

**Missionary Primitivism and Chinese Modernity:
the Brethren in Twentieth-Century China**

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Abstract

Using previously undocumented archival material, this dissertation examines missionaries from the Brethren agency Echoes of Service. A consideration of missionary primitivism provides a more complex picture of the mission engagement with China. The Brethren are a radical evangelical group that originated in Britain in the nineteenth century. They looked backwards to an original ideal of Christian faith and church organisation, which they sought to revive in the modern world. This was a reaction against modernity, but it should also be seen as part of modernity. The Brethren attempt to take missionary primitivism to China demonstrates how Christianity in the West and in China during this period were mutually constitutive, with influences circulating freely and unpredictably between the two.

The thesis is organised into five chapters which develop these themes. Chapter one focuses on changes taking place in Britain at the start of the twentieth century, and shows how the promotion of missionary primitivism abroad was seen as essential for the health of the Brethren movement at home. In particular, missionary supporters elevated the individual missionary who operated according to simple, scriptural principles. Accordingly, the remainder of the thesis focuses on a number of individuals who sought to enact this model in different ways and in a variety of settings. Chapter two examines Watchman Nee, the founder of the Little Flock movement. Nee appropriated missionary primitivism as a means of establishing a truly independent Chinese Christianity, and his success provoked extreme and contrasting responses from Christians in the West. In addition, although Nee emphasised the primitive character of his movement, its immediate context was the cosmopolitan, bourgeois world of China's treaty-ports. Chapters three and four examine the work of Brethren missionaries on China's margins, specifically on the Sino-Mongolian and Sino-Tibetan borders. Missionary primitivism lauded its pioneers in these 'regions beyond', which were seen as arenas where a Brethren missionary could truly fulfil their calling. The remoteness of these places also meant that the modernity of a missionary became more pronounced. Through administering modern medicine or as a result of business or political contacts, missionaries would often become important figures in the mediation of modernity in these regions.

Finally, chapter five examines missionary primitivism in the context of decolonisation. Two points of continuity are particularly noted: first, the survival and growth of the Little Flock in communist China has led to it becoming a significant feature of the landscape of popular religion in contemporary China. The memorialisation of Watchman Nee has also left an enduring legacy among Christians in the West. Second, the Echoes missionary George Patterson, after being involved in the mission to Tibet, began reporting about and campaigning for the Tibetan cause. Though he saw this as a continuation of his missionary calling, it has led to him promoting causes at tension with his earlier convictions. These regional stories of missionary primitivism serve to challenge existing paradigms of modern Chinese history. They demonstrate that, rather than seeing the modern as superseding the primitive, the relationship between the two should be seen as a coterminous and symbiotic one. In addition, the emergence of modern and primitive forms should be seen as a product of the free movement of influences between China and the West, and of their mixing in a variety of contexts.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Introduction: the Brethren in Modern China

‘Beyond any other British denomination, Open Brethren have become noted for their missionary outlook.’¹ Thus has asserted Tim Grass, in his history of the Brethren movement. Despite this, other than from their own historians, the Brethren have received little coverage in studies of missions.² This oversight is especially noticeable in the case of China, where the Brethren influence was particularly strong. As well as sending their own missionaries, the Brethren had a formative influence on China’s largest Protestant mission, the China Inland Mission (CIM).³ That the

¹ Tim Grass, *Gathering to His Name: The Story of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), p.262.

² For accounts by Brethren historians see: W. T. Stunt, *Turning the World Upside Down: A Century of Missionary Endeavour* (Bath: Echoes of Service, 1972); Frederick A. Tatford, *That the World may Know* (10 volumes, Bath: Echoes of Service, 1982-6); Harold H. Rowdon, *The Brethren Contribution to the Worldwide Mission of the Church* (Carlisle: Partnership, 1994). The only recent academic studies that have focussed on Brethren missionaries are: Mark Sweetnam, ‘Dan Crawford, Thinking Black, and The Challenge of a Missionary Canon’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58 (2007), pp. 705-725; Robert Bernard Dann, *The Primitivist Missiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A Radical Influence on Nineteenth-Century Protestant Mission* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2007); Dann, *Father of Faith Missions: The Life and Times of Anthony Norris Groves* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004). There are no studies of Brethren missions in Chinese scholarship. For examples of notable studies of missions more generally, see: Zha Shijie, 民國基督教史論文集 [Essays on the History of Christianity during the Republican Period], (Taipei: Yuzhou guang, 1993); Gu Changsheng, 传教士与近代中国 [Missionaries and Modern China], (third edition, Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2004); Gu Weimin, 基督教与近代中国社会 [Christianity and Modern Chinese Society], (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1996). For a study of the development of religious studies in the People’s Republic of China, see: Fenggang Yang, ‘Between Secularist Ideology and Desecularizing Reality: The Birth and Growth of Religious Research in Communist China’, *Sociology of Religion* 2 (2004), pp. 101-119.

³ For the Brethren connection to the CIM, see: Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, pp. 509-510 and Alwyn Austin, *China’s Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832-1905*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), pp. 54-58; 94-97. The first official history of the CIM was: Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission: The Growth of a Work of God* (2 volumes, London: China Inland Mission, 1911 and 1918), also published in an abridged version as *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret* (London: China Inland Mission, 1932). The first attempt to revise the Taylors’s account was: John C. Pollock, *Hudson Taylor and Maria* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1962). Pollock sought to emphasise Hudson Taylor’s humanity, something he felt the Taylors had concealed, and he did this by focussing on Hudson Taylor’s close relationship with his first wife, Maria. Leslie Lyall sought to extend the coverage to the post-Hudson Taylor years: Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible: The China Inland Mission, 1865-1965* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965). The most comprehensive of the official histories was produced by A. J. Broomhall in the 1980s: A. J. Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China’s Open Century* (7 volumes, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981-89). The London records of the CIM were

Brethren impact was also an enduring one is immediately evident in the growth of the independent Protestant Chinese churches, with Watchman Nee's Little Flock movement being shaped by Brethren influences and ideas.⁴

The presence of the Brethren therefore had a huge significance for the missionary impact in China, and this significance has yet to be examined in depth by scholars. This is partly a reflection of the unpopularity of the Brethren among their contemporaries. A persistent criticism made against them, as noted by Tim Grass and Crawford Gribben, was the alleged sectarian character of the movement.⁵ The stigma that came to be attached to the Brethren meant that the first official histories of the CIM declined to mention the Brethren identification of many of its earliest members and supporters.⁶ This treatment has subsequently been reflected in mission histories, which have given only brief and passing mention to the influence that the Brethren had in inspiring and shaping larger trends in the modern missionary movement.⁷

deposited in SOAS in 1994. The only book-length, academic history of the CIM is: Austin, *China's Millions*.

⁴ For biographies of Nee and the Little Flock written from missionary perspectives, see: Angus Kinnear, *Against the Tide* (revised edition, Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2005); Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men* (Sevenoaks: Christian Focus, 2000). Recent academic studies are: Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 155-178; Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, 'Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement in Maoist China', *Church History* 74:1 (2005), pp. 68-96. For studies of Watchman Nee and the Little Flock in Chinese, see: Chen Zhongdao, 我的舅父倪柝声 [My Uncle, Watchman Nee], (Fourth edition, Hong Kong: Logos, 1999); Chen Zexin, 倪柝声弟兄简史 [A Brief Biography of Brother Ni Tuosheng], (Hong Kong: Gospel Studyroom, 1973); Liang Jialin, 倪柝声的荣辱升黜 [Watchman Nee: His Glory and Dishonour], (Hong Kong: Alliance Seminary, 2003); Shi Bochong, 倪柝声殉道史 [The Martyrdom of Watchman Nee], (Culver City, CA: Testimony Publications, 1995).

⁵ For a summary of criticism directed at the Brethren, see Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, pp. 213-228. For a comparative regional study, see: Crawford Gribben, "'The worst sect that a Christian man can meet': Opposition to the Plymouth Brethren in Ireland and Scotland, 1859-1900", *Scottish Studies Review* 3:2 (2002), 34-53.

⁶ Austin, *China's Millions*, p. 94.

⁷ Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 193-194; Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester: Apollon, 1990), pp. 76, 165; Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1994), p. 25.

In particular, these studies have credited the Brethren with providing some of the initial impetus for the faith missions movement that emerged in the final quarter of the nineteenth century.⁸ Faith missions operated according to a radical framework, whereby contact with Western secular interests were minimised; missionaries concentrated primarily on evangelism; itinerant methods were used to spread the gospel as widely as possible; and missionaries sought to assimilate into the cultures of the people they were trying to reach.⁹ However, little is said of the Brethren beyond this mention of some kind of formative influence. For example, Klaus Fiedler, in his history of faith missions, provides brief acknowledgement of Brethren missiology in the development of faith mission principles.¹⁰ His study, however, then goes on to examine the development of the major faith mission societies, resulting in some of the movement's more marginal, but vital, expressions being excluded.

This reflects a further factor which has led to the marginalisation of the Brethren in historical accounts. That is, the bias towards coverage of what Susan Thorne has called the 'mainline missionary societies.'¹¹ One of the reasons for this has been a concern with assessing the relation of missions to British imperial expansion, something that is more easily gauged by focussing on the large missionary institutions. An example of this can be seen in two surveys: Andrew Porter's 2004 work, *Religion versus Empire*, and Brian Stanley's *The Bible and the Flag*,

⁸ For a history of faith missions, see: Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions*.

⁹ Andrew Porter, 'Evangelical Enthusiasm, Missionary Motivation and West Africa in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Career of G. W. Brooke', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 6:1 (1977), pp. 25-8.

¹⁰ Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions*, p. 25.

¹¹ Susan Thorne, 'Religion and Empire at Home', in Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (eds.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 162.

published in 1990. Porter and Stanley both mention the influence that early Brethren leaders had in formulating the ideas that would become central to the faith missions movement. But they both view the primary factor behind the emergence of faith missions as the imperative to form a model of missions that had a more distant relationship with British imperial interests.

This imperial context is shown to have been particularly pronounced in China, leading to the establishment of the CIM, which was one of the earliest and most well-known of the faith missions. The opportunity for missionary advance in China was brought about through the treaties imposed on China following the British victories in the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860), which subsequently led to a growth in anti-foreign feeling among the Chinese.¹² In this context the CIM tactics of distancing themselves from Western associations and of assimilating into Chinese culture, according to Porter, ‘made abundant practical sense whatever its specific theological justification.’¹³ The missiology of faith missions is therefore seen to be a function of imperial relations. Subsequently, the death of many missionaries during the Boxer uprising¹⁴, according to Porter, ‘demonstrated the impracticability of the

¹² For studies of the Opium Wars, see: Peter Ward Fay, *The Opium War, 1840-1842* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Brian Inglis, *The Opium War* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976); John Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium, Imperialism, and the Arrow War (1856-1860) in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); James M. Polachek, *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). For histories of the opening of China to foreign trade, see: Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-42* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951); John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854* (two volumes, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953); Frederic Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966); Rhoads Murphey, *The Treaty Ports and China's Modernization: What Went Wrong?* (Ann Arbor: MI: University of Michigan Press, 1970); Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire 1832-1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

¹³ Andrew Porter, ‘“Commerce and Christianity”: The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan’, *The Historical Journal*, 28:3 (1985), p. 619.

¹⁴ For the Boxer uprising, see: Joseph Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); Henry Keown-Boyd, *The Fists of Righteous Harmony: A History of the Boxer Uprising in China in the Year 1900* (London: Leo Cooper, 1991); Paul A.

radical faith mission approach and the need for continuing reliance by missions on the secular arm.¹⁵ Consequently, as their narratives enter the twentieth century Porter and Stanley both shift their attention to the ways that missions reacted to the challenges presented by the growth of colonial nationalism.

A similar trajectory shapes Alwyn Austin's history of the CIM. Austin pays considerable attention to the influence that early Brethren leaders had in the formation of the Mission, and on the avant-garde character of the early CIM pioneers.¹⁶ But he closes his narrative at the end of the Qing dynasty and carries this political watershed over to the CIM, arguing in his conclusion that in the post-Qing era the main legacy of the CIM, now operating in a more institutionalised form, was as a mainstay of the American fundamentalist movement.¹⁷ In existing narratives, therefore, the faith missions movement has been depicted as a radical, but short-lived, late nineteenth-century trend. By the twentieth century its idealism had given way to a more institutionalised structure and settled activity. The problem of the relation of missions to politics in China will be a prominent theme in this thesis. However, by emphasising the relationship between missions and empire, the existing historiography does not give sufficient attention to the radical missiology that fuelled such movements as the faith missions, and that existed in more concentrated form in marginal groups such as the Brethren.

Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Robert A. Bickers and R. G. Tiedemann (eds.). *The Boxers, China, and the World*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

¹⁵ Porter, *Religion versus Empire*, p.211.

¹⁶ Austin, *China's Millions*, pp. 54-58; 94-97.

¹⁷ Austin, *China's Millions*, pp. 446-447. For studies of the decline and fall of Qing China, see: Joseph Esherick, *Reform and Revolution in China: the 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hupei* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976); R. Keith Schoppa, *Chinese Elites and Political Change: Zhejiang Province in the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Eto Shinkichi and Harold Shiffrin (eds.), *China's Republican Revolution* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1994).

This bias towards institutionalised forms of mission work has placed a constraint on historical studies. Jeffrey Cox has claimed that ‘a typical missionary in the late nineteenth century... was not a male itinerant preacher but a female schoolteacher or administrator.’¹⁸ He argues, furthermore, that the itinerant missionary is an unrepresentative and stereotyped figure, invoked to justify the marginalising of missionaries in historical accounts. However, the neglect of such marginal expressions of missions has resulted in an incomplete picture of the character and impact of the modern missionary movement. Such marginal missions were a larger and more continuous presence than has been acknowledged. To take the Brethren as an example, Tim Grass has shown how the number of missionaries associated with the Brethren mission agency Echoes of Service increased in the early decades of the twentieth century, reaching a peak in 1939.¹⁹ Furthermore, during this time these missionaries continued to extend their work into previously unreached regions. Although certainly a minority presence in the missionary community, the itinerant evangelist cited by Cox embodied an expression of mission that was practiced for much of the nineteenth century and was vigorously rearticulated in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁰

The missionaries who are the focus of this thesis were associated with the Brethren agency Echoes of Service (hereafter Echoes). The Brethren movement began in the

¹⁸ Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 7.

¹⁹ Tim Grass, ‘The Development of Support for Overseas Mission in British Assemblies: A Chronological Survey’ (paper presented at Brethren Archivists and Historians Network Conference, Wiedenest, 5 July 2005), with thanks to the author.

²⁰ Echoes missionaries did also maintain fixed residences, from which they often ran schools and medical clinics. But these were small and informal operations, and served a primarily evangelistic function.

1820s in southern England and Ireland, as informal gatherings of evangelicals from different denominations who were seeking fellowship and communion outside of denominational constraints. It developed into a larger movement that spread across the whole of Britain.²¹ The name ‘Brethren’ was taken from the King James Version of the Bible where it was used in the New Testament as a synonym for ‘believers.’ Its adoption, therefore, was a self-conscious attempt to designate the simple and non-denominational character of the movement. For this reason the Brethren also preferred the term ‘assembly’ rather than ‘church’ to describe their meetings. These assemblies operated autonomously and without an ordained clergy. The distinctive character of the Brethren stemmed from their primitivism, defined by Tim Grass in his recent history of the movement, as ‘the belief that normative Christianity was that of the apostolic church, with a consequent negative estimate of contemporary Christianity.’²²

The Brethren were not the first Protestant group to have adopted a primitivist vision and, indeed, they can be seen as part of a wider primitivist movement among radical evangelicals during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²³ Richard T. Hughes has argued that primitivists have differed on the particular aspects of the first Christian age they have deemed to be the most important, as well as on the ways they have sought to realise their primitivist visions in the present day.²⁴ Hughes has helpfully described three main types of primitivism: experiential primitivism, which is concerned with reproducing the spiritual experience of the first churches, and is most

²¹ For a history of the Brethren movement in Britain and Ireland, see: Grass, *Gathering to His Name*.

²² Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, p. 84. Grass bases his definition on a separate study: James Patrick Callahan, *Primitivist Piety: The Ecclesiology of the Early Plymouth Brethren* (London: Scarecrow, 1996).

²³ For studies of primitivism in the US context, see: Richard T. Hughes (ed.), *The Primitive Church in the Modern World* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

²⁴ Hughes, *The Primitive Church*, pp. ix-xviii.

frequently associated with Pentecostalism; ethical primitivism, which emphasises the moral teachings taught and practiced by Jesus and the apostles, and an example of which appearing in this thesis is the holiness movement²⁵; and ecclesiastical primitivism, which focuses on reproducing the forms and structures perceived as having been established by the early Church.²⁶ The Brethren can be placed into this final category. They have historically placed most emphasis on the practices of the first Christians, particularly as described in the Acts of the Apostles, which they have interpreted as a normative model. This concern for adhering to New Testament forms and patterns is something that will be seen asserted by the actors documented in this thesis.

Although many primitivists put a high priority on mission, it is possible to talk about a missionary primitivism that was developed distinctively by the Brethren. Their insistence on returning to the pattern of the Acts of the Apostles, where there was depicted a decentralised and expansive Church, led to the Brethren viewing mission as one of the central functions and identifying features of this Church for all time. This can be seen in the actions of Anthony Norris Groves (1795-1853), one of the most important of the movement's founders.²⁷ Formerly an Anglican, on being convinced of the normative status of the New Testament example, Groves sold all his possessions and went abroad as a missionary, first to Baghdad and later to India.

²⁵ For an overview of the history and influence of the holiness movement, see David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 151-180. See also: Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000).

²⁶ Hughes, *The Primitive Church*, p. xii.

²⁷ For a biography of Groves, see: Robert Bernard Dann, *Father of Faith Missions: The Life and Times of Anthony Norris Groves* (Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2004). For a more detailed analysis of his ideas, see: Dann, *The Primitivist Ecclesiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A Radical Influence on the Nineteenth-Century Protestant Church in Britain* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2007), and Dann, *The Primitivist Missiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A Radical Influence on Nineteenth-Century Protestant Mission* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2007).

The formation of Echoes was inspired by Groves' teaching and example. Mission was therefore central to Brethren primitivism, and their mission strategy was also determined by their adherence to a New Testament model, something that produced a distinct missionary culture.

The Brethren developed a missiology, that is, a theology and methodology of mission, that rejected institutional organisation. It was thought that missionaries who worked under the direction of missionary societies lacked the freedom to operate as needs in their particular field demanded. More importantly, the missionary's allegiance to a missionary society compromised what the Brethren argued should be the direct responsibility of the missionary to God. Instead, Brethren missionaries were sent out on the initiative and at the discretion of their local assembly, who would continue to correspond with and support them in the field.²⁸ A final contributing factor to the neglect of research into Brethren missions has been this lack of a conventional mission board, such as has provided a focus for research into other missions. This problem has been exacerbated by the fact that Brethren missionary records have only recently been made readily accessible for academic research. Nevertheless, attention to such smaller missionary groups is urgently required in order to add breadth and nuance to recent scholarship.

²⁸ Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, p. 12.

Missions and Modernity in China

Hughes has also pointed out that primitivism, with its positing of a transcendent and unchanging spiritual reality, produces Christian movements that stand apart from, and in judgement on, contemporary cultures, societies and politics.²⁹ This is certainly the case for the Brethren, but it will be argued in Chapter One that Brethren missionary primitivism was particularly framed in opposition to a modern world that had spawned a culture of unbelief, and in which the Church had departed from its original ideals. Nevertheless, this general trait of primitivism, that is, its rejection of any fundamental idea of historical change or progress, sits uneasily alongside the historiography of missionaries in China. Such assumptions of historical progress underlie this scholarship, in which missionary activity has been assessed according to how it contributed, or not, to China's modernisation. A survey now follows of this historiography, which can be organised into three distinct groups: missionaries as sources of cultural conflict; missionaries as contributors to cultural change; and missionaries as participants in globalisation.

Works in the first of these groups, mostly produced between 1960 and 1990, have highlighted the inherent incompatibility of Christianity with Chinese culture. This is an emphasis that has framed studies of both the modern missionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the earlier Jesuit mission to China (1579-1724). In the case of the latter, scholars examined Jesuit attempts to achieve a synthesis of Confucianism with Christianity, and concluded that the failure to do so

²⁹ Hughes, *The Primitive Church*, p. xiv.

was due to an inevitable conflict between two opposing worldviews.³⁰ In studies of the nineteenth century, this framework was most notable in Paul Cohen's 1963 work, *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Anti-foreignism 1860-1870*.³¹ Cohen examined the reactions of the Chinese educated classes to Christianity. He claimed that they were resolutely and almost unanimously opposed to the work and message of the missionaries, and used the means and influence they had to stir up opposition and resistance among the lower classes. This hostility to Christianity was on one level part of the enmity felt towards the foreigners who had brought China into subjection over the course of the nineteenth century. But Cohen argued that it was fuelled in the main by a tradition of anti-Christian thought that went back as far as the seventeenth century, as a result of the efforts of the earlier Jesuit mission to China.

These interpretations of the earlier Jesuit and later Protestant missions were shaped by larger chronological narratives that were then prevalent in Western scholarship. The Jesuit mission had as its context a long narrative of imperial history, in which China's social, political and cultural institutions saw a continuous evolution.³² Within this, the Jesuit mission represented a subversive and heterogonous presence in a strong and secure China. The beginning of the nineteenth century was seen as a rift in Chinese history, a perception heightened by Kenneth Pomeranz's identification of this point as marking the 'Great Divergence' that saw the beginning

³⁰ For example, see: Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures* (translated from the French, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); John D. Young, *Confucianism and Christianity: The First Encounter* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1983); Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984).

³¹ Paul A. Cohen, *China and Christianity: the Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Anti-foreignism 1860-1870*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1963).

³² Notable surveys that follow this chronology are: Frederick W. Mote, *Imperial China: 900-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Paul Jakob Smith and Richard von Glahn, *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

of Europe's ascendancy and Asia's relative decline.³³ Histories of the late Qing and early Republican eras have subsequently been narrated as a crisis of the traditional order, and a struggle to adapt to the new.³⁴ Cohen's study therefore extended an earlier narrative of Chinese and Christian antipathy, and combined it with a narrative of modernity, in which missionaries operated as one of the sources of conflict that led to the destabilisation of late-imperial China, and ultimately to the collapse of the Qing in 1911.

Missionaries were therefore placed within a broader narrative of Chinese modernity in which they contributed to the processes that led to the end of imperial China and the start of the modern era. In a famous historiographical study, Paul Cohen identified a historical paradigm that summarised the perspective of such studies, labelling it, 'China's response to the West.' Such studies, he claimed, emphasised how the need to deal with the arrival of the West dominated Chinese concerns during this period.³⁵ Missionaries were therefore seen as part of this Western impact that had such an unsettling and transforming impact on China during the nineteenth century.

³³ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: Europe, China, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also: Roy Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

³⁴ Historical surveys that adhere to this narrative are: Jack Gray, *Modern China's Search for a Political Form* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); June Grasso, Jay Corrin, and Michael Kort, *Modernization and Revolution in China: From the Opium Wars to World Power* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004).

³⁵ Paul Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 9. Cohen was particularly commenting on the influence of John King Fairbank (1907-1991) whose works, including *The United States and China* (fourth enlarged edition, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) and *The Great Chinese Revolution, 1800-1985* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986) had been influential in putting forward this perspective.

Many studies on the Republican period³⁶ continued this narrative, viewing missionaries as part of a foreign imperial presence that provoked opposition and conflict, and that hastened the process towards the revolution of 1949.³⁷ These studies have therefore highlighted such points of tension as the May Fourth Movement (which began on 4th May 1919)³⁸ and the Nationalist Revolution (1923-1928)³⁹, with their accompanying anti-Christian protests.⁴⁰ These events served to demonstrate how an anti-imperialist form of nationalism was being forged, in which missionary institutions became a particular target for protests. Among the paradigms identified by Paul Cohen, that of ‘Imperialism’ was used to describe the direction of these studies. Within this paradigm, missionaries operated as cultural imperialists, seeking to submit China to a Western, capitalist world order, and provoking the

³⁶ In this thesis, the term ‘Republican period’ is used to refer to the period 1911-1949 in China, spanning the collapse of the Qing dynasty to the establishment of the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC). This use is not universal, as Republican rule was incomplete and contested almost throughout this period. However, there existed a Republican government on mainland China for the duration, and it remains a meaningful and useful periodisation. From 1928, the Republican government was led by the Guomindang (or Nationalist) party (国民党), and the two are often referred to synonymously during this period. In 1949 the Guomindang withdrew to Taiwan. Subsequent governments on Taiwan have continued to refer to themselves as the Republic of China, and have claimed continued sovereignty over mainland China.

³⁷ See, in particular: Robert A. Bickers, *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism, 1900-1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Jessie Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions: the Anti-Christian Movements of 1920-28* (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Roads Books, 1988); Ka-che Yip, *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students: The Anti-Christian Movement of 1922-1927*, (Bellingham, WA: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 1980).

³⁸ For the May Fourth Movement, see: Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986); Mao Chen, *Between Tradition and Change: The Hermeneutics of May Fourth Literature* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997); Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960); Joseph T. Chen, *The May Fourth Movement in Shanghai: The Making of a Social Movement in Modern China* (Leiden: Brill, 1971).

³⁹ For the Nationalist Revolution, see: C. Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); Michael G. Murdock, *Disarming the Allies of Imperialism: Agitation, Manipulation, and the State During China’s Nationalist Revolution, 1922-1929* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁴⁰ For the anti-Christian movement, see: Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions*; Yip, *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students*; Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

resistance that would lead to the formation of an independent, modern Chinese nation-state.⁴¹

An additional paradigm identified by Paul Cohen was that of 'Tradition to Modernity', which narrated the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in China as a linear transition from one to the other.⁴² Studies within this paradigm focussing on missionaries presented a similar narrative of China's modernisation to that documented above, but viewed missionaries as having a more benign role. The seminal work in this vein was John King Fairbank's 1974 edited volume, *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, in which Fairbank summarised the missionary project as 'pre-eminently a people-to-people movement.'⁴³ Missionaries were therefore to be studied in a framework of cultural exchange and, although Fairbank acknowledged the complexity and variety of such exchanges, he ultimately concluded that the predominant legacy was China's modernisation:

The missionaries came as spiritual reformers, soon found that material improvements were equally necessary, and in the end helped to foment the great revolution. Yet as foreigners, they could take no part in it, much less bring it to a finish. Instead, it finished them. But in the Maoist message of today, 'serve the people,' one can hear an echo of the missionary's wish to serve his fellow man.⁴⁴

The role of missionaries within this narrative was therefore to introduce cultural influences and institutions that would contribute to the development of modern China.

⁴¹ For studies of missionaries and accusations of 'cultural imperialism', see: Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., 'The Missionary Enterprise and Theories of Imperialism', in John King Fairbank (ed.), *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 336-373; Ryan Dunch, 'Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions and Global Modernity', *History and Theory* 41 (2002), pp. 301-325.

⁴² Cohen, *Discovering History in China*, pp. 57-96. Cohen was particularly commenting on the studies by, and influenced by, Joseph Levenson, most notably his work *Confucian China and its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (first combined edition, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968).

⁴³ Fairbank, *The Missionary Enterprise*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Fairbank, *The Missionary Enterprise*, p. 2.

This is a narrative that has continued to shape studies of missionaries. The concern to gauge the contribution of missionaries to China's modernisation has frequently led to a focus on missionary educational and medical institutions, and on the opportunities for social mobility and female liberation that they brought.⁴⁵ Much of this literature is framed in reaction to accusations of imperialism levelled at missionaries. A recent example of this is Ryan Dunch's 2001 work, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China, 1857-1927*. Focussing on the Fuzhou area, Dunch analysed the activities of Chinese Protestants, and in particular their social and political lives. Contrary to claims that conversion to Christianity was incompatible with support for Chinese nationalism, Dunch sought to demonstrate not only that the Fuzhou Protestants held fast to their Chinese identity, but that they used their Christianity as a resource from which to construct their nationalism. Their Christianity informed their active participation in the community, and through their church activities they introduced a number of practices into Chinese life that would become important to Chinese nationalism, for example public ceremonies and flags.⁴⁶ In Dunch's narrative, therefore, missionaries were a major contributor to China's modernisation.

Paul Cohen proposed a fourth paradigm, in order to overcome the Western-centric bias of earlier scholarship. This was the China-centered approach, and it posited an

⁴⁵ Examples include: Jessie Lutz, *China and the Christian Colleges 1850-1950*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971); Daniel H. Bays and Ellen Widmer (eds.), *China's Christian Colleges: Cross-Cultural Connections, 1900-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); John King Fairbank and Suzanne Wilson Barnett (eds.), *Christianity in China: Early Protestant Missionary Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Jessie Lutz, (ed.), *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity and Social Mobility* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2010); Kaiyi Chen, *Seeds from the West: St. John's Medical School, Shanghai, 1880-1952* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 2001); Guangqiu Xu, *American Doctors in Canton: Modernization in China, 1835-1935* (Somerset, NJ: Transaction, 2011).

⁴⁶ Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China 1857-1927*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

approach that would consider modern Chinese history according to an internal, Chinese perspective, rather than external, Western narratives of modernity.⁴⁷ The China-centered approach has had a big influence in shaping studies of missionaries. This was most clearly seen in Daniel Bays' 1996 edited collection, *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. The studies in this volume, according to Bays, 'aimed at the elucidation of basic forces of modern Chinese history, while at the same time, by using materials related to Christianity, they often shed light on the growth and indigenisation of the Chinese church and the role of missions.'⁴⁸ However, while seeking to view the influence of missions from an internal, Chinese perspective, Bays was not substantially altering the modernisation narrative of earlier studies. The essential direction of historical change which missions contributed to was still identified in the emergence of a unitary modernity, albeit one labelled as Chinese.

Paul Cohen's attempt at a corrective to Western-centric, modernisation narratives contributed to a more general trend in viewing Chinese modernity as part of a conceptualisation of multiple modernities. This idea of modernity as being decentred and multi-faceted has led to an array of studies examining the many forms and directions of its development in China.⁴⁹ Arif Dirlik and Prasenjit Duara, in two key recent discussions, have examined this trend. They have described how the collapse of socialism in the 1980s led to a wider recognition of modernity as a homogenous

⁴⁷ Cohen, *Discovering History in China*, pp. 149-198.

