who sent them, whether there are foreigners with them and if the foreigners pay them.”<sup>263</sup> Another story that was related by a Chinese Christian about an American missionary said: “some church or churches have asked her not to visit, in order to avoid the necessity of making long explanations to the authorities after she has gone.”<sup>264</sup> In a similar story, “the CIM [China Inland Mission] Chinese leaders in Kaifeng have advised the Guinneses not to attempt to return to the hospital there, feeling that the hospital will get along better with the authorities if the foreigners are not present.”<sup>265</sup> One Christian educator had a former student visit him surreptitiously: “He was coming frequently to our house merely to get our point of view. He has it, and now all students have been warned it

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<sup>262</sup> Joseph Smith, October 14, 1949, Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>264</sup> “Statement by Chinese Christians” quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

would be unwise for them to come to our home.”<sup>266</sup> Another missionary lamented: “Probably the most difficult of all the need for Chinese friends to cut off their contacts with foreigners. I think for me—tied down to the house—the hardest thing to adjust to is the knowledge that the best thing for our friends to do at this time is to ignore us.”<sup>267</sup>

Because of the political difficulties faced by Christians, some Chinese Christians recanted their conversion, while others continued in the Church. Although no credible estimates exist for what percentage remained, those that did sought to make the church completely Chinese to overcome the political dangers of associating with foreigners. This had been a goal of missions for decades, but with little result. Now, Chinese Christians were insisting on it. “We strongly admit that the Chinese Church must be self-supporting.”<sup>268</sup> Foreigners were a dangerous liability, so the urgency to make the Church Chinese took precedence. Another Chinese Christian’s public statements said that missionaries had a role to play, but must be circumspect in doing it: “Just as the future church should not follow the old patterns of the last century, so the new missionaries may not have to be those of the last century. They may have to play the role of being ‘behind the curtain’. Their counsel and guidance will always be needed by the Chinese workers.”<sup>269</sup> A similar sentiment was expressed by Frank Price, who said that missionaries still had a significant role to play, “but the main responsibility will now pass to the shoulders of Chinese Christian leaders.”<sup>270</sup> None of the missionaries or Chinese Christians noted the irony that the Communists were achieving the missionary goal of making the church Chinese.

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<sup>266</sup> *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, p.14 June 1949. P8. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>267</sup> *Christians under the Communist Chinese State*, June 1949. P8. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>268</sup> “Statement by Chinese Christians” quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> Frank Price letter to John Reisner, December 12, 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

Missionaries almost universally agreed. If the Christian Church in China was to survive, it must be Chinese in more than name. Joseph Smith urged his fellow missionaries to step aside: “The work must not be mission centric. It must be church centric and the church must be Christ centric. . . . We must increasingly think of the church in China not in terms of its missionaries but in terms of the Chinese churches and of their Chinese leaders.”<sup>271</sup> H.W. Spillet noted: “The international connections of the Chinese Church have been misunderstood and misrepresented. The church has been attacked as the tool of imperialism and reactionary politics.”<sup>272</sup> The FMC advice paper to missionaries from earlier in the year could see the problem coming in a way that missionaries on the ground rarely could. It said: “It may be necessary for the Christian church in a given area to sever ties with churches in other lands and become entirely self-sufficient under God.”<sup>273</sup> Missionaries did not understand that their good intentions and service could not erase a century of association with imperialism. Even more importantly, they were an opportunity for the CCP, providing a focal point for new nationalist rage against foreign exploitation. Nothing missionaries could do would overcome this.

Another aspect of the Sinification was financial. James McCallum, who handled the finances of the Nanjing missions, proposed: “An understanding needs to be reached between the Chinese church and the mission boards concerned, based upon the principle of self-support on the one hand and a realistic evaluation of the problem on the other.”<sup>274</sup> This approach was based on experience that the Communists were more interested in foreign influences than in Christianity. John Mott had noted earlier

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<sup>271</sup> Joseph Smith, October 14, 1949, Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>272</sup> H.W. Spillet Review, October 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>273</sup> “Missionary Policy in the Christian Approach to Communism”, FMC paper, January 1949, CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>274</sup> James McCallum, November 8, 1949. Quoted in “The China Statement” by Virgil Sly. 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

that year that, “Church property acquired by Chinese churches with money raised in China is generally not interfered with by Communist authorities.”<sup>275</sup> Removing foreign financing would help minimize the political vulnerability of Christians.

Missionaries were the eyes and ears of America in 1949-1950 because most other foreigners had left. Yet they were too close to the situation and too invested in finding a way to keep the missions alive to be accurate observers. They had every chance to see the end of the missionary enterprise in China coming. Even while some missionaries in liberated areas were sending messages about their relative freedom, other missionaries in China, and even more from Eastern Europe, reported a pattern that was consistent in any area where communists had taken over. Communists would proclaim religious liberty while they were consolidating their power, but as they became more secure, religious freedom was curtailed and eventually ended. One memo prepared for the Foreign Mission Conference in 1948 outlined the pattern clearly. “The first phase is one of tolerance and freedom....The second phase is one of toleration with control....The third phase is one of active opposition.”<sup>276</sup> One International Missionary Council internal publication directly and presciently described CCP practices, “The facts, which are not perfectly consistent, appear to be that when the Communists enter a territory, they may be prepared to tolerate Christian activities for a time... Such limited toleration may not last long, if at all.”<sup>277</sup> But missionaries wanted to believe there was a chance and they grabbed hold of every opportunity, even when the odds were extremely low.

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<sup>275</sup> John R. Mott, Report on Meeting with CCP in Shanghai, April 1949. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 6.

<sup>276</sup> Flowers, Wilfred S. “Communist Attitudes Toward Missionaries and Christian Medical Work in China”, China Missionary Conference. 1948. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 5.

<sup>277</sup> Bingle, E.J. “Communism and the Younger Churches”, International Missionary Council. CRP. RG8 Box 60 Folder 4, Nov. 18, 1948.

## Conclusion

Missionaries knew that missions in China were on shaky ground under Communist rule. They knew that Marxist doctrine condemned religion. Yet in a combination of naiveté and desperation, they stuck to their work in the hope that it would somehow work itself out. Some thought that long-term missions were possible, while others simply wanted to work as long as they could before being forced out. For many, Christianity in China was their life's work. Their dedication to their mission precluded an early withdrawal. Their main hope was that the CCP would want their educational and medical services to help restore China's power and prominence in the world. They were betting on the nationalist tendencies of the CCP to overcome its Marxist tendencies. Although the nationalist streak did prove very strong, it did not save their missions. Instead, it led to the missions' termination.

Missionaries were in the precarious position of being on the front lines of the tumultuous relationship between the United States and China but having very little control over how that relationship developed. The Chinese involvement in the Korean War would be the final nail in the coffin of American missions in China, but the persecution of missionaries started the year before the war began. Communist propaganda put a heavy emphasis on past humiliations of China by foreign powers, particularly the United States. In the new retelling of that story missionaries took a much more prominent role as imperialist agents. Although missionaries were only rarely directly assaulted under CCP rule, they were ostracized, forced to write self-criticism and generally prevented from doing their work. Chinese Christians were forced to cut all ties with them, for fear of being branded as a foreign agent. Because of this pressure, and because the missions had become counter-productive for the

Chinese they intended to help, almost all foreign missionaries left the country by the end of 1951.

## Chapter 4

### Success or Failure: Missionaries Debate Their Legacy

In the fall of 1953, an American correspondent for the Chicago Daily News in Hong Kong, Albert Ravenholt, wrote an article on Christianity in China. In introducing his analysis, Ravenholt wrote: “The termination of an enterprise that has been described as the ‘most ambitious foreign missionary effort in the history of Christendom’ now leaves the Chinese churches on their own.”<sup>278</sup> Written only months after the end of the Korean War, the article highlighted the separation between Chinese Christians and western Christians. The abrupt end of foreign missions in China in 1951 forced both groups to reevaluate their past as well as their future. Christian missions to China were, depending on whom you asked, either a colossal failure or a great victory. On the one hand, there were no American missionaries<sup>279</sup> in China for the first time in one hundred and thirty years. In addition, most mission property had been seized and the new Communist government was hostile towards Christianity. On the other hand, the purpose of the mission was, in theory, to plant the seed of Christianity, which would then grow under the care of native Chinese Christians. In this sense, the missionary exodus accomplished its aims. Chinese Christianity was surviving despite the enmity of the Communist government.

These were issues of extreme importance to returned missionaries. For many of them, their life’s work had been building the Chinese church. They wanted to know

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<sup>278</sup> Albert Ravenholt, “Christianity in China”, Oct. 6, 1953. CRP RG8 Box 56 Folder 11.

<sup>279</sup> The term “missionaries” is used in this chapter to denote non-Chinese people working for a religious organization in China. I continue to use the term to describe missionaries even after they had returned to the United States because their input in the ongoing debate over the end of missions was based on their experience as missionaries.



if that work had been in vain. If so, was it their fault that it failed? This chapter looks at how missionaries tried to evaluate the end of missions in China. It focuses on two key questions that missionaries were asking: 1) What happened to force missionaries out of China? 2) Where does Chinese Christianity go from here? Both of these questions were really about the relationship between Christianity and Chinese Communism. They were investigating whether there was even any hope for missions under the CCP. If there was, what did they do to cause their expulsion? The larger issue was the strength and direction of the Chinese Church once the removal of missionaries, as Ravenholt put it, “now leaves the Chinese churches on their own.” A strong and successful Chinese church would validate the time and effort spent on missions in China. It would also show that Christianity and Communism could coexist. On the other hand, the failure of the Chinese church would show the failure of those missions and strengthen the belief that Christianity could not survive under Communism.

This chapter shows that missionaries and their organizations found very little consensus on where the blame lay for the end of missions. The discussions were more about how missionaries tried to make sense of the end of their life’s work. Given the conflicts between the United States and China during that time, the supporting organizations lacked much information beyond the anecdotal evidence of returned missionaries. As a result, when the studies were initially conducted, most missionaries found the conclusions they were expecting. The discussions show more about the assumptions of the people involved than they do about what actually happened in China.

When examining the direction of Chinese Christianity, however, there was a rough consensus, but it was a disappointing one. Reports coming from China in the

1950's showed that Chinese Christian leaders were increasingly aligned with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which alarmed many missionaries. Some missionaries had been sympathetic to the Communist cause while in China, but they were not expecting the establishment of a Chinese Church that allied with the Communist government. Not only was this church more politically active than western churches, it adopted tactics of the CCP, many of which seemed in direct opposition to Christian philosophy. While some missionaries continued to believe and hope that the Chinese Church could survive as an independent entity ministering to the needs of its members, most missionaries were losing that hope by the end of the decade. It appeared that the Communists had subverted the missions for their own purposes, thereby signaling the failure of the Chinese missions.

### **Post Mortem on the Missions**

Missionaries began asking what went wrong as soon as they returned. Their intentions had been good and they were sure that their work had benefited the Chinese people. So why, after over a century of Protestant missions in China, had the missionary enterprise in China collapsed? Missionary organizations knew that many of the factors were out of their control, but they started asking what they could have done differently.

This was particularly important for the Presbyterians, who had the largest American presence in China in 1950 and 51,280. A December 1951 meeting of the Presbyterian Committee on China policy began the discussion of what happened in China. The chairman of the committee, Dr. George B. Cressey, outlined the issues at hand. The key questions were: 1) What had the Presbyterian Church done in China? 2) What should it have done differently in hindsight? Cressey said that churches fell

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<sup>280</sup> The China Inland Mission had a larger presence prior to 1950, but that organization chose to withdraw earlier than the Presbyterians.

into three categories. Some focused mainly on conversion, believing that the essence of mission work was to bring people to Christ. Other churches tried to build church infrastructure through seminaries and theological education. These churches took a longer approach, trying to build a Chinese clergy. Their assumptions were that a Chinese run church would be better received by the Chinese people and would promote greater long-term growth. The third group, in which Cressey included the Presbyterians, had a broader approach that included evangelization and building the church but also looked to broader social needs. He claimed that the third group gained twice as many converts per missionary and made a much larger impact on Chinese Christianity.<sup>281</sup>

Cressey's description of the third group seemed to spark some pride for him. Although the numbers are difficult to verify, it appears that churches like the Presbyterians that tried to meet social needs *did* gain more converts than did evangelicals. But he did not mention a common concern among missionaries, which was the devotion of these converts. Because many Chinese came for food or medical care that they could not get elsewhere, they were derisively called "rice Christians" by some missionaries who doubted the authenticity of their conversion. In addition, many Presbyterians and Congregationalists did not push for strict adherence to Christian tradition, specifically in giving up the practice of ancestor worship. If the evaluation of the mission was to build a lasting church in China, the number of converts may have been a distorted indicator of success.

The chairman's report, while already having some conclusions, also called for more research. Other members of the committee agreed that more research was needed but questioned Cressey's preliminary conclusions, which they believed were more

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<sup>281</sup> "Committee of China Policy and Procedure", Dec. 13, 1951. PHS RG82-68-5.

positive than the recent expulsion warranted. They noted that some reports from returned missionaries were more critical of the approaches used by mainstream churches.

Cressey might have seemed an unlikely choice as chairman because his only religious experience was as a layman. He had other qualifications that were useful, including PhDs in geography and geology, experience in China and political contacts in the United States. Those contacts came from consulting with the State Department and other government agencies throughout the 1940's. Although the minutes did not indicate why he was selected, it is likely that he added gravitas to any report that would be produced, plus he was not biased toward any particular approach to missions because he had never served in one.

Other missions took similar steps. The World Council of Churches (WCC) sponsored a study that focused on what was actually going on in China, trying to get to the truth behind the rumors. The author of the report was a returned missionary whose name was withheld "in order that this statement may be more widely circulated". Most likely, the WCC were concerned that if the report leaked to China, the Communists might take reprisals against his friends and congregation there. The report itself focused mainly on Chinese society under CCP control. It was exceptionally critical of the Communist regime, saying that "this Communist movement is blinded to social and economic facts, and to the evil in its own system, by the Marx-Leninist ideology which it believes." It spent very little time on the state of the Chinese Church, although it suggested that there was no freedom and therefore no room for religion. Only at the end of the report was there an optimistic tone. It noted that despite the repression, there were some Chinese people trying to live honest and honorable lives. "Often they are forced to participate in movements in which they

do not believe....But always they bargain for as much independence of action as they can get, and they find that Communists respect more this constructive courageous witness in a practical situation than any amount of servility.”<sup>282</sup>

This fairly hopeful finish is at odds with the rest of the rather lengthy report, which gives the overall impression that the author despairs of the state of the Chinese Church. The incongruity is an example of the report's lack of structure and coherence. It reads more like an individual's ruminations than an objective description. The author looked at the church by examining the oppressive system in which it operated, suggesting that the expulsion of missionaries was the fault of the Communists, not the missions. The emotion of the report is clear, with the author appearing to still feel the wounds of the recent expulsion.

The International Missionary Council launched its own analysis in late 1953. The agenda for the report had an incredibly broad scope. It started with a basic question for missionaries who had been expelled: “Was there too much or too little involvement in political matters?”<sup>283</sup> Missionaries were split in their opinion of how they dealt with the Chinese Civil War, with some believing the problem was that they had not supported the Guomindang (GMD) completely. Their opinion would seem to be supported by their eventual expulsion by the Chinese Communist Party. But others thought the problem was getting involved in politics at all. When the CCP took power, they accused missionaries of being either American or GMD spies because so many missionaries had supported the GMD. Missionaries who had remained under the Communist regime in the early years of the PRC argued that Christianity was apolitical, so they would be no threat to the new government or its agenda. As would become obvious with their expulsion in 1951, the Communists did not accept that

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<sup>282</sup> *Facts and Ideals in Communist China*, World Council of Churches, 1951. CRP RG8 Box 56, Folder 6.

<sup>283</sup> “The Christian Enterprise in China: An attempt at an appraisal”, International Missionary Council, Research Department. August, 1953. CRP RG8 Box 56 Folder 11.

argument. The missionaries who supported the GMD publicly may have sown the seeds for the eventual expulsion of all the missionaries, according to some IMC members. The IMC report aimed to evaluate the validity of each of these views and see if there was anything that missionaries could have done to maintain the missionary enterprise in China.

The study also asked another retrospective question about the relationship between missionaries and local Christians/Churches. What was the positive and what was the negative impact of missionaries in the field? Like the question on politics, this was aimed at reviewing experience in China with an eye toward other mission fields. Given the disastrous end to the missions in China, the IMC was trying not to repeat the same mistakes elsewhere.

The study looked to the future in China as well. It asked basic questions about how western Protestant organizations would interact with the Chinese Church. It wanted to know the organization of the Chinese Church as well as its theological content. It also looked at non-theological issues, such as how the church interacted with the state. Liberation had caused some drastic changes to the Church in China, with the removal of missionaries being only one part. The study wanted to examine “the weakness and strength in the church laid bare by the revolutionary changes of the last few years.” A particular focus was the Church of Christ in China. The China it had developed in was chaotic with only limited control from the central government. While that government was not fond of Christianity, it accepted it because Christians were protected by the unequal treaties until World War II. Its situation had changed dramatically after the war, with a totalitarian government controlling the entire mainland and advocating atheism. The IMC wanted to know how Chinese

Christianity had emerged from the revolution and what relationship it would have with its western brethren.<sup>284</sup>

M. Searle Bates wrote a critique of the IMC lessons-learned study while it was still in progress. Bates carried a great deal of weight among mission organizations, particularly in regards to China. He was a Rhodes Scholar who went on to earn a PhD in Chinese history from Yale. He served in China for the better part of thirty years, including being present for the “Rape of Nanjing”. Bates was prominent in the effort by international residents of Nanjing to create the Nanjing Safety Zone to protect Chinese civilians and would later testify in the Tokyo War Crimes Trials for the prosecution.<sup>285</sup> After Pearl Harbor, Bates was imprisoned by the Japanese. After the war, he remained in China until 1950, when he returned to the United States to teach at the Union Theological Seminary. Because of his long and distinguished career, Bates’ opinions were influential in missionary organizations.