⁴⁸ Bays, *Christianity in China*, p. x.

⁴⁹ For example, see: Peter Zarrow (ed.), *Creating Chinese Modernity: Knowledge and Everyday Life, 1900-1940* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); Tani Barlow (ed.), *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Wen-hsin Yeh, *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); Julia F. Andrews (ed.), *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth Century China* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998); Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity, China 1900-1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

and globalising force, at the same time as it brought about an increased contestation of the meanings of modernity.⁵⁰ This has had a number of impacts on histories of Chinese modernity, and of the place of missionaries within this.

For example, new perspectives on the Jesuit mission have sought to emphasise its global context and significance.⁵¹ This is a reflection of a move away from chronologies that posit a rift around 1800 dividing an isolated, self-sufficient imperial China from its opened-up and globalised modern incarnation. Instead, the Ming and Qing dynasties have been increasingly viewed in the context of an emerging early modern world order, characterised by expansive empires, intensified land use and sophisticated and centralised bureaucracies.⁵² More attention has also been paid to the growing connections between China and the rest of the world that developed during this period, particularly in the maritime sphere.⁵³ In this context,

⁵⁰ Arif Dirlik, 'Global Modernity? Modernity in an Age of Global Capitalism', *European Journal of Social Theory* 6:3 (2003), pp. 275-292; Prasenjit Duara, *The Global and Regional in China's Nation-Formation* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 2-3.

⁵¹ See: Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Mary Laven, *Mission to China: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East* (London: Faber, 2011); Michela Fontana, *Matteo Ricci: A Jesuit in the Ming Court* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011); R. Po-chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci, 1552-1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Florence C. Hsia, *Sojourners in a Strange Land: Jesuits and their Scientific Missions in Late Imperial China* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Nicolas Standaert, *The Interweaving of Rituals: Funerals in the Cultural Exchange between China and Europe* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2008); Luke Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); David E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800* (Third edition, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009)

⁵² Valerie Hansen, *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000); Lynn A. Struve (ed.), *The Qing Formation in World-Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton (eds.), *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

⁵³ Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405-1433* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007); Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450 – 1680* (two volumes, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988 and 1993); Timothy Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: the Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009); John E. Wills, Jr., *China and Maritime Europe, 1500 – 1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy and Mission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Zheng Yangwen, *China on the Sea: How the Maritime World Shaped Modern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

rather than viewing the Jesuit mission in terms of a cultural clash between East and West, historians have sought to emphasise the multi-directional exchange of influences and ideas that it brought about.

Studies of missionaries in the nineteenth century have also followed this trend for narrating modern history within a framework of globalization.⁵⁴ For example, Alwyn Austin's *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832-1905*, and Jessie Lutz's work, *Opening China: Karl F.A. Gützlaff and Sino-Western relations, 1827-1852*, both published in 2007, have treated missionaries as constituents in a broader process of globalisation. Both seek to contextualise missions in their own religious worlds as well as in the late Qing society that they operated in, so that missionaries are seen as sites of intersecting influences.

An additional context that has shaped the direction of studies is the revival of religious activity that has taken place in China since the 1980s, and which has included a significant rise in the numbers of Protestant Christians. Bays has commented that this development 'shows how thoroughly Christianity has become Chinese, and part of the Chinese social scene.'⁵⁵ This has led to studies that have sought to uncover the historical roots of this growth. Most notable of these has been Lian Xi's 2010 work, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*.

⁵⁴ For studies on globalization and global history, see: A.G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (New York: Norton, 2002); C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Bruce Mazlish, *The New Global History* (London: Routledge, 2006); Pamela Kyle Crossley, *What is Global History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵⁵ Bays, *Christianity in China*, p. ix.

Ryan Dunch has summarised the development in these most recent studies as an attempt to ‘understand missionaries in the context of a globalizing modernity that altered Western societies as well as non-Western ones in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.’⁵⁶ This approach of viewing modernity, as a connected process but having multiple effects and expressions, has inspired this variety of new studies of missionary activity in China. However, this conceptualisation is largely framed in reaction to earlier pressures to define mission work in relation to Western-centric narratives of modernity. While this has led to the opening up of new perspectives for understanding missions in China, it has also led to studies becoming somewhat fragmented. This in turn has resulted in a neglect of discussion of the relationship of missions to larger historical trends and modern formations.⁵⁷

Prasenjit Duara has recently proposed a conception of hegemonic modernity, and this offers a way to rebalance studies of missions in China. Viewing modernity as hegemonic ‘draws attention to resistant and alternative trends and practices that often cannot find a name or that are denigrated as marginal, superstitious or backward in the dominant narrative.’ But the hegemonic character of modernity serves also to emphasise how ‘these practices survive and create with reference to this framework

⁵⁶ Dunch, ‘Beyond Cultural Imperialism’, p. 318.

⁵⁷ For example, a recent study by Daniel Bays of Chen Chonggui, the Chinese Protestant leader, appears alongside studies from India and Kenya in a section entitled ‘Emergent Christian and National Identities in Asia and Africa’, as part of a larger volume on missions and decolonisation (Bays, ‘Foreign Missions and Indigenous Protestant Leaders in China, 1920-1955: Identity and Loyalty in an Age of Powerful Nationalism’, in Brian Stanley, *Missions, Nationalism and the End of Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), pp. 144-164). And, as part of a section entitled ‘Local Agency: Charismatic and Pentecostal Transformations’, a study by Feiya Tao of the Jesus Family Movement in Republican China appears alongside studies of charismatic movements in India, Ghana and Kenya (‘Pentecostalism and Christian Utopia in China: Jing Dianying and the Jesus Family Movement, 1921–1952’, in Ogbu U. Kalu and Alaine Low (eds.), *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), pp. 238-252).

of hegemony.⁵⁸ This is useful for articulating the importance of primitivism to studies of mission activity in China. Primitivism is one of these trends and practices that has been marginalised in mainstream narratives. However, its importance is in its construction as an anti-modern discourse. In this way, primitivism reflects the existence of a dialectical relation between missions and modernity, and this allows for an appreciation of the ways that modernising influences were defined and circulated within missionary encounters in non-linear ways. Simultaneously, the recognition of modernity as hegemonic draws attention to the ways that primitivism had to be practiced in constant negotiation with this framework of hegemony. Primitivism therefore had an uneasy relationship with the modern, being at once a product of modernity and often aided by associations with it. But it simultaneously needed to define itself in opposition to the modern if it was to maintain its relevance.

Overview of Thesis

The thesis will examine a number of regional stories about missionary primitivism in modern China. The chronology of these overlapping stories spans a period from the advance of Brethren missionaries north of the Great Wall of China in 1897, up to the present day. This extended chronology allows for consideration of the ways that, despite their physical expulsion from the country after 1949, the missionary encounter with China continued to have an evolving impact.⁵⁹ Each of the five chapters addresses distinct historiographical concerns, but also contribute to an interconnected and cumulative examination.

⁵⁸ Duara, *The Global and Regional* p. 10.

⁵⁹ For an examination of the significance of 1949 in Chinese historiography, see Cohen, *China Unbound: Evolving Perspectives on the Chinese Past* (London: RoutledgeCurzon 2003). pp. 131-147.

In addition, the chapters have different geographical contexts, all of which represent a different site on China's frontiers. These include the coastal treaty ports of Fuzhou⁶⁰ and Shanghai⁶¹, with their Western and Japanese enclaves. They also encompass China's Central Eurasian frontiers, and in particular the border regions with Mongolia and Tibet.⁶² These regions were of particular importance in the defining of Chinese modernity. As sites where Chinese sovereignty was partial and contested, they took on a heightened significance as part of efforts to produce a coherent modern Chinese polity. The treaty ports were places where modern influences entered China, and they contained concentrations of modern infrastructures, technologies, ideas and cultures. They were therefore important sites for the reception and negotiation of the modern into China. Conversely, China's

⁶⁰ For late-imperial Fuzhou and Fujian, see: Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Eduard B. Vermeer (ed.), *Development and Decline of Fukien Province in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1990). For the missionary presence in Fuzhou, see: Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants*; Chen Yiqiang, *Christianity in Modern China: The Making of the First Native Protestant Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). For a study in Chinese of mission work in Fujian, see: Lin Liqiang, 晚清闽都文化之西传: 以传教士汉学家卢公明为个案 [Late Qing Fujian Culture and the West: the Missionary Sinologist Justus Doolittle], (Beijing: Haiyang Press, 2010).

⁶¹ For studies of Shanghai and its modernising influence, see: Frederic Wakeman, Jr. and Wen-hsin Yeh (eds.), *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Wen-hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendour: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Shumei Shi, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); Bryna Goodman, *Native-Place, City and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); Christian Henriot, *Shanghai, 1927-1937: Municipal Power, Locality, and Modernization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

⁶² For Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, see: Xiaoyuan Liu, *Reins of Liberation: An Entangled History of Mongolian Independence, Chinese Territoriality, and Great Power Hegemony, 1911-1950* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006); Uradyn Erden Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Christopher P. Atwood, *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia's Interregnum Decades, 1911-1931* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Hao Weimin (ed.), 内蒙古近代简史 [A Concise History of Modern Inner Mongolia], (Hohhot: Inner Mongolia University Press, 1990); Hao Weimin and Gan Xulan (eds.), 内蒙古革命史 [History of the Revolution in Inner Mongolia], (Hohhot: Inner Mongolia University Press, 1997). For Tibet, see: Hsiao-ting Lin, *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier: Intrigues and Ethnopolitics, 1928-49* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006); Beth Meriam, *China's 'Tibetan' Frontiers: Sharing the Contested Ground* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Wang Mingke, 华夏边缘: 历史记忆与族群认同 [On Chinese borderlands: historical memory and ethnic identity], (Taipei: Yunchen Wenhua Gongsu, 1997).

landward frontiers were often remote from modern influences, and yet they became foci of struggles to define the modern identity of China, and of Asia.⁶³

As well as being important in the construction of Chinese modernity, the margins are ideal sites for investigating the character and impact of missionary primitivism. The modernising hubs of the treaty ports brought into focus the relationship of primitivism to the modern. They highlighted the ways that missionaries were a product of the technologies and forms of the modern, and so forced them to re-articulate their religious identity in relation to them. In the case of China's inland frontiers, missionary primitivists were drawn to such remote areas as sites where they could best fulfil their missionary calling to preach to those who had not yet heard the gospel. However, here also the modernity of missionaries became a pertinent issue, in this case because their modernity was more pronounced in these peripheral regions. Missionary primitivism can therefore be most tellingly documented through examining how it sought to operate within the volatile and ambiguous conditions of modern China's margins.

Chapter 1 will introduce Echoes of Service, and place the Brethren in the context both of the modern missionary movement more generally, and of missionary efforts in China specifically. Arif Dirlik has drawn attention to recent revivals of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism across Asia, and identified these as challenges to modernity.⁶⁴ This chapter will ask whether this was a phenomenon that has a longer history, and that can be located in the West as well as Asia. In particular, can the

⁶³ See, in particular: Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Hsiao-ting Lin, *Modern China's Ethnic Frontiers: A Journey to the West* (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁶⁴ Dirlik, 'Global Modernity?', p. 278.

emergence of the Brethren in nineteenth-century Britain be seen as an early example of a reassertion of religious identity, in response to an emerging modernity that sought to subsume religion into a larger, secularised whole?⁶⁵ How might this have affected their attitude towards mission work, and their strategies in the mission field?

Missionaries have been receiving coverage as part of a recent turn to studying ‘the empire at home’, in which the metropole and the colony are analysed within the same frame in order to examine how influences circulated between one and the other.⁶⁶ The focus of these studies, however, has tended to remain on the larger, established missionary societies.⁶⁷ If a marginal missionary group, such as the Brethren, were to be added to this scholarship, what affect would it have on the hypothesis that cultures in the metropole and the mission field were mutually constitutive? Brethren culture and identity were tied at a fundamental level to their activities on the mission field. How might this provide a new perspective for examining the ways that influences flowed between home churches and foreign fields?

⁶⁵ There is a large and ongoing debate on secularization. For a recent survey of the literature in relation to modern Britain, see: Jeremy Morris, ‘Secularization and Religious Experience: Arguments in the Historiography of Modern British Religion’, *Historical Journal* 55:1 (2012), pp. 195-219.

⁶⁶ Examples of this scholarship include: Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England 1715-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Hall and Sonya Rose (eds.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); John Marriott, *The Other Empire: Metropolis, India and Progress in the Colonial Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). For studies specifically on mission, see: Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1998); Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Elizabeth Prevost, *The Communion of Women: Missions and Gender in Colonial Africa and the British Metropole* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁶⁷ For example in *Civilising Subjects*, Catherine Hall examines the Baptist Missionary Society, while in *Congregational Missions*, Susan Thorne focuses almost exclusively on the London Missionary Society (LMS), which drew its support mostly from the Congregationalists. The LMS is also the focus of Anna Johnston’s *Missionary Writing and Empire*.

Finally, this chapter will examine how a consideration of the Brethren affects historical narratives of missions in the twentieth century. Susan Thorne has asserted that by the second half of the twentieth century, ‘missionaries’ influence on popular culture on their British home front had waned beyond all recognition’, and that this was a decline that set in during the inter-war period.⁶⁸ However, a focus on Brethren missions forces a questioning of this decline narrative. Certainly, there was a perception among those Brethren involved in missions that general interest and support was waning, but how did Brethren react to this, and could it have led to new initiatives and a reassertion of Brethren missionary identity and activity? How did this new sensitivity towards Brethren self-identity translate into their missionary efforts in China?

Chapter 2 will seek to provide a fuller answer to this final question through an examination of Watchman Nee, perhaps the most significant Brethren convert in China.⁶⁹ Nee (1903-1972) was the leader of a large independent Christian movement known as the Little Flock. He was influenced by Brethren writings, and sought to organise his movement around primitivist principles. The rapid growth of the Little Flock brought him attention from various Brethren and evangelical groups in Britain, where Nee was invited in 1932 and 1937. The response to Nee in Britain was ambivalent. While his zeal and spirituality were admired, his aggressive, independent stance also provoked strong opposition.

⁶⁸ Thorne, ‘Religion and Empire at Home’, p. 164.

⁶⁹ For biographies of Nee and his movement, the Little Flock, written from missionary perspectives, see: Kinnear, *Against the Tide*; Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*. Recent academic studies are: Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*; Lee, ‘Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement in Maoist China’.

The reaction to Watchman Nee among Brethren speaks to a growing scholarship on ‘World Christianity’, that is, on the emergence of Christianity as a world religion over the course of the twentieth century.⁷⁰ In the case of China, the emphasis has been on documenting the development of ‘Chinese Christianity’, with particular attention therefore given to local agency.⁷¹ This chapter will examine the challenge that missionary primitivism brings to this distinction between missionary and Chinese forms of Christianity. In particular, how does Watchman Nee’s embrace of primitivism complicate a process that has been narrated as the sinicisation of Christianity? Does it provide any new insight on how an alien religion came to be adopted by Chinese people? How did primitivism provide the means for Chinese Christians to assert their independence from missionary oversight?

Nee grew up in Fuzhou and based his movement in Shanghai, and this chapter will consider the importance of this treaty-port context. In particular, how did the international connections and modernising influences that Nee was exposed to serve to shape the direction of his spiritual quest? Finally, the reaction to Nee in the West

⁷⁰ For studies utilising this transnational analysis of the global expansion of evangelicalism, see: Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Vol. 8: World Christianities, c.1815–c.1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Hugh McLeod (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Vol. 9: World Christianities, c.1914–c.2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Donald M. Lewis (ed.), *Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004); David Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostalism and the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006); Michael Nai-Chiu Poon (ed.), *Christian Movements in Southeast Asia: A Theological Exploration* (Singapore: Genesis Books, 2010).

⁷¹ This agenda was first put forward in: Daniel H. Bays, *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 265. Examples of studies of ‘Chinese Christianity’ are: Bays, ‘The Rise of an Indigenous Chinese Christianity’, in *Christianity in China*, pp. 307-316; Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*; Jessie Lutz, ‘China and Protestantism: Historical Perspectives, 1807-1949’, in Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu (eds.), *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), pp. 179-193; Tao Feiya, ‘Pentecostalism and Christian Utopia in China: Jing Dianying and the Jesus Family Movement, 1921–1952’, in Ogbu U. Kalu and Alaine Low (eds.), *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), pp. 238-252; Bays, ‘Foreign Missions and Indigenous Protestant Leaders in China, 1920-1955: Identity and Loyalty in an Age of Powerful Nationalism’, in Brian Stanley, *Missions, Nationalism and the End of Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003).

raises a number of questions concerning the relation of churches to their missions. Specifically, why did Nee's success in China provoke such polarised responses from Brethren in Britain? What does his enduring popularity among evangelicals in the West reveal about the way influences circulated between home churches and mission fields?

Chapter 3 further examines the relation of Brethren primitivist discourses at home to their presence in the mission field. This will be done through an examination of the Echoes mission in north-east China. This mission was commenced in 1897, but the chapter will focus on the period 1919-1952, when efforts were made to extend this mission ever further north in order to reach the Mongolian people.⁷² Particular attention will be paid to the career of Reginald Sturt, who was part of this mission from 1906 until his death in 1949, and who undertook numerous itinerations across the Mongolian grasslands.⁷³

This was a tumultuous period for this region, as its political status became contested in the post-Qing era.⁷⁴ This chapter will examine whether the Brethren engagement with Mongolia aids understanding of the significance of such peripheral regions in

⁷² For an overview of Protestant missionary efforts in Mongolia, see: Hugh P. Kemp, *Steppe by Step: Mongolia's Christians – From Ancient Roots to Vibrant Young Church* (London: Monarch Books, 2000). For studies of particular missions and missionaries see: Kathleen L. Lodwick, "For God and Queen: James Gilmour Among the Mongols, 1870-1891", in *Social Sciences and Missions* 21:1 (2008), pp. 144-172; Erik Sidenvall, *The Making of Manhood among Swedish Missionaries in China and Mongolia, c. 1890-c. 1914* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Patrick Taveirne, *Han-Mongol Encounters and Missionary Endeavours: A History of Scheut in Ordos (Hetao), 1874-1911* (Leuven: Leuven University Press and the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, 2004).

⁷³ For a biography of Sturt, see: A.G. Compton, *Children of the Wilderness* (Auckland: Wentforth Publishers, 1953).

⁷⁴ For studies of China and Mongolia during this period, see: Liu, *Reins of Liberation*; Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge*; Atwood, *Young Mongols and Vigilantes*. For histories of modern Mongolia see: Tsedendambyn Batbayar, *Modern Mongolia: A Concise History* (Ulaanbaatar: Mongolian Center for Scientific and Technological Information, 2002); C. R. Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia* (second edition, London: Kegan Paul International, 1989); Stephen Kotkin and Bruce A. Elleman (eds.), *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century: Landlocked Cosmopolitan* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999).

defining Chinese modernity. In particular, Sturt's approach to his task was scientific in character, and the maps he was able to produce as a result of his travels brought him recognition from the Royal Geographic Society, among others. The scientific therefore had an important role in extending missionary coverage to Mongolia. What does this reveal about the significance that regions considered to be marginal and backward had for formations of modernity?

Sturt travelled thousands of miles over his long career seeking to reach scattered Mongol populations, but his efforts yielded few converts. Despite this, he persisted in an inhospitable and dangerous region, and maintained an itinerant strategy, moving constantly from one settlement to another. The chapter will also examine what Sturt's exertions reveal about the character of missionary primitivism. In particular, why, despite the mission's meagre returns, was Sturt not only allowed to continue in this way, but his efforts also given extensive coverage in *Echoes'* publications? What significance did missions to the unnavigated spaces of China's margins have for Brethren primitivism?

Chapter 4 continues this examination of the significance of peripheral China to missionary primitivism. Geoffrey Bull and George Patterson were the two members of the short-lived *Echoes* mission to Tibet which began in 1947 and ended abruptly with the Chinese annexation of Tibet in 1951.⁷⁵ Bull and Patterson were based in the

⁷⁵ For histories of Tibet in the twentieth century, see, for the pre-1951 period: Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1989); Alex McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj: The Frontier Cadre, 1904-1947* (Richmond: Curzon, 1997). For post-1951 histories and historical analyses of the contemporary political situation, see: Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1951-1955: The Calm before the Storm* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet and the Dalai Lama* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1997); Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* (London: Pimlico,

eastern Kham province of Tibet, a region culturally and politically distinct from the central provinces around Lhasa. A growing body of scholarship is concerned with these marginal regions of Tibet, and the complexities of the China-Tibet border region during the Republican period.⁷⁶ This chapter will examine Patterson and Bull's mission in the context of these enquiries. In particular, what do their efforts to negotiate ambiguous and shifting layers of power contribute to an understanding of this frontier region?

Patterson and Bull's activities raise questions about the relationship between primitivism and modernity, especially as it is framed in China's margins. In particular, their use of modern medicine to undermine the spiritual authority of Tibet's lamas found common cause with the modernising and reforming agendas of local Kham leaders. How does this serve to elucidate the relationship of the modern to missionary primitivism? What does it reveal about the attempts of Tibetans to engage with different visions of modernity during the Republican period? Finally, Patterson and Bull both published accounts of their experiences in Tibet, and their involvement in Tibetan frontier politics gave their narratives an added appeal to a curious West. How did missionary primitivism therefore contribute to the growing volume of Tibetan imaginaries that were being produced in the West at that time.⁷⁷

1999); Dawa Norbu, *China's Tibet Policy* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001); Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* (New York, 1999).

⁷⁶ Lawrence Epstein (ed.), *Khams pa Histories: Visions of People, Place and Authority* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Melvyn C. Goldstein, Dawei Sherap and William R. Siebenschuh, *A Tibetan Revolutionary: The Political Life and Times of Bapa Phuntso Wangye* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); Lin, *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier*; Carole McGranahan, *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Lin, *Modern China's Ethnic Frontiers*; Meriam, *China's 'Tibetan' Frontiers*.

⁷⁷ For studies of Tibetan imaginaries see: Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Peter Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, Travel Writing, and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press); John Powers, *History as Propaganda: Tibetan Exiles versus the People's Republic of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Thierry Dodin and Heinz

The Echoes mission to Tibet was aborted, as was all mission work in China, following the ascent to power of the Chinese Communists.⁷⁸ Chapter 5 will consider this withdrawal of Echoes missionaries. A focus on the afterlife of China missionaries fills a gap in current scholarship and contributes to a growing literature on the effects of decolonisation on British society and culture.⁷⁹ It also speaks to an interest in narrating the changes of 1949 in China within a more continuous narrative and a global context.⁸⁰ In particular, the missionary exodus prompted many to produce written accounts of their experiences. The writings of those associated with the Brethren highlighted the antipathy of the new government towards mission work, and this raises questions about the changing relation between missionary primitivism and Chinese modernity. In particular, how did missionary accounts portray the new Communist China, and what impacts did such portrayals have? How did the withdrawal affect attitudes towards Chinese Christians, such as Watchman Nee?

The chapter also raises a number of questions about the impact of the China

Räther, *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections and Fantasies* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2001); Dibyesh Anand, *Geopolitical Exotica: Tibet in Western Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

⁷⁸ For studies of the ending of the missionary presence in China, see: Beverley Hooper, *China Stands Up: Ending the Western Presence, 1948-1950* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986); George Hood, *Neither Bang nor Whimper: The End of a Missionary Era in China* (Singapore: Presbyterian Church in Singapore, 1991).

⁷⁹ See: David Maxwell, 'Decolonization', in Norman Etherington (ed.), *Missions and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 285-305; Brian Stanley (ed.), *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire*; John Stuart, *British Missionaries and the End of Empire: East, Central, and Southern Africa, 1939-1964* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011); L. J. Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to a Post-Imperial World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002); Stuart Ward (ed.), *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁸⁰ The need to narrate 1949 as a continuity, rather a rupture, was made by Cohen, *China Unbound*, pp. 131-147. Recent studies that have sought to place the changes of 1949 in historical perspective are: Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (eds.), *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Li Hua-Yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948-1953* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

withdrawal on the subsequent activities of the Echoes missionaries. How did the closing of one of its most important fields shape the subsequent direction of Echoes? How did this affect Brethren primitivist identity? Attention will be paid in particular to the post-missionary career of George Patterson, whose response to the missionary withdrawal was somewhat exceptional and extreme. Patterson became involved in raising publicity and support for the Tibetan struggle against China, and his association with the Tibetan cause has forced a radical rearticulation of his missionary identity. This brings into focus the ways in which changing political circumstances have shaped the character and possibilities of missionary primitivism, and in turn draws attention to the ways in which this has affected representations of China in the West.

Methodology and Sources

The research for this thesis has been centered on primary source material only recently made readily accessible to academic researchers, and which is held in the Christian Brethren Archive (CBA), in the John Rylands University Library, at the University of Manchester. This material consists of written correspondence between missionaries in the field and the Echoes staff in their office in Bath. Due to losses during World War II, most of this material extends back only as far as the 1930s. But this correspondence also formed the basis for the reports printed in *Echoes of Service* (hereafter *Echoes*), the monthly publication of Echoes featuring reports from missionaries in their various fields. Coverage of earlier periods can therefore be found in the relevant editions of *Echoes*, a near-complete run of which is also held in

the CBA, and in several other academic libraries in Britain. Echoes produced other periodicals, most notably *Links of Help* and *Echoes Quarterly Review*, and relevant articles in these have also been consulted.

The front page of each edition of *Echoes* contains the subtitle ‘A record of labour in the Lord’s name’, and this reflects the character and purpose of Echoes’ publications, and of the correspondence sent by missionaries for inclusion in these publications. These accounts focus on the activities of the missionaries, and are framed according to the primitivist model they were seeking to emulate. While often detailed, their accounts are somewhat formulaic, and provide few details of the people and places that were encountered by the missionaries. Alwyn Austin, in his history of the CIM, has commented on the difficulty of analysing such a type of missionary source:

How does a historian deal with such opaque sources, where words are meant to hide more than they reveal, where the ‘real world’ drops away and pilgrims wander a timeless landscape that could be Palestine, could be the Middle Ages, could be *Pilgrim’s Progress*? One can throw up one’s hands and declare all is allegory – or one can ask why and how did the CIM write its history as allegory?⁸¹

This thesis will seek to read Echoes’ reports and histories in a similar way, examining the ways that primitivism was practiced and recorded. The style of these sources reflects how mission work was essentially an expression of Brethren primitivist identity in Britain, and how the vicissitudes of mission work were conveyed, often uneasily, in ways that sought to affirm that identity.

There are undoubtedly limits to what these sources can reveal about the encounters that Echoes missionaries initiated in China, and in particular about those Chinese people who were involved in and changed by these encounters. This problem will be

⁸¹ Austin, *China's Millions*, p. 27.

considered more in Chapter One. However, its apparent opacity should be treated as the key to reading a resource that has great potential for presenting home churches and mission fields within the same cultural and historical framework.

The CBA contains other material relating to Brethren assemblies and significant figures in the movement, much of it uncatalogued. Items among this material have been located that have relevance to the China mission, and have been analysed alongside the Echoes of Service material. The CBA is also a constantly expanding archive, as further donations are frequently made. Of particular relevance to this thesis has been the recent donation of a collection of photographs relating to the Echoes Tibet mission. This has allowed a further type of source material to be added to this study.

This archive-based material has been combined with other sources. The careers of many of the missionaries featured in this thesis have been published in accounts written by themselves or by contemporaries, and these have been consulted. This has been further supplemented by oral sources, specifically interviews with former missionaries, their contemporaries, and those with a present-day involvement in the movements under discussion.⁸² There is therefore a biographical character to many of the sources consulted and, indeed, much of the thesis centres on the life stories of a few individuals. Particular methodologies have therefore been employed in order to engage effectively with both written biographical sources, and oral testimony.⁸³

⁸² A total of five interviews were conducted: two with former Echoes missionaries, George Patterson and George Hanlon; one with Jean Kinnear, the wife of the late Angus Kinnear who was a biographer of Watchman Nee; one with Ian Burness, the current General Director of Echoes; and one with a current Little Flock member.

⁸³ For a recent study of missionary writings in an imperial context, see: Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire*. For a more general study of writing and empire, see: Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*:

The prominence of biography in Echoes missionary sources raises the question of the significance of individual agency and charisma in shaping historical encounters.⁸⁴

With regard to missionaries, the fame and influence of particular individuals has been notable, both during their lifetime and as reflected in later historical coverage.

Key examples in the context of China are Matteo Ricci⁸⁵, Karl Gützlaff⁸⁶, Young J. Allen⁸⁷, Hudson Taylor⁸⁸, Timothy Richard⁸⁹, John Leighton Stuart⁹⁰ and James Legge.⁹¹ The prominence that these figures have continued to receive bears

Travel Writing and Transculturation (London and New York: Routledge, 1992). For historical studies discussing and utilising biography and autobiography, see: Carolyn Steedman, *The Radical Soldier's Tale: John Pearman, 1819-1908* (London: Routledge, 1988); Michael Roper, 'Re-remembering the Soldier Hero: the Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War', *History Workshop Journal* 50 (2000), pp. 181-204; Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994); Linda Anderson, *Autobiography*, (London: Routledge, 2001). For discussions of oral history methodology, see: Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010); Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), pp. 65-93.

⁸⁴ The use of charisma as a concept for understanding religion was developed by Max Weber. For recent discussions of charisma in its Weberian context, see: Martin Riesebrodt, 'Charisma in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion' *Religion*, 29:1 (1999), pp. 1-14; Christopher Adair-Toteff, 'Max Weber's Charisma', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 5:2 (2005), pp. 189-204. A separate line of investigation has been into the concept of heroism in both a domestic and imperial context. See: Geoffrey Cubitt and Allen Warren (eds.), *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Edward Berenson, *Heroes of Empire: Five Charismatic Men and the Conquest of Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

⁸⁵ See: Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*; Laven, *Mission to China: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East*; *Matteo Ricci: A Jesuit in the Ming Court*; Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci, 1552-1610*.

⁸⁶ Lutz, *Opening China: Karl F.A. Gützlaff and Sino-Western Relations*.

⁸⁷ Warren Akin Candler, *Young J. Allen: 'The Man Who Seeded China'* (Nashville, TN: Cokesbury Press, 1931); Adrian A. Bennett, *Missionary Journalist in China: Young J. Allen and his Magazines, 1860-1883* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1983).

⁸⁸ Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission*; Pollock, *Hudson Taylor and Maria*; Phyllis Thompson, *God's Venturer: Hudson Taylor* (London: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1974); Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century*.

⁸⁹ William E. Soothill, *Timothy Richard of China: Seer, Statesman, Missionary and the Most Disinterested Adviser the Chinese Ever Had* (London: Seeley Service & Co., 1926); Paul R. Bohr, *Famine in China and the Missionary: Timothy Richard as Relief Administrator and Advocate of National Reform, 1876-1884* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

⁹⁰ John Leighton Stuart, *Fifty years in China; The Memoirs of John Leighton Stuart, Missionary and Ambassador* (New York: Random House, 1954); Yu-ming Shaw, *An American Missionary in China: John Leighton Stuart and Chinese-American Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁹¹ Helen Edith Legge, *James Legge: Missionary and Scholar* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1905); Lauren F. Pfister, *Striving for the 'whole duty of man': James Legge and the Scottish Protestant Encounter with China* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004); Norman J. Girardot, *The*

testimony to the power of individual charisma in shaping historical records. Despite this, a critical examination of the cult of the missionary individual in China has yet to be made.⁹²

This thesis focuses largely on individuals whose careers have been recorded, by themselves or others, within narratives that position them as central and powerful agents. These individuals will be examined with attention to the forms in which their lives have been recorded. This analysis will serve to provide insights into the nature and impact of missionary primitivism, which asserted the primacy and power of individual faith. The Brethren historian W. T. Stunt, has commented of the movement's missionaries that 'They have gone forth in simple faith and dependence upon God, and the One who provided for the needs of Elijah has met their every need too.'⁹³ The irony of this depiction of the humble missionary's 'simple faith and dependence upon God' is that it provided an empowering narrative for charismatic and ambitious individuals. The frequently egocentric character of the missionary biographies produced in this context forces a consideration of the significance of such individuals in creating and shaping their encounters in China. However, in drawing attention to this, the thesis will thereby seek to decentre these figures from their own narratives. It will analyse the changing ways that these individuals have shaped their life stories over time, and will read across their narratives in order to gauge the limits of their agency. This will be done primarily by paying close

Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

⁹² A partial exception is: Kathleen L. Lodwick and W.K. Cheng (eds.), *The Missionary Kaleidoscope: Portraits of Six China Missionaries* (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2005). However, although the collation of the studies in this collection draws attention to the importance of individual missionary narratives, it is not something that is addressed directly. More recently, Lutz, in *Opening China: Karl F.A. Gützlaff and Sino-Western Relations*, has given some attention to the cult of personality that arose around Gützlaff.

⁹³ Stunt, *Turning the World Upside Down*, p. 12.

attention to the socio-political contexts of these figures, which were vital in determining the possibilities and directions of their activities.

Conclusion

This thesis will highlight overlooked facets of the missionary presence in China, and provide new ways for understanding the ways that influences flowed between China and the West as a result of this presence. In particular, it will be argued, missionary primitivism complicates our understanding of the relation of missionaries to modernity. In contrast to studies that view missionaries as carriers of influences and ideas that contributed to China's path of modernisation, this thesis presents a missionary group that was born out of a reaction to modernity, and that operated in China according to a perceived premodern reference point. Missionary primitivism therefore formed a dialectical engagement with Chinese modernity. Sometimes its presence and influence seemed distinctly modern, but on other occasions it appeared as marginal to a hegemonic modernity within which it had to negotiate its existence.

This insight, it will be argued, sheds new light on the ways that Protestant Christianity came to be established as an independent religion in modern China. The seemingly narrow vision of Brethren primitivism took on a potent appeal in the context of Republican Shanghai, where it found the resources to become an expansive movement. In this story the primitive and the modern were combined, with neither corresponding clearly either with the West or with China. This forces a reconsideration both of the character and direction of missionary influences in China.

In a similar way, this thesis also seeks to provide a better understanding of China's inland peripheries during the Republican period. The missionary presence in these contested regions sheds light on their complex configurations of power. The identity of the missionary as a modern figure took on an added significance in this context, as local groups debated how best to consolidate these regions into their various visions for modern Asia.

Finally, the thesis argues for the importance of missionary primitivism in the construction of anti-China discourses in the West. The centrality of mission activity to the self-identity of the Brethren, and the importance of China as a missionary field, meant that the termination of work there following 1949 was keenly felt. The prolificacy of missionary writings served as a channel to popularise the disappointment and accompanying antipathy felt towards the new China. A number of missionaries had operated among groups whose absorption into the Chinese nation-state was contested, and the sympathy frequently expressed towards these groups served to further establish a legacy of suspicion and antagonism towards the new China. The Brethren encounter with modern China was therefore one of enduring and profound impact, and this thesis will seek to examine several facets of this encounter.

1) Primitivism, Modernity and Chinese Nationalism

Introduction

Arif Dirlik has drawn attention to contemporary revivals of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism across Asia. He has identified these as part of a wider return to traditions that can be understood as ‘challenges to modernity’s ways of knowing.’¹ In contrast, studies examining the relation between Christian missions and modernity have generally depicted missionaries as agents of the modern.² This chapter will argue, conversely, that the emergence of the Brethren at the start of the nineteenth century can be seen as an early example of a religious reaction to modernity. Furthermore, the priority that the Brethren gave to missions was a direct outworking of their opposition to the modern.

Attention will be paid to the early development of Brethren missions, and in particular to the concept of ‘living by faith’ that became a central feature of Brethren missiology, whereby divine provision was sought in order to meet material needs.³

With a heightened emphasis on the supernatural and an assertion of the primacy of religious identity, the Brethren sought to resist modernity’s efforts to subsume

¹ Arif Dirlik, ‘Global Modernity? : Modernity in an Age of Global Capitalism’, *European Journal of Social Theory* 6:3 (2003), p. 278.

² See, for example: Jean and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (two volumes, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991-7); Peter van der Veer (ed.), *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity* (London: Routledge, 1996); van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

³ For a study of the development of the concept of ‘living by faith’ in Brethren missiological thought, see: Timothy Larsen, “‘Living by Faith’: A Short History of Brethren Practice”, *Brethren Archivists and Historians’ Network Review* 1:2 (1998), pp. 67-102.

religion within a secular concept of citizenship, and to counter the decline in faith that they perceived to be accompanying the rise of the modern world. A primitivism was embraced, whereby a return was sought to the model of New Testament Christianity, and to its dynamic and expansive vision.

Recent studies of Brethren missionary primitivism will be analysed, and the need to historicise the concept and its practices will be argued for. A focus will be placed on the inter-war period, when Echoes sought to reassert missionary primitivism in response to a number of challenges. Perceiving a decline in interest in missionary work, and facing accusations that Echoes itself had departed from primitivist principles, the Brethren made efforts to rearticulate their missionary principles, and to galvanise support for missions.⁴ The emergence of colonial nationalism in various mission fields also served to shape this return to primitivist principles, with an emphasis being placed on the need for a rapid transition to native leadership.⁵

Finally, the chapter will examine how missionary experiences of the Northern Expedition (北伐, 1926-1928) in China affected discussions about missionary primitivism.⁶ As the missionaries sought to defend themselves against accusations of

⁴ Tim Grass, *Gathering to His Name* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 344-350.

⁵ For studies on the impact of colonial nationalism on missionary work, see: Brian Stanley, (ed.). *Missions, Nationalism and the End of Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003).

⁶ The Northern Expedition refers to the military campaigns undertaken by the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in order to defeat warlord forces and unify China. It is often narrated as part of the Nationalist Revolution (1923-1928), an event seen to span the formation of a Soviet-supported united front between the Guomindang and the CCP in 1923, the military campaigns against warlord armies, the Communist purge in 1927, and the completion of the unification of China under a Guomindang government in 1928. For studies of this period, see: C. Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); Michael G. Murdock, *Disarming the Allies of Imperialism: Agitation, Manipulation, and the State During China's Nationalist Revolution, 1922-1929* (Ithaca,

imperialism, they emphasised their own commitment to establishing independent local churches, and to demonstrate that this was already taking place. As a result of these discussions, the universalist claims of missionary primitivism came under scrutiny. At the same time as the growth of Brethren-influenced Chinese Christian movements was used to demonstrate the success of Brethren missions, these developments also threatened to undermine the claims and basis of Brethren primitivist identity.

The Origins of the Brethren: Christian Faith in the Modern World

David Nash has described how, from the late eighteenth century, theologians and church leaders in Britain were grappling with what they perceived as a ‘dwindled sense of religiosity.’⁷ This, according to Nash, contributed to the construction of a secularization narrative that related the advance of modernity to the decline of religion. Nash does not consider, however, the ways in which religious groups might have reacted to reassert their identity as a result of this sense of declining religion. Something of this has been suggested by Gauri Viswanathan. The emancipation of Catholics, Nonconformists and Jews in England in the first half of the nineteenth century, she argues, reflected the emergence of a pluralist, secular state. Within this, ‘religious differences, although present as established social categories, are neutralised as they are subsumed within a national identity.’⁸ Viswanathan further

NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Li Xin (ed.), 国民革命的兴起 [The rise of the Nationalist Revolution], (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991).

⁷ David Nash, ‘Reconnecting Religion with Social and Cultural History: Secularization’s Failure as a Master Narrative’, *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), p. 310.

⁸ Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1998), p. 13.

suggests that the identification, in the 1851 census, of half of England's worshippers as Nonconformists, is reflective of how dissent had become 'a protest against the legislation and standardisation of religious belief.'⁹

This perspective is important when considering the following anecdote about the Brethren, provided by David Bebbington:

On 30 March 1851, the only occasion on which there was an official census of Christian worshippers in Britain, it was discovered that at Teignmouth, a fishing village on the south Devon coast, there was a chapel with some 400 seats where fifty-five people attended in the morning, fifty in the afternoon and forty in the evening. In addition there were twenty-five at the afternoon Sunday school. The census taker recorded, probably with some bemusement, the refusal of the members of the congregation to adopt a distinctive label. 'They are often called Plymouth Brethren by others', he explained, 'but they do not themselves use this name, but object to it. They use such names as are given in the New Testament to all believers, from whom they do not desire to be distinguished by denominational names.'¹⁰

Bebbington cites this episode to make a theological point, that is, to demonstrate the aversion of the Brethren to any extra-biblical designation. However, the refusal of the Brethren at Teignmouth to defer to any of the categories of worshipper in the 1851 census can be seen as a reaction against the efforts of the secularising state to demote religious identities to secondary categories of allegiance. Further evidence of this can be seen in how the biblical command for Christians to be separate from the world was consistently interpreted by Brethren as implying non-involvement in any

⁹ Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold*, p. 16. For the religious data collected by the 1851 census, see: K.S. Inglis, 'Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 11:1 (1960), pp. 74-86; and W.S.F. Pickering, 'The 1851 Religious Census – a Useless Experiment?' *British Journal of Sociology* 18:4 (1967), pp. 382-407. For studies on religion in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries more generally, see: Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society, Lambeth 1870-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945* (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁰ From the foreword by David Bebbington, in Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, p. xv.

form of politics. The Christian's primary allegiance, it was argued, was to the Kingdom of God, which transcended all political or denominational divides.¹¹

The title of Tim Grass's recent history of the Brethren, *Gathering to His Name*, reflects the priority of the movement in seeking to gather the church from out of the world to meet together in the simplicity that reflected a return to Biblical patterns, and a rejection of worldly influences and traditions. The Brethren were not the first Protestant group to dissent on the basis of a claim to obedience to biblical norms. However, their emergence during the nineteenth century gave a distinct character to Brethren primitivism, which should be seen as a reaction to the rise of a modernity that they equated with unbelief. Brethren primitivism was an attempt to forge an alternative reality based on the primacy of religious identity and an assertion of the supernatural power of faith. An emphasis on missions reflected both this reconfigured priority, and sense of divinely-empowered opportunity.

The Brethren and Mission

The Brethren movement began in Britain and Ireland in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Its origins cannot be reduced to a single figure or idea, but one of its key early expressions was the informal meetings of small groups of evangelicals from different denominations in Dublin, London and various towns in the south-west of England, in order to hold Holy Communion services. These meetings represented a protest against the practice of different Protestant denominations, both Anglican

¹¹ For the Brethren understanding of separation from the world, see: Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, pp. 249-252.

and Nonconformist, of only allowing their own members to partake of Holy Communion, a practice deemed to be in breach of the Bible's insistence on maintaining the unity of Christ's followers.¹² These groups grew and spread, and developed into a wider movement with their own set of doctrinal distinctives. Perhaps the most important of these for mission work was the concept of 'living by faith'. To understand the significance of this it is necessary to trace its development through the writings of its earliest proponents, Anthony Norris Groves (1795-1853)¹³ and George Müller (1805-1898).¹⁴

Anthony Norris Groves was born in 1795, and became a dentist. In 1825 he published a booklet entitled *Christian Devotedness*, which was to become an important text for the Brethren movement. In it he argued that a number of biblical passages to do with money and possessions should be applied literally. The booklet focuses on Matthew 6:19-24, with its opening command to 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.' Groves interpreted this as commanding Christians not to save money, and he argued that a person's refusal to follow this course of action demonstrated both an unwillingness to put their resources at God's disposal, and a lack of trust in God to provide for future needs. Groves later became a missionary, first in Baghdad and then in India. Before going out into the field he had associated with the Church Missionary Society (CMS), but he developed disagreements with their methods and soon came to the belief that mission societies

¹² Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, pp. 21-2.

¹³ For a biography of Groves, see: Robert Bernard Dann, *Father of Faith Missions: The Life and Times of Anthony Norris Groves* (Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2004). For a more detailed analysis of his ideas, see: Dann, *The Primitivist Ecclesiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A Radical Influence on the Nineteenth-Century Protestant Church in Britain* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2007), and Dann, *The Primitivist Missiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A Radical Influence on Nineteenth-Century Protestant Mission* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2007).

¹⁴ For a biography of Müller, see: Roger Steer, *Delighted in God: A Biography of George Müller* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1997). Müller also wrote an autobiography: *Autobiography of George Müller* (London: J. Nisbet, 1905).

in general were unbiblical. Under this conviction he and his wife went out independently as missionaries, trusting in God to meet their needs.¹⁵

As well as being a criticism of churches in England, Grove's writings can be seen as a reaction to the lack of faith that he perceived as characterising modernity. For example, in *Christian Devotedness*, Groves argued that the commitment of temporal resources to God 'would convince those, whom we are anxious to convince, of the reality of our faith in that Redeemer and that inheritance, which they now think only a name, in consequence of the secular spirit that disfigures the Christianity of too many of its professors.'¹⁶ In addition, the example of self-denial and devotion to Christ, Groves claimed, would be a powerful aid to missionary work, so that 'how differently would the heathen look on our endeavours to publish the mercy of our glorified Lord if the hardy and suffering spirit of primitive times were to descend again on the silken age into which we are fallen!'¹⁷

The idea that faith should be demonstrated as a counter to the unbelief of modernity was taken up by another of the Brethren movement's early figureheads. George Müller, born in Prussia in 1805¹⁸, came to London in 1829 to join the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews.¹⁹ The insistence of the society that he go

¹⁵ For an account of Groves's missionary journeys, see: Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*.

¹⁶ A.N. Groves, *Christian Devotedness* (Oak Park, IL: Midwest Christian Publishers, reprint of second edition, 1829), p. 32.

¹⁷ Groves, *Christian Devotedness*, p. 32.

¹⁸ Connections between evangelicals in Britain and continental Europe led to a number of initiatives in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For example, see: Andrew F. Walls, 'The Eighteenth-Century Protestant Missionary Awakening in Its European Context', in Brian Stanley (ed.), *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001); Timothy C.F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain, 1815-35* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000); Jessie Lutz, *Opening China: Karl F.A. Gützlaff and Sino-Western Relations, 1827-1852* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007).

¹⁹ The Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews was founded in 1809, and continues today as the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People. For a history of the society's work in Israel, see:

through their training course and operate under their direction clashed with his conviction that the missionary need only be informed and directed by scripture and the Holy Spirit. He left the society and embarked on an independent itinerant ministry in England. Prior to beginning this work, Müller had met Henry Craik (1805-1866), who had worked as a private tutor in the home of Groves.²⁰ After reading *Christian Devotedness* Müller was persuaded to follow Groves's example.

Müller established a large and varied ministry with Craik in Bristol and the surrounding regions. They pastored several churches together and in 1834 founded the Scriptural Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad. In 1836 Müller opened an orphanage, which marked the beginning of an endeavour for which he became famous during his lifetime and celebrated long after his death. From the outset Müller made no appeals for the funds or resources that he would require, but determined to make his needs known only to God, through prayer. Müller's first Orphan-House was opened in April 1836 and housed thirty girls. The work gradually expanded until 1870 when a fifth House was opened, and the total number of orphans being cared for reached two thousand.²¹ These were all fed, clothed and educated, with the boys being taught a trade and the girls prepared for domestic service. By the time of Müller's death in 1898, Steer has estimated that his Orphan-Houses had undertaken the care of around ten thousand children. Several national newspapers contained obituaries in admiration of his achievements.²²

Kelvin Crombie, *For Love of Zion: Christian Witness and the Restoration of Israel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991).

²⁰ For Craik, see: Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, pp. 32-34.

²¹ Steer, *George Müller*, p.140.

²² Steer, *George Müller*, pp.231-232.

However, Müller intended the primary beneficiaries of his work with orphans to be those who were lacking faith in God. In his autobiography he wrote of encountering men who worked long hours each day in fear of not being able to provide for their families; of those who feared reaching old age because of the prospect of having to enter the poor-house; and those engaged in business who carried on dishonest practices to maintain an advantage in a competitive economic climate. Müller was frustrated by the unwillingness of these people to alter their practices, and put it down to a lack of faith in God to provide for those who trusted in him. It was in response to these encounters that he engineered his plans:

All these exercises of my soul, which resulted from the fact that so many believers, with whom I became acquainted, were harassed and distressed in mind, or brought guilt on their consciences, on account of not trusting in the Lord; were used by God to awaken in my heart the desire of setting before the church at large, and before the world, a proof that He has not in the least changed; and this seemed to me best done, by the establishing of an Orphan-House. It needed to be something which could be seen, even by the natural eye. Now, if I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith, obtained, without asking any individual, the means for establishing and carrying on an Orphan-House: there would be something which with the Lord's blessing, might be instrumental in strengthening the faith of the children of God besides being a testimony to the consciences of the unconverted, of the reality of the things of God.²³

Müller wanted to demonstrate that God was the same in the present-day as He had been in biblical times. This would be both to strengthen the faith of Christians and to prove to sceptics the power of God. For the remaining sixty-two years of his life, Müller testified that all that was required for the Orphan-Houses came about through free-will offerings, without him ever disclosing what his needs were. To Müller, this was a vindication of his belief in the active power of God, and of the efficacy of trusting in Him. He intended that the answers to his prayers would serve as a visible sign of the relevance and power of faith in the modern age.

²³ George Müller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller, Written by Himself – First Part* (ninth edition, London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1895), pp. 145-146.

Groves later articulated this emerging practice specifically in relation to missions. In 1840 he wrote 'A Letter on Missions to the Heathen' which was published in the journal *The Christian Witness*. Groves criticised the practices of existing mission societies, and outlined what he saw as the strategy contained in the Bible. Mission societies, according to Groves, were run by an 'oligarchy' that controlled the activities of missionaries, who therefore were effectively 'salaried agents'. This oligarchy also monitored the information the public received concerning the activities of the missionaries, making the missionaries unaccountable. In addition, through their public appeals for support, they ended up doing God's work through worldly provision.²⁴ Instead, Groves argued that local churches should send out missionaries and take responsibility for supporting them, though not in the form of a salary.

When Groves returned to Britain from one of his missionary journeys in 1852, he outlined his ideas to a Brethren assembly in Tottenham. Less than a year later, and two months after Groves' death, this assembly collaborated with another Brethren meeting in Hackney to produce the first edition of *The Missionary Reporter*. The opening editorial of this new magazine called for assemblies to do more local outreach work and to send out and support missionaries in work overseas. It also contained reports from missionaries already labouring in the field. *The Missionary Reporter* ceased production in 1858, but was succeeded by *The Missionary Echo* in 1872.²⁵ This changed its name to *Echoes of Service* in 1885. In this way, Groves'

²⁴ A. N. Groves, 'A Letter on Mission to the Heathen', *The Christian Witness*, 7 (1840), pp. 128-9.

²⁵ Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, pp. 508-09.

ideas became the basis for the independent missions carried out by Brethren and facilitated by Echoes.

Groves' primitivist model for mission, although articulated as biblical in its origin, should be seen as part of the wider Brethren reaction against modernity and the Church's contamination by the modern world. His quest to find a biblical model for mission was driven by his conviction that the existing mission societies had their basis in human ideas and institutions, and not in divine instruction. It was also built on the conviction that God would provide for those who went out as missionaries in obedience to His calling. This view of missions has endured among Brethren, as can be seen in the following comment by the Brethren historian W. T. Stunt, who commented in the introduction to his history of Echoes missions that: 'The story of the present, as well as of the past, is of a God who is faithful and in whom His people can unreservedly trust.'²⁶ The Brethren have narrated the progress of their missionaries as a demonstration of the efficacy of their primitivist convictions in the modern world. Their missiology has therefore been propelled on the one hand by a rejection of institutional organisation, and on the other by a belief that the missionary should receive direction and material support through faith.

But, despite this, Brethren missionaries have not operated entirely independently, and a number of organisations have existed to facilitate aspects of their work. The foremost of these is Echoes. The origins of Echoes can be traced back to a magazine, *Echoes of Service* (referred to hereafter as *Echoes*) that was first produced in 1872 in order to provide reports on the work of Brethren missionaries. Those responsible for

²⁶ W. T. Stunt, *Turning the World Upside Down: A Century of Missionary Endeavour* (Bath: Echoes of Service, 1972), p. 13.

its production subsequently took on an enlarged remit, which included the transmission of funds; stimulating interest in missionary work; and providing other services for missionaries and sending churches, such as advice on financial issues and on obtaining visas.²⁷ Therefore Echoes came to be identified as an agency that facilitated the operation and support of Brethren missionaries. It has continued in operation to the present day, and its magazine has continued in monthly publication throughout this time.²⁸ Because of the centrality of the *Echoes* magazine, and the desire to be distinguished from missionary societies, those responsible for the running of Echoes have normally been referred to by Brethren as ‘the editors’, and this designation will be followed in this thesis. Below are some examples of *Echoes* content from the 1920s.

²⁷ Anon, *Echoes Factfile: All About Echoes of Service* (Bath: Echoes of Service, 2002), pp. 7-12.

²⁸ From 1885-1917 *Echoes* was published in two installments each month. From 1918 these were combined into a single monthly issue.

Monthly.]

[Registered for Canadian Magazine Post.]

[Price Twopence Net.]

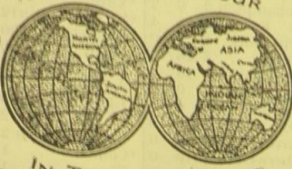
CHRISTIAN MISSIONS]

"Go ye into all the World."

(IN MANY LANDS

A RECORD OF LABOUR

ECHOES of



SERVICE

IN THE LORD'S NAME

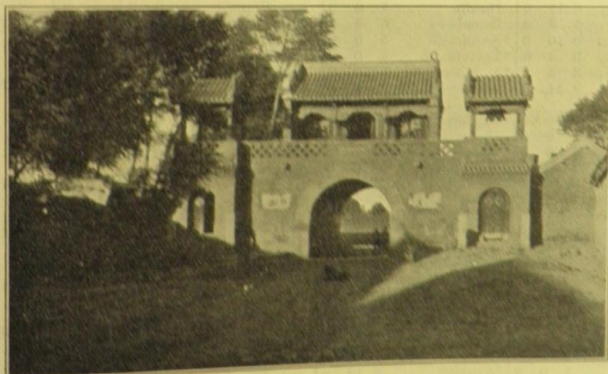
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A VILLAGE GATEWAY IN LOWER MONGOLIA.

The photograph was taken by Mr. L. Steel, and may remind us to pray both for workers and Chinese believers in that distressed land.

LIST OF MISSIONARIES FOR PRAYER (New Edition). 2d.; Six copies, 1/- post free.

JOHN WRIGHT & SONS LTD. BRISTOL.

Figure 1 - Echoes of Service (July 1926), front page.

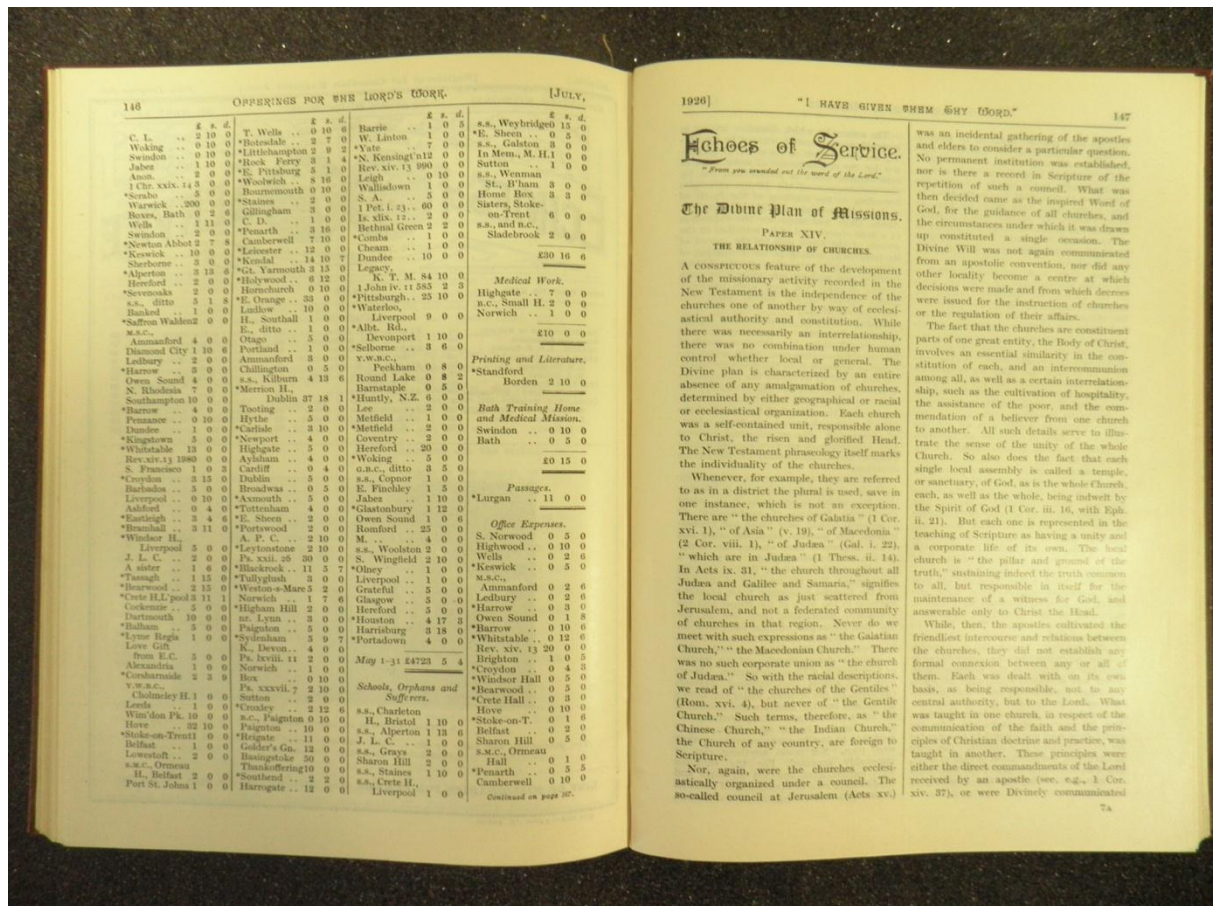


Figure 2 - Echoes of Service (July 1926), inside pages. The left-hand page is titled 'Offerings for the Lord's Work', and shows the donations recorded for that month. They are listed according to the location of the Brethren assembly or, if it was a personal donation, by an anonymous reference. The two right-hand columns show donations made to specific causes. The right-hand page contains the monthly editorial message, normally a biblical exposition or some other comment on mission work.