While Bates supported the idea of analyzing the end of missions in China, he had some reservations. Bates was clearly of the opinion that missions were successful in planting the seeds of Christianity in China and that the end of missions was due to circumstances that missionaries had little ability to affect. His biggest concern was that the report would place the blame on missionaries, which he believed was unfair. He argued that missionaries may have made mistakes, but the situation was largely out of their control. He wrote: “Possibly the feeling of crisis and catastrophic event was too easily equated with the judgment of failure.” Similar to the earlier WCC report, he wanted to put the emphasis of the examination on the Chinese, rather than on the missionaries. As he put it: “This Chinese human and total environment largely defined the problems for the Christian enterprise....” Bates claimed that the end of the

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<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> Iris Chang. *The Rape of Nanjing: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).

Christian mission was out of missionaries' hands. He suggested that western powers and missionaries could have done more, but that it is a “vulgar assumption that the conquest by the Communists and the establishment of a communist regime was due to Christian failure”. He noted other Communist victories in countries that had far stronger Christian presences, such as Poland or Russia.<sup>286</sup>

He then went on to argue that missions succeeded because of the continued presence of Christianity in China. He wrote that for the missions to be considered failures is to accept “the ignorant assumption that interruption of work by overseas missions meant the disappearing of the Christian faith from China”. This was a key point for missions as they looked back on their efforts. Missions could be considered a success if they planted the seeds of the church, regardless of whether missionaries continued to be involved. In this light, the China mission was successful as long as the church survived. The idea of failure, Bates suggested, comes from disappointment “in that apparent acceptance of the communist regime by the Chinese Christians, with more readiness or less protest than many Christians outside of China approve of.” He later added, “Our terms of failure and success simply mean that some churches are relatively unsatisfactory, according to our poor lights. But satisfactory to whom and relative to what?”<sup>287</sup>

Bates was building a case that the continued survival of the Christian Church demonstrated that missions in China had attained their goals. The removal of missionaries was not a failure, but a success in that it ended several of the mistakes the missions were making, and allowed the Chinese Church to build on the successes of missions without their weaknesses. Removal of missionaries helped the Chinese

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286 M. Searle Bates. “Issues Arising in the International Missionary Council Study of the Christian Enterprise in China” 1957, CRP RG8 Box 56 Folder 11.

287 M. Searle Bates. “Issues Arising in the International Missionary Council Study of the Christian Enterprise in China” 1957, CRP RG8 Box 56 Folder 11.



Church appear actually Chinese instead of western. It provided the Chinese Church with the self-government and self-support that was intended from the beginning. Bates argued “that missionaries did not adequately realize the unhappy position of their Chinese colleagues” who “felt the continual strain of needing the financial and other aid of missions,” while at the same time “resenting their dependence of foreign aid ultimately resting upon forces outside Chinese society.” Moreover, the withdrawal of missionaries allowed Chinese Christian leaders to move the church so that it connected more to the Chinese people. Bates said of the missions, “They were too western in attitudes, practices, and forms. Negatively, this resulted in the charge of cultural imperialism and the lack of Christian morale through inability to deny or refute the charge.” He later added that missions should have separated themselves from the protection of the unequal treaties long before they did in 1943.<sup>288</sup>

Bates's overall argument was that missionaries were ultimately successful despite their many missteps. A retrospective of the China missions needed more research and would provide many lessons to be learned, but he doubted the commission's ability to be dispassionate on the subject. He was clearly speaking from experience, recognizing his own bias regarding the topic. His life's work had been in the China missions, so it should not be surprising that he came to a positive conclusion about its work. He reinforced this point with the question: “Does the China experience speak to us or do we speak to the China experience?” His suggestion was that most people's analysis of the end of the China mission was similar to their analysis when the mission was still in existence. He was skeptical of any commission's ability to evaluate China missions fully, ending with the statement: “We

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288 *Ibid.*

can be certain that real knowledge of the whole and right judgment of any part belongs to God alone.”<sup>289</sup>

Bates’s analysis, which was widely read by members of the IMC, got to the heart of the issues that had framed the debate over Chinese Christianity for most of the 1950’s. The missions could only be considered a success if the Chinese Church was able to survive and thrive on its own. If it was closely tied to the Communist Party in order to survive, was it still a viable church or simply an arm of the Party? These issues played into the larger Cold War discussion of whether it was possible to work with Communists, which will be discussed in Chapter 5. Many mission organizations still believed that was possible, while the public at large had already decided the answer was no.

A British missionary, David Paton, added a voice to the conversation that was very sympathetic to the Chinese Church but critical of missions. Paton had been a missionary in China for about ten years before leaving in 1950. In 1953, he published a powerful critique of China missions in *Christian Missions and the Judgment of God*. Paton’s book argued that the missions were fundamentally flawed by being too bureaucratic and too arrogant, particularly about dismissing Chinese culture. He suggested that the expulsion of missionaries from China was God’s judgment on missions that were more concerned about financial statements and theological minutia than with carrying Christianity to the world. He did not, however, think the missions in China were unique in this shortcoming, but their failures were the most obvious. He argued that, “God’s judgment today is being executed upon his church by political movements which are anti-Christian. Of this almost worldwide movement, the Communists are the spearhead.” For Paton, the failings of foreign missions, especially

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<sup>289</sup> M. Searle Bates. “Issues Arising in the International Missionary Council Study of the Christian Enterprise in China” 1957, CRP RG8 Box 56 Folder 11.

those in China, resulted in God using Communists to sweep them away. Only a response that corresponded to God's will would reverse these losses.<sup>290</sup>

Paton's strong views were not out of the ordinary for him. He was known for expressing his opinions, which were increasingly unorthodox, in very brusque terms. After returning from China, Paton became Editor of the SMC Press, an academic press specializing in theology. He had a great deal of sympathy for Chinese Christians, whom he heroicized for their efforts to keep their fledgling church alive under difficult circumstances. In a 1957 letter to members of the SCM Book Club, Paton wrote of his experience in China and speculated on its future. As he had prepared for his departure from China, he remembered his students singing hymns of salvations: "So, like others, I came away sad but with reassurance." He later added, "Was my assurance then merely wishful thinking? Not at all." He went on to explain, "It is not only or primarily that the number of Christians is slowly but steadily growing, or that the quantity and quality of ordination candidates is improving. What stands out is a new sureness of touch and sense of direction." Paton was convinced, partly by reassurances from K. H. Ting, a prominent Chinese Christian leader, that the Chinese Church was healthier than ever and that its relations with the Communist government made it stronger, not weaker. He said missionaries and other western Christians assumed that "when real discourse again becomes possible with the Chinese Church," western Christians will express "that the Chinese Church had been unduly influence by the Communist Party and had over- obediently 'toed the Party line'; and that the Chinese would have to admit this. I doubt it will be so simple."<sup>291</sup>

Paton was generally regarded as too radical for the mainstream, even for the United Kingdom which was more open to socialism than was the United States. His

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<sup>290</sup> David Macdonald Paton. *Christian Missions and the Judgment of God*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI). 1996: p. 49.

<sup>291</sup> David M. Patton. Letter to Members of the SMC Book Club. Mar. 1957, CRP RG8 Box 56 Folder 11.

position would cost him his position as editor of the SCM Press in 1959. The conclusions of his letter are a good example of how his bluntly stated opinions went against the grain of public opinion. He said, "I think the Chinese are going to reply that the self-hood of the Church cannot be discovered [emphasis in the original] without the ready embracing of the people's revolution under the leadership of the Communist Party." Even more radically, he added, "And that where there is sterility and uncertainty in the Churches of Asia and Africa within the ambit of what we call the 'free world', this is because there has been no such Communist-led people's democratic revolution." Paton argued that Communist revolutions were revitalizing to Christianity, even suggesting that such a revolution might be beneficial in the "free world." Needless to say, this attitude placed him a serious conflict with the majority views of westerners.<sup>292</sup>

Paton and Bates offered differing but overlapping opinions on what happened in China. Bates thought that missionaries were not to blame for the end of missions, while Paton thought that their bureaucratic stagnation caused them to lose the true purpose of missions. Both agreed, however, that the seeds of Christianity had been planted and that Chinese Christianity was surviving and possibly thriving. Both continued this position even as events from China made optimism about the Chinese church increasingly difficult to maintain.

### **The Three-Self Patriotic Movement**

The key question about the future of the Chinese church was whether it could find a way to work under the Communist regime. The question of whether it was possible to find an accommodation with Communists would seem an odd one for missionaries. Many had tried to work with the Communists from 1948-51 and were

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<sup>292</sup> David M. Patton. Letter to Members of the SMC Book Club. Mar. 1957, CRP RG8 Box 56 Folder 11.

rewarded for their efforts by being driven out of China. So why was it being raised again? The biggest difference was that the missionaries were no longer in China, which removed part of the foreign taint that imperialism had put on the church. Many missionaries finally accepted that their good intentions had not washed away their association with the unequal treaties. Now that there was no foreign missionary presence in China, there was some hope that Christianity in China might grow as a Chinese institution.

There was another school of thought in dealing with the Chinese church – one that believed that the PRC was irrevocably hostile to Christianity. Only the Communist regime’s collapse would protect the church. The Chinese Church under Communism was no church at all. Its members had no freedom to practice and the little activity that was allowed bore only a passing resemblance of true Christianity. There was no way to deal with the PRC other than to isolate and hope for its collapse.

The clearest sign regarding the direction of Christianity in China was the creation of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). The TSPM was an attempt by Chinese Christians to find a way to continue to do Christian work in Communist China. The PRC government had forced Christian churches to cut financial ties with foreign organizations saying that religious organizations could continue to operate as long as they were self-supporting. In 1950, several Chinese leaders, most prominently Y. T. Wu and T. C. Chao, met with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai to discuss the future of Christianity in the PRC. The result was the “Christian Manifesto”<sup>293</sup>, also known as the “Three-Self Manifesto”, which said that Christianity in China must be shorn of its imperialist trappings. It pledged to make the Chinese Church self-supporting, self-

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<sup>293</sup> “The Christian Manifesto” was a semi-facetious name given to the document by western observers. The actual name was “Direction of Endeavor for Chinese Christianity in the Construction of New China”, but because it so closely aligned the Church with the CCP line, the word “Manifesto” was put in place for the shortened name. Daniel H. Bays. *A New History of Christianity in China*, (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackburn Press, 2012).

governing and self-propagating. These Three-Self principles had been put on paper as a goal of missions as early as 1892, but missionaries had been very slow to hand over control of the church to the Chinese. Wu and Chao, with the help of other Chinese Christians, started this movement to demonstrate the loyalty of Chinese Christians to the newly established PRC. Eventually they claimed that 400,000 Chinese Christians signed the manifesto, launching the TSPM (sometimes known as the Three-Self Patriotic Church).

As the word “patriotic” in its name would suggest, the TSPM had a strong anti-foreign tone. While acknowledging that missionaries brought Christianity to China and made some contributions to Chinese society, the Manifesto stated that missionaries came from imperialist countries and their actions were forever tainted by imperialism. Now that Communism had triumphed over imperialism, foreign powers would try to use Christianity “to forward their plot of stifling internal dissension, and creating reactionary forces in this country.” The purpose of the manifesto was “to heighten our vigilance against imperialism, to make known the clear political stand of Christians in New China... and to indicate the responsibilities that should be taken up by Christians through the whole country in the national reconstruction of New China.”<sup>294</sup>

The nationalist sentiments of the Manifesto were starker than Chinese Christians had used before, but the ideas had been articulated before, particularly by Wu. Wu had earned a master’s degree in philosophy from Union Theological Seminary in New York before returning to China in the late 1920s. He worked with the YMCA, eventually rising to Secretary of the organization in China. He had always been drawn to the social calling of Christianity rather than the mystical aspects. Even

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<sup>294</sup> “The Christian Manifesto”, May 1950. *Documents of the Three-Self Movement: Source Materials for the study of the Protestant Church in Communist China*. (New York: National Council of Churches, 1963) ed. Wallace Merwin and Francis P. Jones.

prior to the Communist victory over the GMD, Wu had shown sympathy for the Communist cause, including writing a scathing critique of Christianity in China in 1948. American missionary Frank Price called him an “‘Old Testament prophet’ whose ‘soul is seared by the social sins and injustices.’”<sup>295</sup>

The 1948 article that Wu wrote was in the Protestant Journal *Tian Feng* (which translated roughly at *Heavenly Wind*) titled, “The Present-Day Tragedy of Christianity.” Wu served as editor as well as an occasional contributor to the journal. The journal was generally quite liberal, but Wu’s article was several steps beyond its norm. In it, Wu launched an assault on capitalism and Christianity’s association with it. He also accused the United States of subverting true Christianity in order to use it to fight communism. Using standard Marxist analysis, Wu asserted: “For thousands of years history has been a history of ‘man eating man’, a history of class struggle’.” He went on to talk about the international Communist revolution saying that “Capitalism can no longer meet the needs of our time.” He accused the United States of fighting a crusade that “is upholding not the good of mankind, not the saving gospel which the risen Jesus wants us to believe, but is only the special privilege of a few men.”<sup>296</sup>

Even prior to the Communist victory in China, Wu was laying the groundwork for allying with the CCP. He argued that true Christians should support the Communist movement. His argument concluded that Christianity had lost its way in China, and “that in its history of the past hundred years it has unconsciously changed to become a conservative force. And now at the present stage it has become a reactionary force.” Yet he finished his article with a strong proclamation of his faith.

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295 Lian Xi. *Redeemed By Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010) 198.

296 Y. T. Wu. “The Present Day Tragedy of Christianity”, *Tian Feng*, April 10, 1948. Reprinted in *Documents of the Three-Self Movement: Source Materials for the Study of the Protestant Church in Communist China*, (Philadelphia, PA: National Council of Churches in the United States of America, 1963).

“In spite of our stupidity, weakness and selfishness, he [Jesus] forever stands before us, beckoning us forward to a rebirth of mind and soul.”<sup>297</sup>

The article got Wu in of trouble among the Protestant community in China. *Tian Feng* was published initially through the YMCA, which was striving to avoid entanglement in Chinese politics. Wu actually addressed that in his article, saying “There may be many who think naively that Christianity is above politics...”<sup>298</sup> He did not specifically name the YMCA, but by implication he certainly included them. Even though *Tian Feng* represented the more liberal side of Christianity in China, the clearly pro-Communist argument did not go over well among its board and readers. As a result, Wu was removed as editor of *Tian Feng*.

By 1949, Wu had begun working with the CCP, particularly Zhou Enlai, to help Christians work with the Communist regime, which would eventually lead to the TSPM. When he and his colleagues approached Zhou about the Manifesto in 1950, they approached not as a group trying to influence a great movement, but as supplicants who were trying to get in line with that movement. One of his colleagues outlined the meeting afterward in notes to American missionaries. He stated two goals of presenting the manifesto. The first was “to secure his [Zhou’s] help in meeting certain problems of the churches.” These included seizure of church property, intimidation of clergy and interference with church operations. Secondly, they wanted Zhou’s help “to determine our own attitude and policy.” They were essentially asking what policy would be deemed correct by the CCP. The implication was that Chinese Christians understood that the church’s continued existence depended on conforming to Communist standards. They went on to say, “Most of our difficulties, we realize, are from within the church. We cannot shove responsibility off on the

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<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*



government.”<sup>299</sup> This attitude of penitence shows the Three-Self Church as largely a defensive creation that would allow Christianity to survive under Communism. Given Wu’s earlier embrace of Communism, he may have expected greater acceptance by the CCP. Yet by 1950, he and his colleagues were not feeling secure. They were at least wary enough to offer a *mea culpa* for supposed wrong doing as a means of protecting the church.

The timing of the Christian Manifesto proved to be quite important. It was first published about a month before the outbreak of the Korean War, but its authors had clearly been working on it for some time. When they approached Zhou looking for support and protection, Zhou’s initial reaction, according to the notes of one of the authors, was that he “may issue later an order for protection of the Christian church. But we must do our part first, to dissociate ourselves from all imperialism.”<sup>300</sup> This lukewarm response did not give heart to Manifesto’s authors, but they went out to gain as many signatures as possible for the manifesto. The beginning of the Korean War a little over a month later was most likely a decisive factor in the Manifesto gaining support from both Christians and the CCP. The war added vigor to the anti-imperialist and anti-American rhetoric. Even before the Chinese army intervened in November of 1950, the “Resist America, Support Korea” campaign began a mass mobilization of people and resources to assist in the war. Anyone not fully participating would be viewed as suspect. The TSPM was a great opportunity for Chinese Christians to demonstrate their loyalty to the cause, no doubt dramatically increasing its membership. Equally important, it gave the Chinese government a means to control Protestant churches without violating its promise of religious freedom. They could use the TSPM to mobilize Christians and give them direction that would coincide with

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<sup>299</sup> “Notes on Reports of Conferences with Premier Cho En-Lai” Sept. 8. 1950. CRG RG8 60 7  
<sup>300</sup> *Ibid*

Communist programs. As a result, Zhou's initial mild response to the Christian Manifesto in spring changed to one of strong support for the TSPM by autumn.

The TSPM supported the war effort enthusiastically. Its initial organizational meeting in 1951 was inelegantly named the "Preparatory Council of the China Christian Resist-America Help-Korea Three-Self Reform Movement." It urged patriotic mobilization to fight against the imperialism of the United States. More concretely, the prominent TSPM leader T. C. Chao resigned his position as one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches (he was one of six when it was founded in 1948) when the WCC Central Committee designated North Korea as the aggressor in the war. He said, "as a patriotic Chinese I must protest against the Toronto message [condemning North Korea], which sounds so much like the voice of Wall Street."<sup>301</sup>

Although it was not officially launched until 1954, the TSPM was already the dominant organization of Christianity by 1951. It quickly displaced the Church of Christ in China, which had been the largest umbrella Protestant church. Prior to the Communist takeover the CCC had the most influence among Christians and with the government, even though many denominations had never joined. After the establishment of the PRC, the CCC had initially worked with the new government, but was gradually being marginalized as the Communist regime solidified its power. The publication of the Christian Manifesto, made in high-level consultation with Chinese government, demonstrated the shift in power among Chinese Christians. As discussed in Chapter 3, attempts by Christians to be apolitical marked them as potential subversives. The Christian Manifesto's demonstration of the loyalty and political awareness of Chinese Christians contrasted starkly with the CCC's tepid embrace of the new order. In an effort to remain relevant against the rise of TSPM, the CCC sent

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<sup>301</sup> "China Protestants Cutting World Tie", *The New York Times*, Oct. 14, 1951.

messages to foreign missionary societies that basically echoed the nationalist themes of the Christian Manifesto. It said, “All grades of church organization within the Church of Christ in China and all forms of work under them shall strive to attain the goal of autonomy – self-government, self-support and self-propagation – within the shortest possible time.” While this sounded good and would no doubt be appreciated by the authorities, the CCC undermined that message with a touch of moderation that deviated from the tone of the Christian Manifesto. It finished with, “You know, without our saying it again, how greatly we appreciate the contributions of your China Mission to the establishment of the Christian church in China. Christian memories and influences abide, and in Christ no thought or labour or prayer is ever lost.”<sup>302</sup> The CCC attempted to ride the wave of nationalism, but still failed to understand how adversely any sign of affection for missionaries would be taken by the Chinese government. The letter was written barely two months after the Chinese had intervened in the Korean War. The massive “Resist America, Aid Korea” campaign to mobilize the Chinese masses was already underway. The inclusion of the caveat of appreciation was tantamount to a suicide note for the organization, which was quickly absorbed by the TSPM. It stopped having organized meetings later in 1951 and its leaders were soon absorbed into the TSPM or denounced as imperialist sympathizers.<sup>303</sup>

The creation of the Three-Self Church and Chao’s resignation sent a clear signal to the Chinese government that Chinese Christians were loyal to China first. Western Christians saw that signal as well, although their information was spotty.