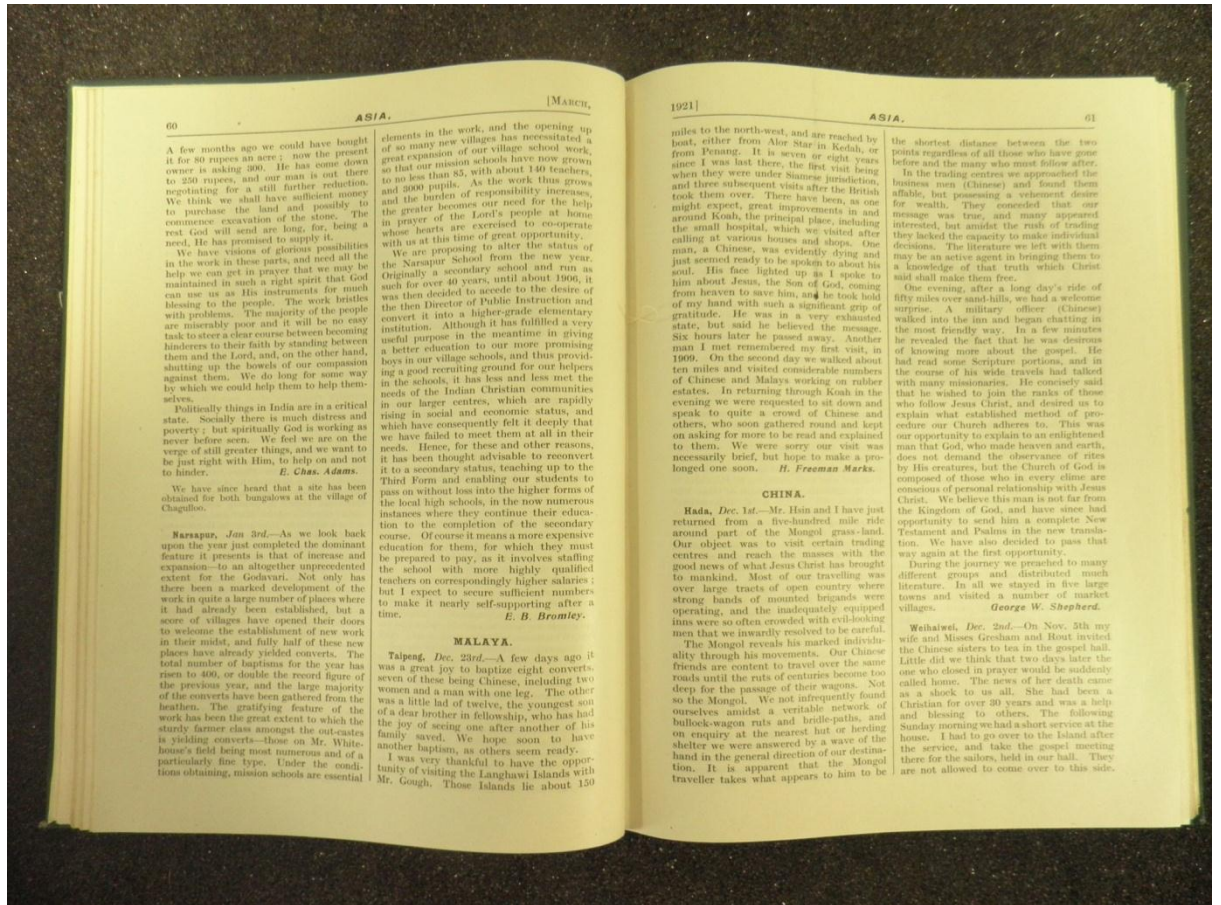


Figure 3 - *Echoes of Service* (March 1921), inside pages. Reports from China missionaries are shown on the right-hand page.

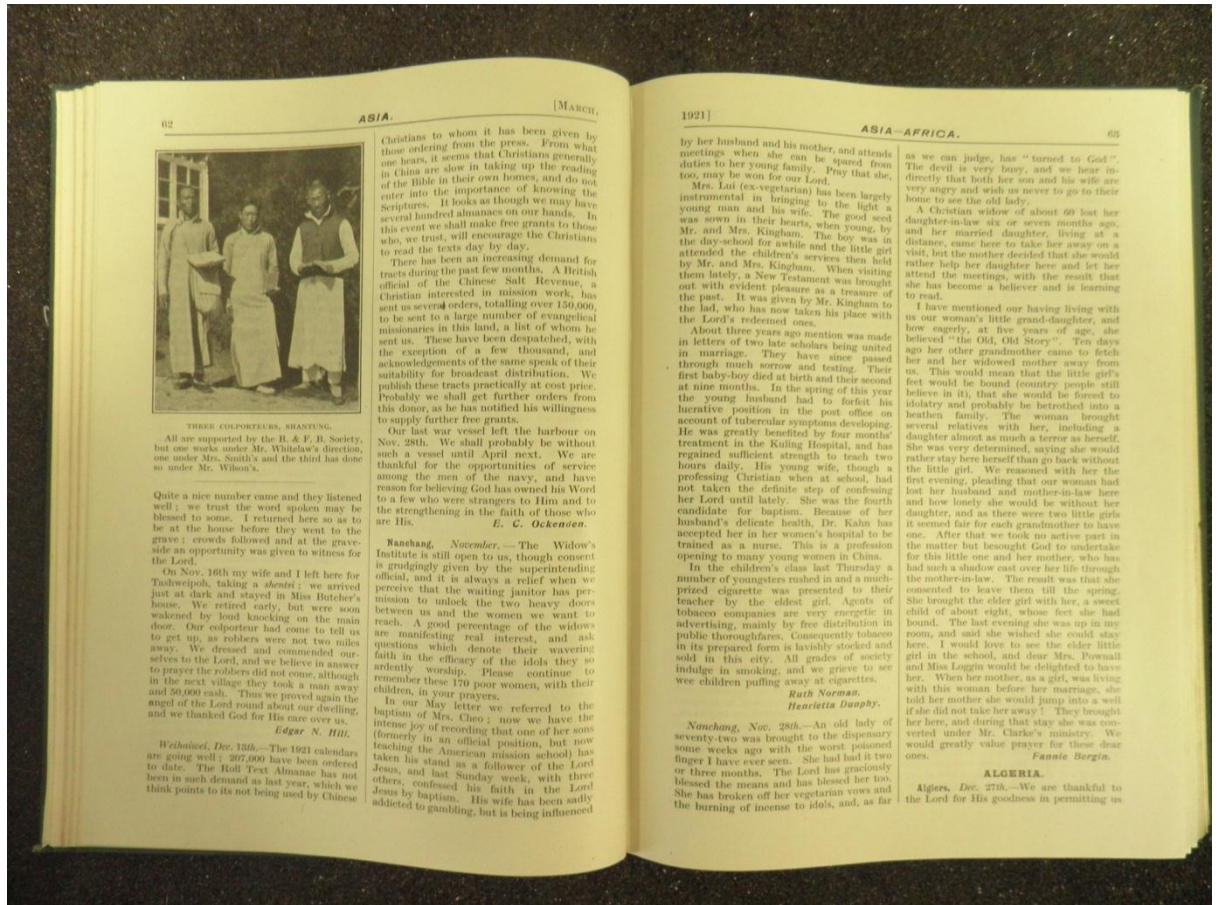


Figure 4 - *Echoes of Service* (March 1921), inside pages. This, and Figure 3, show the missionary reports from China. Reports are displayed from all three of *Echoes*' main regions of operation. Also displayed is a photo of three Chinese colporteurs, i.e. distributors of Christian literature, who assisted the missionaries.

A further distinctive feature of Brethren missiology that can be related to their negative view of modernity was their premillennial eschatological interpretation.²⁹ This was in contrast to the postmillennial view that had held sway among evangelicals at the start of the nineteenth century. According to postmillennialism, the second coming of Christ would take place after the millennium of Revelation 20:1-10, a period which would see the reform of humanity. From the mid-nineteenth century the consensus shifted towards a premillennial view of things, something that the Brethren helped to initiate. According to this interpretation, Christ would return before the millennium, and its inauguration would be brought about by his final judgement. This encouraged a pessimistic outlook on the world and a focus on the hope of the return of Christ to set things right. David Bebbington has suggested that postmillennialism reflected an optimistic worldview shaped by the Enlightenment belief in progress, whereas premillennialism reflected a turn towards Romanticism.³⁰ However, the pessimism that characterised premillennialism should also be related to the negative reaction of the Brethren to modernity.

In terms of missions, premillennialism demanded that the message of the gospel be spread as widely as possible so that everyone would have a chance to hear about the

²⁹ For a historical study of evangelical millennial beliefs, see: Crawford Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500-2000* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Millennialism has been distinguished from millenarianism, with the latter identified as a general political or religious ideal, and the former being seen as a specifically Christian expression of this, based on the one thousand years described in Revelation 20:1-10. However, other definitions have also been applied to these terms at different times. For a discussion of the terminology, see: Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism*, pp. 12-14. Gribben argues that such broad distinctions are unhelpful for a tradition that has seen many different and evolving expressions, and that 'scholars working in millennial studies ought therefore to adopt a wider range of descriptive definitions' (p. 14). In this thesis the above distinction between millennialism and millenarianism will be followed. Millennialism will therefore be used to refer to evangelical beliefs about the millennium, as described in Revelation 20:1-10, and premillennialism and postmillennialism will then be employed to describe these two main forms of millennialist belief. The different ways in which millennialism impacted Brethren mission work in China will be examined more specifically.

³⁰ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp.80-81, 167-68.

way to be saved from God's wrath. Only then would the final judgement come, and the millennium begin. The priority for mission work therefore became itinerant evangelism, which was to be carried out as widely and as quickly as possible. The aim of mission work became the calling out, from all lands, of the members of Christ's Church. They were then to exist in separation from the chaos and unbelief of modernity, waiting until Christ returned.³¹

Missionary Primitivism in China

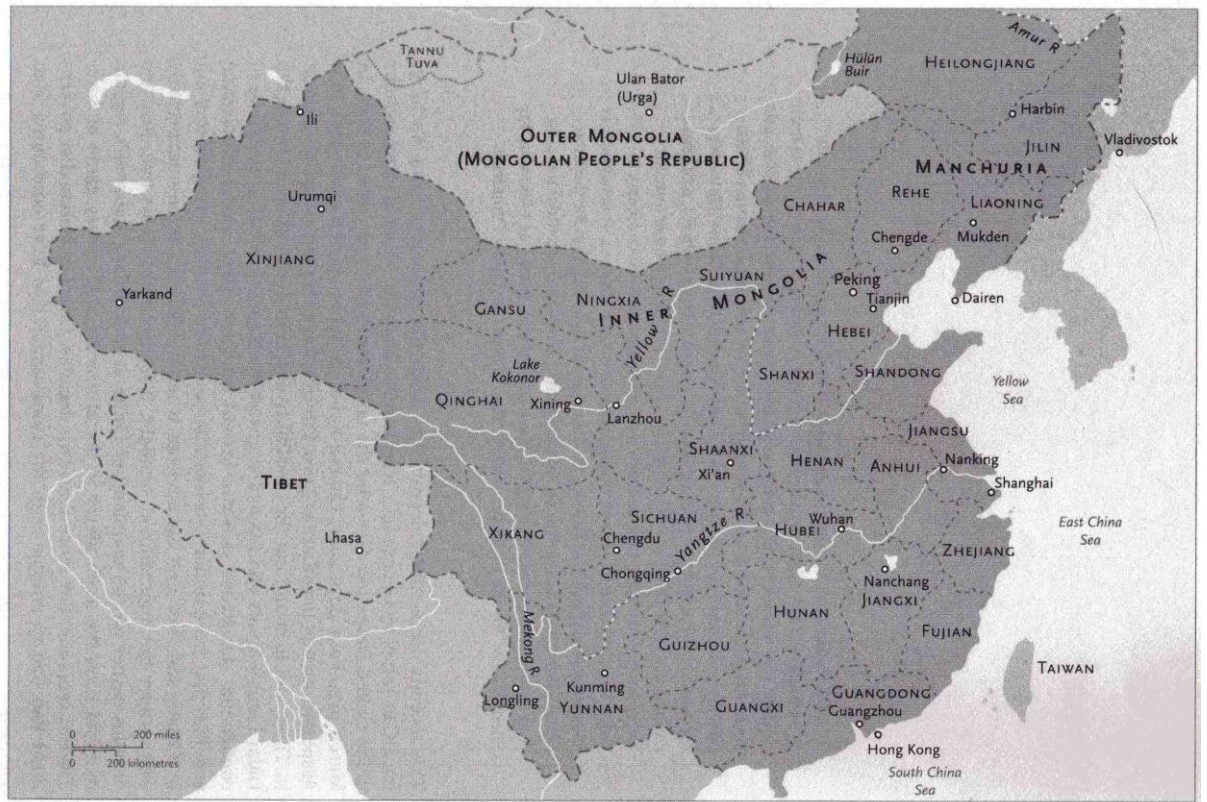
Reports from Hudson Taylor, the founder of the CIM, were contained in *The Missionary Echo* and early editions of *Echoes*. The connection between the Brethren and the CIM came about through Müller's influence on Hudson Taylor. Taylor heard about Müller's work through his involvement with Brethren assemblies in Hull and Tottenham, and he went in person to seek Müller's advice shortly after he established the CIM. Taylor subsequently adopted the principle of living by faith, and he also took on the Brethren emphasis on taking the gospel to previously unreached areas. The CIM, as its name suggests, was formed with the aim of carrying out mission work in all the provinces of inland China. This imperative to spread the gospel message as widely as possible was informed by this confidence in a powerful, enabling God. But it was also shaped by premillennialism, which

³¹ For discussions of the impact of millennial beliefs on missionary work, see: Andrew Porter, 'Evangelical Enthusiasm, Missionary Motivation and West Africa in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Career of G. W. Brooke', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 6:1 (1977), pp. 23-46; Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), pp. 76-8.

brought an increased urgency and an emphasis on geographic coverage rather than institution building.³²

In order to meet its expansionist goals, Hudson Taylor built up a centralised administration and recruited missionaries from all evangelical denominations. This led many among the Brethren to view the CIM as another mission society. Although the CIM would continue to be supported by many Brethren, it ceased being associated with Echoes, who began sending their own, independent missionaries to China. Echoes shared the CIM's desire to penetrate inland China, something that can be seen in the regions operated in by their missionaries. Out of the three locations chosen where sustained work took place, two were in mainland China: the north-west of Jiangxi province, where they began operating in 1885; and eastern Shandong province, where work commenced in 1888. The third mission was located in Rehe province, at the entrance to Manchuria, and was started in 1897. This was a remote region in itself, but one always intended to be a base for further expansion northwards to reach Mongol populations. Following the end of World War II, two further missions were begun: in Guizhou province, in western China, and in Tibet. While both short-lived, these further demonstrate the concern of the Brethren missionaries to enter unreached regions and evangelise to their peoples. The provinces where the Echoes missionaries operated can be located in Map 1, below.

³² Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, pp.441-2.



Map 1 – Nationalist China in the 1930s. (Source: Hsiao-ting Lin, *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier: Intrigues and Ethnopolitics, 1928-1949* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), p.4).

The following tables and maps have been taken from *The Christian Occupation of China: A General Survey of the Numerical Strength and Geographical Distribution of the Christian Forces in China*.³³ This was commissioned at the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, and intended as a complete survey of Protestant missionary work that had been carried out in China.³⁴ The data for the survey was collected from 1918-1921. The table below shows the size of the Echoes missionary force in China in comparison to that of the CIM and of the various missionary bodies affiliated to the major Protestant denominations. As can be seen, the overall Echoes presence was moderate, but significant. Although, in the period of the survey, Echoes were operating in just three provinces, as the data and maps below show, they were a major presence in each of them.

Name of Mission or Denominational Allegiance	Total Foreign Force
ECHOES OF SERVICE (CMML)	83
Anglican	588
Baptist	569
Congregational	335
Lutheran	508
Methodist	839
Presbyterian	1031
China Inland Mission	980

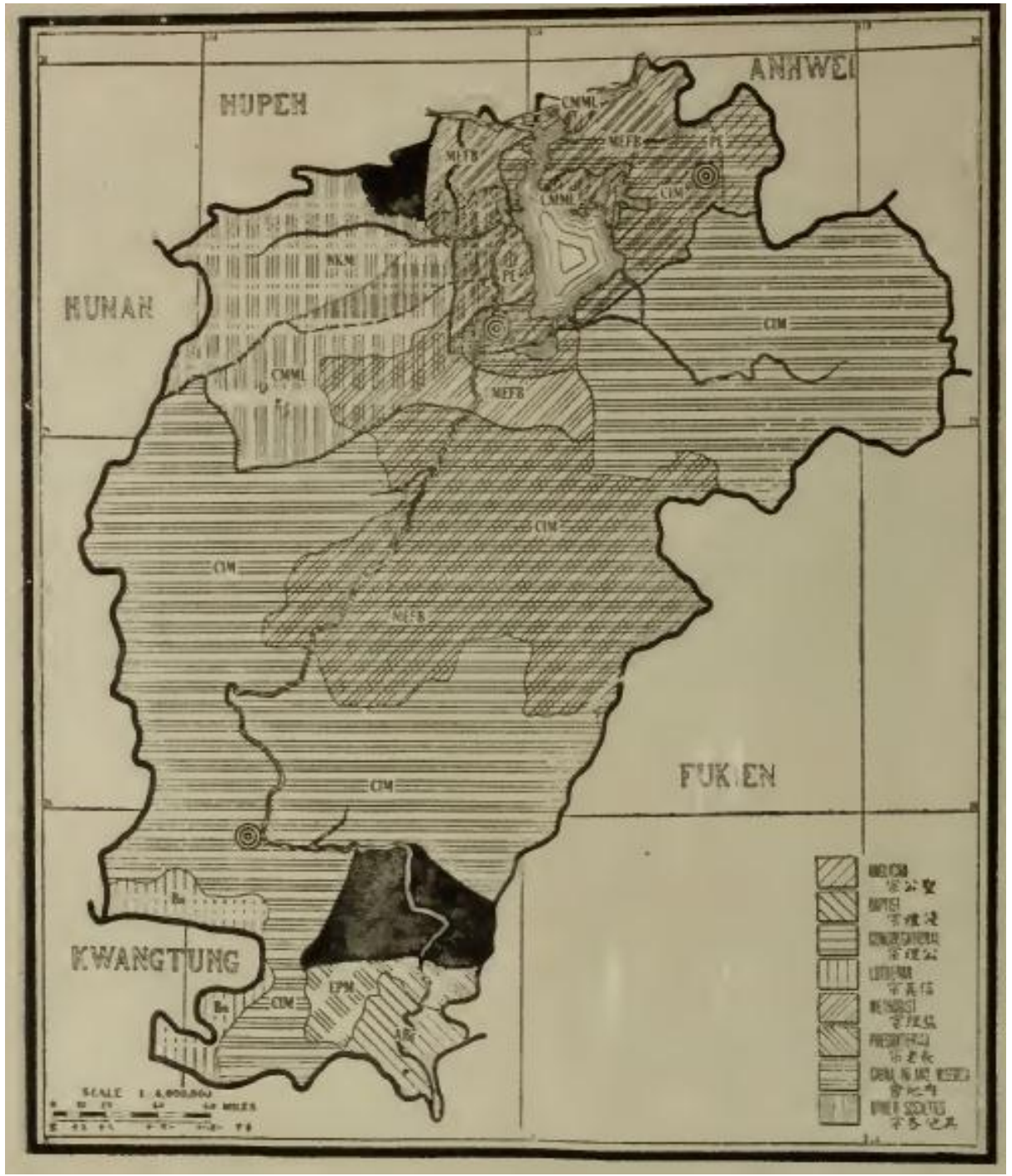
³³ Milton T. Stauffer (ed.), *The Christian Occupation of China: A General Survey of the Numerical Strength and Geographical Distribution of the Christian Forces in China* (Shanghai: China Continuation Committee, 1922).

³⁴ For 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, see: Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009).

Jiangxi

Name of mission and abbreviation used on map	Total Foreign Force
ECHOES OF SERVICE (CMML)	36
Protestant Episcopal Church, USA (PE)	7
American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABF)	5
Berlin Mission (Bn)	2
Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEFB)	38
China Inland Mission (CIM)	102
OTHER (4 societies)	23
Total	226

The inland location of Jiangxi meant that it had received less coverage from missionaries. Echoes began operating here in 1885, and were one of the largest groups operating in the province.

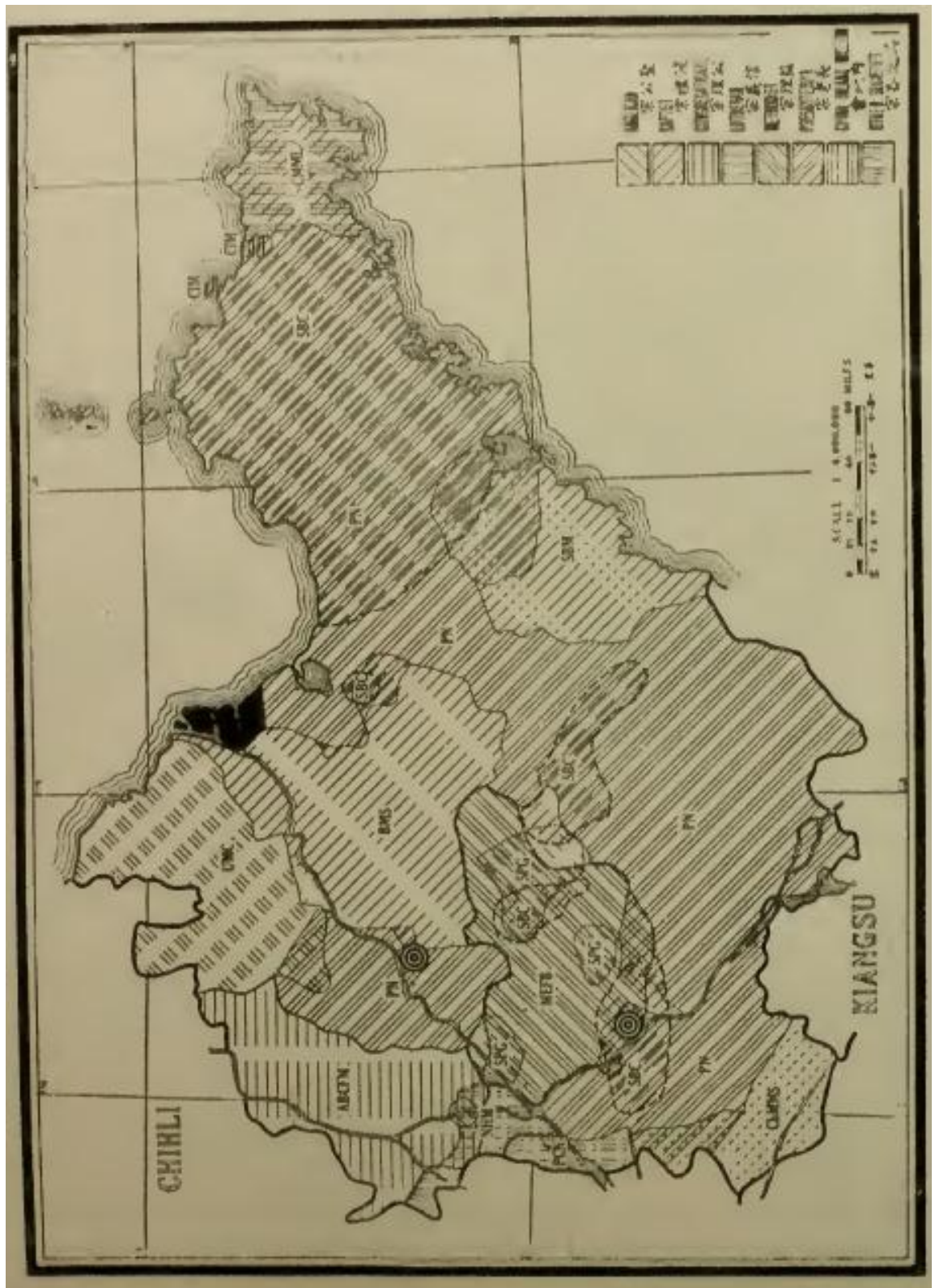


Map 2 – Protestant Mission Fields in Jiangxi (Source: Stauffer, *Christian Occupation of China*, p. 124).

Shandong

Name of mission and abbreviation used on map	Total Foreign Force
ECHOES OF SERVICE (CMML)	19
Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG)	29
Baptist Missionary Society (BMS)	61
China Mennonite Missionary Society (ChMMS)	16
Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)	58
Swedish Baptist Mission (SBM)	13
American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM)	26
Berlin Mission (Bn)	12
Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEFB)	12
United Methodist Church Mission (UMC)	6
American Presbyterian Mission, North (PN)	135
American Presbyterian Mission, South (PS)	1
China Inland Mission (CIM)	53
OTHER (8 societies)	49
Total	504

The coastal location of Shandong meant that, immediately following the Treaty of Tianjin, signed in the middle of the Second Opium War (1856-1860), the province was steadily settled by a variety of major and smaller missionary societies. Echoes began working here in 1888, and established their operations in the eastern tip of the peninsula.



Map 3 - Protestant Mission Fields in Shandong (Source: Stauffer, *Christian Occupation of China*, p. 197).

Mongolia (Inner and Outer)

Name of mission and abbreviation used on map	Total Foreign Force
ECHOES OF SERVICE (CMML)	28
Scandinavian Alliance Mission in Mongolia (SAMM)	2
China Inland Mission (CIM)	14
General Council of the Assemblies of God (AG)	4
Apostolic Faith Missionaries (AFM)	1
Salvation Army (SA)	1
Swedish Mongol Mission (SM)	6
Total	56

‘Mongolia (Inner and Outer)’ was included in the section on ‘Large Unclaimed Areas and Special Administrative Districts.’ Echoes constituted the largest group working in this region, and they had taken responsibility for Jehol territory, the area corresponding on the map with Echoes’ sphere of operation.



Map 4 - Protestant Mission Fields in Inner and Outer Mongolia (Source: Stauffer, *Christian Occupation of China*, p. 269).

Brethren Primitivism in the Twentieth Century

In the provinces where they operated, the Echoes missionaries sought to follow similar strategies. Bases were established in key towns where the missionaries would rent or buy residences and other premises for their activities. Shop buildings on main streets were often acquired as a drop-in venue for enquirers, and from which street preaching and literature distribution could be conducted. Halls were also rented which were used for evangelistic and church meetings, and also for schools and clinics. The latter were mostly small and informal; few of the missionaries had extensive medical training, and the schools rarely went beyond teaching basic literacy and Bible lessons. The one exception was the Gracie Kingham Memorial School in Nanchang.³⁵ This was named after Gracie Kingham, the young daughter of a missionary couple who had all been killed in an anti-Christian uprising in 1906. The city authorities had provided financial reparation which had been used to construct a girls' school, which was opened in 1913.³⁶ This took both local day pupils and those from outside the city, who were provided with board. Most of those admitted were children of converts.

Itinerant work took a high priority. As well as maintaining their bases in the main towns, the missionaries took frequent trips to villages in the surrounding countryside, where they would preach, distribute Christian literature and sell copies of the Bible.

³⁵ Nanchang (南昌) is the capital of Jiangxi province (江西). It is best known for the Nanchang Uprising of 1 August 1927, which is commemorated in China as the first engagement in the civil war between the CCP and the Guomindang. See: Bruce A. Elleman, *Moscow and the Emergence of Communist Power in China, 1925-30: The Nanchang Rising and the Birth of the Red Army* (London: Routledge, 2009); Shi Fenglan, 八一南昌起义 [1st August Nanchang Uprising], (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1990); Yi Yu, 南昌起义全记录 [A Complete Record of the Nanchang Uprising], (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 2009).

³⁶ Stunt, *Turning the World Upside Down*, pp. 508-509.

Evangelism among women would be carried out by female missionaries, who would visit them in their homes. Missionaries would often time their trips to coincide with local markets and temple festivals, where they would preach and distribute literature to the crowds who gathered. Converts in rural areas would be revisited periodically. In addition, during holiday periods, such as New Year, the missionaries would host conferences in the main towns, and invite the rural converts for several days of teaching.

The reports printed in *Echoes* consistently reflect the outline above. A regular programme of activities is described, all centered on the spread of the gospel message by the means of the spoken or written word. The reports were punctuated by certain crises, in particular the Boxer uprising of 1900 and the Northern Expedition of 1926-1928, but overall the missionaries were shown to be maintaining their program of continual and expansive evangelism. The missionaries in the field, as well as the *Echoes* editors in Bath, were keen to record the faithful adherence to a simple, apostolic missionary model. This has been reflected in recent academic studies of Brethren missions, which have emphasised the consistency of their primitivist strategy.

Mark Sweetnam's article, 'Dan Crawford, Thinking Black, and The Challenge of a Missionary Canon', focuses on the autobiography of Dan Crawford, who was an *Echoes* missionary in Africa from 1889-1911 and 1915-1926.³⁷ Sweetnam argues that Crawford's emphasis on cultural immersion and his willingness to endorse an African Christianity, in terms of both leadership and cultural forms, derived from his

³⁷ Mark Sweetnam, 'Dan Crawford, Thinking Black, and The Challenge of a Missionary Canon', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58 (2007), pp. 705-725.

primitivism. This primitivism, Sweetnam claims, was shared by all Brethren missionaries, and was adopted by other mission societies as well.³⁸ Sweetnam, however, treats the remarkable Crawford as being representative of Brethren primitivism. This he defines according to an ideal which he assumes could be applied in a uniform way across mission fields. Therefore he concludes that Brethren missionaries were ‘unusually free of any form of ideological investment in extra-biblical ecclesiology and correspondingly unlikely to press any non-scriptural forms upon native converts.’³⁹

A similar approach is taken by Robert Dann in his study, *The Primitivist Missiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A Radical Influence on Nineteenth-Century Protestant Mission*. Dann sets out to demonstrate the influence of Groves’ thought on the wider modern missionary movement, which he does by comparing the strategies and writings of later missionary bodies and figures with those of Groves. As with Sweetnam, Dann defines primitivism as a unitary and consistent missiological ideal, and does not examine the history of its application in the mission field. For example, towards the end of his study, he claims:

A primitivist ecclesiology, based on New Testament principle and practice, will tend to produce forms of church meeting and leadership of a similar nature in any cultural context. Groves himself did not expect Indian churches to be very different from English churches, for both would be modelled upon the churches of the apostolic age described in the New Testament. Among the perceived advantages of this scheme might be a stronger sense of international unity and an ease of adaptation to ministry in any part of the world.⁴⁰

In Dann’s largely theological study, the primitivist claim to be following an apostolic model that transcends cultural difference, is accepted uncritically. However, in

³⁸ Sweetnam, ‘Dan Crawford’, pp. 718-719, 724.

³⁹ Sweetnam, ‘Dan Crawford’, p. 718.

⁴⁰ Dann, *Primitivist Missiology*, p. 252.

practice, the expectation that English churches would not be different from churches in other settings, because of their shared primitivism, would prove problematic.

There is a need to historicise missionary primitivism in the contexts in which it was applied. Indeed, as the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, efforts to implement missionary primitivism in China in turn had effects on primitivist identity in Britain. Primitivism will therefore be defined discursively, and seen as constitutive of a desire for a pure and original Christian spirituality; a reaction against the perceived degradation of the modern church; and an effort to implement a normative, apostolic church order. This definition shows primitivism to be contingent on a variety of historical conditions.

The remainder of this chapter, and of the thesis, focuses on the twentieth century, as this is a period when the changing meanings of primitivism can be seen most clearly. Much coverage of this period in missionary studies is shaped by the assumption, as expressed by Susan Thorne, that by the second half of the twentieth century, ‘missionaries’ influence on popular culture on their British home front had waned beyond all recognition’, and that this was a decline that set in during the inter-war period.⁴¹ However, a focus on Brethren missionary primitivism forces a questioning of this simple decline narrative. Certainly, there was a perception among those Brethren involved in missions that general interest and support was declining. But this impression was always relative, and actually led to greater activism and to new

⁴¹ Susan Thorne, ‘Religion and Empire at Home’, in Hall and Rose (eds.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 164.

initiatives. One of these was the Missionary Study Classes.⁴² This was an attempt by Echoes to encourage a greater and more informed interest in missions among young people in Brethren assemblies. Its bimonthly publication, *Links of Help*, contained articles on Brethren mission principles, studies on different mission fields and world religions, and reports written by Echoes missionaries.⁴³ The front page of *Links of Help* featured the slogan, ‘The light that shines the farthest shines the brightest nearest home.’ This encapsulates something of the importance that a strong mission presence was asserted to have for Brethren identity at home, because of a belief that mission was central to the primitive church.

Therefore, a perceived decline in missionary interest, real or otherwise, led to Brethren primitivism being rearticulated and reasserted during the first half of the twentieth century. It was during this time that some of the writings considered to be major articulations of Brethren missionary principles, and therefore of Brethren identity more generally, were produced. These included *The Divine Plan of Missions*, by W.E. Vine; *The Pilgrim Church*, by E.H. Broadbent; and *Departure* by G.H. Lang.⁴⁴ The last of these asserted that the Brethren had deviated from their primitivist origins, and it singled out Echoes for particular criticism in this regard. W.E. Vine was one of the Echoes editors, and *The Divine Plan of Missions* was largely a response to Lang, and an attempt to affirm Echoes’ adherence to primitivist

⁴² For a summary of the origins and development of Missionary Study Classes, see: Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, pp. 267-269.

⁴³ *Links of Help* ran from 1911 until 1935, when it was absorbed into *The Harvester*, another Brethren publication.

⁴⁴ G.H. Lang, *Departure* (London: C.J. Thynne, 1925); W.E. Vine, *The Divine Plan of Missions* (London: The Hulbert Publishing Co., 1927); E.H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1931).

principles.⁴⁵ Missions therefore became of singular importance in defining Brethren identity at home.

Missionary Primitivism and Native Churches

The Divine Plan of Missions was produced in instalments in *Echoes*, before being published as a book (see Figure 2 for one of these instalments as produced in *Echoes*). In it, Vine asserted the enduring and exclusive relevance of missionary primitivism:

Now the Divine plan of mission work, as given in the New Testament, whether in narrative or doctrinal form, essentially belongs to the faith, and accordingly the plan was intended to be permanent; it was neither to be tampered with by human device, nor to be modified to meet changing conditions. The plan is always up to date. It remains as workable in the twentieth century as in the first, and is as possible in the wilds of heathendom as in the midst of civilized communities. Its power and efficiency are being proved today, and adherence to the plan alone marks for true success in the mission field.⁴⁶

The ‘divine plan’, according to Vine, has universal applicability. However, the remainder of the book displayed signs of adaptation in response to recent circumstances. One particular focus was on the relation of missionaries to the churches they founded. Vine asserted that, beyond the initial baptising of converts and establishing of regular meetings, the case of Timothy in the New Testament also demonstrated that ‘it was necessary for him [Timothy] to exercise pastoral care for a

⁴⁵ Vine (1873-1949) was an editor for *Echoes* from 1909 until his death. For a short biography, see: Stunt, *Turning the World Upside Down*, pp. 52-58. For a study of the career and major writings of Broadbent (1861-1945), see Tim Grass, ‘Edmund Hamer Broadbent (1861-1945): Pilgrim Churchman’, in Tim Grass (ed.), *Witnessing in Many Lands: Leadership and Outreach Among the Brethren* (Troon: Brethren Archivists and Historians Network, forthcoming, 2012), pp.143-154. Lang (1874-1958) wrote an autobiography: G.H. Lang, *An Ordered Life: An Autobiography* (London: Paternoster, 1959).

⁴⁶ Vine, *Divine Plan*, p. 53.

considerable time over the church over which he had become responsible.’ There was therefore perceived to be a principle of prolonged missionary oversight of local churches.⁴⁷

However, Vine also asserted that Timothy had ‘the special duty of handing on the truth to men who were manifesting themselves as spiritually competent to do the same in their turn.’⁴⁸ Vine suggested that this was an area in which there was room for improvement in current practice:

Has there been a diligent effort to seek out in each locality faithful men and commit the truth to them with a view to their doing the same to others after them? Is sufficient heed being paid today to the Apostle’s injunction? God be thanked for the diligent and faithful services of those who continue labouring in the Word in any church. There is room, however, for something more than the regular ministry of the edification of believers. The Spirit of God is ever waiting to provide spiritual gifts in the churches, and besides the constant teaching of the Word of God, there is scope for more definite instruction of those whom God is raising up and equipping by the Spirit to engage in such ministry, faithful men ‘who shall be able to teach others also.’⁴⁹

Vine argued that the ‘regular ministry’ being carried out by missionaries among their converts, although laudable, needed to be accompanied by a more ‘diligent effort’ to train local Christians to take on leadership and teaching roles.

As Vines continued, it was clear that this comment had been informed by recent circumstances:

There are indications in various countries today of a tendency to legislative restriction upon the public preaching of the Word of God on the part of any save those who are native to a country itself. How needful, therefore, to seek help from God to fulfil the injunction we have been considering! And not only in the regions beyond, but in every church, adherence to the Divine plan in this respect will meet with God’s approval in the resulting provision for the future testimony until the Lord returns.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Vine, *Divine Plan*, p. 62.

⁴⁸ Vine, *Divine Plan*, p. 67.

⁴⁹ Vine, *Divine Plan*, p. 68.

⁵⁰ Vine, *Divine Plan*, p. 69.

The concern that nationalist movements were threatening the future of missionary work in some regions caused Vine to put particular emphasis on those aspects of the ‘divine plan’ that called for a rapid transition to local leadership. Vine may well have had China in mind, as the Northern Expedition had been taking place as he had been compiling his observations. Indeed, this event would have huge implications for missionary primitivism both in China, and in Britain.

Robert Bickers, in his history of the British presence in China, has written:

Mission work in China may be divided neatly into three stages before 1949: somewhat aggressive expansion down to 1900 and the Boxer events; a period of complacent calm in the aftermath of that crisis, down to about 1926; then rapid change after the crisis of the Nationalist revolution.⁵¹

The Northern Expedition had a significant impact on missions across China.⁵² From its base in Guangdong (广东), the Guomindang and CCP forces had progressed northwards, defeating warlord armies and ultimately, if only nominally, uniting all of China under the flag of the Republic. As the armies advanced, a propaganda campaign was carried out in order to stir up support for the aims of the revolution. The campaign targeted local customs, warlord rulers and foreign encroachments as forces that threatened to undermine China’s unity and progress. Missionaries became targets of the campaigns against foreign imperialism. Churches and other mission properties were looted and destroyed, and missionaries themselves were sometimes attacked, resulting in many retreating temporarily to the coastal treaty-ports.

⁵¹ Robert A. Bickers, *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism, 1900-1949* (Manchester, 1999), p. 195.

⁵² For studies of its impact on missions, see: Jessie Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions: the Anti-Christian Movements of 1920-28* (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Roads Books, 1988); Ka-che Yip, *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students: The Anti-Christian Movement of 1922-1927*, (Bellingham, WA: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 1980); Paul A. Varg ‘The Missionary Response to the Nationalist Revolution’, in John King Fairbank (ed.), *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 311-335.

These attacks on missions continued and intensified an anti-Christian movement that had been operating since 1922.⁵³ This in turn had grown out of the more widespread attack on religion spawned by the May Fourth Movement.⁵⁴ The anti-Christian movement was organised largely by students in missionary colleges. They called for an end to the independence of these colleges, and demanded that more Chinese staff be employed, the amount of Christian instruction reduced and the curricula reoriented according to the demands of the students. These protests were intensified in the wake of the Northern Expedition, with demands being made for missionary schools to register with the new government if they wished to continue operating. Robert Bickers has analysed the responses of a broad range of British missionary societies, and has concluded that the vast majority willingly complied with registration demands. The consequence of this was a loss of direct control over the running of schools and the removal of religious instruction from their curricula, but most felt they had little choice but to accede to Guomindang demands if they were to continue to operate in the new China.⁵⁵

Demands for registration and reform were extended to other missionary institutions, with the consequence being that more Chinese Christians were moved to senior

⁵³ For the anti-Christian movement, see: Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions*; Yip, *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students*; Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

⁵⁴ For the May Fourth Movement, see: Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986); Mao Chen, *Between Tradition and Change: The Hermeneutics of May Fourth Literature* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997); Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960 & 1967); Joseph T. Chen, *The May Fourth Movement in Shanghai: The Making of a Social Movement in Modern China* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); Timothy B. Weston, *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1929* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); Roxane Heater Witke, *Transformations of Attitudes Towards Women During the May Fourth Era of Modern China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971).

⁵⁵ Bickers, *Britain in China*, pp. 203-04.

positions in the churches, and Chinese staff appointed to positions of leadership in hospitals and other mission-run organisations.⁵⁶ Bickers concludes: ‘the old institutionalised paternalism was in terminal decline, and missionaries found themselves having to learn how “to serve and not to rule.”’⁵⁷ Bickers’s analysis is based on a survey of the large, established mission societies, all of which had developed significant medical and educational operations, which then became the focus of nationalist protest. For the Brethren, however, such operations had not been a priority, and the challenges they faced following the Northern Expedition were somewhat different.

One of the missionaries involved in teaching at the Gracie Kingham Memorial School in Nanchang commented in the February 1927 edition of *Echoes*:

If registration be enforced, we shall have to close down, as we could not possibly comply with the regulations. Rather than compromise in any way, or turn from the one aim of our school work, we would give it up, but this would grieve us as much as the children of the Christians would have nowhere to go.⁵⁸

The *Echoes* missionaries were seemingly willing to relinquish their schools and clinics if they could no longer serve an evangelistic function. The reluctance of the missionaries to accede to Guomindang demands was expressed as a refusal to compromise the religious priority of the mission, rather than a refusal to cede authority to the Chinese. Indeed, the Gracie Kingham Memorial School continued operating after 1927, but with a Chinese Christian, Miss Hu, as principal.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Bickers, *Britain in China*, pp. 195-6.

⁵⁷ Bickers, *Britain in China*, p. 210.

⁵⁸ *Echoes of Service* (February 1927), pp. 37-38.

⁵⁹ Stunt, *Turning the World Upside Down*, pp. 508-509. The school closed in 1937.

In their reactions to the upheaval of the Northern Expedition and the demands of the Guomindang, the *Echoes* missionaries claimed to favour a transfer of responsibility to the Chinese:

Whatever limitations may be placed upon the liberties of the Lord's servants from other lands, we cannot regard such as a catastrophe. It is obvious that we cannot regard ourselves as being the nursing fathers and the nursing mothers of the Chinese believers, at least not indefinitely so. If there is a considerable restriction placed upon the liberty of the foreign missionary, it may, in the wisdom of God, be a means of awakening the Chinese Christians to a sense of His Will in regard to their own responsibility for the witness it is theirs to give.⁶⁰

In line with the primitivist policy of Brethren mission, the *Echoes* missionaries asserted the need for the local Christians to be responsible for ongoing evangelism. Rather than a reluctance on the part of the missionaries, as asserted by those demanding reform, it was suggested here that it was the Chinese Christians themselves who were slow to take on their responsibilities. The hope was therefore expressed that the absence of the missionaries, as a result of the unrest caused by the Northern Expedition, might serve to galvanise these converts.

Editions of *Echoes* in the years preceding the Nationalist Revolution do, to some extent, give substance to missionary claims to be encouraging Chinese responsibility in the churches. In 1921, the front covers of both the January and July editions had photos of conferences put on by the mission in Rehe for its converts, with the latter conference being specifically for the training of Chinese preachers (see Figures 5 and 6). Inside the July edition, a brief comment, by Mr McColm, was provided on the conference for Chinese preachers:

A fortnight ago we had a week's special meetings for colporteurs and evangelists, from the districts around Pakow, for study and instruction in the Word of God. Twenty native brethren were present, who represented most of

⁶⁰ *Echoes of Service* (March 1927), p. 60.

the stations in the district. It was the first conference of the kind to be held. Messrs. Stephen, Tharp and Duthie were here for a week to help.⁶¹

Colporteurs, that is, distributors of Christian literature, and evangelists are frequently mentioned in reports in *Echoes* by the China missionaries. They accompanied missionaries on their itinerations and provided assistance at mission stations. However, the frequent mention of these figures, and their display in photographs, is in contrast to the lack of personal information that is provided about them. Their voices are absent in the reports, and even their names are not always provided (see figure 4 for a photo in *Echoes* of three unnamed colporteurs).

⁶¹ *Echoes of Service* (July 1921), p. 164.

CHRISTIAN MISSIONS "Go ye into all the World." (IN MANY LANDS.)

A RECORD OF LABOUR
ECHOES of SERVICE
 IN THE LORD'S NAME

50th Year—No. 913

1921.

[JANUARY.]

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CHAOYANG NATIVE CONFERENCE, AUGUST, 1920.

This photo shows some of the Christians attending the morning Bible-readings. Messrs. Tharp and Oliver are in the centre, and third from the right in the front row is Dr. Liu-yi, James Gilmour's old servant.

"ECHOES OF SERVICE" BOUND VOLUME FOR 1920. 3/- post free.
 PRAYER LIST. 2d. net; 12 copies, 2/- post free.

FORB WRIGHT AND SONS LTD., BRISTOL

Figure 5 – Echoes of Service (January 1921), front page.

Monthly. [Registered for Canadian Magazine Post.] [Price Threepence Nett.]

CHRISTIAN MISSIONS "Go ye into all the World." [IN MANY LANDS.]
 A RECORD OF LABOUR
ECHOES of SERVICE
 IN THE LORD'S NAME

50th Year—No. 919 1921. [JULY.]

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CONFERENCE FOR CHINESE PREACHERS HELD AT PAKOW, MARCH, 1921.
 Brethren Stephen, Duthie, McColm, and Tharp.

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 PRAYER LIST. 2d. net; 12 copies, 2/- post free.

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Figure 6 – Echoes of Service (July 1921), front page.

Instead, the presence in *Echoes* of Chinese workers is in accord with the function of the magazine as, in the words of its subtitle, ‘A record of labour in the Lord’s name.’ It served to demonstrate to Brethren in Britain the active outworking of missionary primitivism around the world. An effective missionary presence was central to Brethren primitivist identity at home, and *Echoes* played an important role in demonstrating and nurturing this. The reports and photos of the conferences in Rehe, and the frequent mention of Chinese workers, therefore affirmed to the Brethren that they were being true to their primitivist identity. In the same way, baptisms of new converts were frequently mentioned in reports. The names and backgrounds of the converts were sometimes given, but often just the number of those baptised was provided.

The sparse details provided of the *Echoes* converts belies the significance that they had for the mission. Another report from Rehe in 1921 describes a village that was visited:

The meetings at... [Su-tao-chuan] were held in the home of a Christian who was received into fellowship at Ai-lin-ho-tzu about eighteen months ago. He has been working around his home and had interested a number of his neighbours in the gospel, and he asked us to go and have these meetings with them. He entertained both us and the enquirers whilst the meetings were going on. I took a native brother from here to help in the meetings and eight more brethren accompanied me from Ai-lin-ho-tzu to give a hand in the singing and to converse with the people, a help which was greatly appreciated by us and, I am sure, more so by the Lord. It is good to see these young converts with a real love for souls.⁶²

In a province like Rehe, where converts were scattered among villages made isolated by the hilly terrain and the limited road network, such converts as this nameless ‘Christian’ who hosted the meetings and who had invited his neighbours, were surely vital to the mission. The missionaries could make only infrequent visits to these

⁶² *Echoes of Service* (May 1921), p. 108.

villages, and so the maintenance and extension of such remote and isolated churches became the responsibility of these local figures. To the missionary, such displays of zeal were reported in order to assure supporters of the progress of the mission. In this way, the report mentions enthusiastically the Chinese ‘brethren’ who were brought along to assist the missionary. But the important figure in this episode is the resident convert whose details are left unmentioned.

In the wake of the Northern Expedition, there was much discussion in *Echoes* publications of the impact and implications. The campaigns against Christians were widely deemed to be due to Soviet influence.⁶³ For example, James A. Gordon, a missionary in Jiangxi, wrote in *Links of Help*:

There is a purely nationalist ideal in the minds of the best of the Cantonese leaders, but as they have chosen to have as their associates those who hold a definitely Soviet intent we fear that the Soviet will win... The Nationalist elements are not anti- Christian. As a young Nationalist lieutenant said the other day: ‘The real Revolutionary Army is not opposed to Christianity.’⁶⁴

This allowed Gordon to view the situation as one of religious persecution, rather than nationalism. In a report in *Echoes*, he commented:

The Chinese believers must remain to face that which we escape from, and very real their distress will be; and yet I fear that they have felt that the anti-British spirit, which has been for so long fostered, makes it almost easier for them to be alone. Persecution may even cause them to flee to obscurity... And yet we add again the statement that we believe the Lord is using this way to lead them to a conscious dependence upon Himself.⁶⁵

Gordon expressed the hope that the events of the Northern Expedition would provoke a reluctant local church to higher levels of faith, and to take on more responsibility for the expansion of the witness.

⁶³ The USSR were responsible for facilitating the united front between the Guomindang and the CCP, and played a leading role in advising and resourcing the Northern Expedition. See: C. Martin Wilbur and Julie Lien-ying How, *Missionaries of Revolution: Soviet Advisers and Nationalist China, 1920-1927* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁶⁴ J.A. Gordon, ‘A Note on the Position in China’, *Links of Help*, Vol. XVI (1927), p.43.

⁶⁵ *Echoes of Service* (April 1927), pp. 84-85.

However, other reports in *Links of Help* provided a more self-critical perspective. In one edition, an extract from *China's Millions*, the CIM periodical, was printed. The author showed sympathy towards the revolutionaries:

It is a struggle of fresh and growing and almost incalculable strength which wants to establish its rights, with declining decrepitude which wants to keep its long-established privileges. 'China for the Chinese' is the slogan of Chinese Nationalism, and it is difficult to see how its contention can, with any justice, be resisted.⁶⁶

In addition, he asserted that this should have implications for missions:

When the missionaries return to their former spheres of labour it will not be to resume their work former oversight and control of the work. In most places it will be to an entirely changed condition, a condition which will demand readjustment not merely of methods but of mind... There will certainly be wide open doors also for pioneer evangelists, for there are vast territories still unreached and untouched. But the work will not be carried on in the future, as in the past, by foreign missionaries with Chinese helpers. It will be done by the Chinese Church with the invited co-operation of foreign helpers.⁶⁷

The author called for missionaries to take a subservient role in all aspects of the mission. The administration of the churches, he argued, as well as the expansion of evangelistic work, ought to be done under Chinese oversight, with missionaries offering assistance as directed.

Though the printing of this article is evidence of a willingness to reconsider methods in light of the new political situation, an evident tension remained. The editor of *Links of Help* took issue with the term 'Chinese Church' in the report, and added a note: "The Chinese Church" is not a Scriptural phrase. What is referred to is churches in China.⁶⁸ What was being asserted by the editor was the primitivist ideal by which the character of local churches was deemed to be free from local cultural

⁶⁶ J. Stuart Holden, 'An Extract from an article in "China's Millions"' by Dr. J. Stuart Holden', *Links of Help*, Vol. XVI (1928), p. 206.

⁶⁷ 'An Extract from an article in "China's Millions"', p. 207.

⁶⁸ 'An Extract from an article in "China's Millions"', p. 207.

influences, whether Chinese or Western. This conviction meant that the missionaries found it hard to abide expressions of nationalism among Chinese Christians:

What seems to me to be serious is the attitude so many of the professing Christians are taking up with regard to the foreigner. They do not say, 'we are very grateful to you for having brought the Gospel to us, but we feel that now we are able, and it is our responsibility, to carry on all the work by ourselves, so God bless you as you go elsewhere.' Their attitude is rather that we are their enemies, that we represent imperialism, that we are the 'running dogs' of capitalists, and that the sooner we rid them of our obnoxious presence the better pleased they will be. So-called Christian papers are openly advocating the driving out of all foreign missionaries, and all this seems to be so utterly opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, that one trembles for those who take this attitude.⁶⁹

The primitivist demand that Christians separate themselves from politics meant that the *Echoes* missionaries were quick to condemn such nationalist sentiments as unbecoming of Christians.

Simultaneously, the *Echoes* missionaries sought to display their confidence in Chinese-led churches. Many missionaries left their stations and retreated to the coast for safety, and a number of subsequent reports in *Echoes* described how the mission work was continuing under the initiative of the Chinese converts. One report was even written by one of those converts. However, this represented more a demonstration of the primitivist conviction that the churches would flourish under persecution, than it did a new commitment to Chinese authority. As one missionary wrote:

Does this mean that Mission work has failed? No! a thousand times No. We did not go out to build a material building which can be thus destroyed, but we went out as servants of the Living God, working with the One Who said, 'Upon this rock will I build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'... thank God, there are men and women there today who have been saved by the grace of God, and although we have been driven away

⁶⁹ Harry Price, 'Editorial', *Links of Help*, Vol. XVI (1927), p. 129.

they remain to carry on the testimony, and we know that a testimony borne by a persecuted Church always bears fruit.⁷⁰

The initiative of the Chinese Christians in the absence of the missionaries was therefore set forth as proof of the success of missionary primitivism.

Further optimism was expressed by another *Echoes* missionary. Having retreated with other missionaries to Shanghai, Miss Dunphy reported in the September 1927 edition of *Echoes* that ‘Watchman Nee, a young man in his early twenties, is holding meetings for the Chinese, and it has pleased the Lord to save precious souls and to revive His work in the hearts of His own.’⁷¹ This early reference to perhaps the most important Brethren-influenced convert in China is significant for its timing. While the *Echoes* missionaries sought to draw a divide between church leadership on the basis of Chinese nationalism, and leadership on the basis of missionary primitivism, Nee would increasingly make such a distinction difficult to make. Robert Dann has noted of Nee that he took ‘to its logical conclusion the evangelical belief that the New Testament is inspired, authoritative and endowed by right with a status above foreign church custom and local culture.’⁷² And yet this embrace of the primitivist principles that were so central to Brethren identity would prove problematic and deeply challenging to Brethren in both China and Britain.

⁷⁰ A. Cuff, ‘A Little Light Upon the Situation in China, Part III’, *Links of Help*, Vol. XVI (1928), pp. 266-267.

⁷¹ *Echoes of Service* (September 1927), p. 214.

⁷² Dann, *Primitivist Missiology*, p. 252.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued for the need to historicise missionary primitivism, and to view it as a discursive construction that emerged out of a dialogue between the mission field and the Brethren in Britain. Contrary to the many studies that have depicted missionaries primarily as agents of modernity, it has been shown that the Brethren, and their missions, emerged out of a reaction to modernity, and in particular its secularising tendencies. In an assertion of the primacy of their religious identity, the Brethren sought to practice a faith based on a primitivist reading of the New Testament. This led them to emphasise missionary work as a central sphere of Christian activity, and to develop a self-consciously simple missionary strategy that emphasised itinerant preaching and required missionaries to be ‘living by faith.’

Recent studies of missionary primitivism have treated it as a unitary and unchanging concept. Instead, this chapter has sought to examine how the Brethren sought to apply their universalist faith in the mission field, and how this in turn served to reshape their conception of primitivism. The inter-war period saw a reassertion of primitivist principles by Echoes in response to a growing concern that the Brethren had lost the distinctives that had once set them apart so radically from the rest of the missionary community. Simultaneously, the rise of nationalism in places such as China forced a reconsideration of methods, and a rearticulation of the ‘divine plan.’

The Northern Expedition raised questions about the amount of control that missionaries still held over the churches they had founded. Scholarship has tended to focus on the larger mission societies and has viewed the situation as being primarily

about Chinese leadership of missionary institutions, in particular schools and hospitals. A focus on Echoes draws attention to the ways that the Northern Expedition challenged missiological convictions at a more fundamental level. While not uncritical of their own practices, Echoes missionaries generally expressed confidence in their primitivist methods, and displayed evidence in their reports of the progress being made by their converts. In all of this, however, Echoes were most concerned with maintaining their primitivist heritage, and projecting a clear demonstration of the vitality and effectiveness of that primitivism in the mission field. However, the questions that were being raised by the rise of Chinese nationalism, as well as the emergence of independent Chinese Christian movements, highlighted tensions within Brethren missiological discourses. It had been hoped that a revival of interest in missions would help to restore the vitality of the Brethren movement in Britain. However, the success of missionary primitivism abroad would increasingly create challenges for Brethren identity at home.

2) ‘So far from this land as China’¹: Watchman Nee and the New Missionary Primitivism

Introduction

The establishment of local churches by missionaries is a complex and disputed process.² This has been the case in the study of Christianity in China, where the direction of enquiry continues to be shaped by Daniel Bays’ question: ‘how soon (if ever) and in what ways would Christianity become Chinese...?’³ This chapter will argue for the importance of primitivism in understanding this process of ‘Christianity becoming Chinese’.⁴

The efforts of recent scholarship to historicise ‘Chinese Christianity’ speaks to a debate at the heart of questions about Chinese modernity. The framing of Bays’

¹ Letter from G.H. Lang to Watchman Nee, 24 September 1935 (Papers of G.H. Lang, Correspondence 1930-1954, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester).

² Recent studies, in the context of China, include: Daniel H. Bays, ‘The Growth of Independent Christianity in China, 1900-1937’, in Bays (ed.), *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 307-316; Bays, ‘Foreign Missions and Indigenous Protestant Leaders in China, 1920-1955: Identity and Loyalty in an Age of Powerful Nationalism’, in Brian Stanley, *Missions, Nationalism and the End of Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), pp. 144-164; Jessie Lutz, ‘China and Protestantism: Historical Perspectives, 1807-1949’, in Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu (eds.), *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), pp. 179-193; Feiya Tao, ‘Pentecostalism and Christian Utopia in China: Jing Dianying and the Jesus Family Movement, 1921-1952’, in Ogbu U. Kalu and Alaine Low (eds.), *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), pp. 238-252; Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

³ Bays, *Christianity in China*, p. 265.

⁴ This chapter will be examining the growth of independent Protestant Christianity. Catholicism in China has a longer history, dating back to the Jesuit mission during the Ming and Qing dynasties. For a study of this mission that highlights its successes in planting Chinese Catholic congregations, see: Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). During the twentieth century Catholicism in China has undergone a similar, though more limited, expansion to that of Protestantism. For a study of this, see: Richard Madsen, *China’s Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

question, above, was influenced by his concern that a lack of interest in the history of Christianity in China was due to the perception that it was ‘against the trend for a more “China-centered” approach.’⁵ The reference is to Paul Cohen’s influential call for historians to move away from paradigms that place primary importance on the influence of the West in modern China.⁶ It was with this academic agenda in mind that Bays insisted that the aim should be to study ‘the history of Chinese Christianity, not excluding missions, but only highlighting them when they were a central part of a story centered on Chinese Christians.’⁷

This agenda has continued to shape the way that histories have been framed.⁸ For example, Lian Xi, in his recent study of independent Protestant Christian movements, has claimed:

Whatever influences the missionaries did have on the Chinese church, a significant part of the explanation for the subsequent flourishing of Protestant Christianity in China must be sought outside the missions and among indigenous groups. It is the latter that were chiefly responsible for turning Christianity from an alien faith into a spirited, popular religion.⁹

However, this distinction, between a missionary and a ‘popular’ form of Christianity, is problematic, both in a conceptual and a historical sense. The implication that Christianity was not truly ‘Chinese’ until it had found approval at a popular level is somewhat arbitrary and difficult to measure. Elsewhere Xi claims that these groups had transformed Christianity into ‘an indigenous religion of the masses.’¹⁰ Here, a kind of indigenous religious essence is identified. It is by integrating into this core of

⁵ Bays, *Christianity in China*, p. vii.

⁶ Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

⁷ Bays, *Christianity in China*, p. ix.

⁸ Bays has retained this narrative in his recent survey, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), in which he describes Christianity’s evolution ‘from a foreign creed to an indigenized and acculturated reality’ (p. 184).

⁹ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p. 8.

¹⁰ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p. 2.

Chinese religiosity that Christianity is seen to have become no longer an ‘alien faith’ but now a ‘spirited, popular religion.’

The conceptual problems here speak to a criticism made by Arif Dirlik of the China-centered approach.¹¹ Dirlik has pointed out that it results in ‘a reification of China and Chineseness’ resulting in the ‘denial of historicity to Chinese to the extent that they have become modern.’¹² In a similar way, the idea of Chinese Christianity implies a reified Chinese religiosity set apart from a missionary influence, and this does not allow for an appreciation of the ways that influences flowed between them, changing both in the process.

Instead, a focus on primitivism allows for a more nuanced historicising of the process by which Christianity was established in modern China. In his study of Brethren missiological thinking, Robert Dann has pointed out that primitivist ideas have proved particularly attractive to indigenous church leaders.¹³ He has highlighted the Chinese Christian leader Watchman Nee as a notable example of this.¹⁴ Nee was one of the founders and the leader of the independent Chinese Christian movement, referred to most frequently in English as the Little Flock.¹⁵ From its origins in Fuzhou in 1922, the movement expanded rapidly so that by 1940 it numbered around seventy thousand members in more than seven hundred meetings

¹¹ Arif Dirlik, ‘Reversals, Ironies, Hegemonies: Notes on the Contemporary Historiography of Modern China’, *Modern China* 3 (1996), pp. 243-284.

¹² Dirlik, ‘Reversals, Ironies, Hegemonies’, p. 266.

¹³ Robert Bernard Dann, *The Primitivist Ecclesiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A Radical Influence on the Nineteenth-Century Protestant Church in Britain* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2007), p. 220.

¹⁴ Nee was named 倪述祖 (Ni Shuzu) at birth, but changed his name to 倪柝聲 (Ni Tuosheng) in 1925. ‘Tuosheng’ refers to the sound made by the clapper of a city watchman, and it is from this that his English name is derived. Nee changed his name to signify his new spiritual vocation.