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302 “Church of Christ in China Report to Missions Abroad”, Feb. 21, 1951. *Documents of the Three-Self Movement: Source Materials for the study of the Protestant Church in Communist China*. (New York: National Council of Churches) 1963. ed. Wallace Merwin and Francis P. Jones.

303 George Hood. *Neither Bang Nor Whimper: The End of a Missionary Era in China*, (Singapore: Press of Presbyterian Church in Singapore, 1991); Wallace Merwin. *Adventures in Unity: The Church of Christ in China*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974).

*Tian Feng*, which was sporadically received in Hong Kong and then sent to churches in the United States and Europe, was one of the few avenues for westerners to see the development of Chinese Christianity. It had been founded as a YMCA journal, but was quickly absorbed into the TSPM. Wu no doubt found some satisfaction in reestablishing control of it only a few years after being forced to resign. As the main published work of the TSPM, *Tian Feng* was an important source of information on Christianity in China for the outside world. It offered some insights in the TSPM's own words. *Tian Feng* was geared towards a Chinese audience to show the patriotism of its members, but to foreigners it showed some of the key difficulties of Chinese Christians operating in the PRC. In mid-1951, it detailed a speech by the Dr. H.H. Tsui, Secretary General of the Church of Christ in China, that showed an attempt at accommodating Christian and Communist dogma. He talked about accusation meetings, which were a key part of the mobilization of the Chinese masses. For missionaries, as well as most western Christians, accusation meetings seemed antithetical to the Christian ideals of forgiveness and toleration. Tsui, however, made them seem not only compatible but complementary. He said that while he used to try to look on everyone's good points, he was doing both them and himself a disservice. They should be made aware of their faults and he should let go of his resentment. He seems to suggest that making an accusation, if done whole-heartedly, was like a catharsis. After he made the accusations, the relief he felt as a Christian was like a "new birth," a clear reference to the rite of baptism.<sup>304</sup>

Tsui was trying to incorporate Communist methods into Christianity. In addition to showing the utility of accusation meeting, he advocated a redirection of Christianity from personal salvation to collectively helping the Chinese people.

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304 E.E. Walline. Letter to Presbyterian Mission Board, June 5, 1951. PHS RG82-68-6

Rather than focusing on individual spiritual salvation, Chinese Christians should move closer to God by implementing Jesus's teachings on earth. This would mean working for the betterment of the Chinese people as a whole, showing the generosity and selflessness Jesus illustrated in the Gospels. In one respect, this was a traditional Christian approach. Echoing the philosophy of social gospel missionaries, he said that Christians must stand with the people. But he quickly moved to a more combative tone. He said that if your internal feelings take you in a different direction, you must "struggle with yourself." The word "struggle" was quite common in CCP doctrine. Its use here was another shift towards incorporating parts of Communism into Christianity. He continued by arguing that Christians must draw clear lines between their friends and enemies. In conjunction with that, Christians should join the rest of China in opposing imperialism. This message appears to have had two meanings. Tsui was telling Chinese Christians that missionaries were not their friends. On the contrary, missionaries were imperialist agents who corrupted the gospel by using it to undermine China. Chinese Christians should resist missionary attempts to resist the revolution. The message was also a veiled threat to Chinese Christians to join the mass movements or be labeled an enemy. Tsui emphasized where everyone's first loyalty should be by saying, "I love the Church; much more do I love our great strong fatherland." Love of China must be preeminent.

Chinese Christians, who were already under suspicion for having divided loyalty and ties to foreigners, had to demonstrate their love of China even more than most Chinese. Tsui left no doubts about that at the conclusion of his speech. He said, "The Church still harbors agents of imperialism and the teeth and class of the running dogs."<sup>305</sup> Although this statement was undoubtedly meant as a warning to Chinese

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305 E.E. Walline. Letter to Presbyterian Mission Board, June 5, 1951. PHS RG82-68-6

Christian, it was most likely also a statement of his own loyalty for the government. In warning his Christian brethren that they were already under suspicion, he was also showing them how to prove their allegiance by demonstrating his own.

Tsui's speech, being published in *Tian Feng*, was another strong indicator of the direction of the TSPM. Chinese Christian leaders were adapting Christianity to the new Communist environment that placed nationalism over religion. Like missionaries before them, they were facing something new in the CCP. The Communists had control over the entirety of mainland China and the ability to enforce its will on Chinese society. The Qing Dynasty had been hostile to Christianity as a dangerous heterodoxy, but was forced to accept it because of the unequal treaties enforced by western weapons. As an institution, the GMD was deeply suspicious of Christians, but it did not have the means to impose its control. Chiang Kai-Shek, despite being a Christian himself (at least nominally), was still wary of Christian churches as socially destabilizing and as a potential rival source of power. But since the GMD could not expunge Christianity, it tried to exploit it by using Christian schools to push its propaganda. It also promoted its connections to Christians in hopes of garnering more foreign aid. The CCP, on the other hand, had the power to eradicate Christianity. When Christians began joining the TSPM, they were acknowledging the new reality in China.

The creation of the TSPM and its strongly anti-foreign rhetoric gave pause to even the most optimistic western church leaders. It did not explicitly replace the NCC and CCC, but both of those organizations were quickly withering. The mass support that the TSPM had garnered promised to accelerate that process. Chao's resignation from the WCC cut another connection between the ecumenical movement and Chinese

Christianity. Many American church leaders believed that a break between Chinese Christians and the WCC was imminent.<sup>306</sup>

Despite these discouraging signs coming from China, many leaders in the American missionary community felt that they must try to keep in contact with the Chinese Church, even if support for the Church was impossible. In March 1951, the General Secretary of the IMC said, “There is a universal conviction that everything possible must be done to maintain living ecumenical contact with the Church in China.”<sup>307</sup> His feelings were echoed by many members of the IMC council, but they recognized the difficulties confronting them, greatest of which was simply the mechanics of communications. There was no direct way to contact anyone in China from the United States. All communications had to go through very convoluted back channels and were unreliable. Most messages were sent through either Hong Kong, where smuggling in and out of China was commonplace, or third parties in non-aligned countries like India, which did not have the taint of imperialism.

Even if communication could be sent, there were dangers to trying it. Lloyd Ruland, Secretary of the Presbyterian Mission Board, highlighted the dangers to Chinese Christians who were in contact with foreigners. He wrote, “It is unwise for Chinese to write to anyone in America, and it is a very serious embarrassment for them to receive any letters from anyone in this country.”<sup>308</sup> This was a reflection on the experience of missionaries in the last year they were in China. Their friends and congregations shunned them because any association with them would bring the attention of the local cadres. One missionary said, “We wanted to stay and help the Chinese rebuild, but we realized our presence was hurting those we were trying to help. For me, it was when I realized that our gardener was being physically assaulted

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306 “China Protestants Cutting World Tie”, *The New York Times*, Oct. 14, 1951.

307 Charles W. Ranson. IMC letter to missions. Mar. 2, 1951, CRP RG8 Box 56, Folder 6

308 Lloyd S. Ruland. Letter to Elleroy M. Smith, Apr. 10, 1951, PHS RG82-68-6.

for working for the imperialists. I knew I needed to go.”<sup>309</sup> Ruland was making a similar point when the Mission Board was accused of giving up. He wrote, “It should be made clear that these withdrawals are not through any personal fear or unwillingness to suffer, but solely because of the missionaries’ consideration for their Chinese colleagues and the welfare of the work.”<sup>310</sup>

He then returned to the issue of future communications with Chinese Christians, noting the difficulties they were facing. “All Christians are under extreme pressure to say something affirmative in connection with the present program of government, speaking adversely of anything pertaining to American and American imperialism.”<sup>311</sup> He concluded that although the Mission Board had a strong interest in the health and growth of the Chinese Church, it was completely out of the hands of western churches. “We must, during this period, trust these fellow Christians, for we believe that the Word has been grounded in their hearts and they will come through this testing period with a clear record.”<sup>312</sup> Ruland was acknowledging that communications had been cut. Yet he was also offering the hope that if missionaries had done a good job of planting the seeds of Christianity in China, the church there would survive without assistance from westerners.

### **First Hand Observers**

With the limited information coming from China, the few personal contacts between Chinese and western Christians took on much more importance. No American clergy went to China in the 1950’s, but there were trips by European and Australian clergy. These were ostensibly fact finding missions, but rather than helping settle the question of what was going on with Christianity in China, they created more

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309 Mary Reed Dewar. Interview. August 7, 2011.

310 Lloyd S. Ruland. Letter to Elleroy M. Smith, Apr. 10, 1951, PHS RG82-68-6.

311 *Ibid.*

312 Lloyd S. Ruland. Letter to Elleroy M. Smith, Apr. 10, 1951, PHS RG82-68-6.



controversy. The trips served as a Rorschach test for westerners, inevitably confirming the opinions of the PRC for groups that condemned the TSPM, as well as the contrasting opinions of those that wanted better relations with it.

The timing was also to follow up on trips, which had taken place in the previous few years, by clergy from other western countries. When the Korean War ended, western church leaders hoped that relations with the Chinese Church might slowly be reopened. There was still almost no direct communication, but there were some grounds for optimism. The PRC was looking to end its isolation, but on its own terms. By 1954 the PRC government began to invite some western Christians to China, albeit those that were already sympathetic towards the PRC.

In early 1955, a delegation of British Quakers visited China and returned with a favorable image of the Church in China. At a mission conference later that year, one of its members, Janet Rees, presented a cautiously optimistic view of Christianity under Chinese Communism. She started with a qualification: “First, it must be said that Christians have been carried along with the general tide of national life, feeling themselves as good patriots.” She moved on to say how the church was thriving under Communism. They had lost a substantial portion of “rice Christians”, meaning those who converted for material benefit, but “the church was stronger for their going.” She also noted that because of government services, which the Chinese Christians described as having “brought in many Christian principles,” the churches only focused on direct Christian work, meaning witness meetings and proselytizing. Rees seemed to think this was an excellent use of resources that would strengthen the church further.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Janet Rees. Address to Conference of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and Ireland, East Asia Group. Nov. 11, 1955, CRG RG8 Box 56 Folder 8.

Rees also had a positive spin on the isolation of the church from any non-Chinese contacts. “The acceptance of the patriotic movement has involved looking inwards rather than outwards.”<sup>314</sup> She went on to say: “It was clear that the Churches are rather wrapped up in themselves, concentrating on Church activities – holding services, Bible study, Sunday schools, open meetings, but all associated with the internal life of the Church.” Her implication was that the isolation was self-imposed by the church and was a positive.<sup>315</sup>

She did mention an interview with Chinese Church leaders, Y. T. Wu among them, where they hinted that there were political problems with foreign contacts. The Chinese leaders said that the time was not right for contact with western churches. They suggested that contact could create problems for any Chinese who received letters from foreigners. Her own observations confirmed this when she said that the Chinese “are not remembering very forcibly the people here [former missionaries to China]; when names are mentioned there was a response, but nothing was followed up after the first ‘How good’ and ‘Give him or her our greetings’.” Rather than attribute that to any political hazards that might arise from showing interest, she attributed the lack of interest to the fact that “they were absorbed in what they are doing in their own country and their Church.”<sup>316</sup>

Perhaps most optimistic was a note near the end of her presentation. Rees wrote: “It was not known if the Christian leaders would have to make a report of their meetings with the delegation.”<sup>317</sup> Rees gave the benefit of the doubt to Chinese Christians throughout her visit and in her subsequent report, but this was stretching credulity. The PRC was avowedly isolationist and atheist. Christians were already

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<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> Janet Rees. Address to Conference of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and Ireland, East Asia Group. Nov. 11, 1955, CRG RG8 Box 56 Folder 8.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

viewed with suspicion about foreign influence. It is almost inconceivable that government officials would not have interviewed the Chinese Christians who met the foreigners. This question, as much as anything, demonstrates how much Rees wanted to portray the Chinese Church as independent and thriving.

It should not be surprising that Rees looked favorably on Chinese Christianity. She had lived in China for almost four decades before leaving in 1950. She was born in China while her parents were serving as missionaries there. So the Church of Christ in China was not only her life's work, but that of her parents as well. Her desire to see it succeed no doubt colored her opinion of it.

Rees's presentation was quickly communicated to Christian leaders in the United States, most of whom were encouraged by it. Her report, however, demonstrated a bias that ran through first-hand reports from China. Those who went to China to meet with Chinese Christians had a predisposition to give the benefit of the doubt to the Chinese Church, as well as the PRC as a whole. The fact that they were invited to China and then made the effort to go, which was a very difficult task, demonstrated that they had some affinity towards finding common ground with the Chinese Church and that they were politically acceptable to the Chinese government. Those who were condemning the Chinese Church were not issued invitations and would likely not have taken them had they been issued.

The report also came at a difficult time in US-China relations. The Taiwan Straits crisis of 1954-5 had made many think there would soon be open war between the two powers.<sup>318</sup> Britain was not directly involved in the standoff, but showed some concern for a potential general war. For the American public, what appeared to be

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<sup>318</sup> This crisis was over some small islands off the coast of China that were held by the GMD. The PRC began shelling the islands to drive out the GMD forces, but Chiang Kai-shek refused to withdraw them. The United States aided in resupplying the islands, causing many to fear it being drawn into an open war with China. Both sides privately took great pains to avoid an escalation, but the rhetoric was brinkmanship at its best. It ended inconclusively in May, 1955.

reckless adventurism by China undermined the hope for better relations that had grown since the end of the Korea War.<sup>319</sup>

With Sino-American relations on a continuing roller coaster, direct information about China continued to come from foreign sources. A 1956 trip by Australian clergy demonstrated this inherent bias. An issue of the American Christian weekly, *The Church Herald*, ran a series of articles that gave conflicting views of the trip. The first article argued that the Chinese Church was flourishing under Communism. That article was followed on the same page with an article calling the Chinese Church little more than a puppet of the Communist state. The first was written from the report of Dr. W. K. Mowll, an Anglican Archbishop who headed a delegation of eight men to China. After stating that the church in China was thriving, Mowll said, “I suppose a priest could say what he liked in the pulpit and even criticize the government in China, but I never heard of anyone doing it. Perhaps it is because the people feel they have a real share in the government.”<sup>320</sup> The second article was based on comments of Malcolm Mackay, a Methodist clergyman who took exception to Mowll’s remarks. Although he had apparently not been to China to see firsthand, he argued vehemently that the Chinese Church was “playing its role in subverting men and women from the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.” He went on to call Mowll’s statements and those like them “sentimental nonsense” and “high treason in an ideological war.”<sup>321</sup>

A third article in the same issue reported on the statements of Dr. George L. Ford, who served as Executive Director of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). The NAE was founded in the 1940’s as a conservative counter to the Federal Council of Churches, which transformed into the National Council of Churches in

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319 Tucker, Nancy Bernkopt. *The China Threat: Memories, Myths and Realities in the 1950’s*, (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012).

320 “Chinese Church a ‘Growing Force’”, *The Church Herald*, Jan. 18. 1957. p2.

321 “Chinese Church an Ally of Communist Regime”, *The Church Herald*, Jan. 18. 1957. p2-3

1949. The NAE was a loose association of fundamentalist churches that believed that the NCC and its mainstream members were too liberal. It was made up of many smaller organizations, but by the late 1950's, had a membership of over 1.5 million people from 32 denominations. Speaking for the NAE, Ford saw the recent trips by the Australian Christian leaders and the proposed American delegation from the NCC to the PRC as worthless at best, and dangerous at worst. "Any such visit would be highly circumscribed by the Red China government thus preventing a realistic view of the church. Contact would be established, not with the true uncompromising Christians of China, but with those liberal churchmen who have sold out to the Communist regime."<sup>322</sup> Ford's comments were probably meant as a not so veiled attack on the NCC, which his organization viewed as too secular. He was also challenging any attempt to find compromise with the PRC, alluding to the lack of religious freedom under its rule.

The visit by the Australian team received U.S. coverage from non-religious publications as well. The *New York Times* covered its departure, noting that it was "the first representative group of religious leaders from outside the Iron Curtain to visit China since the Communists took over the country in 1949," apparently forgetting about the Quakers the year before.<sup>323</sup> Newspapers across the country published articles about the disagreement between Mowll and Mackay. One titled "Red China Religion Free, Says Australian Archbishop." Despite the title, the article spent more time discussing Mackay's challenges, including the pithy quote: "The church in China is as free as a tiger in a cage."<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> "Deplores Proposal American Delegation Go to China", *The Church Herald*, Jan. 18. 195: p3.

<sup>323</sup> "Australians Leave for China" *New York Times*, Oct. 30, 1956: p5.

<sup>324</sup> "Red China Religion Free, Says Australian Archbishop", *Steubenville Herald Star*, Jan. 23, 1957: p. 15.

There was one notable trip in the other direction. In 1956, K. H. Ting visited the UK to meet with church leaders. Ting was educated at mission schools in China, including getting two Bachelor's degrees from St. John's University in Shanghai. He received a Masters in theology from Union Theological Seminary in New York shortly after World War II. After working for the World Council of Churches for three years in Switzerland, Ting returned to China in 1951 to take his place in the PRC. He was a surprising leader for the Chinese Church because he had spent the entire civil war in western countries. He had only limited personal contacts with Chinese Christians and his experience in the United States and Europe must have made him suspect to the Communist regime. Nevertheless, he rose quickly after returning to China and soon became one of the leaders of the TSPM.