¹⁵ This name derived from the title of a hymnbook used by the movement, but was disliked by Nee who refused to give the movement any collective designation. His preferred name, 基督徒聚会所 (the Christian Assembly), emphasised instead the local basis of the movement, and its intended normative character.

across China.¹⁶ It has since gone on to form one of the main constituents in the huge growth of Protestant Christianity in China at the end of the twentieth century.¹⁷

Though identified by Dann, the importance of primitivism in the rise of the Little Flock has been overlooked in accounts of Nee. The perceived need to overcome the foreignness of their religion was something that increasingly preoccupied Christians in China, both Western and Chinese.¹⁸ Primitivism is an overlooked, but essential, aspect of the process by which this was achieved. Nee promoted a Christianity that he claimed was neither Chinese nor Western, but purely biblical. This allowed him both to overcome the foreignness of Christianity and to assert the possibility of independent Chinese oversight of churches.

However, Nee's primitivism also produced an ambivalent relationship with Western Christianity.¹⁹ Nee was assertive of his independence and attacked missionaries for their failures, but he also drew heavily on British evangelical models and writings, and sought the recognition of groups and figures in Britain who he particularly admired. At the same time, among missionaries and evangelicals in Britain, Nee's

¹⁶ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p. 178. For biographies of Nee and the Little Flock written from missionary perspectives, see: Angus Kinnear, *Against the Tide* (revised edition, Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2005); Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men* (Sevenoaks: Christian Focus, 2000). For a biography by one of Nee's co-workers, see: Witness Lee, *Watchman Nee: A Seer of the Divine Revelation in the Present Age* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1991). Recent academic studies are: Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*; and Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, 'Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement in Maoist China', *Church History* 74:1 (2005), pp. 68-96. For works in Chinese, see: Chen Zhongdao, 我的舅父倪柝声 [My Uncle, Watchman Nee], (fourth edition, Hong Kong: Logos, 1999); Chen Zexin, 倪柝声弟兄简史 [A Brief Biography of Brother Ni Tuosheng], (Hong Kong: Gospel Studyroom, 1973); Liang Jialin, 倪柝声的荣辱升黜 [Watchman Nee: His Glory and Dishonor], (Hong Kong: Alliance Seminary, 2003); Shi Bocheng, 倪柝声殉道史 [The Martyrdom of Watchman Nee], (Culver City, CA: Testimony Publications, 1995).

¹⁷ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p. 1, 215.

¹⁸ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 122-130.

¹⁹ The use of the term 'ambivalence' follows that of Homi K. Bhabha. It describes the discursive tension produced in the encounter between coloniser and colonised, as a result of the colonised being represented simultaneously as similar and different to the coloniser. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

own writings and the success of the Little Flock provoked controversy and admiration in equally extreme measures. As Nee strove for a primitivist faith as the ultimate means of establishing Christianity across China, so Christians in the West turned to Nee to find the spiritual vitality they felt they had lost. Nee's story is therefore not simply one of Christianity becoming Chinese. Rather, it presents a cross-projection of desires and a circulating of influences between China and the West, in an encounter that changed both.

In order to elucidate this process, this chapter will focus on various points when the interstices of primitivist authority became most evident, and where the constructed nature of its authenticity was exposed.²⁰ Particular attention will be paid to Nee's two visits to Britain, in 1933 and 1938-39, when his presence became simultaneously an affirmation of and a threat to the integrity of missionary primitivism. A variety of sources will be consulted. The correspondence of several Echoes missionaries, as well as their later published writings and oral recollections, will be utilised to show how Nee's success prompted an ambivalent reaction containing both suspicion and adulation. The correspondence between G.H. Lang²¹ and T. Austin-Sparks²², two evangelical writers who Nee particularly admired, will also be examined. These will show how Nee's movement appealed to those

²⁰ 'Interstice' refers to the space at the meeting of two competing cultures in which new and hybrid forms of culture are produced. This follows the use of Bhabha in *Location of Culture*.

²¹ G.H. Lang (1874-1958) was a well-known, though controversial, Brethren writer and speaker. Lang wrote an autobiography: G.H. Lang, *An Ordered Life: An Autobiography* (London: Paternoster, 1959).

²² Austin-Sparks (1888-1971) was an independent evangelical speaker and writer, and founder of the Honor Oak Fellowship Centre in south London. No biography of Austin-Sparks has been approved by either his family or the Honor Oak Christian Fellowship Centre, but the following have been produced: Rex G. Beck, *Shaped By Vision: A Biography of T. Austin-Sparks* (Cleveland Heights, OH: Greater Purpose Publishers, 2005); Angus Gunn, *Theodore Austin-Sparks: Reflections on his Life and Work* (Revised edition, Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2001). Austin-Sparks did not copyright his writings or the recordings of his sermons, and they are available online: <<http://www.austin-sparks.net/>> [accessed 29th Sept 2011].

missionaries and writers who were disillusioned with the evangelical establishment as they saw it. In the Little Flock they saw a fresh and vital expression of Christianity, such as had fallen beyond the grasp of the West.

A further key source will be Angus Kinnear's 1973 biography of Nee.²³ Kinnear, a former missionary in India, met Nee when the latter visited London in 1938. His biography is detailed, but it employs a problematic narrative structure in order to memorialise Nee in a particular way. The title of Kinnear's biography is *Against the Tide* and, accordingly, Nee is depicted as one who 'stood against the tide of Chinese Marxist atheism.'²⁴ Nee is presented as an example of single-minded devotion to God, and of faithfulness in the face of persecution by an atheist government.²⁵ This chapter will read across Kinnear's narrative in order to place Nee's rise in a broader social context. A further biographical account of Nee originating from the missionary community is in *Three of China's Mighty Men*, a collection of short biographies of Chinese Christian leaders, written by Leslie Lyall and published in 1973.²⁶ This will also be consulted.

Nee's primitivism was formed in relation to conditions in modern China. This is something noted by Lian Xi, in his recent study of independent Chinese Christian movements. Xi covers a variety of such movements, from the Taiping Heavenly

²³ A revised edition, containing extended sections on Nee's arrest and imprisonment, was published in 2005. The revision was begun by Angus Kinnear and completed, following his death in 2002, by his wife, Jean Kinnear.

²⁴ Taken from the blurb of Angus Kinnear, *Against the Tide*.

²⁵ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 301-04.

²⁶ Lyall (1905-1996) served as a missionary with the CIM. He subsequently wrote a number of books about the CIM and Christianity in China, including *A Passion for the Impossible: The China Inland Mission, 1865-1965* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965); *Come Wind Come Fire: The Present Experience of the Church in China* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1961); *Red Sky at Night: Communism Confronts Christianity in China* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969).

Kingdom up to the present day.²⁷ What connects these groups and their leaders, Xi claims, is their millenarian emphasis. This placed them within the tradition of Chinese sectarian religion, a force that has often found expression during times of political and social upheaval, such as the late Qing and Republican periods. In this way, with specific reference to the Little Flock, Xi claims that ‘What Nee fashioned was a theology of triumph over the blight of existence.’²⁸

However, while agreeing with Xi that the conditions of post-dynastic China go a long way to explaining the ability of popular Christian groups to take root and flourish, this chapter will argue that this should be viewed not only reactively, in terms of upheavals that Christianity might provide consolation against, but also proactively, in terms of structural and social changes that provided new means for spreading a movement like the Little Flock. Far from seeking to overcome ‘the blight of existence’, Nee was part of an upwardly mobile social group that was benefitting from the modernisation and economic development that was taking place in the treaty ports.²⁹ Nee’s primitivism, therefore, had a complex relationship with Chinese

²⁷ For the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, see: J.S. Gregory, *Great Britain and the Taipings* (New York: Praeger, 1969); Jonathan Spence, *God’s Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (London: HarperCollins, 1996); Thomas H. Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2004).

²⁸ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p.10.

²⁹ The treaty ports were cities opened up to foreign trade as a result of a series of unequal treaties made between China and various foreign powers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For the opening up of the treaty ports, see: Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-42* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951); John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854* (two volumes, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953); Frederic Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966); Rhoads Murphy, *The Treaty Ports and China’s Modernization: What Went Wrong?* (Ann Arbor: MI: University of Michigan Press, 1970); Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire 1832-1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011). A number of the treaty ports contained concession zones which were leased to foreign powers and governed directly by them. For studies of the foreign communities that developed in these concessions, see: Robert A. Bickers, *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism, 1900-1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Bickers, *Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai* (London: Allen Lane, 2003); Frances Wood, *No Dogs and Not Many Chinese: Treaty Port Life in China, 1843-1943* (London: John

modernity, and this chapter will seek to elucidate something of this relationship. Particular attention will be paid to Nee's move into business in 1942, and his subsequent use of this means in the expansion of the Little Flock. While this appeared to go against the idea of 'living by faith', one of the central tenets of Brethren primitivism, it served to expose how, both in China and Britain, missionary primitivism was a discourse tightly bound up with modern capitalism.³⁰

Chinese Nationalism, Social Mobility and Independent Christianity

This section will provide an overview of Nee's career up to the time of his first trip to Britain in 1933. In doing so it will seek to place him more broadly into the world of treaty port China during the Republican period.

Watchman Nee was born in 1903 and grew up in Fuzhou, which was one of the five treaty ports under the Treaty of Nanking of 1842.³¹ Consequently, by 1850, three major mission societies were operating in the city, and would remain for the next hundred years: the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church (North), the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and the

Murray, 1998). For the treaty ports as centres of economic and social development, see: Joseph Esherick (ed.), *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2000); Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Qin Shao, *Culturing Modernity: The Nantong Model, 1890-1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

³⁰ For living by faith, see: Timothy Larsen, "'Living by Faith": A Short History of Brethren Practice', *Brethren Archivists and Historians' Network Review* 1:2 (1998), pp. 67-102. For the emergence of a Chinese middle-class in the treaty ports, see: Marie-Claire Bergère, *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie 1911-1937* (French edition: Paris, 1986; English edition: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

³¹ For late-imperial Fuzhou and Fujian, see: Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Eduard B. Vermeer (ed.), *Development and Decline of Fukien Province in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

Church Missionary Society.³² By the time of Nee's birth a notable Protestant community had become established in the city with a disproportionate presence in the modern professional sector.³³ This upward mobility had been achieved through the educational and employment opportunities that membership of the churches provided, something exemplified by Nee's family.³⁴ His grandfather had been converted while attending the school of the American Board, opened in 1853, and had gone on to become the first Chinese man to be ordained by this mission in Fuzhou. His fourth son, Ni Wenxiu, born in 1877, also attended a missionary school where he received a Western-style education. He also had a classical Chinese education at home, which allowed him to enter the imperial examinations and become a second-level degree holder.³⁵ This in turn enabled him to attain a post in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service.³⁶

³² Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China 1857-1927*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 3. For studies of the first decades of Protestant missionary work in Fuzhou, see: Ellsworth C. Carlson, *The Foochow Missionaries, 1847-1880* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Chen Yiqiang, *Christianity in Modern China: The Making of the First Native Protestant Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Lin Liqiang, 晚清闽都文化之西传: 以传教士汉学家卢公明为个案 [Late Qing Fujian Culture and the West: the Missionary Sinologist Justus Doolittle], (Beijing: Haiyang Press, 2010).

³³ Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants*, p. 36.

³⁴ For missionary education in China, see: Jessie Lutz, *China and the Christian Colleges 1850-1950*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971); Tao Feiya and Wu Ziming, 基督教大学与国学研究 [The Christian Colleges and Chinese Studies], (Fuzhou: Fujian Academic Publishing House, 1998); Zhang Kaiyuan and Ma Min (eds.), 社会转型与教会大学 [Social Change and Christian Universities], (Hankou: Hubei Academic Publishing House, 1998); Daniel H. Bays and Ellen Widmer (eds.), *China's Christian Colleges: Cross-Cultural Connections, 1900-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Wen-hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Glen Peterson, Ruth Hayhoe, and Yongling Lu (eds.), *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth-Century China* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001), pp. 109-136.

³⁵ For a study of the imperial examination system, see: Ping-Ti Ho, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368-1911* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962).

³⁶ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 24-26. For the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, see: Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast*; Donna Brunero, *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949* (London: Routledge, 2006).

Ni Wenxiu married Lin Heping, another Chinese Christian from Fuzhou. Lin Heping was from a peasant family in Fujian.³⁷ She was sold during a famine to a family in Fuzhou, who sold her on again to the family of a merchant who worked for a foreign company in the city. This merchant converted to Christianity after attributing his recovery from illness to the prayers of a Methodist minister. Lin Heping was subsequently sent to the Methodist Mission School for Girls in Fuzhou, and from there went to Shanghai to attend the McTyeire School for Girls, another Methodist College.³⁸ She then returned to Fuzhou to marry Ni Wenxiu.³⁹ The family lived in the Nantai area of Fuzhou, which had become the business district of the city. Watchman was their eldest son, and in 1916 he was sent to the school of the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) which had expanded over time to form a complex of primary, middle, normal, high and divinity schools collectively known as Trinity College, named after the college in Dublin from which the majority of the school's staff were drawn.⁴⁰ Successful graduation from Trinity allowed for entry to the prestigious St John's University in Shanghai.⁴¹

Protestants in late-imperial and early Republican Fuzhou had a disproportionate involvement in the movement for political and social reform. This can be seen in how they played leading roles in both the Republican movement and the provincial

³⁷ Lin Heping wrote an autobiography: 恩愛標本 [An Object of Grace and Love], (Shanghai, 1943).

³⁸ For Methodist education in Fuzhou, see: Ryan Dunch, 'Mission Schools and Modernity: The Anglo-Chinese College, Fuzhou', in Peterson et al, *Education, Culture, and Identity*, pp. 109-136. For the McTyeire School for Girls, see: Heidi A. Ross, "'Cradle of Female Talent': The McTyeire Home and School for Girls, 1892-1937", in Bays, *Christianity in China*, pp. 209-227.

³⁹ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 26-30.

⁴⁰ For the role of Trinity College, Dublin, in the CMS mission to Fuzhou, see: R.M. Gwynn, E.M. Norton and B.W. Simpson (eds.), *'T.C.D.' in China: A History of the Dublin University Fukien Mission 1885-1935* (Dublin: Church of Ireland Printing and Publishing, 1936; reprinted for the Mission's centenary, 1985-1986).

⁴¹ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 27-28, 42, 54. For St John's University, see: Xu Yihua, 'St John's University, Shanghai as an Evangelising Agency', *Studies in World Christianity*, 12:1 (2006), pp. 23-49.

government, and also in how Christian-inspired reform activities, in particular those initiated by the YMCA, had the broad support of the city's progressive elite.⁴² Nee's father and mother both participated in the city's reform movements. Ni Wenxiu served on the board of the Fuzhou YMCA during the 1910s and 1920s⁴³, but Lin Heping's involvement was more extensive. She formed a Women's Patriotic Society to support the Guomindang's Second Revolution, and had an official role during Sun Yat-sen's visit to Fuzhou in 1913. Her work earned her the award of the Order of the Second Class for Patriotism.⁴⁴

However, the direction of the family's devotions altered when Lin Heping and Watchman Nee came under the influence of revivalist Christianity.⁴⁵ Following a series of meetings in Fuzhou in 1920, led by the female evangelist Yu Cidu (余慈度, 1873-1931), both had conversion experiences.⁴⁶ They now pursued a vision of a purified Christianity, divorced from political and social concerns. An anti-Christian movement had emerged in the early 1920s, and was centred on China's many missionary colleges. The movement was largely a protest against missionary control

⁴² Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants*, pp. 74-77, 108-109. For the YMCA in China, see: Shirley S. Garrett, *Social Reformers in Urban China: the Chinese Y.M.C.A., 1895-1926* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

⁴³ Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants*, p. 195.

⁴⁴ Kinneer, *Against the Tide*, pp. 41, 46. The Second Revolution (July-October 1913) was an uprising by the Guomindang against Yuan Shikai (袁世凱, 1859-1916), whose rule as President of the Republic of China had become increasingly autocratic. The uprising failed, and Sun Yat-sen fled to Japan. For the creation of cultures of citizenship in early Republican China, see: Joshua Fogel and Peter Zarrow (eds.), *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890-1920* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885-1924* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

⁴⁵ For a summary of the history of Protestant revivalism in China, see Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 85-108; Liang Jialin, 華人傳道與奮興佈道家 [Chinese Evangelists and Revivalists], (Hong Kong: Alliance Seminary, 1999).

⁴⁶ For a biography of Yu Cidu, see: Wu Xiuliang, 余慈度—二十世纪中国教会复兴的先驱 [Yu Cidu: Harbinger of Christian Church Revival in Twentieth-Century China], (Boston, MA: Pishon River, 2000).

over education, and created a great deal of disruption in the major treaty ports.⁴⁷ The anti-Christian movement was strong in Fuzhou, and it involved many students in Trinity College. Nee's separation of Christianity from politics, as well as his rejection of Western denominational churches, was therefore clearly informed by this political climate. He now ended his membership of the city's Methodist church and instead began meeting with a small group of like-minded Chinese Christians. He also started receiving instruction from an English missionary, called Margaret Barber, who had broken off her membership of the CMS and now operated a small, independent ministry on the edge of Fuzhou.⁴⁸ However, it is important not to overemphasise Nee's break from the Protestantism that had, up to that point, predominated in Fuzhou. His renunciation of the world was somewhat selective, and the networks and opportunities that came with membership of the Chinese Protestant community were still largely accessible to him.

The central role of women in Nee's story to this point has been notable, and women would continue to play a significant role both in influencing Nee's spiritual direction and in establishing the Little Flock. The social mobility associated with Protestantism applied to women as well as men, allowing access for women to a variety of professional careers.⁴⁹ However, a gender specific division of labour

⁴⁷ For the anti-Christian movement, see: Ka-che Yip, *Religion, Nationalism, and Chinese Students: the Anti-Christian Movement of 1922-1927* (Bellingham, WA: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 1980); Jessie Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions: the Anti-Christian Movements of 1920-28* (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Roads Books, 1988). For the protests of the 1920s in a wider context, see: Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

⁴⁸ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 160-161. Margaret Barber (1866-1929) worked as a missionary in Fuzhou from 1899-1906 for the CMS, and then from 1909-1929 as an independent missionary with the informal support of Surrey Chapel, in Norwich. Because of her independent status there is very little documentary evidence of her time in Fuzhou. The archives of Surrey Chapel, held in the Norfolk Record Office, for example, contain just a few, brief mentions of her.

⁴⁹ For studies on the impact of Christian missionary institutions on the social status of Chinese women, see: Jessie G. Lutz (ed.), *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity and Social*

meant that the influence of women in the leadership of the churches themselves was limited during the Republican period.⁵⁰ This would be the case also in the Little Flock, where Nee's literal reading of the New Testament meant that women attending church meetings were required to cover their heads, and not to speak.⁵¹ Despite this, women played key roles in the development of the movement. One notable example was Li Yuanru, who was an editor at the Spiritual Light Publishing Society of the Presbyterian Mission in Nanjing.⁵² Nee worked there with Li in 1924 and 1926, and she would later resign her position in order to work on the expansion of Nee's written ministry. The role of women in the Little Flock therefore provides an example of how Nee combined the primitive and the modern in expanding and defining his movement.⁵³

Nee's writing and publishing quickly became the most important part of his ministry. He had been irregularly producing his own journal since 1923, and in 1928 had produced his first book, 属灵的人 (The Spiritual Man).⁵⁴ The opportunities in printing and publishing, afforded to him by his Protestant background, were essential

Mobility (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2010); and Tao Feiya, 性别与历史: 近代中国妇女与基督教 [Gender History: Modern China and Christian Women], (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2006).

⁵⁰ Lutz, *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women*, pp. 19-21.

⁵¹ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p. 144.

⁵² Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 90, 116-117.

⁵³ For further studies on gender in Late Imperial and Republican China, see: Bryna Goodman and Wendy Larson (eds.), *Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labour and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); Gail Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Nanxiu Qian, Grace S. Fong, and Richard J. Smith (eds.), *Different Worlds of Discourse: Transformations of Gender and Genre in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Leiden: Brill, 2008);

⁵⁴ Watchman Nee, 属灵的人 [The Spiritual Man], (two volumes: 1926 and 1928). Reprinted as volumes 15 and 16 in Nee, 倪柝声著述全集 [Complete Works of Watchman Nee], (33 volumes, Hong Kong: Manna Publisher, 1995).

to the establishment of his movement.⁵⁵ They simultaneously allowed him to propagate the aims and ideas of his movement and to establish personal contacts in Nanjing and Shanghai, which enabled him to set up a base in the latter in 1928.⁵⁶

Over the course of the 1930s the Little Flock grew and spread along the towns of China's south-eastern coast. With Nee's success, however, came controversy. Although he had an increasing number of friends and admirers in the missionary community, many others viewed his activities with suspicion. The Little Flock not only sought to gain converts, but also encouraged Chinese Christians in missionary churches to leave and to join Little Flock assemblies instead. Mission churches, Nee argued, taught a Christianity that had departed from the biblical model that the Little Flock represented. In particular, he claimed that the denominational labels of the

⁵⁵ For modern printing and publishing in China, see: Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004); Xiantao Zhang, *The Origins of the Modern Chinese Press: The Influence of the Protestant Missionary Press in Late Qing China* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁵⁶ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p.116. For studies of Shanghai during the Republican period, see: Frederic Wakeman, Jr. and Wen-hsin Yeh (eds.), *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Wen-hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendour: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Shumei Shi, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); Bryna Goodman, *Native-Place, City and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); Frederic Wakeman, Jr. *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); Gail Hershat, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997); Brian Martin, *The Shanghai Green Gang: Politics and Organized Crime, 1919-1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996); Christian Henriot, *Shanghai, 1927-1937: Municipal Power, Locality, and Modernization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Parks M. Coble, *The Shanghai Capitalists and the Nationalist Government, 1927-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); Stephen Smith, *Like Cattle and Horses: Nationalism and Labor in Shanghai, 1895-1927* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Stephen Smith, *A Road is Made: Communism in Shanghai, 1920-27* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2000); Joseph Fewsmith, *Party, State, and Local Elites in Republican China: Merchant Organizations and Politics in Shanghai, 1890-1930* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1985); Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Xiaoqun Xu, *Chinese Professionals and the Republican State: The Rise of Professional Associations in Shanghai, 1912-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For Christianity in Shanghai, see: Yao Minquan, *上海基督教史, 1843-1949* [A History of Christianity in Shanghai, 1843-1949], Shanghai: Shanghai Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, 1994).

missions prevented the unity that was supposed to characterise the local church. However, many missionaries saw this as a poaching of their converts, and resentment built up against Nee.⁵⁷

Watchman Nee and the Exclusive Brethren

Nee's book *The Spiritual Man* drew heavily on the writings of Jessie Penn-Lewis, a speaker and writer associated with the 1904-05 Welsh Revival, whose work Nee had read and translated.⁵⁸ Nee, under the direction of Barber, read the writings of a number of evangelicals associated with the holiness movement. This was an interdenominational evangelical movement in Britain and the USA which advocated the pursuit of the 'higher life', that is, a fuller consecration to God and victory over sin.⁵⁹ Barber also directed Nee towards a number of eschatological writings related to the early Brethren. Chief among these were the works of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), who had outlined a detailed vision of the end times, and had called for the true church to purify itself in preparation for the second coming.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 170-171.

⁵⁸ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p.165. For Penn-Lewis, see: Rhodri Hayward, 'Lewis, Jessie Elizabeth Penn- (1861–1927)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47645>> [accessed 5 Sept 2011]. For the 1904-05 Welsh Revival, see: R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation: Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004). For modern religious revivals in a British and Irish context, see: Janice Holmes, *Religious Revivals in Britain and Ireland, 1859-1905* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2001). For a study placing these revivals in a more global context, see: David Bebbington, *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵⁹ For an overview of the history and influence of the holiness movement, see David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 151-180. See also: Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000).

⁶⁰ For Darby, see: Timothy C. F. Stunt, 'Darby, John Nelson (1800–1882)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7141>> [accessed 5 Sept 2011]. For Darby's influence on Nee, see: Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 168-169, 173.

In 1932 Nee received a small delegation of Exclusive Brethren from Britain, who he had been in correspondence with for a few years. The Brethren movement had divided into the 'Open' and 'Exclusive' branches in 1848, a split that had been initiated by Darby. Darby had been keen to enforce some kind of order onto what, until that point, had been a disparate and informal movement. He was concerned that some kind of doctrinal uniformity was needed, and when others disagreed with his criteria for this, he effectively excommunicated them. Furthermore, Darby developed a principle of communion whereby association was forbidden with those who, though otherwise doctrinally sound, held communion with others considered to be in error.⁶¹

Though the Exclusive Brethren, that is, those who followed Darby, were initially the larger of the two groups, their principles of organisation discouraged evangelism. This meant that they soon became the smaller branch of the movement, and were marked by a strict separatism. The Open Brethren, who maintained a principle of the autonomy of each separate meeting and became very active in mission work, would be a much more significant presence in the evangelical landscape. However, at this time, Nee had as yet had no significant contact with the Open Brethren missionaries in China, as they were located in provinces some distance from where he had been operating. Instead, having taken on the teachings of Darby, it is the Exclusives who he sought contact with and, specifically, the group of Exclusives known as the Taylorites.⁶² After observing the meetings of the Little Flock, the delegation felt able

⁶¹ For an account of the early development of the Brethren movement, see Tim Grass, *Gathering to His Name: The Story of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 9-48. For its subsequent divisions, see Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, pp. 63-83.

⁶² The Exclusive Brethren divided following the death of Darby. The largest group was led by Frederick Raven (1837-1903). He was succeeded by James Taylor (1870-1953), under whom the group became known as the Taylorites. For a comparative history of both the Open and Exclusive

to accept Nee and his movement into fellowship with them, and they invited Nee to Britain and North America on a return visit, which he embarked upon in 1933.⁶³

branches of the Brethren in the twentieth century, see Roger N. Shuff, *Searching for the True Church: Brethren and Evangelicals in Mid-Twentieth-Century England* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).

⁶³ For accounts of the Exclusive Brethren's brief embrace of the Little Flock, see Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 138-152; Xi, *Refined by Fire*, pp. 173-4; Shuff, *Searching for the True Church*, pp. 40, 57. For an account from the Exclusive Brethren perspective, see A. J. Gardiner, *The Recovery and Maintenance of the Truth* (second edition, Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, 1963), pp. 272-288.



Figure 7 – The Little Flock and the Taylorite Brethren in Shanghai, 1932. (Source: Brethren Photograph Collection, BPC/1/53, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester). Email correspondence of 10 July 2000, preserved with the photo and held between David Brady, former archivist of the Christian Brethren Archive, and Gordon Rainbow, member of the Exclusive Brethren, identifies the figures as: Standing: Arthur E. Mayo (Banbury, England); Dr C.S. Powell (San Francisco); Faithful Luke; E. Phillips (Australia); Joyce (Australia), Ye, W.J. House (Australia). Seated: John Chang; Mrs.—(Unknown); Mrs.—(Unknown); Watchman Nee. (One of the ladies is thought to be Mrs Barlow, whose husband, Charles R. Barlow, was a member of the Taylorite delegation, but does not appear in this photo). Little is known about the origins of this photo, or figure 8 (below). They are both reproduced in Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, which suggests they were produced for circulation.



Figure 8 – Watchman Nee. (Source: Brethren Photograph Collection, BPC/1/54). Date of photo is unstated, but its provenance, alongside Figure 7, above, in the Christian Brethren Archive, suggests that it was taken during the Taylorite visit to Shanghai in 1932.

Considering the tightly bounded character of the Taylorites, their embrace of Nee and the Little Flock was a surprising occurrence. Their willingness, albeit short-lived, to extend the circle of their fellowship in such a radical way, suggests something of the fascination that would later develop around Nee among evangelicals in the West. The Taylorites held that their existence as true, primitivist Christians was due to an independent working of the Holy Spirit. The discovery of the Little Flock in Shanghai, apparently independently holding the same beliefs and practices as them, was taken as a confirmation to the Taylorites of the divine origins of their movement. Nee's presence among them therefore took on an affirmative significance, something that would be repeated in a later visit to Britain.⁶⁴

However, Nee's presence among the Taylorites also had an unsettling effect. The following is taken from Kinnear's account of this episode:

He never ceased to respect the wealth of biblical insight to be found within this group, whose written ministry he had devoured. But at the same time he was much disturbed by the complacency that allowed them more than once in his hearing to say things like, 'Is there anything in the field of spiritual revelation that we Brethren do not have? To read what other Christians write is to waste time, for what do they have that we don't?' Their deep spiritual wisdom seemed frozen. Once at a conference at Park Street, Islington, when invited to add his comment to a long discussion of doctrine to which he had listened, he gave vent to mounting impatience. Rising to his full six feet and stretching his arms wide, 'My dear brothers,' he said, 'your understanding of the truth is vast,' and then, bringing finger and thumb together, 'but in my land it would avail you only so much if, when needed, you could not cast out a demon!' He felt guilty afterwards at this outburst, but it expressed too his sense of how real is the Unseen. And as he left Britain he observed with frankness to his friend Charles Barlow, 'Your people have wonderful light, but oh so little faith!'⁶⁵

Kinnear's depiction of the Taylorites is respectful, but nevertheless critical. He particularly draws attention to a distinction between knowledge and faith that

⁶⁴ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p.143.

⁶⁵ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 146-148.

emerged out of their encounter with Nee. While learning much from their spiritual knowledge, Nee's faith is shown to contain a vitality and dynamism that is lacking among the Taylorite Brethren. This episode echoes comments Nee reportedly made six years later when asked by a group from the Open Brethren to give his impression of the Taylorite meetings he had visited previously. Nee's response was simply, 'mighty in knowledge, feeble in faith, useless for casting out demons in China.'⁶⁶ In both these instances Nee contrasted the Taylorites's great knowledge with their lack of faith, and cited the need to deal with the demonic in China as evidence of the insufficiency of the 'revelation' they were so proud of.