When he traveled to the United Kingdom, it was the first trip abroad by a major Chinese Christian leader since the revolution. The official reason for the meeting was preparation for the 1958 Lambeth Conference, which was a meeting of Anglican Communion that occurred every ten years, but Ting's presence was something of a distraction from the business at hand. His visit was such a rare opportunity to speak with a Chinese Christian leader that he was given time to address the meeting.<sup>325</sup>

Ting used his speech to promote the image of Chinese Christianity. He spoke at length on the point that the Church's mission, which was to bring the Chinese people to Christ, had not changed under Communism. He also offered an implied rebuke to the missionary movement in China. A report of his speech said, "Christians in China had not been prepared for the events of 1949, and as all supporting agencies were withdrawn they were forced back to God alone...vague Christianity was no

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<sup>325</sup> Philip L. Wickeri. *Reconstructing Christianity in China: K. H. Ting and the Chinese Church*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).

help.” Ting later added a hint about the church floundering under missionaries but recovering after they left. “The Church has surrendered its crutches one after the other. Judged by human standards the Church without its supporting medical and educational institutions looks weaker, but in reality is stronger.” He suggested that the Chinese Church was more streamlined and effective in its primary tasks by removing these services. Ting spoke about the growth of the Church under the TSPM. The TSPM itself was a rebuke to missionaries and westerners, and Ting used his platform to drive home the point. He noted, “In the past the Church had been too detached from the people. It had been too much like the elder brother in the story of the Prodigal Son, or like the Prophet Jonah. The Church has learned that it must love the people.” 326

Ting finished by saying that the Chinese “are not antagonistic to evangelism, but feel that they must beware of Colonialism.” He supported increased contact with foreign Christians but suggested that personal visits to China would be best. When asked if Christmas cards would be acceptable, Ting had no objection. Ting was not invited to the United States on this trip, nor would he likely have gone had he been invited. Had he been, it would be interesting to see if American Christmas cards would be as welcome.<sup>327</sup>

Ting’s speech had a two-fold purpose. First, he was showing the strength of the TSPM behind the Communist regime. Because the new PRC government provided the social services which had previously fallen to missionaries (education, health care), the TSPM was able to focus on living as Christians. He was vague on what this meant, particularly as he talked about serving the community, but also boasted that the

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326 Report on Visit of the Rt. Rev. K.H. Ting, Bishop of Chekiang to England for Consultative Committee of the Lambeth Conference for 1958. Aug. 28 1956. CRP RG8 56 10.

327 Report on Visit of the Rt. Rev. K.H. Ting, Bishop of Chekiang to England for Consultative Committee of the Lambeth Conference for 1958. Aug. 28 1956. CRP RG8 56 10.

church no longer provided social services. Nevertheless, he was making a case that Chinese Christianity was stronger under Communist rule.

Coupled with that was a rebuke to missionaries for their role in imperialism. His speech was clearly trying to drive home the point that Chinese Christianity suffered because of missionary actions. He implied an appreciation that missionaries brought Christianity to China, although he did not actually say it as the CCC had done in 1950, but he claimed that missionaries used an imperialist model of Christianity that actually undermined the strength of China. Only by removing foreign missionaries and creating a truly Chinese church could Christianity thrive and help build a new China.

When Ting finished, the Anglican leaders initially responded to Ting's speech with a prepared statement. With the clear Chinese association between missionaries and imperialism, the British leaders seemed keen to distance themselves from missions in China and establish relations between the Chinese and English churches as equals. They started with a quick praise of the development of the Three-Self Church. "We rejoice to know of the continued life and witness of the Churches in China and of their self-government, self-support and self-propagation." After the Anglican leaders offered an assurance that they regarded "the Churches in China as Churches in the same sense as we regard Churches of this country...", they added a further assurance that "we do not regard China as a 'mission field' in the sense that the re-establishment of missionary organization is contemplated or desired." As a final measure of ambivalence towards missions, they said, "that the present close association of the International Missionary Council with the World Council of Churches is a subject of constant searching and examination by both bodies..." It was a remarkable statement



by missionary leaders who seemed uncomfortable with the organizations they ran, at least in regards to China.<sup>328</sup>

The Anglicans' statement aimed to open the door for more visits to China. Ting's visit, despite his anti-imperialist rhetoric, gave hope to both British and American Christians that relations with Chinese Christians could be reopened. The NCC proposed sending a delegation shortly after they received a report of Ting's visit to the UK. News of the proposal served conflicting purposes in the debate in the United States. Ecumenicals were optimistic that this was the opening they had been waiting for, while advocates of isolating China saw Ting's statements as evidence of the subservience of Christianity in China to the CCP.

The timing of the proposed trip was partly because Chinese society appeared to be opening more in 1956. Towards the end of that year, the CCP launched the Hundred Flowers Campaign. This was a project where Mao Zedong wanted to open society to "let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend." This colorful language seemed to signal that the Chinese government felt secure enough to open itself to public criticism. Although the details were scarce in the United States, the little information available encouraged those Americans who believed the PRC would moderate its behavior once it did not feel threatened. These groups hoped that this openness would allow Chinese Christians to finally be accepted in Chinese society.<sup>329</sup>

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328 Report on Visit of the Rt. Rev. K.H. Ting, Bishop of Chekiang to England for Consultative Committee of the Lambeth Conference for 1958. Aug. 28 1956. CRP RG8 56 10.

329 Mao Zedong appears to have started the Hundred Flowers Campaign in late 1956 in good faith, but was shocked to find how much resentment there was against the Chinese Communist Party. He reversed himself in July 1957 by starting an anti-rightist campaign that would persecute anyone who was thought to have attitudes at odds with the Party. Christians were prominent among the accused, but information was slow to leak to the west. Jonathan Spence. *The Search for Modern China*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991).

By this point the China Committee, the part of the missionary division of the NCC that dealt with China, had been put in an awkward position. It was responsible for all of China, but there were no missionaries in the mainland. As a result its main purpose was to coordinate missionaries in Hong Kong, whose numbers had grown exponentially as a mission since 1950, and Taiwan. But it would also be responsible if the relations between the American and Chinese churches were to be reestablished. When missionaries had been expelled in 1951, it had taken the position that relations should be reestablished as soon as possible. But by 1957, it had to be careful that its attempts to do that would not unduly support the PRC's hopes for international legitimacy.

In a 1957 meeting, the China Committee tried to address the issue of reestablishing communications between the two churches. It began by acknowledging that relations were essentially broken and it outlined the questions facing a renewal of those relations. If there was a change in the Chinese government (a constant hope for most Americans), would there be a change in the leadership of the Christian Church in China? If they thought that was likely, why contact the current Chinese Church now? Implicit in this issue was the question of whether the Church had become an arm of the Communist Party. Had the church so suborned itself to Communist policies that it was no longer a truly Christian organization? "The general consensus has been that we agree on the desirability of resumption of communication with Chinese Christians but feel that a direct approach at this time would be premature and unwise." 330 That it was considered premature might have been because of the continued hope that Communist China would collapse, but it was also because any communication to

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330 China Committee Minutes, Apr. 4, 1957. CRP RG8 Box 56 Folder 11.

Chinese Christians would only put them under suspicion at a time when Chinese society appeared to be opening slightly.

The China Committee was also concerned with the politics of the situation. Some of its members were afraid that its efforts at ecumenism with the Three-Self Church would be taken as evidence that they accepted the legitimacy of the PRC government. Its final resolutions included some very benign statements. It held on to the responsibility “as a clearing house of information.” Later in the meeting it adopted a resolution that included the vague statement, “When the Committee feels that the time is probably right, it will communicate with other agencies of the NCC.”<sup>331</sup> It finally got to a more concrete expression of its unease when it finished with the admonition, “that we must be alert to the Communist Government’s effort for support from all possible sources for admission to the United Nations and the danger that they might seek to work through American church leaders for such support.” While the minutes did not object to the PRC’s seating at the UN, it was concerned that support for the PRC might have “possible repercussions from the Chinese Government in Taiwan.” While the China Committee was inclined to improve relations with the PRC (see Chapter 5), it had an increased commitment to areas that the PRC claimed, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Renewed relations between American and mainland Chinese churches could not come if it supported the expansion of PRC power into areas that had churches independent of political pressure. The China Committee had altered its position to reflect the geo-political realities of the day.<sup>332</sup>

Some individuals had a more hopeful view of the possibilities for a renewed relationship. Wallace Merwin, a former missionary to China and a prolific writer on Chinese Christianity after returning to the United States, demonstrated a cautious

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<sup>331</sup> Emphasis in original.

<sup>332</sup> China Committee Minutes, Apr. 4, 1957. CRP RG8 Box 56 Folder 11.

optimism in his 1958 address to the China Committee about the potential to reestablish the relationship between Chinese and American Christianity. He said that, “In spite of this undeniable break in communications, prayers have continued to go up on both sides of the curtain for individual Christians and for the Church of Christ.”<sup>333</sup> His speech outlined the contacts between the westerners and Chinese Christians during the last decade. He did not deny the paucity of those contacts (barely ten in ten years) but blamed them on the governments of the United States and China, while arguing that Christians on both sides wanted warmer relations.

This was not Merwin’s first attempt to open discussion with the TSPM. In 1957, he had written to several mission boards to support the idea of an American delegation to China. While it was received courteously, mission boards had reservations and ultimately the trip was shelved. In one response to Merwin’s letter, the General Secretary of the Methodist Board of World Missions, Eugene Smith, said that such a trip would be “to act altogether too much from political grounds.” He suggested that the situation in China and the “recent record of relationships between the two countries” would make any trip to establish ecumenical relations ultimately distorted and render any fact finding of very limited use. Having recently spoken to Ting while he was in England, Smith said that he appreciated Ting’s positive reports “even with the strong feeling that I have as to the dependability of Ting’s interpretation of what has happened in China.” This polite language diluted what appears to be a significant distrust of Ting’s presentation of the direction of Chinese Christianity. That distrust and the desire to stay out of the political battle precluded sending an American delegation to visit the PRC.<sup>334</sup>

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333 Wallace Merwin. “Resume of Approaches to the Chinese Church: Report to the Annual Meeting of the China Committee”, Mar. 5, 1958, CRP RG8 Box 56 Folder 11

334 Eugene Smith. Letter to Wallace Merwin. Mar. 6, 1957. CRG RG 6, Box 52, Folder 2.

## **Conclusion**

When missionaries returned to the United States from China in 1950 and 1951, they immediately began asking “what happened?” Did they do something that contributed to the end of missions in China or was that result due to external factors? Ultimately they were concerned with whether the missions were successful or whether the expulsion of missionaries meant the failure of the Christian enterprise in China. Missionaries were heavily invested in the Chinese church, with many of them having been in China for decades. The health of the church was a judgment on their life’s work.

The health of the Chinese church also had repercussions on politics. If the church was surviving as an independent entity and meeting the spiritual needs of its members, it indicated that the CCP was allowed religious freedom once missionaries had been removed from the equation. In that case, there was a good chance that the United States could find a working relationship with China. If, however, the church had been made into an appendage of the CCP to control Christians, it showed that Communist assurances of religious freedom were just more broken promises.

Like most debates among missionaries, this one saw very little agreement. There was not much information available other than anecdotes from returned missionaries, so most analysis of why missionaries were expelled was very subjective. The more concrete discussion was on the strength of Chinese Christianity. In 1951, there was cautious optimism among many missionaries that the Chinese church could survive, and potentially thrive, under Communism. The withdrawal of missionaries and the end of the unequal treaties removed some of the foreign taint of Christianity. These missionaries hoped that Chinese leadership of the church and the supposed

religious freedom that the PRC professed would help Christianity grow under the new regime.

The outbreak of the Korean War 1950 was a huge blow to that hope. Not only did it put anyone in the United States on the defensive if they spoke kindly of the Chinese, it also reinforced the need for Chinese Christians to prove their loyalty and distance themselves from the United States. The creation of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was a means to do that. It created some security for Christians by providing them an organization where they could profess their faith while also demonstrating their patriotism. After the Korean War ended in 1953, relations opened somewhat, but the direction of the TSPM was not in doubt. Even with the slight opening of the PRC after the war, the TSPM had to continue to strongly profess its loyalty under a regime that disdained religion in general and Christianity specifically.

Over the course of the 1950's, the development of the TSPM disheartened many missionaries. They came to believe that the TSPM was merely an adjunct of the CCP. This conclusion implied that missions had failed because the Chinese church had turned its back on many of the most important aspects of Christianity. Although very few missionaries actually came out and said that, there was general pall cast over any discussion of Chinese Christianity. When Wallace Merwin made his impassioned speech in 1958, he represented the liberal Christian groups that still believed in reestablishing relations with Chinese Christians. By that point, however, those groups were becoming an ever smaller the minority.

The debate among missionaries over religious freedom in China paralleled the debate over reestablishing relations with the PRC, but not precisely. The direction of the TSPM had disheartened many missionaries. Missionaries had long implied that religious freedom was a test of the new order in China. Yet when the CCP failed that

test, many liberal missionaries did not abandon their call for better relations with China. They would continue to advocate a less dogmatic view of Communism in the spirit of ecumenism even when it was very unpopular and they were being largely ignored.

## Chapter 5

### **“Losing to the Cold War Consensus: The Marginalization of Dissenting American Missionaries in China in the 1950s”**

Mary Reed Dewar was preparing to speak to an assembly of high school students in Boston about her years in China. It was 1952 and the fear of Communism was palpable. It was her first speaking experience after spending three years under the control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). To make a good impression, she bought a new dress and had her hair done. Slightly nervous, she arrived at the school auditorium early. While waiting there, the usually outgoing missionary engaged some of the students in conversation. The students were surprised by her healthy and well-groomed appearance, apparently expecting someone either emaciated or wearing rags. Dewar, who by her own description was “stout”, hardly fit the bill. They pressed her to describe the hardships she experienced under the Communists, only to find that life, by her account, was not that bad. Although she disagreed with the CCP on a lot of issues, she thought life in China was better there than it had been under the Nationalist regime of Christian leader Chiang Kai-Shek. One of the school administrators walked in on the middle of this conversation and was aghast at her words. After asking Dewar to clarify her position, he canceled her speech.<sup>335</sup>

Dewar’s story reflects a process that we normally associate with the State Department in the early 1950’s. “China hands,” experts who had often worked on Chinese issues for decades, were dismissed from the State Department for supposedly being soft on Communism. They often condemned GMD incompetence or suggested

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<sup>335</sup> Interview with Mary Reed Dewar, July 2011.



trying to work with the Communists, which made their loyalty appear suspect. Their dismissals were not official policy, but the growing anti-Communist hysteria of the day made their removal politically expedient for their superiors to avoid similar charges. The biggest symbol of that hysteria was Joseph McCarthy, who began his rise to fame with a list of State Department personnel who were supposed members of the Communist Party. Because of the increasing frenzy of anti-communist feelings, many of the most knowledgeable China experts in the State Department were gone within a few years of the Communist victory in China, replaced by people with less understanding of China, but strong anti-communist feeling.<sup>336</sup>

As Dewar's story suggests, a similar process was happening with missionaries returning from China. Those who were anti-communist found a receptive audience among Americans who wanted their anti-communist views confirmed. In contrast, missionaries who acknowledged both the good and bad of the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) were viewed with suspicion. These returned missionaries were trapped by the emerging Cold War consensus in which both major political parties and the vast majority of American society agreed that Communism was a threat to America and had to be resisted.<sup>337</sup>

Many missionaries returning from China in the early 1950's were largely disillusioned with the Communists, but they also remembered the terrible times that

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<sup>336</sup> Paul Gordon Lauren. *The China Hands' legacy: Ethics and Diplomacy*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press) 1987. Lynne Joiner. *Honorable Survivor: Mao's China, McCarthy's America, and the Persecution of John S. Service*, (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2009).

<sup>337</sup> Historians broadly define the Cold War consensus as the agreement between Democrats and Republicans, which was accepted by a large majority of the American public, that they must fight international Communism. This was not an official agreement as such, but an acceptance by both sides that this was necessary. With the start of the Korean War, the debate over whether Communism was a threat narrowed dramatically. Until the late 1960's, the public discussion was how the United States should fight Communism, not whether it should. People who questioned this consensus were often marginalized or had their patriotism attacked. Benjamin Fordham. *Building the Cold War Consensus: The Political Economy of U.S. National Security Policy, 1949-51*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

preceded Communist rule. The Guomindang government of Chiang Kai-shek had been brutal, corrupt, and incompetent. Hyperinflation, brought on by economic mismanagement, had destroyed the lives of the average Chinese. The Communists had much to answer for, specifically their restrictions on religion and their totalitarian tendencies, but many missionaries believed they still represented an improvement. Yet when these missionaries returned from China, their pleas for recognition of the People's Republic of China fell on deaf ears. They were marginalized by an already established narrative that painted the Communists as brutally crushing individualism in favor of the collective.

Returning missionaries seemed to be in a strong position to influence the public debate. Of all American citizens, they had the best first-hand knowledge of Communist China. They should have had more credibility than other commentators. Missionaries generally held a position of esteem in American society because of their dedication to religion and service. In addition, religion was becoming a major aspect of the Cold War consensus. Communist antipathy towards religion was one of the main reasons for Americans to fight against them.<sup>338</sup> Discussion of suppression of religious freedom was a major propaganda tool for the United States, giving missionaries a unique position to discuss China in terms of both politics and religion. Some missionaries were, in fact, listened to, but mainly those who went with the mainstream view. Missionaries who dissented, meaning they did not automatically condemn the PRC, were marginalized as Mary Dewar was.

This chapter looks at the political attitudes of returning missionaries towards Communist China. It reveals that there was a segment of returning missionaries who argued against the isolation of China. They believed that only through engaging China

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<sup>338</sup> For the a clear argument of how religion motivated anti-Communism, see William Ibdoden's *The Soul of Containment*, (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

would the extremist tendencies of the CCP be moderated. These missionaries had plenty of reasons to hate the Chinese Communists, but instead wanted to develop an understanding with them. This position required nuance that went against the stark black/white, good/evil dichotomy that mainstream Americans accepted as a means to understand the early Cold War. As a result, their voices were lost in the anti-communist feelings of the time and further drowned out by several provocative actions by the CCP. The American public would ignore these missionaries' ideas but use their stories of hardship to support the policy of isolating China.

### **Denationalized Missionaries**

Missionaries who returned to the United States were in an unusual position. They could be classified as "Third Culture Kids". This was a term coined in 1950's by sociologist Ruth Hill Useem to describe children who are raised in a foreign country but inherit some of the culture of their native country from their parents. As a result, they form a hybrid culture that can communicate with the cultures of both their homeland and their host country, but that is not fully a part of either. Second and third generation missionaries clearly fit this profile as they were born in China to missionary parents. Others, who were born in the United States, had been in China for so long (often for decades), that they were clearly out of touch with American culture. So even though they were not technically third culture kids, they exhibited some of the same symptoms, including limited identification with their homeland and lack of knowledge of their home culture. At the same time, they had difficulty fully understanding Chinese culture.<sup>339</sup>

National identity was less important to missionaries whose life's work had been in China. They did not cease to be Americans, but they identified themselves as

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<sup>339</sup> David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken. "Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds", (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc, 2009).

Christians as much as Americans. They had dedicated their lives to serving the Chinese people, either spiritually or physically.<sup>340</sup> The weakened nationalism became obvious during the Chinese Civil War, when many missionaries argued for an apolitical Christianity that could work under Communism.<sup>341</sup> Many missionaries had difficulty understanding why their foreignness hurt their cause and why they were associated with imperialism by the Chinese. The anti-foreign feeling became worse under the Communists, but missionaries continued to try to demonstrate that they wanted to serve regardless of their nationality. The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 meant that American missionaries became enemy nationals in China. Even then, some missionaries tried to stay and work. It took until 1951 for these missionaries to realize that their nationality precluded further service in China.

The limits of their nationalism manifested itself again when they returned to the United States. Having been overseas as the Cold War consensus against communism was forming, they were not caught up in the national emotion about of the Communist threat. They had great reason to be emotional about Chinese Communism, yet many missionaries did not share the growing national hostility towards the Chinese and the Communism. Instead, they tried to use their experience and expertise to help Americans understand Communist China. These missionaries rarely painted a rosy picture, but they did give a more nuanced analysis. In particular, they were concerned for Chinese Christians. Continuing to believe that religion can be separated from politics, they advocated Christian understanding of the Chinese Communists rather than condemnation and hatred. Victor Hayward, the Anglican secretary of the National Council of Churches in China, wrote to the North American

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<sup>340</sup> Lian Xi. *The Conversion of the Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907-1932* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

<sup>341</sup> See Chapter 2.

Board of Foreign Missions to argue that maintaining ecumenical contacts was essential not only for the church, but as a means to avoid another world war: “Viewed from China, there thus appears nothing more important in the world today than taking of every step possible, while there is yet time, for the bridging by the Churches, on Christian principles and for Christian reasons alone, of the ever deepening political chasm which threatens human existence itself.”<sup>342</sup>

It should not be too surprising that Hayward advocating reaching out. Even had he been living in his home country, the British were less dogmatic than Americans. Yet his nationality is less telling than his ecumenical philosophy. He shared a more universal outlook that looked to protect “human existence.” In this, he was representative of many ecumenicals, including American missionaries. For them, ecumenical contacts and reducing tensions seemed logical and consistent with their faith. For the larger American public, however, Christianity was inseparably connected to nationalism. Christianity was a reason to fight Communism and to make no compromises with it. These missionaries’ separation from American nationalism led them to advocate views that were untenable in the political climate of 1950’s America.

### **The Recognition Issue and the China Lobby**

By 1949, when it was clear that Communist victory was imminent in China, many missionaries and their organizations called for recognition of the PRC. Most of the missionaries who wanted recognition, however, stayed in China to try to continue their work under Communist rule. Even after the PRC had forced most missionaries to leave in 1951, there was still a feeling among many of them that recognition of the PRC was the best course of action. This demonstrated how out of touch the

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<sup>342</sup> Victor E. W. Hayward. Newsletter: May 5, 1950. CRP RG8 Box 56, Folder 6.

missionaries were with American public opinion. When they returned to the United States, the Korean War was still being fought. The war had hardened American opinion against China even while the missionaries were trying to find an accommodation with the Communists. So while missionaries who could claim authority from both personal knowledge of China and their religious devotion, they found almost no support for their calls for better relations with the PRC. On the contrary, while these missionaries' views were ignored, anti-Communist groups claimed the support of American Christianity for their position of condemning Red China.

The Korean War was the primary catalyst for the solidifying American opinion against Communist China. In June 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea and overran most of South Korea. In September, large American reinforcements arrived under the banner of the United Nations to drive the North Koreans into the far north of the peninsula. The American government had been wary of Chinese intervention but believed that because they had only recently vanquished Chiang Kai-shek's regime, the PRC was in too weak of a position to risk war with the United States. General Douglas MacArthur had assured President Harry Truman that the Chinese would stay out and that the troops would "be home by Christmas." When the Chinese launched a devastating counter-offensive in November 1950, both the American government and the American people were shocked. When General Omar Bradley called Truman about the Chinese attack, he said he had received "a terrible message" from MacArthur that had changed the entire complexion of the war.<sup>343</sup>

The war itself was indecisive, at least on the battlefield. It settled into a stalemate by the summer of 1951, but continued until July 1953. The result was to

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<sup>343</sup> Steven Casey. *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics and Public Opinion in the United States*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

formalize the division of Korea at almost the exact point as before the war. It also pushed American policy towards China into a near complete reversal. Prior to the outbreak of the war, the Truman Administration had accepted that Chiang Kai-shek's regime on Taiwan would soon be overrun by the CCP. After the North Korean Invasion, the United States Government moved the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Straits to "neutralize" them. Although it was ostensibly to prevent the PRC from attacking Taiwan, but was also to prevent Chiang Kai-Shek from taking advantage of the situation to launch an ill-advised attack on the mainland.

In terms of the American public, the most important result was the approximately 40,000 Americans killed or missing.<sup>344</sup> The human losses in the war solidified American opinion against Communism in general, but specifically against the Chinese. The Chinese army was well-disciplined but poorly armed. They used innovative tactics to compensate for their lack of equipment. To the American troops and the reporters embedded with them, those tactics looked like a human wave tactic where the individual Chinese soldier sacrificed their life in a suicidal charge. They would eventually overrun the American positions while accepting huge numbers of casualties. These attacks reinforced the stereotype of the Chinese as a yellow hoard with little regard for individual life. Anti-Chinese news stories and political comics were very common, often with racial allusions involving collectives and mob mentality.<sup>345</sup>

The hatred that many Americans felt towards the Chinese obliterated any early attempts to suggest moderation with China. Even after the war was over, its legacy

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344 The Chinese suffered 150,000 killed or missing according to the official Chinese figures. Some western estimates put the total Chinese fatalities as high as 300,000. Chen Jian. *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

345 Steven Casey. *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics and Public Opinion in the United States*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

would continue to undermine any advocates of engagement for decades. More than anything, the Korean War set the tone of the next two decades of Sino-American relations. While the war was going on, talk of recognizing China was almost impossible. After the war, it was possible, but got very little traction. The American people did not easily get over their fear of Communism, nor did they forget the casualties the Communist Chinese inflicted. Missionaries returned to an environment completely tainted by the war, making their position of moderation a very difficult one to defend.

The most important faction in discussions on China was the China Lobby, which was an informal group of political, religious and business leaders who advocated very forcefully for a hard line against Red China. The China Lobby dominated the debate on China, targeting any politicians who supported recognition of the PRC as potential communist supporters. Although this charge did not always stick, the threat was enough to cut off most debate before it started. The Lobby's most prominent spokesman was Senator William Knowland, a Republican from California, but many of its members had religious connections, which is not surprising given the use of religion in attacks on the PRC.

Congressman Walter Judd had been a Methodist missionary in China prior to World War II. He returned to the United States in 1938 to lobby for more American support for Chiang Kai-shek. Having witnessed the atrocities of the Japanese invasion of China a year earlier, he urged the United States Government to end its policy of isolation to help the besieged Chinese. In 1943, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and became known for his advocacy of China. After World War II, Judd would become even more vocal for support of China, including taking multiple trips to China for fact-finding missions. His conclusions remained the same after each



visit: China needed American help for both moral and practical reasons. In one speech in the House, having just returned from China, Judd quoted another missionary: “When the history of our age is assessed, the present leader of China will stand revealed as one of its greatest men...A man of the people, he knows their needs and has nothing so much at heart as the promotion of their true welfare.”<sup>346</sup> This assessment of Chiang was, at a minimum, very forgiving. It was originally made by Catholic Bishop James E. Walsh. Like most Catholics priests in China, Walsh was very anti-communist, which made them by necessity pro-Chiang as the only alternative in China.

As the Chinese Civil War tilted decisively against Chiang, Judd shifted his speeches. After the Guomindang retreat to Taiwan in early 1949, Judd looked for someone to blame. If the reports of Chiang’s greatness were to be believed, the only explanation was treachery. Judd, like most of the China Lobby, believed that the State Department had sold Chiang out. In a futile attempt to combat these charges in the summer of 1949, the Truman Administration published *United States Relations with China with Special Reference to the Period 1944-1949*, commonly known as the “China White Paper.” This was a collection of government papers on its China policy. It included a summary which argued that Chiang’s regime was incompetent and corrupt. The United States tried to help Chiang but nothing short of direct and massive intervention with American troops could save him.

Rather than placating the China Lobby, the White Paper had the effect of blood in shark-filled waters. Judd was one of many to accuse the Truman Administration of covering up the State Department’s betrayal of Chiang. Immediately after its publication, Judd claimed that a World War II report was left out because it said that

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<sup>346</sup> Walter H. Judd. “Blunder Out of China”, Speech in U.S. House of Representatives, July 26, 1947. U.S. Government Printing Office, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA. RG82-65-16.

the CCP was Soviet-dominated and a Communist controlled China would be a disaster for the United States. Judd used the report to show that the White Paper was little more than propaganda to defend a failed policy.<sup>347</sup> In October 1949, Judd used the House floor to accuse the State Department of “conniving” against Chiang at the end of World War II.<sup>348</sup> He made repeated speeches decrying the betrayal of Chiang, using similar language and often referring to World War II as the defining point. The decisions made to support the Soviet Union, particularly at the Yalta Conference in 1945, undermined Chiang’s position after the war, eventually leading to his defeat. In a 1951 speech, Judd bemoaned the “sacrifice of China in a vain attempt to get Communist friendship.”<sup>349</sup> Judd would continue this theme throughout the 1950’s. In 1954, in a speech discussing policy for all of East Asia, Judd called for increased support to counter the Communist plan for “the overthrow of the free world.” He went on to say that China had already been lost after Yalta, which was “the first of a series of concessions that some people thought would satisfy the Communists.”<sup>350</sup> For Judd, Yalta became the equivalent of the appeasement of Hitler at Munich. It was the great betrayal that only encouraged an implacable aggressor.

Another vocal member of the China Lobby was William Johnson. Like Judd, he had been a missionary to China. Johnson had served thirty-six years in China, refusing to leave during the Japanese occupation. He was put in an internment camp by the Japanese in 1941 and was repatriated to the United States the next year. Upon returning to the United States, he worked as a minister, but really wanted to return to China. He had been in China most of his adult life and considered it his home. After World War II ended, he applied for any position that would take him back. His age

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347 “Secret War Report on China Suppressed, Judd Charges” *New York Times*, Aug. 21, 1949, p.1.

348 “U.S. Aides Fought Chiang, Says Judd” *New York Times*, Oct. 19, 1949. p.24.

349 “Judd Sees China Sacrificed by U.S.” *New York Times*, Oct. 10, 1951.

350 “Rep. Judd Urges U.S. Firmness in Far East”, *Winona Republican Herald*, Apr. 24, 1954, p. 3.

(almost 70 at war's end) meant that neither mission boards nor private agencies would hire him.<sup>351</sup>

Being stuck in the United States, Johnson became a full-time lobbyist for China. He began a speaking tour on China while the war was still going. After the war, he continued at a vigorous pace despite his age, but changed from an anti-Japanese theme to an anti-Communist one. He believed that the Communists would destroy China's integrity at the very moment when Chiang Kai-shek was restoring her greatness. He was convinced, and sought to convince others, that Mao was simply a pawn for the Soviet Union. Like Judd, he believed that assisting Chiang was both the moral and practical thing to do. Aside from helping a traditional friend (meaning both China as a whole and Chiang specifically), assisting China would weaken Moscow and protect the United States.<sup>352</sup>

The term indefatigable would be an understatement for Johnson's efforts on China's behalf. In 1946 alone, he reportedly made 361 speeches across the country.<sup>353</sup> He wrote dozens of articles about China and the need to fight Communism. He also kept up a staggering correspondence with members of Congress and their staffers. Using money from his pension as well as donations from like-minded supporters, Johnson would take trips to Washington to lobby in person. On one ten-day trip to Washington at the end of 1947, he met with over 60 Senators and Representatives and over 250 of their staff.<sup>354</sup>

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351 *Religion and American Foreign Policy 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

352 *Ibid*

353 Missionary Record Project, Yale University Divinity School.

<http://drs.library.yale.edu:8083/HLTransformer/HLTransServlet?style=yul.ead2002.xhtml.xsl&pid=divinity:006&query=maps&clear-stylesheet-cache=yes&hlon=yes&filter=fgs.collection:%22Divinity%20Library%22&hitPageStart=51>

354 *Religion and American Foreign Policy 1945-196: The Soul of Containment*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Like Judd, when the Communists came to power in China, he began looking for someone to blame. Also like Judd, he believed the State Department had stabbed Chiang in the back. In repeated speeches and articles, Johnson accused the State Department of duplicity and/or incompetence. In one speech in 1951, he said, "Were Secretary Acheson performing his duties as a member of the Communist sabotage group under Kremlin direction, it is difficult to discover how he could have done more, or left more undone, than he has to serve the Kremlin's purpose."<sup>355</sup> In 1952, he was called to a Senate hearing where he said that a recently finished treaty with Japan would continue the Truman Administration's policy that favored the Chinese Communists to the detriment of Taiwan.<sup>356</sup>

Also important in the China Lobby was Henry Luce, the founder and publisher of the magazines *Time*, *Life* and *Fortune*. Luce had been born in China to missionary parents and had developed a strong admiration for Chiang Kai-Shek. As a result, *Time* became one of the loudest voices supporting Chiang, putting him the cover a total of ten times from the 1920's to the 1950's. He and his wife visited Chiang's wartime capital of Chongqing in 1941 and began urging for increased aid to Chiang's regime.

He returned to China in 1945, only three months after the war had ended, and stepped up his calls for aid to Chiang against his new/old enemy, the Communists. His tour of China reinforced his opinions of Chiang's abilities and "invincible effort." Luce's tour of China was colored not only by his own admiration of Chiang, but also because there was no counter-voice. He was accompanied by two ardently anti-Communist editors from Time Inc. (which included *Fortune* and *Life*), Roy Alexander and Charles V. Murphy. His support staff was well-aware of his dislike of criticism, so

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<sup>355</sup> "Asia Delivered", *Sandusky Register Star News*, June 22, 1951, p. 4.

<sup>356</sup> William S. White. "MacArthur's Views on Pacts Sought", *New York Times*, Jan. 26, 1952.

they offered no dissent to his conclusions. And, of course, his GMD hosts were not about to temper his enthusiasm for their cause.<sup>357</sup>

When Luce returned to the United States, he threw himself into Chiang's cause. He went so far as to censor his chief China correspondent, Theodore White, because of what Luce perceived as his sympathy towards the Communists. Luce and his Foreign Editor would rewrite White's dispatches, without White's consent, to give a more pro-Chiang tone. In the process, they dramatically changed the point of most of his articles. As a result, *Time* became a mouthpiece for the Chiang regime, despite the findings of the magazine's most senior correspondent there.

After the Communist victory, Luce, like Judd and Johnson, threw the blame on the Truman Administration. He used both his magazines and his personal fame to attack Truman and the State Department as often as possible. In an interview in 1966, Luce said that even after more than a decade, he was not able to "excuse the American government." Although Luce was interested in many political and economic issues, the ties he felt towards China through his parents and his personal relationship with Chiang Kai-shek gave the issue of China a passion that drove him throughout his life.<sup>358</sup>

The China Lobby was too diverse a group to generalize its membership, but they had at least one thing in common: China was their primary issue. They feared and hated Communist China while wanting to support Chiang Kai-shek's "Free China" in Taiwan. After the Communist victory, they all asked "Who lost China?" They would name various people, all of whom were associated with the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations. Some undoubtedly did this for political gain, but many others felt very strong ties to China and felt that the United States had betrayed it by not backing

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<sup>357</sup> Alan Brinkley. *The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*

Chiang fully. Some, such as Judd, Johnson and Luce, also shared a connection to Christian missions there and so mixed in religious issues as well.

Judd, Johnson and Luce also had one other thing in common. They formed their opinions prior to World War II and only returned to China briefly, if at all. There is no question that Chiang Kai-shek mismanaged the war against the Japanese. Once the United States was at war with Japan, Chiang looked content to let the Americans beat the Japanese while he saved his own forces for the coming fight with the Communists. He valued loyalty over competence and allowed rampant corruption in his government. His dismal performance during the war was in stark contrast to his campaign to unify China in the 1920's and his successful campaigns against the Communists in the early 1930's. Judd, Johnson and Luce formed their opinions of Chiang when he was in his heyday. They did not adjust their opinions of him despite growing evidence that Chiang had proven himself to be a terrible war-time leader (including both World War II and the Chinese Civil War). Instead, they clung to him as the hero of China and used every available avenue to advance his cause in the United States.