In these episodes, Nee's comments were approvingly quoted in order to show that the essence of primitivism was not to be located in a tightly-defined and guarded doctrinal formula, but in something more spiritual and ephemeral. By citing a problem that the Taylorites were unable to deal with, that is, casting out demons, and by locating this problem in China, Nee was exposing a disjuncture in the primitivist authority of the Taylorites. This would be repeated in later encounters, when Nee's articulation of primitivism would, on the one hand, appear familiar and reassuring, but would also contain a difference that would be unsettling and threatening.

The tension between Nee and his Taylorite hosts developed into confrontation as Nee transgressed the spiritual bounds laid down by them. Nee visited churches both in London and in Canada that were outside of the Taylorite circle.⁶⁷ At both of these he participated in communion services, so demonstrating his fellowship with them, something forbidden by the Taylorites who demanded a strict separation from those

⁶⁶ Diary of E.H. Broadbent, entry for 4 August 1938, p. 276 (Papers of E.H. Broadbent, CBA/3067-86, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester).

⁶⁷ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 148-150.

whose doctrinal views differed from their own. On discovering Nee's transgressions a furious exchange of letters commenced, in which the Taylorites tried to persuade either Nee to renounce his actions, or the Little Flock to renounce Nee. A selection of these letters has been published by the Taylorites, in *The Recovery and Maintenance of the Truth*, which, as the title suggests, narrates their brief association with the Little Flock as one ended as a result of the errors of the latter.

The correspondence took the form of expositions of Bible texts, as each side sought to justify the position it held as being biblical and primitivist. The Little Flock leaders asserted their freedom to associate with whoever they deemed fit for fellowship. In response to this, the Taylorites asserted the primacy of obedience to truth in deciding matters of fellowship, and called for the Little Flock to accept their authority in this:

This ministry with the divine formations more or less in keeping with it, in hundreds of gatherings of saints throughout the world, is your heritage, my beloved brother, and that of all the dear brethren in China, as it is ours in Europe and America, and you are obligated to the Lord to embrace it, profit by it, and stand firmly by it, refusing what is not of God until He comes for us all.⁶⁸

The Taylorites, whose fellowship Nee had courted because of what he had seen as their commitment to biblical authority alone, now asserted an alternative, historical location of authority. In doing so, they were making an appeal to tradition, exactly the kind that Nee sought to escape by disassociating with the mission societies in Shanghai.

⁶⁸ Gardiner, *Recovery and Maintenance*, p. 286.

Nee and Brethren Primitivism

In 1935, the Little Flock were informed that their fellowship with the Taylorites had been broken off. But Nee's correspondence with other Brethren figures in Britain continued. In particular, Nee sought the advice of the speaker and writer G.H. Lang. Lang had been a member of the Taylorites, but had left and joined the Open Brethren.⁶⁹ Nee initially sought Lang's advice over his fallout with the Taylorites.⁷⁰ In his reply Lang affirmed Nee in the stance he had taken. He also expressed his admiration for Nee's ministry:

It is refreshing to find saints so far from this land as China so enlightened and definite upon these matters; and I cannot but think it significant that Christians in China should, after one hundred years, be found setting forth these truths to Christians in this land who have largely surrendered them.⁷¹

Lang was expressing a sentiment that would increasingly be voiced by a significant section of the Open Brethren, and in particular those who were on the margins of the movement. Disillusioned by those in Britain who had 'largely surrendered' Brethren practices, Lang projected his desire for a revival of Brethren primitivism on to the emerging Little Flock. Lang was a radical figure whose 1925 book *Departure* attacked what he saw as centralising tendencies among Brethren and calling for a return to primitivist principles. His criticisms, which included Echoes among their main targets, had an unsettling impact.⁷² However, Lang's attacks did not bring about the widespread changes he had hoped for, and he would become somewhat

⁶⁹ For the life of Lang, see his autobiography: *An Ordered Life: An Autobiography*.

⁷⁰ Nee's initial letter has not survived, but Lang's reply confirms that the approach had been made by Nee, who had sent copies of his correspondence with the Taylorites to Lang. These are contained among Lang's papers, and are labelled 'copy of letter for private circulation', along with others marked as belonging to M.H. Haughton, about whom no information is provided (Papers of G.H. Lang, Correspondence 1930-1954, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester).

⁷¹ Letter from Lang to Watchman Nee, 24 September 1935 (Papers of G.H. Lang, Correspondence 1930-1954).

⁷² For more on Lang's attacks, and in particular those that were directed at Echoes of Service, see Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, pp. 345-349.

marginalised towards the end of his life. But his ideas gained support from a significant minority of Brethren, some of whom would also become supporters of Nee.

Around this time, G.C. Shepherd, a Brethren missionary in China, disassociated himself from Echoes and began operating independently. In a circular letter, which included Lang among the recipients, he outlined the reasons for this move, in which he repeated many of Lang's accusations against Echoes. However, as the letter continued, it was evident that an encounter with the Little Flock had helped to shape his new convictions:

Failing to see in the numerous representations of Christianity in China anything near akin to the New Testament pattern, they [the Little Flock] have boldly set out to follow the teaching and example found therein. All believers not scripturally disqualified are received among them... I am fully convinced that this movement is the work of the Holy Spirit, and that we would do well to adjust our own methods by the light of Scripture and thus be found working shoulder to shoulder with our Chinese brethren, who at present with good reason consider our position to be unscriptural and sectarian.⁷³

Shepherd attests to the authenticity of the spiritual character of the Little Flock, asserting it to be produced by the Holy Spirit. However, he combines this assessment of the Little Flock's spiritual qualities with its close adherence to 'the New Testament pattern', a phrase which evokes a more scientific and prescriptive view of primitivism. Shepherd sees that the Little Flock's biblicism has exposed the departure of the Brethren themselves from the biblical principles on which they claimed to draw their identity.

⁷³ Circular letter from G.C. Shepherd, February 1934 (Papers of G.H. Lang, Correspondence 1930-1954).

Among other Echoes missionaries, however, Nee continued to develop a more infamous reputation as someone whose movement was flourishing by drawing away missionary converts.⁷⁴ During his second visit to Britain, from 1938-39, an attempt was made to address what had clearly become a deeply felt distrust between Nee and Echoes. The attempted reconciliation was orchestrated by E.H. Broadbent (1861-1945).⁷⁵ A close friend of Lang, Broadbent was another radical figure. His career was a varied one, combining a speaking ministry in Britain with missionary work in Eastern Europe and Russia. Broadbent was an associate editor for Echoes of Service from 1919-1928, but left this position as a result of a disagreement. Broadbent felt that Echoes was moving away from New Testament principles and becoming more like a denominational missionary society. However, he maintained good relations with the Echoes editors in Bath, and during Nee's visit to England he orchestrated a meeting between them.⁷⁶

Little remains of Broadbent's correspondence, so it is not clear for how long he had known Nee, but a diary entry for 4th August 1938 relates how he accompanied Nee to Bath to meet the Echoes editors:

We hoped that if the brethren there were to hear his report of his experiences in China they might come to welcome the formation and progress of churches among the people there and modify the opposition of those of the 'Echoes' missionaries who think that their 'Mission Stations' are weakened by this movement among the Chinese.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 170-171.

⁷⁵ For a study of the career and major writings of Broadbent, see Tim Grass, 'Edmund Hamer Broadbent (1861-1945): Pilgrim Churchman', in Grass (ed.), *Witnessing in Many Lands: Leadership and Outreach Among the Brethren* (Troon: Brethren Archivists and Historians Network, forthcoming, 2012), pp.143-154, with thanks to the author.

⁷⁶ Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, pp. 347-349.

⁷⁷ Diary of E.H. Broadbent, entry for 4 August 1938, p.273 (Papers of E.H. Broadbent, CBA/3067-86).

Broadbent clearly hoped to bring an end to the hostility felt towards Nee. However, he later concluded: ‘The effort in Bath to bring about an understanding and fellowship does not seem likely to lead to the desired result.’⁷⁸ His diary entry is a description of Nee’s summary of his own ministry up to that point, and provides few hints as to the response of the Echoes editors. But some indication of what was perhaps the main point of contention can be seen in Nee’s comment:

It was natural that when such a church [a Little Flock meeting] was formed in a place where there was already a mission station there would be a tendency for some members of the mission to leave it and go to the church, finding that more in accordance with what they saw in the Word. This could not but be painful to the missionaries, so that, while some rejoiced in seeing a work of the Spirit among the Chinese, others resented losing some of the fruit of their labours.⁷⁹

Again, the combination of adherence to a biblical model and an inner spiritual vitality is emphasised. Nee deflected criticism of the actions of his movement, claiming instead that the success and appeal of the Little Flock was based on its adherence to the Bible. Though he acknowledged that the missionaries might find this hard to take, Nee painted their grievances as being secondary to the success of ‘a work of the Spirit among the Chinese.’

Nee’s Second Trip to Britain, 1938-1939

Nee’s second visit to Britain was a longer one, during which he attended a variety of evangelical meetings around Europe.⁸⁰ Despite the greater diversity of gatherings that he moved among, Nee held steadfastly to his conviction that his movement alone in China was truly adhering to primitivist principles. In addition to those from

⁷⁸ Diary of E.H. Broadbent, p.276.

⁷⁹ Diary of E.H. Broadbent, pp. 275-276.

⁸⁰ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 187-196.

Echoes, he was approached by a number of senior missionary representatives, but also rejected their calls for closer cooperation. This led to a growing suspicion towards Nee, and Kinnear noted how one senior missionary director described him as ‘from the foreign missions’ point of view, “the most dangerous man in China.”⁸¹

However, this growing antipathy among some was combined with a rapturous reception from others. This can be seen during Nee’s attendance at the Convention for the Deepening of Spiritual Life in Keswick, in the Lake District. The Keswick Convention had been running annually since 1875, and had become the main focus of the holiness movement in Britain.⁸² It also had a strong missionary focus. For the 1938 Convention, the trustees planned to inaugurate a new event:

The Chairman suggested that it would be a courteous gesture to arrange a special gathering for friends from overseas, making it clear that this was not for those eligible for the Missionary Reception, or even for those who had visited other lands, but for bona fide residents from countries overseas who were visiting England for the Convention. The suggestion was warmly approved...⁸³

This emphasis on the Convention’s inclusivity was commented on in a report in the *Cumberland Evening News*:

The reception of the Keswick Convention Trustees – inaugurated this year – for the overseas visitors, excluding the missionaries (who have their own reception) revealed the truly international character of this year’s gathering. That reception was held in the Keswick Pavilion on Tuesday, when there were present people from thirty countries. They were from the United States, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, Greece, Yugoslavia, Estonia, Latvia, Eire, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa, Nigeria, British Guiana, Jamaica, China, Japan, Argentine, Mexico, Iran, Egypt and Palestine.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p. 196; Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 170-171.

⁸² For the Keswick Convention, see: John C. Pollock, *The Keswick Story: The Authorized History of the Keswick Convention* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964). For Keswick in the context of the holiness movement, see: Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 151-180.

⁸³ Minutes of the Meeting of the Keswick Convention Trustees, Friday, April 8th, 1938 (Keswick Convention, DS0 250/1/1/2, Cumbria Archives).

⁸⁴ Anon, ‘War or Mightiest Christian Revival’, *Cumberland Evening News* (20 July 1938), p. 3.

This emphasis needs to be seen in a wider context in which a missionary discourse of evangelical internationalism was coming under pressure as a result of conflict in Europe and the growth of nationalist movements abroad.⁸⁵ The emphasis on the number of nationalities in attendance at the Convention can be seen as an attempt to restore confidence in the internationalist identity of missionary evangelicalism. It is in this context that Nee's appearance at Keswick must be considered.

From early on in its history the Convention had included in its programme a meeting devoted to missionary concerns. During this meeting at the 1938 Convention, which was led by W. H. Aldis, the Home Director of the CIM, Nee was invited to pray for China. Over five thousand were reported to have attended the main meetings,⁸⁶ and the occasion was noted with some enthusiasm in the commemorative volume for that year:

But for many the crowning moment of vision was undoubtedly reached when Mr Aldis invited a Chinese Christian, Watchman Nee, to lead us in prayer. We had just been hearing of the war havoc, and of the unspeakable sufferings of China. The opportunity to unite in prayer was accordingly eagerly welcomed. No one who was privileged to be present can forget these moments. For the very Spirit of our Lord Himself breathed through that prayer. 'The Lord reigneth. He *is* reigning, and He *is* Lord of all. Nothing can touch His authority. It is the spiritual forces that are out to destroy the interests of the Lord in China and in Japan. We do not pray for Japan. We do not pray for China. But we pray for the interests of Thy Son in China and in Japan. We do not blame any men. They are only tools in the hand of the enemy of the Lord. Lord, we stand in Thy will. Lord, shatter the Kingdom of Darkness. Lord, the persecution of Thy Church is persecuting Thee.'

⁸⁵ Stanley, *Missions, Nationalism and the End of Empire*, pp. 1-11.

⁸⁶ A report in the *Cumberland Evening News* stated: 'At the opening meeting on Saturday night the large tent, the largest in the world, seating with its wooden annexe about 5000 people, was full' and that 'The attendance was increased by latecomers on Sunday and Monday, and was further added to by the many who now motor into Keswick day by day for two or three days to attend the meetings.' (Anon, 'Five Thousand at Opening of Keswick Convention', *Cumberland Evening News* (18 July 1938), p. 4). The missionary meeting took place on Friday morning in the main tent, and was considered one of the highlights of the Convention, so it is likely that it attracted similar numbers.

So he prayed. And every heart amongst us was united in the Spirit to say, 'Amen,' and 'Amen.'

How deeply moved and glad must every missionary and helper who had wrought in the work in China have been! How truly these men and women have 'learned Christ!'⁸⁷

Nee's prayer asserted an indifference towards national interests and a concern only for 'the interests of Thy Son.' Such spiritual-mindedness struck a chord with the Keswick audience, and chimed with the convention's international character. His assertion of the purposes of God transcending the chaos and violence of national conflict powerfully affirmed the Keswick motto, 'All one in Christ Jesus.'

However, in light of Nee's growing infamy in China, his presence at Keswick is unlikely to have made China missionaries 'deeply moved and glad', as the yearbook suggested. Despite being aware of this tension, Nee's English-language biographers give prominence to the Keswick episode and echo the adulation of the Convention yearbook. The prayer is quoted in full by Kinnear, who comments that 'It was a prayer that few who were privileged to be present forgot.'⁸⁸ Lyall concurs, saying that 'the spirit of that prayer, as Mr Nee interceded, not only for China, but also for Japan, deeply moved the great gathering and left an indelible impression on the minds of many who were present.'⁸⁹ Though neither Kinnear nor Lyall ignore the animosity surrounding Nee, both ultimately seek to place him within a narrative of evangelical internationalism, and so the warm reception that Nee received at the gathering at Keswick has an important place in their accounts.

⁸⁷ Anon (ed.), *The Keswick Convention 1938* (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd, 1938), p. 245.

⁸⁸ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p. 188.

⁸⁹ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, (Sevenoaks: Christian Focus, 2000), pp. 75-6.

Most of the duration of Nee's second trip to Britain was spent at the Honor Oak Fellowship Centre of Theodore Austin-Sparks. Formed in 1925, Honor Oak hosted regular church meetings, but also formed a larger operation that included residential conferences and regular publications. Nee had been introduced to Austin-Sparks' writings by Margaret Barber, and he had subsequently befriended a CIM missionary, Elizabeth Fischbacher, who had been part of the Honor Oak Fellowship before becoming a missionary. Fischbacher resigned from the CIM in 1935 and became associated with the Little Flock.⁹⁰ It was she who had suggested that Nee accompany her and a group of missionaries to Britain in 1938.

Honor Oak is described by Kinnear as being 'in a flow slightly aside from mainstream church planting policies.'⁹¹ It emphasised a number of teachings that placed it slightly on the fringes of wider evangelicalism and, while not connected to the Brethren, was held in esteem by a number of them, including G.H. Lang.⁹² Kinnear himself spent time with Nee at Honor Oak, and his reflections further reveal the ambivalence with which Nee was received in Britain:

Those of us who were privileged to enjoy briefly something of a monopoly of his fellowship and ministry were immensely enriched by the experience. He was so easy to talk with, and his Eastern cultural background made discussion of our common heritage in Christ so stimulating. When he spoke in public, whether taking morning prayers or addressing a church meeting, his excellent English conspired with the charm of his mannerisms and his non-Western analogies to make him a joy to listen to. But it was the content of his addresses that won us. He wasted no words, but brought us straight to grips with some problem of Christian living that had long bothered us. Or he confronted us with some demand of God that we had shamelessly sidestepped, for on too many matters we Christians excel – as he engagingly put it – at 'dotching the issue'. He displayed, too, the Chinese thinker's great

⁹⁰ Minutes of the China Council, China Inland Mission: One hundred and seventy-sixth session, Shanghai, 11 September 1935 (CIM/01/03/2/08, School of Oriental and African Studies).

⁹¹ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p. 189.

⁹² A friendly correspondence between Lang and Austin-Sparks is evident, with Lang, in a letter to T. Austin-Sparks dated 24th February 1953, expressing his support of Austin-Sparks's work at Honor Oak (Papers of G.H. Lang, Correspondence 1930-1954).

care in his choice of terms and often gave back new meaning to our worn evangelical clichés.⁹³

There is a certain amount of orientalism in Kinnear's description of the 'charm of his mannerisms' and 'the Chinese thinker's great care'. But most notable is how Nee is praised for his directness in addressing issues that British Christians were afraid to, and the freshness of his Bible teaching. Nee, it is suggested, was able to communicate truths that the staid Western churches had lost their grip on.

Nee made Honor Oak his base during his time in Britain, and seems to have viewed Austin-Sparks as a kind of mentor, whose advice he sought for the next stage of the Little Flock's expansion.⁹⁴ Nee, therefore, had once again come to Britain in order to find the primitive Christianity which he had pursued through the writings he had obtained in China. Ironically, he now found this idealised Christian vision projected back onto him by those he met in Britain.

Nee and the 'New' Missionary Primitivism

While in Britain, Nee translated into English a set of talks he had given a few months earlier in Shanghai. This was in order to get Austin-Spark's opinion on them, and also at the request of his growing body of admirers. These talks had been given to a group of his senior workers, and in them he had departed from his normal focus on individual spiritual growth to deal with the external organisation of his expanding movement.⁹⁵ The talks had been transcribed and published soon after in Chinese, as

⁹³ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p. 189-190.

⁹⁴ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 174-176.

⁹⁵ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p. 186.

工作的再思 (Rethinking the Work)⁹⁶, and now Nee rapidly worked to produce an English version before he returned to China.⁹⁷ The title of the English version was *Concerning Our Missions* and it was Nee's first English-language publication. The English title gives a more normative claim for the contents than the Chinese title, and the use of the word 'missions' also implied a direct comment on the operation of Western missions in China, whereas Nee had given the talks to a number of Little Flock leaders, in relation to the specific expansion work they had been doing.⁹⁸

In the preface to the English-language edition, Nee explained that he had been reluctant to produce an English version because the book was 'liable to be misunderstood and a source of controversy' and cautioned against those who he feared 'would use it as a manual for service.'⁹⁹ However, despite his reservations, Kinnear recalled that *Concerning Our Missions* was 'avidly seized upon as a tract for our times' by a missionary community concerned about the long-term survival of its work.¹⁰⁰ The book contained Nee's vision for an organisation of churches based on the New Testament model. He emphasised the importance of the autonomy of each local church, but also a superstructure of apostles, responsible for overseeing the expansion and general direction of the movement, and who held ultimate authority. However, an aspect of Nee's ideas that was not so well received was his insistence on one church for each individual city. As well as disputing the biblical precedent

⁹⁶ Watchman Nee, 工作的再思 [Rethinking the Work], (1938). Reprinted in volume 8 of: Nee, 倪柝声著述全集 [Complete Works of Watchman Nee], (33 volumes, Hong Kong: Manna Publisher, 1995).

⁹⁷ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p. 174.

⁹⁸ The English version would be reprinted by Living Stream Ministry in 1980, under the title *The Normal Christian Church Life*, in order to accompany another of Nee's books with the title *The Normal Christian Life*.

⁹⁹ Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1980), pp. 6-7.

¹⁰⁰ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p. 193.

that Nee claimed to be following, critics feared that it indicated that he would continue his policy of putting forward his movement as the rightful successor of the work of the missions.¹⁰¹

Nee's travels led to a great deal of ambivalence in the way that he and his ideas were perceived and represented. Suspicion towards him grew as he showed no sign of deviating from a ministry that many felt threatened by. Simultaneously, he was perceived as someone who was free from the degradations and divisions of Western Christianity, and who had grasped a simple and essential Christian faith. Here can be seen the origins of an idealised discourse of Chinese Christianity. Narrating this as a linear progression from a missionary to an indigenous Christianity only serves to perpetuate this romanticised view, one which seems to have come about as a result of frustration within Western missions at their own shortcomings. Instead, Chinese Christianity, in the case of Nee and the Little Flock, needs to be seen as a complex process of hybridisation, characterised by a cross-projection of desires, and a recycling of Christian and missionary discourses in a variety of contexts. This will be seen again, as Nee now sought to speed up the expansion of his movement.

Nee and the Chinese Bourgeoisie

While in Britain, Nee had made enquiries about obtaining a business licence for his brother, a chemist, to manufacture sulphanilamide.¹⁰² Then, in 1942, Nee left the leadership of the main Little Flock meeting in Shanghai and, until 1947, devoted

¹⁰¹ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 193-196.

¹⁰² Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p. 213.

himself to expanding China Biological and Chemical Laboratories (CBC), a pharmaceutical company started by the same brother. This move has disconcerted Nee's biographers, all of whom have found it difficult to reconcile it with their narratives. Leslie Lyall has viewed Nee's foray into business as a neglect of his spiritual occupation, and a contradiction of his own insistence in *Concerning our Missions* that the Christian worker should rely on God for material needs. Because of this, according to Lyall, the elders of the Little Flock assembly in Shanghai asked Nee to stop preaching at their meetings. Later, in 1947, Nee was accepted back only after having made 'a public confession of his error in becoming involved in the business of the factory.'¹⁰³

Kinnear has also claimed that Nee was forbidden from preaching by the Shanghai elders as a result of his increased commercial involvement. But unlike Lyall he claimed that this was a decision which they later regretted, and that their reconciliation in 1947 required confession of faults on both sides.¹⁰⁴ Kinnear has sought to explain this 'unexpected turn' as being motivated by Nee's sense of obligation to provide for the support of the movement's full-time evangelists, who were struggling in wartime conditions. In addition, he claims that Nee was also compelled by a sense of obligation to family concerns.¹⁰⁵ Historians have also found Nee's move difficult to explain. For example, Lian Xi, while not concerned about justifying or censuring Nee in his break from living by faith principles, still identifies it as a move that sparked controversy within the Little Flock. He explains this by

¹⁰³ Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, pp. 84-6.

¹⁰⁴ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 226-7, 233.

¹⁰⁵ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 211-4.

repeating allegations, the veracity of which he offers no comment on, that Nee had been defrauding investors.¹⁰⁶

In all three accounts, then, Nee's turn to business is presented as a surprising turn of events, and a departure from his primitivist ministry. However, the extent to which it deviated from his own teachings has been exaggerated. Nee's reflections in *Concerning our Missions* on financial support are ambiguous. On the one hand he was adamant about the need for Christian workers to be dependent on God, and not on a human source, for their support. But he also acknowledged that the New Testament gave examples of times when other means were appropriate:

But in Corinth [the apostle] Paul did not live from the gospel; he made tents with his own hands. So there are evidently two ways by which the needs of God's servants may be met — either they look to God to touch the hearts of His children to give what is needful, or they earn it by doing part-time secular work. To work with our hands may be very good, but we need to note that Paul does not regard that as the usual thing. It is something exceptional, a course to be resorted to in special circumstances.¹⁰⁷

There was scope, then, for other means of meeting material needs when the situation demanded it.

But as well as remaining consistent with his own teaching, Nee's move comes as far less of a surprise when it is contextualised into the world of the Chinese bourgeoisie, a group in which he remained firmly embedded.¹⁰⁸ As Marie-Claire Bergère has shown in her seminal study, it was not unusual for the members of a single bourgeois

¹⁰⁶ Xi claims this came to light in 1942, and that Nee's involvement with CBC dated back to 1938 (Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 194-195). Kinnear, however, is clear that although Nee had made enquiries in 1938, while in London, about acquiring a business licence for his brother to manufacture Sulphanilamide, he did not become formally involved until 1942, when he became Chairman of Directors (Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 212-213).

¹⁰⁷ Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, p. 171.

¹⁰⁸ The Chinese bourgeoisie were described by Marie-Claire Bergère in: *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie, 1911-1937* (French edition: 1986; English edition: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

family to be involved in a variety of careers, and therefore for an individual to have connections with a number of professions and concerns, and even to pursue different activities either simultaneously or successively, as Nee was now doing.¹⁰⁹ This was achieved through the dense network of relations that characterised this new social group.

Bergère has emphasised the importance of family connections in establishing business concerns, both those of immediate relations and those established through marriage. This can be seen in Nee's case, with his business being formed out of a partnership with his brother, who provided chemical expertise, and being developed with the assistance of his brother-in-law, Zhang Yilun. Nor was it unusual for religion to become mixed into this world of business, as profession of a common religion, including Christianity, sometimes provided a further bond in the network of bourgeois relations.¹¹⁰

The role of Chinese Christians in the development of middle-class cultures in the treaty ports has been noted.¹¹¹ However, the ways that this social context shaped the development of independent Chinese Protestantism has been neglected. The tension that Nee's move into business creates in missionary accounts of his life is a reflection of the enduring strength of primitivist missionary narratives, both in their exaggeration of the agency of individual missionaries, and in their concealing of the socio-economic context of missionary work.¹¹² This continues to be reflected in

¹⁰⁹ Bergère, *Chinese Bourgeoisie*, pp. 128, 139-140.

¹¹⁰ Bergère, *Chinese Bourgeoisie*, p. 141.

¹¹¹ The link is made most explicitly in Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants*.

¹¹² Alwyn Austin, in his study of the CIM, comments on the 'hagiographic aura' that surrounds CIM publications, and notes in particular the absence of records or other material relating to money in the CIM archives. See: Austin, *China's Millions*, pp. 18-20.

academic studies of these groups. The most recent of these, Lian Xi's 2011 work *Redeemed by Fire*, focuses on the dynamic leadership of a few key figures, and on the strength of the religious cultures they created. Coverage of the socio-economic context of primitivism is essential both to documenting the means by which its missionary activities were supported and expanded, and for providing a perspective from which the creation of such individualistic cultures of faith can be better understood. This is true for primitivism in both Britain and China. Although there were distinctive features to Nee's use of his bourgeois background in expanding the Little Flock, there are parallels with the Brethren in Britain, such as the involvement of John Laing in the expansion of Echoes.¹¹³

The Expansion of the Little Flock

Following the end of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), Nee left his position at CBC and returned to his role with the Shanghai Little Flock assembly. But CBC would continue to play an important role as he now initiated an ambitious expansion plan. Under this new strategy, evangelism took place through migration out of several major centres. This required a centrally orchestrated effort, and so marked a significant shift from Nee's earlier emphasis on local autonomy.¹¹⁴ He called for the Shanghai assembly to channel their resources to support this new strategy. Nee

¹¹³ Laing was a builder and civil engineering contractor who donated a large proportion of his sizeable wealth to Echoes. In 1922 he gave almost forty per cent of his personal ordinary shares in his company to the Steward's Company Ltd. This was a charitable holding foundation, established by Echoes in 1988, in order to hold in trust the property acquired by missionaries in the various countries in which they operated. See: Alan Thorpe, 'Laing, Sir John William (1879–1978)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48743>> [accessed 13 July 2012].

¹¹⁴ For more on this expansion of the Little Flock's organisational structures, and of its adaptation under the Communists, see: Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, 'Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement in Maoist China', *Church History* 74:1 (2005), pp. 68-96.

himself had earlier placed the profits of the CBC entirely at the disposal of the Little Flock, and now many others in the assemblies in Shanghai and the other treaty-ports were encouraged to donate generously, with the result that the movement came to command significant material resources.¹¹⁵

A number of new Echoes recruits, arriving in China following the end of the Sino-Japanese War, witnessed the workings of this new strategy with some admiration. George Hanlon, who worked in Jiangxi province from 1947-1950, recalled it enthusiastically when interviewed in 2011:

And I remember I went to Changsha one night, which was another big city in Hunan province. And I went into an inn before I went on the next day on the journey, and I said to the innkeeper, 'are there any Christians in this town?' And he said, 'it's funny you should ask that. Just down the street there is a dentist, and he has Christian meetings in his shop.' So I went down, and here was this lovely dentist office, and he was a Little Flock man... Watchman Nee had a conference in Shanghai before the Communists came... So he said, 'we have this short six months or so to answer Christ's call in the gospel, to spread over China... And we have an offering box there at the front of the building. I want you to give your wealth to that. And God has today among us those who can go: young couples, educated, cultured people. Give up your business, give up your university job, and go into inland China, to the main cities, and begin to preach the gospel. You've maybe got a year to do it.' And he was right. Now the dentist was one of these fellows. He had a lovely big practice in Shanghai, and he and his wife and kids sold it, and came up to Changsha. He took this shop, and he was doing dentistry during the day and preaching at night!¹¹⁶

According to Hanlon, the Little Flock expansion was initiated with the imminent arrival of Communism in mind. It was a call for those Little Flock members from the Chinese bourgeoisie to use their resources and their education in order to establish Little Flock outposts in major cities across China. Hanlon was clearly impressed by the resourcefulness and resolve that characterised this expansion of the movement.

¹¹⁵ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 195-196.

¹¹⁶ Interview with George Hanlon, 14 June 2011.