With strong voices like Judd, Johnson and Luce, the China Lobby dominated discussion of China in the 1950's. They took advantage of the growing fear of communism and the threat it posed to intimidate many of their opponents into silence. The political beating they had given Truman for the "loss of China" made other politicians wary of crossing them. For instance, when Dwight D. Eisenhower came to the Presidency in 1953, he made no moves to recognize the PRC despite his view that non-recognition was ridiculous. His Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, shared this view but kept up the outward appearance of a staunch support of Chiang Kai-shek. Both felt recognition was an obvious policy. They believed that trade with China was a

positive thing for the US economy and for its allies. They also believed that recognition did not imply approval of a government, but was the acknowledgment of that government's control over its country. To not recognize the PRC was to deny reality. Yet they did not feel strongly enough about recognition to pay the political price for crossing the China Lobby. Both Eisenhower and Dulles were focused on Europe and felt that Asia was a distraction, so they gave lip service to the ideas of the China Lobby while Eisenhower privately referred to Knowland as “extraordinarily stupid.” Eisenhower’s popularity gave him the clout to push back against the China Lobby had he wanted to, but chose not to. The White House’s refusal to engage in the debate meant that the China Lobby’s voice was able to dictate discussion of China.<sup>359</sup>

The China Lobby’s position was reinforced by the rising power and aggressiveness of Joseph McCarthy, another person that Eisenhower viewed with disdain but declined to resist. McCarthy had risen from obscurity as a crusader against communist infiltration in American government and society. Although the term “McCarthyism” was coined because of him, he was not the cause of the anti-communist hysteria, but was its most visible representative. His attacks on suspected communists, which were often televised, were both a manifestation of that hysteria and fuel for it to grow further. The visibility of McCarthy and other anti-Communist crusaders strengthened the atmosphere of fear of the 1950’s while also reinforcing the Cold War consensus.<sup>360</sup>

While McCarthy and the China Lobby were fellow travelers in their hatred of international Communism, they had different priorities. McCarthy was ostensibly

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359 Nancy Bernkopt Tucker. *Patterns in the Dust: Chinese-American Relations and the Recognition Controversy, 1949-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

360 Ellen Schreck. *Many are the Crimes*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

trying to root out communist agents and sympathizers in the United States.<sup>361</sup> The China Lobby, on the other hand, was obsessed with protecting Taiwan while attacking Red China. In their policy prescriptions for China, they emphasized human rights and religion. For example, when a political organization affiliated with the China Lobby petitioned President Truman not to recognize the PRC in 1950, part of its argument referred to attacks on missionaries and Chinese Christians. This group, which had the cumbersome title of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding Anti-Communist China, was made up of American businessmen, politicians and some clergy, including several former missionaries. The petition said that recognition would be a “political mistake.” It used the argument that the PRC did not represent its people and was morally reprehensible. It accused the PRC of having missionaries killed, although it did not offer specifics for who or how many. It concluded with “we see no greater hope for freedom in China than in other satellite countries.”<sup>362</sup>

Another group in the China Lobby, the Committee of One Million Against the Admission of Communist China to the United Nations, also claimed wide ranging religious support. This committee was formed in 1953 and became a vociferous advocate for Taiwan. It sent many petitions to the White House for that purpose, couching its arguments in “decency” and “civilization.”<sup>363</sup> The committee actively recruited clergy for its cause, so that by the end of the decade it had over 7,000 signing its petitions.<sup>364</sup>

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361 Many historians argue that his primary goal was not catching communists, but promoting his own career. Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991). David M. Oshinsky. *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005).

362 “Clergy Urge U.S. Bar to Communist China”, *New York Times*, Oct. 2 1950.

363 “Red China Ban Backed: Committee of One Million Send Endorsement to President”, *New York Times*, Jul. 9, 1954.

364 Stanley D. Bachrack. *The Committee of One Million: “China Lobby” Politics, 1953-1971*, (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1977).



Both of these committees were clearly associated with the China Lobby and both were associated with large groups of Christians, but their claim to be the voice for American Christianity was misleading. Religious leaders made up one of the only segments of American society in which there was no clear consensus on how to deal with Communism. They were much more likely to be in favor of recognizing the PRC than were leaders from other fields of work. A 1955 Gallup poll on recognizing the PRC questioned the leaders of various fields of work including business/industry, law, medicine, journalism, science, government and education/religion. While the overall poll was 34% in favor of recognition and 61% against, 48% of the leaders of education/religion were in favor of recognition with 46% against. This was significantly higher than any other field and showed that, while there was no large agreement among religious leaders, they were much less likely to view the PRC with open hostility.<sup>365</sup>

Among religious leaders, mission boards were the most likely to want recognition of Communist China. They believed that improved relations with China would probably help the cause of Chinese Christians. Former missionaries and mission boards were among the most vocal segments of American society to advocate recognition. They often tried to mitigate the criticisms they heard of the PRC to give a more accurate view. In one case the Secretary for the Presbyterian Church Mission Board, Lloyd Ruland, replied to a church leader to dispel a complaint made against the Communist regime. "There seems to be a general belief that our Board has lost its property to the Communists and that large sums of money have gone into the hands of the Communists. This is entirely untrue." He went on to show the legality and reasonableness of the seizures, despite the fact that the church suffered for it. He

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<sup>365</sup> "Red China in U.N.? Some Leaders Say Yes", *Ogden Standard Examiner*, May 27, 1955: 6.

added, “The action of the Communist Government in taking over all American properties was a formal procedure in retaliation for a similar action taken by the American Government in connection with Chinese funds and properties held in this country.” The charge of confiscation of property, so important to the Anglo-American legal system, was a common refrain against Communist countries. When that property was owned by the church, the violation became even more damning in American eyes. The fact that a church official would defend the action as a simple quid-pro-quo demonstrates how the mission board was trying to give a more balanced view of China. This was even more remarkable because Ruland’s letter was written in 1951, while the Korean War was still going.<sup>366</sup>

Religious groups made several direct petitions to the White House for recognition of the PRC, beginning as early as 1950. They stopped during the Korean War but got more direct in their advocacy of recognition as the decade progressed. These petitions were invariably dismissed, but raised the ire of other Americans. A 1955 petition to the White House drew fire from supporters of Chiang’s regime in “Free China” as appeasement. One letter from a Chinese-American who fled China after the Communist victory used religious persecution as his first argument: “They [mainline churches] should realize that while their attitude is so beneficent to Red China, they themselves could not enjoy freedom of religion or thought or action in the China mainland, nor can the Christian churches avoid persecution.” The image of religious persecution and an atheist government made for a very strong argument for most Americans.<sup>367</sup> In 1958, prominent rabbi Dr. William F. Rosenblum challenged another such petition to recognize the PRC. He said that recognition would only aid plans of advancing world communism. Communist leaders’ “avowed purpose is so

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<sup>366</sup> Lloyd S. Ruland. Letter to Elleroy M. Smith, Apr. 10, 1951, PHS RG82-68-6.

<sup>367</sup> Stephen C. Y. Pan. “Churchmen’s Solution Held Contrary to American Sentiment”, *New York Times*, Apr. 8, 1955: 20.

palpably to destroy the very religions upon which the clergymen draw for their ideals.”<sup>368</sup>

Among the most consistent advocates of better ties with the PRC was the National Council of Churches. Ernest Gross, the NCC’s head of the Department of International Affairs in the mid-1950’s, made a strong but nuanced address at the end of 1956 about the politics of dealing with China. His address to the American Assembly, a non-partisan public policy forum started by Eisenhower when he was President of Columbia University, tried to balance two issues. The first was that Communism was anathema to the American way of life. But he went on to say that China was too important to be ignored. His overall argument was that even though Communism was something to be resisted, logic dictated that only through negotiation and direct contact could the United States engage and potentially moderate “their present lawless course of behavior.”<sup>369</sup> He did not advocate recognition, but asked those present at the conference to acknowledge that China was too important to leave negotiations to intermediaries. He argued for direct contacts between the United States and China in the hopes that engagement would curb the extremist tendencies of the Communist regime.<sup>370</sup>

The tone of his speech left little room for doubt about his opinion of Communism. At one point Gross said, “It is clear also that the vast majority on Taiwan reject communism and could be enslaved only against their will.”<sup>371</sup> He later added, “The Red Chinese regime may well fall for lack of support or for other cause. We

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368 “Rabbi Disparages Ties to Red China”, *The New York Times*, Nov. 30, 1958.

369 Ernest Gross. Address to 10<sup>th</sup> American Assembly, Arden House, Nov. 17, 1956. CRG RG8 Box 56 Folder 10.

370 With no official diplomatic relations between the United States and the PRC, negotiations usually took place through a third, and sometimes a fourth, party. There were direct Ambassadorial talks in Warsaw beginning in 1955, but they accomplished nothing until 1970.

371 Ernest Gross. Address to 10<sup>th</sup> American Asembly, Arden House, Nov. 17, 1956. CRG RG8 Box 56 Folder 10.

must hope that it will, if it persists in flouting the civilized code.” Trained as a lawyer, Gross had worked in the U.S. Government in several capacities, including having been on the UN delegation that negotiated the end of the Korean War. He used the importance of law and democracy as the basis for his opposition to Communism. He contrasted that with Taiwan, which was a bastion for freedom and democracy in China. He said, “Taiwan is a repository of political and professional leadership of Free China. It is a fact which tends to be submerged by the more newsworthy items of military personalities and activities.”<sup>372</sup> Yet he also advocated admitting the PRC into the UN, believing that subjecting it to international law would bring it into the norms of the “civilized world.” Gross was clearly critical of American policy under President Eisenhower, but did not suggest that Communism was posed no danger. He felt that engagement with the PRC would show it the benefits of tempering its behavior, while isolation would only reinforce its xenophobia and extremism.<sup>373</sup>

The NCC consistently pushed for recognition after the Korean War. One of its most vocal leaders, John A. Mackay, shared the views of many former missionaries to China even though he had never traveled there. MacKay had been a missionary to Latin America and shared an ecumenical outlook common to many missionaries. As a Presbyterian raised in Scotland but having been educated at Princeton before his mission work and then returning to teach at Yale, MacKay had a very broad worldview. That attitude led him to join many returned missionaries from China in campaigning for recognition of the PRC. Through his leadership positions in the NCC or as the Chairman of the International Missionary Council, he was one of the best

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<sup>372</sup> It should be noted that Chiang Kai-shek consolidated his personal rule in Taiwan as he never had been able to on the Mainland. While many intellectuals and civil leaders went to Taiwan with the GMD, Chiang . Taiwan practiced the principle of “one man, one vote”. Chiang Kai-shek was the man and he had the vote.

<sup>373</sup> Ernest Gross. Address to 10<sup>th</sup> American Asembly, Arden House, Nov. 17, 1956. CRG RG8 Box 56 Folder 10.

known advocates of recognition. His leadership in the ecumenical movement, whose members were often advocates of better relations with the PRC, probably influenced his opinion on opening relations with China. Mackay used similar terms as Gross. Communism was dangerous but only through discussions could the United States bring Communists around to more reasonable behavior. In 1952, while the United States was fighting the Chinese in Korea, McKay authored a statement that was adopted by the NCC that called for “the United States to persevere in ‘honest negotiation’ to solve world tensions ‘in the face of the most aggravating opposition’.” After the war ended, so did MacKay’s position. Once the armistice was signed, he soon joined other former missionaries in calling for full relations with the PRC.<sup>374</sup>

In 1957, Mackay was instrumental in proposing a trip by American clergymen to China to meet with Chinese Christians. The trip did not materialize, but it did provoke an outcry among the American press. One newspaper wrote, “American clergymen actually propose to drive a breach into our nation’s boycott of Red China.” It added that the boycott was put in place because of “the murderous attack of the Red Chinese on our American troops at the Yalu River in November, 1950.”<sup>375</sup> Another paper wrote, “We always are amazed and more than a little puzzled when clergymen find it impossible to understand that communism today is just as anti-God as it was when Marx and Engels, founders of modern communism, made their historic pronouncement that religion is the ‘opium of the people’.”<sup>376</sup>

### **Overwhelming Mainstream Opposition to Red China:**

While some Christians hoped that Chinese Churches would soon rejoin the world communion, they were essentially voices in the wilderness. Driven by their

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374 George Cornell. “Dallas Bishop is Elected Head of Nation’s Largest Religious Group”, *Morning Avalanche*, Dec. 13, 1952: p. 12.

375 “Monsterism”, *The Hattiesburg American*, Mar. 14, 1957: p. 8-A.

376 “Softness Toward Red China”, *The Newport Daily News*, May 15, 1957: 20.

ecumenism, these Christians wanted to reach out to those they disagreed with to engage them in discussion and hopefully change their mind. Even if such a change of mind was not forthcoming, the dialogue would create a greater understanding between the two sides and, hopefully, a greater acceptance of the other's position.<sup>377</sup> A clearer picture of the PRC might dispel some of the fear and paranoia that was rampant in the early Cold War. Of course, the call for this dialogue was based on the assumption that the Chinese Communists were not as dangerous as was popularly assumed. Most Americans, however, were satisfied with the consensus that Red China was the enemy. While these ecumenical Christians were trying to find a way to engage with China, the mainstream American discussion of China echoed the ideas of the China Lobby. Debate was limited to what China was doing wrong and what could be done to stop it. Not only would those ecumenical Christians be ignored, but their religion and in some cases their stories would play a large part in crafting the narrative that they opposed.

The most consistent portrayal of the PRC was the general oppression by the Communist government, with religion taking a prominent place. The abuse of Christians and church property was reported quite often by the American press. While it no doubt made for good press and a strong readership, it also served to highlight the evils of Communism and the moral nature of resisting it. These stories reinforced the popular view of Red China as a malevolent force in the world.

Some stories about Communist abuse of religion occurred while missionaries were still in China. For instance, in October 1950 the *New York Times* reported the new PRC government was enacting a policy to end all mission schools. The PRC spokesman said that it was to attain "educational sovereignty." They stressed that

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<sup>377</sup> Daniel Kasomo, Nicholas Ombachi, Joseph Musyoka, Napoo Naila. "Historical Survey of the Concept of Ecumenical Movement, Its model and Contemporary Problems", *International Journal of Applied Sociology*, Vol. 2, Iss. 5, p.47-51. David Hein. "The Episcopal Church and the Ecumenical Movement, 1937-1997: Presbyterians, Lutherans, and the Future." *Anglican and Episcopal History*, Vol. 66, Iss. 4, 4-29.

teachers' and students' beliefs would be safeguarded by China's religious freedom, but that the institutions would lose their Christian character. According to the article, Zhou Enlai thought that the United States would use religious organizations to spy on and disrupt the political movements of the Chinese people under the CCP.<sup>378</sup>

That story, unlike many, was verifiable because it dealt with published government policies. It was less dramatic than others, but showed the Communist animosity toward religion. Other stories with similar themes were based on little more than rumor. In March 1951, *The New York Times* published another article about nineteen Chinese Christians who were arrested in Tientsin as spies for the Guomindang. One missionary was reportedly executed and another apparently died while in captivity. They were accused by a Tientsin newspaper of "abusing religion." The difficulty with cases like this is that there was no way to verify the details at the time. Most of the information was rumors that could have been distorted or picked up as CCP propaganda through newspaper and radio. Nevertheless, major newspapers across the country repeatedly printed even the most dramatic and improbable accounts, often with no verification whatsoever. One missionary in Hong Kong tried to confirm the story of the executed missionary in Tientsin but could find no information on the report.<sup>379</sup> Nevertheless, stories condemning Red China made for good press and good sales, even if they might be exaggerated or false.<sup>380</sup>

While missionaries were in China, their stories were often covered by newspapers. Once the last missionaries left China, they could provide their own first-hand accounts. Some missionaries would tell harrowing tales of their time under Communism. They would give interviews, write articles or occasionally memoirs which seldom put Communist China in a good light. A few missionaries were

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378 Henry R. Leiberger. "China Reds to End Mission Schools", *New York Times*, Oct. 16, 1950: 5.

379 Ed Walline. Letter to J. L. Hooper, Dec. 27, 1951.

380 "Red China Holds 19 as 'Church Spies'", *The New York Times*, March 2, 1951.

forbidden to leave the PRC, facing imprisonment for a variety of charges, usually relating to espionage. These stories were frequently carried by religious publications and sometimes made it to the mainstream press.

Missionaries who had been detained started trickling out of China in 1952 a few at a time, but only to limited public attention. Missionary organizations and church newsletters would carry the news, but the mainstream press only gave them short mentions. In October 1952, three missionaries were released with more fanfare. Part of that extra attention was undoubtedly timing. The Korean War was in a stalemate. The biggest issue in the negotiations was the return of POWs. After World War II, Soviet soldiers who had been captured by Germany had been repatriated to the Soviet Union. Upon their return, many of them were arrested, imprisoned and/or executed by the Soviet government as German collaborators. President Truman felt this was a stain on American honor and refused to conclude a peace with North Korea/China until he was assured that prisoners of war would not be forced to return to their home country against their will. It should not be surprising that the return of these missionaries, as prisoners during the war, received more interest.<sup>381</sup>

An additional factor was the notoriety of two of the missionaries, Frank and Esther Price. Both had been in China for more than thirty years. Frank was a second generation missionary to China who was known for his dedication to his work and friendly demeanor. He had chosen to stay in China during World War II and then again after the Communist victory. During the war and immediately afterwards, Price had advised Chiang Kai-shek on a variety of issues, including how to deal with the United States. His friendship with Chiang made him something of a celebrity among missionaries, but it also made him a target for the Communists. His capture and

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<sup>381</sup> William Stueck. *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).



imprisonment was more noted in the press than most others at the time. When he was captured, a GMD source put out the report that he was being detained for espionage and tortured.<sup>382</sup> A month later the story was challenged, saying that Price was “unmolested” by the Communists.<sup>383</sup> After still another month, he was confirmed as arrested and accused of spying.<sup>384</sup> He and his wife were released in late 1952 to some public note.<sup>385</sup> The reason for their release was never made public. They had been subjected to repeated accusation meetings against them with innumerable charges, but were eventually released without explanation. Curiously, they had a fairly comfortable captivity despite their supposed crimes. They were well fed and had some freedom of movement. Their treatment, according to Ed Walline who moved to become the Presbyterian administrator in Hong Kong, “constitutes another of the paradoxes of official procedure in the Peoples’ China that the ordinary mind cannot understand.”<sup>386</sup>

By coincidence of timing, the Prices left China with John Hayes. Hayes was less well-known upon his release, but he would become much better known after returning to the United States. Hayes was born in China to missionary parents. After receiving degrees in divinity and theology in the United States, he returned to China to work in education and development. Hayes had a much worse time under Communist rule than did the Prices. He was kept in prison and put on trial as a spy. When he returned to the United States, he described his treatment in a lengthy article in *U.S. News and World Report*. He said that the Chinese did not beat him, but they did deprive him of food and disrupt his sleep for weeks or months at a time. Despite his

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382 *The New York Times*, Mar. 17, 1951.

383 Norman Johnson. “Reports Indicate Dr. Frank Price, Missionary, Safe”, *The Rocky Mount Evening Telegram*, Apr. 6. 1951: 7.

384 “Dr. Price Held By Reds, Report”, *The Rocky Mount Evening Telegram*, May 21, 1951: p. 10. “This week in Religion”, *The Walla Walla Union Bulletin*, July 25, 1951: 10.

385 *Kingsport Times News*, Oct. 5, 1952: p. A-6.

386 E.E. Walline. Letter to J. L. Dodds, Presbyterian Mission Board, Sept. 30, 1952, PHS RG82-68-16.

treatment, he offered a matter of fact account that had very little emotional language. Even without strong language, his description strongly condemned the Communist system. He talked about trying to live in the PRC as a teacher before being arrested. He then got more graphic with descriptions of “death carts” that carried the corpses of those that had been executed that day to a mass grave. When asked about brainwashing, he said, “It should be called ‘brain-wringing’” because they did not convince him that Communism was right, but did confuse him enough that he began to question reality. Yet he also maintained a typical American trope – that Communist governments may hate the United States, but the people still wanted their freedom. “Despite all this, friendship built up during the war years and the memory of philanthropic and missionary effort over many years cannot be erased.” He later said, “Even when I was marched across the public drill ground after 10 months in prison, a little youngster saw me and raised up his thumbs calling out, ‘America tops!’ The guard smiled.”<sup>387</sup> There is no way to verify the validity of Hayes’s story, but he was saying all the things that American people were receptive to hearing.

Two years later, ABC would make a television episode about his confinement called “The Brainwashing of John Hayes” starring Vincent Price. The show was classic propaganda, showing the Communists trying to dehumanize him and make him confess. Even though Hayes eventually did sign a confession while in China, in the show he remained unbroken. After a Chinese friend accused him in court of spying, Hayes told him that the Communists would betray him too. When he was exiled instead of executed<sup>388</sup>, the judge explains that they let Hayes go because he had the “friendship of the people.” Then, of course, his friend realized his mistake in

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<sup>387</sup> “I Saw Red China From the Inside: An American Tells Story of 3 Years Under Communist Rule”, *U.S. News and World Report*, Mar. 13, 1953: 26-39,.

<sup>388</sup> There is no evidence that he was to be executed in China. Hayes was never sure on the exact charges or why he was released.

attacking Hayes, denounced the Communists and was executed on the orders of Soviet officer. The show ended with a boy saying “America tops!” and then the narrator saying that Hayes was given new hope because “for as Christians think, so in the end must their captors.”<sup>389</sup>

There are very few reports on Hayes after that, probably because as much as he disliked the PRC, he believed that the United States should work with China, especially to reunite with Chinese Christians. He only gave the one interview to a major media outlet. Most of his public speaking was to small church groups on the subject of ecumenism rather than anti-communism. He did make the news briefly in 1954, when he administered communion to President Eisenhower and his wife at the National Presbyterian Church, before walking the President to the door at the end of the service. The reports of the service did not include any statements by Hayes, but did include a summary of the sermon, which was delivered by a more senior minister. It alluded to the fallacies of communism as a substitute for religion, saying, “mankind was divided into two categories, the lords and the slaves, the rulers and the ruled, the free and the unfree.”<sup>390</sup> It appears that for the purposes of anti-communism, Hayes made a better symbol than a speaker.<sup>391</sup>

When Hayes later returned to mission work in Indonesia, his wife, Barbara, could not accompany him for health reasons. While she remained in the United States, she took over his role of public speaking, but also focused on promoting the ecumenical movement rather than anti-Communism. Her approach seemed out of step with mainstream America and, like her husband, she spoke almost exclusively to

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389 “The Brainwashing of John Hayes”, *TV’s Reader’s Digest*, Nov. 7, 1955.

<http://archive.org/details/TvsReadersDigestTheBrainwashingOfJohnHayes>.

390 Ironically, this sermon about Communism not being a substitute for religion resembled many impassioned speeches by Chinese Communists urging the Chinese people to throw off the lords/rulers to become free themselves.

391 “Eisenhower’s Worship: Ex-Prisoner of Chinese Reds Aids in Communion Service”, Dec. 13, 1954.

church groups. Part of her standard talk was to suggest that Americans stop viewing the world through the bi-polar Cold War lens. She suggested that most peoples in Asia and Africa wanted independence and “hope for peace,” making an analogy between their independence movements and those of the American colonies in 1776. While she disliked Communism, particularly for its suppression of Christianity, she showed her ecumenical beliefs by saying, “We all need to pray more for the Communists and hate them less. That’s the Christian way.”<sup>392</sup> Like many ecumenical Christians, she wanted to engage rather than condemn those with whom she disagreed. Barbara Hayes had returned to the United States in 1950, while her husband remained working in China and was later imprisoned. Even while he was imprisoned, she spoke favorably of the CCP in comparison to Chiang Kai-shek’s rule. With the incompetence of Chiang’s regime, it was only natural that the Chinese turn to something that addressed the concerns of the masses. Even though she understood why the Chinese looked to Communism for salvation, she said that “Communism isn’t the answer for China.”<sup>393</sup> She was continuing her husband’s work, which was to disdain communism but still recognize that the communist government was a reality and must be worked with.

The story of John Hayes was one of many that made for good anti-Communist press. The Communist attacks on religion in China made for a powerful story across American media. In 1953, prominent journalist Fred Sparks wrote a scathing article called, “How Commies Crush Religion in China” that was carried in newspapers across the country. Sparks was well-known for his coverage of the Korean War, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1951. After the war, he continued to work in East Asia, including reporting on what information he could obtain on China. He started

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<sup>392</sup> “Asians Regards Selves as Hope of World Peace”, *The Gettysburg Times*, Mary 17, 1956: 1.

<sup>393</sup> “Long-Time Mission Worker Assumes Role of ‘Grandma’”, *The Walla Walla Union Bulletin*, May 6, 1951: 20.

this article with a couple of vivid anecdotes about religious persecutions. “They led the Catholic priest through the public square by a ring placed in his nose like a cow. They tossed the Protestant minister into a pit of filth and made him dig his way out with chopsticks as the newsreel cameras turned.” Sparks depicted a China that was full of vigor after the end of the Korean War and was flexing its muscles. It wanted to push missionaries out, but not actually use force to make them to go. If missionaries opted to stay, as in one example he cited, the Chinese Communists would find ways to make their lives intolerable. He described Father Caouette, who was assigned to street sweeping duty starting at 4am. Then they interrupted his church services, eventually forcing the congregation to meet outside. When none of that worked and Caouette remained, the authorities started harassing his Chinese flock and then led him around naked as depicted in the opening vignette. Sparks’ article was one of many that depicted Red China as full of heathens who attack good God-fearing men. His depiction of the Communist Chinese society and its “religious freedom” was more graphic than most, but its theme of Communism attacking religion was common.<sup>394</sup>

Another example was a story in *Newsweek* earlier that year. It described an American Catholic priest who had been put on trial for spying for the United States. The article reported that Robert W. Greene “saw his mission compound turn into a Red hell. His church was dismantled, a picture of Mao Tse-tung<sup>395</sup> replaced the crucifix, and the church was used as a jail from which poured the screams of those strung up by their thumbs.” The article painted the Communists as profaning religion, but it also showed their larger political agenda. According to the article, when Greene was being released, the judge told him, “We have had our benefit from you – our purpose has been achieved.” The implication is that the trial was for propaganda,

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<sup>394</sup> Fred Sparks. “How Commies Crush Religion in China”, *The Lima News*, Dec. 20, 1953: 10.

<sup>395</sup> Mao Tse-tung is now generally referred to as Mao Zedong.

probably for both domestic and international audiences. But the judge went on, “You are now 40 years of age, but remember, you will never see 50. Do you know why? Because in ten years we shall have America. The Communists in America will take care of you.” Not only was Red China attacking religion in China, but it had targeted the United States. 396

Another story that year highlighted the fear of godlessness that most Americans associated with communism. Albert Ravenholt, an American correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News* who had covered China since the beginning of World War II, wrote a report from Hong Kong on Christianity in China in the autumn of 1953. The report was published as a series in papers across the country. His lengthy account starts with the first introduction of Christianity to China in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE but quickly goes into an analysis that was critical of both missionaries and Communists.<sup>397</sup> Ravenholt’s articles were not particularly inflammatory but their reception shows one problem that missionaries faced when they returned to the United States. The response to the articles was rage against the PRC. For example, one reader responded, “If anyone ever needed any further arguments against communism and its ungodly aims, these articles were it.”<sup>398</sup> The balance in Ravenholt’s reporting was lost to an American public that was already settling into the early Cold War. The press largely fed the public fear, making reporters like Ravenwood, who did not automatically condemn Communists and their actions, a minority.

Raging against communism was well-received, while more nuanced views were ignored or attacked. For instance, a teacher in Colorado argued against a former missionary’s idea to be open to China. He made a speech that continually referred to Communism as fundamentally antagonistic to religion. He referenced China directly

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396 “Calvary in China”, *Newsweek*, Apr. 13, 1953: 54.

397 Albert Ravenholt, “Christianity in China”, Oct. 6, 1953. CRP RG8 Box 56 Folder 11.

398 James Daly, Letter to the Editor, *Long Island City New York Star Journal*, Jan. 18, 1954, 4.

by arguing that the Three-Self Church was merely a smokescreen that covered the attack on religion. Ultimately it distorted Christian faith to support the government.<sup>399</sup>

A regional paper in Iowa, *The Mason City Globe Gazette*, published an editorial that had a similar view. Red China only tolerated religion when it could be used for the needs of the state. When discussing religion, the editor, W. Earle Hall, quoted a statement by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai: “It is ridiculous to separate religion from politics.” Hall commented, “That was the first tip-off to the fact that in Red China religion must serve political purposes.” He continued by citing an observation by a student member of the Australian team that visited the PRC. The student said that the purpose of religion in the PRC was “the complete and final eradication of real religion.”<sup>400</sup> Hall’s editorial was also broadcast on the radio. Even though his reading and listening audience was small, his point by point condemnation of Communist China and his use of religion was typical of the mainstream press at the time.

One missionary, although not American, became a totem for anti-Communism. Ambrose Poletti, an Italian Catholic priest, had been expelled from China in 1950. He was reassigned to Kowloon, which was the part of Hong Kong on the mainland and was where most refugees left the PRC. He claimed to have greeted thousands of missionaries as they escaped China. He also detailed the suffering he had seen from missionaries who had been detained in China. In an October 1955 article in *Time*, there were pictures of him helping to carry an elderly Italian bishop who had been tortured by the Chinese. The article served the double purpose of condemning the Chinese while also showing the indomitability of Christian faith. The bishop, Alfonso

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<sup>399</sup> Beverly Barret. “Conflict Between Communism and Religion Stressed by Dr. Braden”, *Greely Daily Tribune*, July 27, 1954.

<sup>400</sup> W. Earle Hall. “One Man’s Opinion”, *Mason City Globe Gazette*, Oct. 14, 1957.

Ferrari, was described as “a beriberi-ridden 70-pound skeleton.” *Time* reported the defiant words of the bishop that sounded very similar to those of the televised John Hayes: “Despite their threats and torture, I would never change my mind. They wanted to put a Communist brain into mine. They failed.”<sup>401</sup>

Poletti was profiled the next year by the *New York Times* in an article that served the same dual purpose. It showed him as a jovial man who helped long-suffering escaping missionaries finish their journey to freedom. It also took the opportunity to mention the injustice of the PRC and its treatment of religion, while praising the virtuous missionaries. The Communists had “virtually completed the liquidation of a century and a half and more of foreign missionary works in China.” It mentioned the good work the missionaries had done, which “included education, medicine and public health, orphan care, youth activity and relief as well as religion.” It also included a list of missionaries being held in prison in China as well as the three that had died while being detained.<sup>402</sup>

The inclusion of Catholics in the mainstream narrative was something new for Americans of the 1950’s. Catholics as a group had been viewed with suspicion by Protestant America throughout American history. The massive influx of Catholic immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries exacerbated this feeling dramatically. The advent of the Cold War, however, began the process of bringing Catholics into mainstream civic life. The Catholic Church, both in the United States and internationally, was strongly anti-communist. As the Cold War consensus formed in the early 1950’s, Catholics went from being suspect members of society to solidly

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401 “Communism’s Mark on a Holy Man: Emaciated Italian bishop gains freedom from Red China as captive Americans are also released”, *Time*, Oct. 3, 1955: 43.

402 “A Tale of Exodus from Red China”, *The New York Times*, May 14, 1956: 14.



anti-Communist Americans. They began to be included in the larger depiction of the fight against Communism.<sup>403</sup>

### **Memoirs**

Newspapers and magazines were happy to tell stories of missionary suffering, but former missionaries sometimes took a more direct route to getting their stories across – memoirs. They produced a plethora of them, most of which had similar themes. The story went that they had done good work before the Communist takeover but then suffered greatly under the new regime. These were mostly Protestant missionaries, but a few American Catholic memoirs came out as well. Few made the bestseller list, but there were enough anti-communist memoirs to suggest that there was a market for them. There was a distinct lack of memoirs sympathetic to the PRC, despite the fact that many missionaries did not condemn Communist China.

One memoir in particular stands out. John Leighton Stuart had been a missionary, an educator and then the final U.S. Ambassador to China during the Chinese Civil War and the establishment of the PRC. His memoir, *Fifty Years in China*, followed the formula of reminiscing about his good work before condemning the Communists. What was curious about Stuart's work was that he only wrote about two-thirds of it. He was incapacitated by a stroke before finishing his manuscript, so members of the State Department (who do not appear to have known Stuart personally) finished the manuscript without direct input from Stuart. While the first two-thirds of the book speak of the glowing work missionaries had done and his strong ties to the Chinese people, the final section of the book, which includes his interactions with the Communists, is much more angry and condemning. This seems

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<sup>403</sup> Albert J. Menedez. *The Religious Factor in the 1960 Presidential election: an analysis of the Kennedy victory over anti-Catholic prejudice*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2011); Mark A. Noll. *Religion and American politics: from the Colonial Period to the Present*, (New York; Oxford University Press, 2007).

to go against Stuart's personality and his writings while in China. He was generally regarded as very friendly and slow to criticize anyone publicly, but his State Department ghost writers did not share those traits. While it is possible that Stuart would have finished with a more angry tone because of his treatment by the Communists, it seems to go against his affable personality. As historian Yu-Ming Shaw suggests, it is more likely that his ghost writers used the book to promote their political agenda.<sup>404</sup>

Of the many other memoirs, most had the same themes. Yet they also shared an unintentional theme that they would never have admitted. One book reviewer noticed this theme. Kenneth Latourette, a former missionary to China who had become a Professor at Yale, recognized a consistency among three memoirs he reviewed, which included *Calvary in China*, by Robert C. Greene. The publication of Greene's book coincided with the previously discussed article about him in *Newsweek*. Latourette also reviewed Dorothy S. McCammon's *We Tried to Stay* and F. Olin Stockwell's *With God in Red China: The Story of Two Years in Chinese Communist Prisons*. Although Greene came from a different religious tradition (Catholic) than did Stockwell and McCammon (Methodist), their overall stories hit many very similar points. Although they strongly resented their treatment by the Communists, they remembered their work prior to Liberation as hard and desperately needed. Latourette pointed out that in showing the dire straits of Chinese society, "without intending to do so, it shows why Communist 'liberation' was so easy." It was impossible to show the importance of missionary work without implicitly showing the injustices of Chinese society under GMD rule. All three of the memoirs that Latourette reviewed had very

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<sup>404</sup> John Leighton Stuart, *Fifty Years in China: the Memoirs of John Leighton Stuart, Missionary and Ambassador*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1954); Yu-ming Shaw. *An American Missionary in China: John Leighton Stuart and Chinese-American Relations*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

negative views of Communist rule, particularly in terms of religion, but they also carried an implication that the GMD had also been a disaster as well, albeit for different reasons.<sup>405</sup>

Most Americans were not as critical as Latourette. The American public generally viewed missionary accounts as unequivocal condemnations of Red China. A 1954 letter to the editor about a memoir shows something of the consensus being built about Red China. Martin T. Gilligan, a Catholic priest and former Vatican diplomat to China wrote a disapproving letter to the *New York Times* in response to a book review. The book, *Nun in Red China*, was a memoir of a Catholic nun that detailed the hardships she and her Catholic brethren faced under the CCP. Gilligan took exception to the reviewer's statement that Catholics were persecuted because of "that vast surge of anti-foreign feeling which accompanied the Communists to power." Gilligan believed that there was something distinctly anti-Catholic about Communism, as shown by the continued vigorous and often violent persecutions of Chinese Catholics. Although the breadth of the persecution of Catholics may have been exaggerated as rumors escaped through the Bamboo Curtain, the reviewer and Gilligan accepted the specifics of the persecutions uncritically. For them, as for most Americans, the Chinese Communists attacking religion was beyond question. They only differed on the motivations behind those attacks.<sup>406</sup>

One problem in understanding what was really going on in China was the limited information available to Americans. The rumors were often worse than the actual conditions on the ground, but were much easier to believe. One report was that

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405 Kenneth S. Latourette. "The Cross in Red China", *The New York Times*, May 10, 1953. BR6.

406 It should be noted that anti-foreign and anti-Catholic were almost synonymous for the CCP. The CCP's national agenda required constant and unswerving political participation. Anyone with foreign allegiances was a threat and the Catholic loyalty to the Papacy was seen as divided loyalty. Gilligan's assertion that Communism was distinctly anti-Catholic as opposed to anti-foreign is discussing two aspects of the same phenomenon.

29 Chinese Christian leaders were executed in early 1954. Ed Walline investigated the case and found no substantiation for the report, even though it was carried in several newspapers. Walline was able to speak with a family member of one of those who was supposedly executed but was apparently alive and well.<sup>407</sup>

As a major reinforcement to the portrayal of Communist China as evil and anti-religious, westerners got word in 1958 that the Hundred Flowers Campaign had been halted. Mao had reversed himself and ordered an “Anti-Rightist Campaign.” The Hundred Flowers Campaign had unleashed a torrent of criticism of the CCP. Mao had not expected that level of antipathy towards his regime and so declared that critics were “poisonous weeds” that had invaded the “fragrant flowers.” He implied that the whole campaign was designed to draw out these weeds, whom he labeled “Rightists.” Rightist became the label for anyone who had questionable political attitudes, meaning dissent from the CCP line and/or sympathy for Chiang Kai-shek. When Mao declared that ten percent of the Chinese people were rightists, local cadres had to find ten percent of the people to accuse. Christians made easy targets for those accusations because of their heterodox beliefs. Persecutions of Christians continued during the Great Leap Forward, a forced industrialization of the rural economy, which began the next year. It was a wildly ambitious undertaking that required all Chinese to be eager political participants.<sup>408</sup> The *New York Times* reported that Christians were being purged as “‘imperialist running dogs’ who ‘hide under the cloak of religion’.”<sup>409</sup> American Christians who had wanted to reach out to China for religious reasons found

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407 E. E. Walline. Letter to Charles T. Leber: Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. May 13, 1954. PHS RG82-68-15.

408 It was also a complete disaster, causing as many as 30 million deaths from starvation and disease. Rebecca E. Karl. *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth Century World*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010)

409 “Red China ‘Purges’ Christian Groups”, *New York Times*, Jul. 13, 1958.

that the issue of religious persecution was being used very effectively by Americans who wanted to keep the PRC isolated.

### **Conclusions**

When missionaries returned to the United States after being driven from the People's Republic of China, most were discouraged with their experience and thoroughly disillusioned with the Chinese Communist Party. They had been harassed and their life's work had been attacked. Yet many of them kept some hope for China. They believed that the Chinese Communists would moderate their behavior once they believed themselves secure from internal and external attack. The Communists' persecution of missionaries was aimed at eliminating any potential source of resistance to their agenda. With missionaries gone, a dangerous foreign presence on their soil was removed. When the Korean War ended, these missionaries and their organizations hoped the CCP might feel secure enough to reach out and end its isolation. In particular, they hoped that they could reunite with their Chinese Christian brethren.

In promoting these hopes, these church leaders and former missions tried to sway American opinion to show that the CCP was doing what any nationalist party would do – protect and strengthen its country. They argued that although there was no question that Chinese policies on religion and personal freedom were flawed, but they could only be changed through engagement. Isolation prevented any sort of compromise being reached. In addition, maintaining a hostile relationship with China would only increase its sense of insecurity, leading to a continued need for persecution of Christians.

Ecumenism was clearly a driving factor for most of these American Christians. They were devoted to reuniting world-wide Christianity, which included China.

Ecumenism also came from a world-view that was less about bipolar right and wrong and more about accepting alternative points of view that were various shades of gray<sup>410</sup> that could be discussed. Those with this world view disagreed strongly with Communism, but accepted that Communism might be a short term answer to the problems facing China. As a result, the ecumenical movement overlapped very strongly with efforts to moderate hostility to the PRC.

All of this was for naught, however. While missionaries were trying to find accommodation with the CCP in the early years of the Cold War, American public opinion was coalescing into a consensus that Communism was a threat to the United States and must be fought. The coercive communist state crushed all the freedoms that Americans held dear. Religion was the most threatened because of the doctrinal atheism of Marxist ideology. Newspapers, magazines and TV all ran stories about persecution of Christians and the way in which Communists degraded their people.

The result was that ecumenical religious leaders found themselves to be largely marginalized in their calls for better relations with China, while stories of persecuted missionaries and oppressed Chinese Christians were published in mainstream media. Ironically, some of those stories were about missionaries who, like Frank Price and John Hayes, actually favored ecumenism and engagement with the PRC. Their hardship was being used to sell newspapers and magazine, while at the same time reinforcing the consensus that Red China was a godless and evil force that must be fought.

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<sup>410</sup> Approximately fifty.

## Conclusion

What can be learned about US-China relations from the experiences of missionaries in the early Cold War? There was clearly a vocal segment of missionaries that objected to the dogmatic condemnation of Communism, particularly. It is difficult to determine how strong this segment was numerically, but they were most likely a minority. The reasons for their position appear to have come from their ecumenical world-view and their absence from the United States. This brings out a second issue, which was that missionaries show some of the conflict between nationalism and Christianity. They maintained their American identity, but their religious calling made their attitudes more welcoming to outsiders than the exclusivity of nationalism generally allowed.

The level of dissent in the early Cold War is only recently being explored by historians. A common narrative of Sino-American relations in the early Cold War focuses on domestic politics in the United States and how China fit neatly into the Cold War consensus to fight Communism. There has been considerable scholarship that shows how the 1950's saw a growing agreement among Americans that fighting Communism was imperative to the American way of life. Lary May calls the early 1950's a "paradigm shift of major proportions."<sup>411</sup> That shift was caused by the threat of Communism and the fear it generated. According to May, Americans overwhelmingly conformed to the attitudes of anti-communism. Media reinforced that conformity with consistent anti-communist messages and by providing positive examples of the American way of life. Stephen J. Whitfield similarly argues that Americans' fear of Communism affected all aspects of American life to some

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<sup>411</sup> Lary May. *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989) p. 14.

degree.<sup>412</sup> He shows the shadow cast by the aggressive red hunting of the FBI and how that shadow would lead many Americans to self-censor their behavior to avoid appearing as communist sympathizers. Jonathan P. Herzog includes religion as one of the key tools used in the creation of this consensus, arguing that political and religious leaders aggressively pushed religion as a means to combat Communism.<sup>413</sup> Elaine Tyler May looks at a different aspect of early Cold War culture, focusing mainly on how it affected the home.<sup>414</sup> She attributes the baby boom of the 1950's in part to Cold War anxieties. She argues that the home became a refuge from the fears of Communism, which led to the idealization of domesticity and a refocus on the home and family. These books, and works like them, show that the Cold War created and then reinforced a consensus about foreign relations that severely circumscribed the possibilities of dissent within society.

That narrative is fine as far as it goes, but it omits the fact that the Cold War consensus was not absolute. New scholarship on the American consensus shows that many Americans either resisted the fear of Communism or were apathetic about it. Andrew Falk argues that mass media actually resisted that consensus and maintained some degree of moderation. He admits that the immense anti-Communist movement inside and outside of government could wield a great deal of intimidation, but he contends that mass media did not always cave to those pressures. Most interestingly, he argues that Hollywood's resistance came not so much from idealism as from business decisions based on the belief that audiences did not always want anti-Communist propaganda. Falk's argument is supported by Thomas Doherty who focuses on television, arguing that it was much more tolerant and open in the 1950's

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412 Stephen J. Whitfield. *The Culture of the Cold War*, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

413 Jonathan P. Herzog. *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2011).

414 Elaine Tyler May. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (New York City, NY: Basic Books, 1990)



than was commonly held. He cites the verbal sparring between Edward R. Murrow and McCarthy as well as sit-coms like *I Love Lucy* that turned traditional domesticity on its head. Moving away from mass media, Bruce E. Field looks at the political dissent from an agricultural union. His work argues that the leaders of the National Farmers Union criticized Truman for supporting colonialism. They eventually relented when accused of being communist sympathizers during the Korean War, but a minority of the organization split off and maintained its opposition to US policy. These works are part of a growing literature that shows that despite the strength of the consensus against Communism, dissent did not disappear. They show that there was always a minority that did not accept that they must be unquestioningly anti-communist.

None of those works, however, spend much time on religion, which is still largely assumed to have accepted anti-Communism unquestioningly. Scholarship on dissent among the various religious communities within the United States is just beginning. David E. Settje has used Lutherans as a window into “average America” by examining how they viewed the Vietnam War. He argues that there was a “silent majority” of Americans who neither approved, nor dissented, of US policy in Vietnam.<sup>415</sup> Another recent work edited by Dianne Kirby looks at the active role that religious leaders played in the Cold War. Rather than focusing on the United States, the essays look at global religious leaders and show that the role of religion was not consistently anti-Communist.<sup>416</sup> These books make excellent contributions, but are only the beginning of understanding religious dissent in the Cold War. Neither focuses on the early Cold War in the United States, when the Cold War consensus was being formed.

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415 David Settje. *Lutherans and the Longest War: Adrift on a Sea of Doubt about the Cold and Vietnam Wars, 1964-1975*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007).

416 Dianne Kirby, ed. *Religion and the Cold War*, (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003).

This project works to fill that gap, showing how missionaries unexpectedly provided a voice that disagreed with the Cold war consensus, particularly on the issue of China. Many American missionaries in China refused to condemn Communism out of hand. These missionaries wanted to give the Communists a chance, hoping that they could find some *modus vivendi*. More surprising was that even after the attempts at cooperation failed disastrously, many of these missionaries still refused to denounce the Communists as evil, preferring to look at both the good and bad aspects of the Party and its members. They supported rapprochement with China and recognition of the communist government well before the majority of Americans came to these opinions. They tried to escape the dichotomy that the Cold War consensus had constructed, e.g. Us vs. Them, Good vs. Evil. Their dissent was even more remarkable because of the key place religion held as a reason to fight Communism.

Even as these missionaries resisted seeing the world as simply bipolar, they existed within their own dichotomy. Nationalism and Christianity were two important aspects of American society and the American identity. Nationalism defines an identity that is separate from those outside the nation. American nationalism is among the most inclusive, partly based on the multi-ethnic makeup of the United States and partly because of the principles of human rights and dignity embodied in the Declaration of Independence. Even with that inclusive ideal, there are still dividing lines between Americans and the rest of the world. In fact, the belief that those principles are universal is one of those lines. Christianity, on the other hand, is based on the principle that Jesus died for all people, so therefore Christianity is universal and for everyone.

American missionaries demonstrate the tension that can exist between these two forces. In the 1966 film *The Sand Pebbles*, an American missionary makes a

passionate speech renouncing his citizenship and claiming that all nationalism is a crime against God because it separates man from his fellow man. As Hollywood tends to do, this was an over dramatized depiction of a real issue. Without question, missionaries' nationality hindered their work. They were foreigners and were treated with suspicion. They tried to become close to the Chinese, but still kept many of the assumptions from home. For instance, they liked to talk about human rights and individual freedom. Chinese culture, on the other hand, put much more emphasis on family and duty. Their American nationalism was diluted somewhat over the years and decades they were in China, but it never disappeared. American missionaries kept their identity as Americans. Almost all missionaries took furloughs to the United States no matter how long they had been in China. They wrote "home" to describe their life in China. With the exception of the China Inland Mission whose missionaries were often quite isolated from any other westerners, they tended to find their closest friends among other missionaries, rather than the local population. As evidenced by their letters and actions, they never forgot that they were Americans.

The tension between nationalism and Christianity was not always obvious, but could not be ignored during the Chinese Civil War. American missionaries were writing to friends, family, newspapers, and government officials to tell them what was happening in China. Many of them argued that Communism was wrong and that everything must be done to resist it. This view fit nicely with the view of most Americans. By contrast, liberal missionaries would often go against the grain by arguing that the CCP was actually a lesser evil than the Guomindang. They tended to look on the Communists as offering a potential improvement on the status quo, which was not something that was well-received in the United States. Their presence outside the United States allowed them to be less susceptible to the anti-communist fears that

were sweeping their homeland. In addition, their ecumenical world view made them less judgmental and dogmatic toward Communists. As a result, they were willing to find some potential worth in the Communists rather than uniformly condemning them.

The difference between the two views played out in who chose to leave China and who chose to stay. Those who left at the time of the Communist victory were mainly those who were strongly anti-Communists. Their view of Christianity led them to believe that one should not compromise with evil and that cooperation with the CCP would cause them to become puppets of an evil regime. Leaving also demonstrated their strong association with their home country. When a crisis came, their connection to the Chinese and/or their mission was not strong enough to keep them there. Those missionaries who chose to stay may not have liked the CCP, but they were willing to find common ground with it. Their version of Christianity was more inclusive and less condemning. They were, without realizing it, accepting part of what *The Sand Pebbles*' missionary said. While not abandoning their sense of American identity, they gave priority to their religious beliefs.

This clash of ideals reflected a larger conflict over American Protestantism in the United States. Protestants have continually divided and fractured since the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. The first half of the twentieth century saw another such division and subsequent reorganization between liberal and conservative Protestants.<sup>417</sup> Conservatives, who generally had a more fundamentalist view of Christianity, were more likely to embrace the Cold War dichotomy. Liberals were more likely to look beyond it and support the ecumenical movement, whose members tried to find the good in all traditions. They were much more accepting of a difference of opinion, preferring to look to the higher truths of

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417 Kenneth Scott Latourette. *A History of Christianity Volume 2: Reformation to the Present (AD 1500 – AD 1975)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Spokane, WA: Prince Press, 1975); Bruce L. Shelley. *Church History in Plain Language*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Press, 2013).

Christianity and not quibble on details of doctrine. By contrast, fundamentalists rejected ecumenism as making unacceptable compromises on essential doctrinal elements. Their hardline view of right and wrong translated easily to condemnation of Communism, while the more tolerant view of ecumenicals led them to be open to working under Communism.

These dissenting voices have largely been lost. Cold War histories rarely include missionaries as more than a cameo. When they are included, the narrative usually groups them with the overwhelming majority of Americans who condemned Communism. There is a reason for that image, as some missionaries did join that majority. That image also fits with the conventional narrative. The atheism espoused by Marxists was one of the foundations for Americans opposing communism. This was the same decade in which “In God We Trust” became the official motto of the United States and “under God” was inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance. It would seem likely that the religious community in the United States would uniformly oppose communism in all its forms. Yet, as often is the case, the conventional narrative can miss significant exceptions. Even though new work is being done to see the fractures in the early Cold War consensus, that work only rarely touches on religious dissent. Those missionaries were among the most knowledgeable Americans about both China and Communism, yet the historical narrative largely focuses on only the anti-Communist voices, ignoring the breadth of opinions among missionaries.

To fully understand these perspectives, it must be acknowledged that the CCP was guilty of many of the charges that were leveled against it. It did persecute Chinese Christians throughout the 1950’s. It confiscated some church property and viewed with great suspicion any Chinese who had connections to Americans. Its aggressive behavior in international relations also inflamed the American public, particularly in

the Korean War, but also with the two Taiwan Straits crises of 1954 and 1958.

Chinese actions both domestically and internationally fed into Americans hatred of the Chinese.

Nevertheless, the torrent of anti-Communist feeling meant that any story condemning the Chinese was taken at face value without questioning the source or looking for verification. Stories of religious persecution in China were a popular meme, serving to reinforce the image of the Communists as brutal atheists.

Missionaries tried to give another side of the story, but the American mainstream had already made up their minds about China, reinforced by stories of religious repression.

This story sounds like a tragedy. Missionaries were faced with a crisis of faith made manifest. Despite the Communists' avowed atheism, many liberals believed that they could find a way to work with the CCP. Their decision was based on a mixture of hope and desperation. Hope that the Communists would value their services and desperation because this was the only way to continue their missions. The only way to do that was to work under the Communists. Some were aware that the odds were against them, but the only other option was giving up and going back to America. One missionary, Sherwood Eddy, showed the mixture of the two emotions in a prediction in 1948 about how Christianity would survive in China: "Many Christians will have to adopt new methods and new ways and sometimes a new spirit. The center of worship may often have to move from the chapel to the homes of the people, where it was under similar conditions in the Roman Empire."<sup>418</sup>

Conservatives, on the other hand, often decided to leave. They believed that the dogmatic atheism of Communism and its dismissal of individual freedoms precluded any legitimate church activity. While they also wanted to continue their

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418 Sherwood Eddy. "Civil War in China", open letter to China Committee, CRP RG8 60-1, 12-22-48.

missions, they believed that trying to work with Communism was not only a waste of time, but might contribute to the CCP's legitimacy. By the mid-1950's, it looked as though the conservatives had made the smart move by returning to America. All missionaries were driven out in 1951 and Chinese Christians were being persecuted. The Three-Self Church was founded as an instrument for the CCP to control Christians. It appeared to hardly be a church at all because it was an appendage of the government.

The tragedy got worse from there. During the Cultural Revolution of 1965-1975, the Three-Self Church was completely suppressed. Flawed as it was, it had been the last major vestige of Christianity in China. Christians became targets for mass movements trying to eradicate imperialist and bourgeois elements. The Three-Self Church's most prominent leader, Y.T. Wu, was arrested and sent to a labor camp. Those were dark times for Chinese Christians and the former missionaries who saw their life's work being destroyed.

There is a famous story of Zhou Enlai being asked what he thought about the effects of the French Revolution, to which he replied: "It is too soon to say." The authenticity of the story is doubtful, which is a shame, because it is easily applicable to missionaries who witnessed Christianity being crushed in China. Had they been able to look forward to the 1980's, they would have seen the Three-Self Church reinstated. Even more encouraging, the Chinese Christian Council was formed as an alternative because many Christians wanted nothing to do with the state-controlled Three-Self Church.

Had those missionaries been able to evaluate Christianity in the present day, they would have seen a vindication of their efforts. Although the Three-Self Church was restored, Chinese Christians avoided it and rebuilt the churches at a grassroots

level following the tradition of the missionaries. As Eddy suggested in 1948, house churches form the basis of this new Christianity. A 2012 study by the CCP showed that there were 23 million Chinese Christians registered, but that only shows the ones willing to tell the government of their faith.<sup>419</sup> Other estimates range as high as 120 million.<sup>420</sup>

The key question of the success of the missions was how Christianity fared after the missionaries left. While many liberal missionaries never gave up hope for Chinese Christianity, it was hard to maintain much optimism in the 1950's. Yet events in the last thirty years suggest that the seeds they planted have flourished, despite relentless persecution for over two decades. Christians now almost certainly outnumber members of the CCP.<sup>421</sup> Perhaps the biggest irony of this story is that missionaries were afraid Christianity would flounder in China without them. In reality, it thrived without them in a way that was beyond their wildest hopes.

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419 Francis Wong. *Over 23 million Christians in China, official survey shows*, *Christianity Today*, Aug. 12, 2010.

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/over.23.million.christians.in.china.official.survey.shows/26488.htm>

420 Lauren Green. "Christianity in China", Fox News.com.

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/01/20/christianity-china/>

421 2011 CCP census showed 80 million members. "China's Communist Party members exceed 80 million", *Xinhua*, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-06/24/c\\_13947698.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-06/24/c_13947698.htm).



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