Another new Echoes arrival was also struck by the independent action of the Little Flock. Geoffrey Bull arrived in China in 1947 with the intention of travelling on to Tibet. En route, he stayed for four months in Chengdu, where he spent time with the Little Flock in that city.¹¹⁷ Though a small group, Bull reported that it was experiencing rapid growth following the arrival of Zhang Yilun, Nee's brother-in-law.¹¹⁸ This reveals the central role that CBC now came to play in the Little Flock's expansion. According to George Patterson, Bull's fellow-missionary, Zhang had a peripatetic ministry. In each city that he went to he opened a pharmacy for trade during the day, and then used the premises for evangelistic meetings in the evening, moving on once the core of a new meeting had been established.¹¹⁹

Bull provides another example of how admiration for the Little Flock was set off against disillusionment at the state of mission work. Shortly after leaving Chengdu and going on to Tibet, Bull drew an unflattering comparison between the Little Flock and Brethren missions in a letter to Echoes:

From the lips of a Chinese brother in fellowship here came these words – ‘the “Brethren” in China have learnt the ways of the denominations.’ He was referring to workers from foreign assemblies. What could I say – it fair carries my conclusion. The leaven of the ‘society’ outlook has crippled the work in Kiangsi, it seems to me... It's no good saying well it's China and the Chinese – because Chinese believers elsewhere – acting according to the NT - are being established, very often with no foreigners present at all. It is challenging to the core.¹²⁰

The failure of Brethren missions, according to Bull, was due to their gradual conformity with other mission societies, and therefore their departure from

¹¹⁷ Chengdu (成都) is the capital of Sichuan province (四川). For studies during the Republican period, see: Di Wang, *Street Culture in Chengdu: Public Space, Urban Commoners and Local Politics, 1870-1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Kristin Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu: Chinese Urban Reform, 1895-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹¹⁸ Letter from Bull to Echoes, 7 April 1948 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Bull, Mr Geoffrey T., John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester).

¹¹⁹ Interview with George N. Patterson, 3 May 2011.

¹²⁰ Letter from Bull to Echoes, 7 April 1948 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Bull, Mr Geoffrey T.).

primitivism. While the missionaries, Bull claims, sought to blame their problems on ‘China and the Chinese’, he saw his experiences in Chengdu as a clear refutation of this. In Chengdu, Chinese Christians were operating independently of foreign missionaries, and doing so in closer accordance with biblical principles than the Echoes missionaries.

The Little Flock expansion demonstrates most emphatically the combination of the primitive and the modern that was integral to the success of the movement. The evangelism by migration strategy, with its roving ‘apostles’, such as Zhang Yilun, and its transplanting of members from the treaty-ports into the interior, represented the fulfilment of Nee’s mission to establish a church movement on primitivist principles across China, a vision he had outlined in *Concerning our Missions*. Its mobilisation was based on the biblical call for believers to cede their earthly possessions in light of the imminent coming of Christ’s kingdom. However, it was a call that was heightened by the more visibly imminent arrival of the Communists, and the threat that this would bring both to religious freedom more generally, and to the assets and professions of the Little Flock’s bourgeois heartland. The expansion represented, then, both the apotheosis of Nee’s primitivist vision, and a bourgeois mobilisation in advance of the Communist arrival.¹²¹

¹²¹ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 234-235; Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p. 195.

Watchman Nee in Communist China

Nee was arrested in 1952, following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949.¹²² Prior to his arrest, the Little Flock had been cooperating with the new government, albeit uneasily. The Communists launched the Three-Self Movement in 1951 in order to remove foreign influences from the churches, and Nee had publically supported it.¹²³ His arrest came about not as a result of his opposition to the government's religious policies, but as part of the Three-anti and Five-anti campaigns, that were launched in 1951 and 1952, and that targeted corruption in bureaucracy and business. The Five-anti campaign, launched in January 1952, particularly targeted capitalists.¹²⁴ Nee, perhaps anticipating that the Little Flock's business ties might become compromising, was seeking to sell CBC to buyers in Manchuria, but the sale was suspended pending investigations, and Nee was arrested soon after.¹²⁵

¹²² For studies of the transition to Communist rule, see: Liao Kai-lung, *From Yanan to Peking; The Chinese People's War of Liberation, From Reconstruction to First Five-Year Plan* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1954); Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (eds.), *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); David Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); Li Hua-Yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948-1953* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Kenneth Liberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin, 1949-1952* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); Tony Saich and Hans J. van de Ven (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995). For a study of the Little Flock's adaptation to Communist rule, see: Lee, 'Watchman Nee and Maoist China.'

¹²³ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p. 200. The three-selves - self-governance, self-support and self-propagation - were promoted as government policy from 1951. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement was formally initiated in 1954. The Little Flock would pull out of the Three-Self Movement in 1954, two years after Nee's arrest.

¹²⁴ The five antis were: bribery, tax evasion, theft of state assets, fraud, and theft of state economic secrets. For a study of Communist policy towards capitalists following the Communist Revolution, see: Sherman Cochran, 'Capitalists Choosing Communist China: The Liu Family of Shanghai, 1948-56', in Brown and Pickowicz, *Dilemmas of Victory*, pp. 359-385.

¹²⁵ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p. 244.

Nee was put on trial in 1956 and was accused of committing all of the Five antis. There were also a number of other charges, but the Five-antis campaign formed the context and primary grounds of his arrest.¹²⁶ He was found guilty and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, and would eventually die in prison, in 1972.¹²⁷ Following Nee's imprisonment, many other senior Little Flock leaders were arrested. The movement was then officially brought back into the Three Self Movement, from which it had withdrawn in 1954. However, many Little Flock groups would now continue to operate outside the auspices of state-approved Christianity.¹²⁸

Leslie Lyall provides the following response to Nee's arrest:

The final nemesis came in 1952 when one of the Communist charges against Mr Nee was that of being a capitalist. The factory enterprise thus proved to be a more serious mistake than Mr Nee had realised in 1947. David, the man after God's own heart, made not a few errors of judgement in his time through failing 'to seek the Lord' and leaning to his own understanding. Watchman Nee, it appears, was in this venture no wiser than David.¹²⁹

Nee's turn to business, according to Lyall, was a mistake that resulted from a lapse in faith. The fact that it also played into the hands of the Communists further emphasises its folly, but the significance of this is ultimately underplayed. The subtitle of Lyall's book is 'Leaders of the Chinese church under persecution', and Nee's arrest and imprisonment is placed within this narrative of the persecution of Christianity under Communism. Nee's business involvement, while coming under censure, is finally seen as incidental, and it is his primitivist faith that is shown to be the reason for his confrontation with the forces of Communism.

¹²⁶ These are outlined by Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 266-271, and were: being at the head of a counterrevolutionary clique; supporting Nationalist actions against the Communists; being subsidised by and collaborating with foreign imperialists; using the Little Flock as a shield for the promotion of counterrevolutionary activities; and numerous counts of licentious behaviour.

¹²⁷ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, pp. 266-271.

¹²⁸ Lee, 'Watchman Nee and Maoist China', p. 92.

¹²⁹ Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 88.

However, as this chapter has demonstrated, the story of Nee and the Little Flock cannot be separated from the historical context of the rise and fall of the Chinese bourgeoisie. Nee benefited from the education, networks and employment opportunities that membership of the bourgeoisie afforded to him. The harnessing of these resources to aid the Little Flock's expansion efforts ultimately enabled the spread of the movement to the far reaches of inner China so that, at the time of Nee's arrest, the Little Flock numbered 'at least eighty thousand members in 870 congregations nationwide.'¹³⁰ While the success of the Little Flock was largely due to the potency and appeal of Nee's primitivist Christian vision, it is nevertheless true that the scale of its expansion was only possible within this socio-economic context. Correspondingly, the link between Christianity and capitalism, and therefore imperialism, was something that incriminated Nee in the eyes of the incoming Chinese Communist government.

Conclusion

George Patterson, the Echoes missionary, later wrote a book about the independent Chinese Christian movements. In it he explained that the so-called indigenous groups 'were not truly "indigenous" in the sense of "native", "belonging naturally", growing out of the spiritual soil of China.'¹³¹ Instead:

This was, if I may define the term 'indigenous', a spontaneous native version of Christianity based on New Testament principles rather than a national variety of imported Western ecclesiastical systems as represented by Roman

¹³⁰ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p. 201.

¹³¹ George N. Patterson, *Christianity in Communist China* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1969), p. 69.

Catholic and Protestant churches. What the latter were attempting to do was to superimpose Chinese nationals on Western-conceived ecclesiastical structures; while the former personified a complete break with later Western tradition and a return to first-century New Testament church principles and practices.¹³²

Patterson's definition reveals again the problematic premise of primitivist Christianity, which is identified here as not being part of 'Western tradition', but a return to pure, biblical Christianity. Patterson's opposing of this 'indigenous' Christianity with 'Western-conceived ecclesiastical structures' demonstrates again the potent appeal that primitivism could have, both because of its promise of a genuine and essential Christianity, and because of its potential for challenging the authority of church and missionary establishments. In this way, Nee's primitivism can be seen as a reaction to the perceived entrenchment of the modern missionary establishment, and to its compromised association with the forces of imperialism.

Watchman Nee's primitivism therefore played an essential role in establishing Protestant Christianity as an independent religion in modern China. It allowed him to overcome the foreignness of Christianity and to provide a basis and impetus for an independent, Chinese Christianity. However, a focus on primitivism also serves to problematise the idea of Chinese Christianity as a simple process of indigenisation. Instead, primitivism, while making a claim of ahistoricity, brought about new, hybrid forms. As has been seen, much of this was a consequence of a cross-projection of desires, with primitivism operating as an illusive vision of an essentialised Christian religiosity. But this rootless and shifting discourse also took more grounded and localised forms, as Nee sought to locate and utilise those means most readily and effectively available for the realisation of his primitivist vision for

¹³² Patterson, *Christianity in Communist China*, p. 38.

China. However, his success in harnessing the resources and networks of the Chinese bourgeoisie to the expansion of the Little Flock then worked against him. Under the Chinese Communists, Christianity was now presented as an imperialist religion, and its ties with global capitalism were highlighted and condemned.

3) 'To the uttermost part'¹: Reginald Sturt and the evangelisation of Mongolia, 1906-1948

Introduction: Christianity at China's Margins

One of the central emphases of missionary primitivism was the imperative to carry out mission work among peoples as yet unreached by missionaries. The Apostle Paul's command, 'To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you'², was frequently cited to this end by Brethren and the faith missions movement more generally.³ For the Echoes mission to China, this was reflected in attempts to penetrate northwards to reach Mongol populations and westwards in order to preach among Tibetans.⁴ This chapter and the one following will examine these missions in turn. Both missions had a negligible impact in terms of conversions, but the efforts of those involved were well-publicised and held up for emulation. By seeking to evangelise the 'regions beyond' these missionaries were seen to be practicing an idealised, apostolic model of mission. In highlighting this, Echoes were affirming Brethren identity in Britain, and setting forth a standard for the younger generation.

¹ *Echoes of Service* (September 1927), pp. 207-208.

² II Corinthians 10:16 (King James Version).

³ Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) p. 194.

⁴ For a survey of Christian missions to China's ethnic minority groups, see: Ralph Covell, *The Liberating Gospel in China: The Christian Faith Among China's Minority Peoples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995). For Echoes missions see, for Mongolia: A.G. Compton, *Children of the Wilderness* (Auckland: Wentforth Publishers, 1953); and for Tibet: George N. Patterson, *God's Fool* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954); Geoffrey T. Bull, *When Iron Gates Yield* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1955).

These missions therefore reveal the performative nature of missionary primitivism. The use of ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’ as concepts for understanding identity formation was something developed in psychology and anthropology⁵, and has recently been developed most extensively by the feminist and queer theorist Judith Butler.⁶ It is not a concept that has been much applied to the study of religion, but provides a useful way of understanding the activities of missionary primitivists.⁷ Performativity in this context has two aspects to it. First, it describes strategies carried out in the field. The practice of missionary primitivism was based on models inferred from the New Testament, and that prioritised a rapid and expansive dissemination of the gospel message to people who had not previously encountered it. Second, the performance of missionary primitivism was repeated in the reports printed in *Echoes*. These highlighted the faithful adherence of *Echoes* missionaries to apostolic models, which in turn served to affirm Brethren principles and identity, and to provide a model and an inspiration for Brethren at home. Seeing missionary primitivism as performative therefore helps to further elucidate the importance of mission activity to defining Brethren identity in Britain.

The attraction of the ‘regions beyond’ affected primitivist identity in other ways. These were frequently remote places, far from modern civilisation, and they were treated ambivalently in missionary writings. On the one hand the distance from modernity was welcomed. The challenges of travelling and living in often inhospitable terrain were treated as tests of obedience, and the primitive setting,

⁵ For a recent survey, see: Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (second edition, London: Routledge, 2004).

⁶ See: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁷ For a recent study that explores the utility of the concept in relation to religious belief, see: Abby Day, ‘Propositions and Performativity: Relating Belief to the Social’, *Religion and Culture* 11:1 (2010).

away from the corruptions of modernity, was seen as an ideal arena for the practice of primitivist principles of mission. However, the remoteness of the ‘regions beyond’ also meant that they were places where the modernity of missionaries became more pronounced.⁸ The harshness of these primitive locations repelled missionaries as they simultaneously attracted them. In seeking to overcome some of the dangers faced, missionaries became more dependent on modern medicine, modern technology, and modern forms of knowledge.⁹ This in turn affected their interactions with the people they sought to convert.¹⁰

The ‘regions beyond’ were located at China’s margins, and this made them foci of political contestation.¹¹ Despite the fact that missionary primitivism was apolitical,

⁸ For studies that emphasise the modernising effect of missionaries on so-called premodern peoples, see: Jean and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (two volumes, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991-7); Peter van der Veer (ed.), *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity* (London: Routledge, 1996); van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

⁹ For missionary medicine, see: David Hardiman (ed.), *Healing Bodies, Saving Souls: Medical Missions in Asia and Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006). For the use of science and technology in the Jesuit mission to China, see: Florence C. Hsia, *Sojourners in a Strange Land: Jesuits and their Scientific Missions in Late Imperial China* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Zheng Yangwen, *China on the Sea: How the Maritime World Shaped Modern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). For missionaries and modern knowledge, see: Patrick Harries, ‘Anthropology’, pp. 238-260, and Norman Etherington, ‘Education and Medicine’, pp. 261-284, in Etherington (ed.), *Missions and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ussama Makdisi, ‘Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity’, *The American Historical Review*, 102:3 (1997), pp. 680-713; Jean Michaud, *‘Incidental Ethnographers’: French Catholic Missions on the Tonkin-Yunnan Frontier, 1880-1930* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Patrick Harries, *Butterflies and Barbarians: Swiss Missionaries and Systems of Knowledge in South-East Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2007); Patrick Harries and David Maxwell (eds.), *The Spiritual in the Secular: Missionaries and Knowledge about Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012).

¹⁰ For missionary interactions with indigenous peoples, see: Norma Diamond, ‘Christianity and the Hua Miao: Writing and Power’, in Daniel Bays (ed.), *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 138-157; Jamie S. Scott and Gareth Griffiths (eds.), *Mixed Messages: Materiality, Textuality, Missions* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2005); Patricia Grimshaw and Andrew May (eds.), *Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Exchange* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2010); David Lindenfeld and Miles Richardson (eds.), *Beyond Conversion and Syncretism: Indigenous Encounters with Missionary Christianity, 1800-2000* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

¹¹ For studies of China’s ethnic frontiers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see: Stevan Harrell, *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1995); Colin Mackerras, *China’s Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). For Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, see: Xiaoyuan Liu,

missionaries found independence from politics an impossible position to maintain, and they dealt with this problem in different ways. In the case of Mongolia, the Echoes mission became implicated in discourses in which the margins were seen as backward places that needed civilising. In the case of Tibet, the missionaries came to sympathise with the local peoples they encountered, and sought to help defend them from larger political powers. In both cases, this placed missionaries in an ambiguous relationship with modern Chinese geopolitical identity. In particular, in identifying these mission fields as lying beyond China's frontiers, they implicitly questioned the claims of the emerging Chinese nation to these former imperial territories.

Examining the Echoes missions on China's margins therefore reveals a complex arrangement of the political, the spiritual and the geographical, and these chapters will explore something of the intersections of these in Mongolia and Tibet.

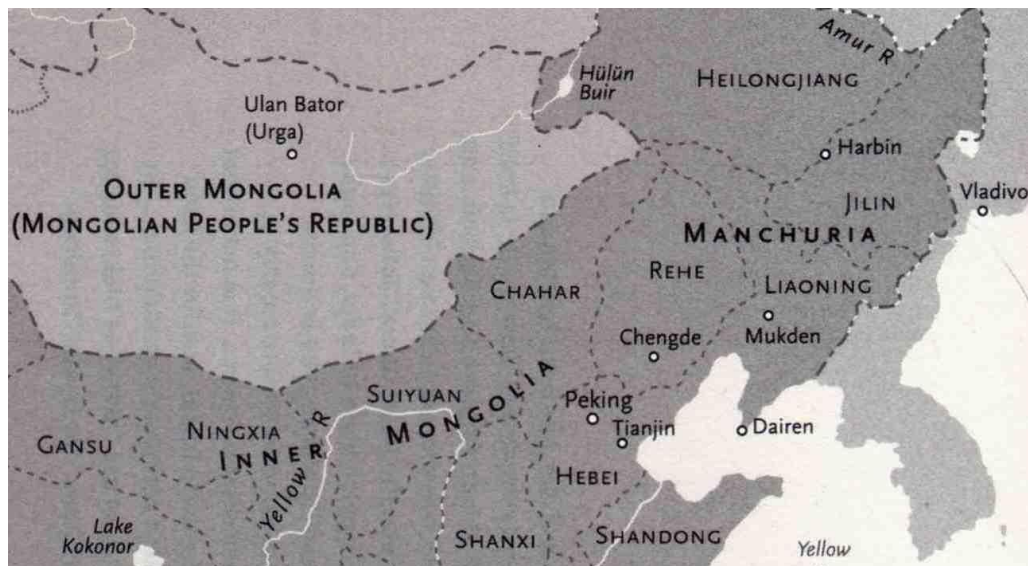
The Echoes Mission to Mongolia

The Echoes mission to north China lasted from 1897 to 1948 and was based in Rehe province (热河), which had a mixed Han Chinese and Mongol population.¹² The

Reins of Liberation: An Entangled History of Mongolian Independence, Chinese Territoriality, and Great Power Hegemony, 1911-1950 (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006); Uradyn Erden Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Christopher P. Atwood, *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia's Interregnum Decades, 1911-1931* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Hao Weimin (ed.), 内蒙古近代简史 [A Concise History of Modern Inner Mongolia], (Hohhot: Inner Mongolia University Press, 1990); Hao Weimin and Gan Xulan (eds.), 内蒙古革命史 [History of the Revolution in Inner Mongolia], (Hohhot: Inner Mongolia University Press, 1997). For Tibet, see: Hsiao-ting Lin, *Modern China's Ethnic Frontiers: A Journey to the West* (London: Routledge, 2011); Beth Meriam, *China's 'Tibetan' Frontiers: Sharing the Contested Ground* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

¹² Rehe was also known as Jehol province, which is how it was referred to by the Echoes missionaries. The area previously incorporated by Rehe was reorganised in 1955, and is now divided between the provinces of Hebei (河北), Liaoning (辽宁) and Inner Mongolia (内蒙古).

missionaries sought to reach both groups, but one of the main motivations for commencing this mission was the opportunity to work among the Mongols, a group that had until that point received little attention from Protestant missionaries.¹³ However, as time went on, the logistical difficulties of reaching the Mongols, who were semi-nomadic and were found further north in a region that was increasingly subject to political contestation, meant that the mission came to focus on the Chinese population. The mission to the Mongols continued, but became the work almost exclusively of one missionary, Reginald Sturt (1881-1948).¹⁴



Map 5 – Northeast China during the Republican period (Source: Hsiao-ting Lin, *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier: Intrigues and Ethnopolitics, 1928-1949* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), p.4).

Sturt was born in Brighton, in England, but had moved to New Zealand while still a student. He joined the Mongolia mission at the end of 1906, aged 25, and remained with it until his death, in 1948. His work there, however, was intermittent, with

¹³ For a survey of missionary work among Mongol peoples, see: Hugh P. Kemp, *Steppe by Step: Mongolia's Christians – From Ancient Roots to Vibrant Young Church* (London: Monarch Books, 2000).

¹⁴ For a biography of Sturt, see: Compton, *Children of the Wilderness*.

interruptions resulting from political instability, his frequent health problems, and his family situation (his first two wives died in Mongolia, and his children were raised and educated elsewhere in China). Nevertheless, in the many years that he did spend in the field he operated at its northern frontier, preferring not to remain in an established base, but to itinerate. He sought to systematically traverse the lands around him, moving from settlement to settlement, preaching and distributing literature, and steadily moving ever further north. In his lifetime he travelled thousands of miles and came into contact with thousands of Mongols, but could claim to have made only a few scattered converts. This poor return, however, did not prevent Sturt's work from receiving considerable coverage. His long reports were given prominence in *Echoes*, and a biography, *Children of the Wilderness*, was produced after his death by A. G. Compton, a friend and supporter in New Zealand.

The title of Compton's biography evokes the figure of the Mongol nomad, who had come to represent a Western depiction of Mongolia as remote and backward.¹⁵ Mongolia's peripheral image was a reflection of the political decline of the Mongols in Central Eurasia, a region that had become much contested in the early modern period.¹⁶ The changing Protestant missionary engagement with Mongolia is a

¹⁵ For studies of nomadism in Central Asia, see: A. M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Reuven Amitai and Michal Burin (eds.), *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); David Sneath, *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

¹⁶ This chapter, and the one following, uses the term 'Central Eurasia', defined by the Department of Central Eurasian Studies at Indiana University as 'the vast heartland of Europe and Asia extending from Central Europe to East Asia and from Siberia to the Himalayas.' (<<http://www.iub.edu/~ceus/>> [accessed 7 November 2012]). This usage follows that of Peter Perdue, who has argued for its use in preference to both 'Central Asia' (normally seen as incorporating the former Soviet Turkic lands) and 'Inner Asia' (defined as the traditionally non-Han regions of China). Both of these, Perdue argues, are unhelpfully defined in relation to twentieth-century Chinese and Russian supremacy in the region (Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. xiii-xiv). At times, for the sake of clarity, the term 'Central Asia' is used in relation to missionary discussions of the region referred to by this name. For studies of the Central Eurasian frontier, see: Perdue, *China Marches West*; Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous*

reflection of this shifting geopolitical significance. The Brethren mission was the last of three that operated in eastern Mongolia, and that spanned a period dating back to the mid-eighteenth century. Placing the Brethren mission in this longer chronological context provides an interesting perspective on the ways that changing geopolitical contexts have shaped the direction and character of missionary endeavours. Missionary primitivism, on the one hand, made Echoes missionaries give greater attention to Mongolia than other missions had. But their encounter with the Mongols was nevertheless framed by a wider perception of Mongolia as backward and marginal.

Two surveys of Christianity in Mongolia have been produced. The first, by Ralph Covell, formed part of his larger work, *The Liberating Gospel in China: The Christian Faith Among China's Minority Peoples*. This was published in 1995, and examined the history of missionary activity among China's minority ethnicities. The second, published in 2000, is a book-length work by Hugh P. Kemp, entitled *Steppe by Step: Mongolia's Christians – From Ancient Roots to Vibrant Young Church*. Both authors are former missionaries, Covell in China and Taiwan, and Kemp in Mongolia, and their accounts are intended primarily, though not exclusively, for a Christian audience. Their narratives present a long series of short-lived missions that had minimal impact, but are presented as a record of commitment to Mongol

Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 B.C. to A.D. 1757 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Daniel Power and Naomi Standen (eds.), *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700-1700* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999); John F Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2003); Nicola Di Cosmo, 'State Formation and Periodization in Inner Asian History', *Journal of World History* 10 (1999), pp. 1-40; Peter B. Golden, *Central Asia in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For histories of modern Mongolia see: Tsedendambyn Batbayar, *Modern Mongolia: A Concise History* (Ulaanbaatar: Mongolian Center for Scientific and Technological Information, 2002); C. R. Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia* (second edition, London: Kegan Paul International, 1989); Stephen Kotkin and Bruce A. Elleman (eds.), *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century: Landlocked Cosmopolitan* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999).

evangelisation.¹⁷ By examining one of these missions in more depth, it is possible to probe more deeply into the importance of such fruitless fields for missionary discourses.

This chapter will use as its main source Sturt's reports and articles as published in *Echoes* publications throughout his career. His direct correspondence with *Echoes* exists from 1940 onwards, and this will also be utilised. Compton's biography of Sturt, mentioned above, mostly consists of reprintings of the reports published in *Echoes*, but Compton also had access to other writings and correspondence, and so provides additional information. Sturt's reports contain a close attention to detail, and so it is possible from these to reconstruct an accurate account of his movements and activities. However, the chapter will also pay close attention to the narratives in which he frames his reports, examining in particular his depiction of Mongolian history, landscape, the religion of the Mongol people, and of his own task.

The Echoes Mission to Mongolia in Historical Perspective

This section will consider the progress of Protestant missionary efforts as a whole in Mongolia. This reveals the changing ways in which Mongolia has been considered within mission strategies for Asia, and also the ways in which the changing geopolitics of the region has shaped these strategies.

¹⁷ Ralph Covell, *The Liberating Gospel in China: The Christian Faith Among China's Minority Peoples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995); Hugh P. Kemp, *Steppe by Step: Mongolia's Christians – From Ancient Roots to Vibrant Young Church* (London: Monarch Books, 2000).

The first mission to the Mongols came about as a result of the expansion of the Russian empire eastwards into Siberia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the subsequent need to try to integrate non-Russian peoples into this new polity.¹⁸ It was in this context that the early Protestant missionary societies found a favourable reception when they sought to work among the peoples of the Russian steppe frontier. In 1764 Empress Catherine II granted permission for the Moravians, a German pietist movement with a strong missionary emphasis, to form a colony on the lower Volga, which became known as Sarepta.¹⁹ This was one of a number of colonies of Europeans, most of them German, that were encouraged to settle on the edges of the Russian empire, with the intention of consolidating the borders of the empire and of having a civilising effect on non-Russian imperial subjects. Sarepta was located next to the grazing lands of the Kalmuck Mongols, and the Moravians, although their primary mandate was to produce a settlement that was economically self-sufficient, were permitted to proselytise among the Kalmucks. This they did with limited success, the biggest hindrance being the Russian stipulation that all converts had to be baptised into the Orthodox Church. In 1822 the Moravians withdrew from the settlement.²⁰

However, the Moravian presence helped to enable further missionary initiatives in the region. Following the annexation of Finland by Russia in 1809, the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), founded in 1804 and with a base in Helsinki, sought

¹⁸ For the expansion of the Russian Empire, see: Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002); James Forsyth, *History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700-1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Carol B. Stevens, *Russia's Wars of Emergence, 1460-1730* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007).

¹⁹ For a history of the Moravian church, see: J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum, 1722-1957* (Second edition, Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church in America, 1983).

²⁰ Kemp, *Steppe by Step*, pp. 245-247.

to expand its operations further east.²¹ Finding an unlikely source of support in the person of Emperor Alexander I, who had ‘pronounced mystical and evangelical leanings’²², the BFBS established the Russian Bible Society in St Petersburg in 1812.²³ The work of the RBS expanded rapidly, with a total of 196 branches eventually established across the empire, including in Siberia.²⁴ The emphasis of the RBS, with the encouragement of the Emperor Alexander, was on producing translations for the non-Russian groups of the empire. The various Mongolian dialects were among those targeted for Bible translation. Soon after its formation, the RBS had provided a grant to the Moravians at Sarepta to produce a Bible translation in the Kalmuck dialect of Mongolian, and work began on the Buratia dialect soon after. Interest in the Mongol groups increased, and this led members of the London Missionary Society (LMS) to embark on a mission to Selengirsk in Siberia, among the Buriat Mongols. The mission proved to be a failure, and was abandoned in 1840.

These efforts to evangelise Mongol populations were among the first of the Protestant missions to the non-Christian world. Although short-lived, they highlight some of the problems faced by Protestant missions among the Mongols. In particular, they reveal a bias against nomadic and pastoral societies. This can be seen in how both the Moravian and, to a lesser extent, the LMS missionaries set up

²¹ For an account of the development of the Protestant missionary movement during the eighteenth century, see: Andrew F. Walls, ‘The Eighteenth-Century Protestant Missionary Awakening in Its European Context’, in Brian Stanley (ed.), *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (William. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K., 2001), pp. 22-44. For a history of the BFBS and LMS missions to Siberia during the eighteenth century, see: C.R. Bawden, *Shamans, Lamas and Evangelicals: The English Missionaries in Siberia* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); D.S.M. Williams, ‘The “Mongolian Mission” of the London Missionary Society: An Episode in the History of Religion in the Russian Empire’, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 56:3 (1978), pp. 329-345.

²² Bawden, *Shamans, Lamas and Evangelicals*, p. 13.

²³ Stuart R. Tompkins, ‘The Russian Bible Society: A Case of Religious Xenophobia’, *The American Slavic and East European Review*, 7:3 (1948), pp. 251-268.

²⁴ Tompkins, ‘The Russian Bible Society’, p. 262.

agricultural and industrial settlements, as it was thought that evangelistic work would be more effective if the steppe peoples could be persuaded to settle. It is also betrayed in the way that the LMS mission was viewed as being strategic, with the ultimate end being entry into the Chinese empire. Conversion of nomadic Mongols was sought, but it was the great, settled civilisation of China that was seen as the key to winning Asia for Christ.²⁵

Mongolia Missions in the Nineteenth Century

In 1870 the LMS reopened its mission to Mongolia. This new mission emerged in a different context to that of their first effort. Following British victories in the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860), British missionaries now had security and freedom to operate in China, and so the LMS restarted the mission to the Mongols through an approach from the south.²⁶ All subsequent Protestant missions to Mongolia would be operated as extensions of missions to north China, and this would give them a similar geopolitical context to that of the earlier missions. In the same way that Protestant missionaries had earlier gained access to Mongolia through an association with the expansive Russian empire, so now they would once again reach Mongol populations as a result of the rights they had to operate in China. In addition, whereas before they had encountered nomadic Mongols in the context of

²⁵ Bawden, *Shamans, Lamas and Evangelicals*, pp. 47, 54-60.

²⁶ For the Opium Wars, and the opening of China to British trade and missionaries, see: Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-42* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951); John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854* (two volumes, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953); Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966); Rhoads Murphey, *The Treaty Ports and China's Modernization: What Went Wrong?* (Ann Arbor: MI: University of Michigan Press, 1970); Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire 1832-1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

the expansion of Russian settlers into Central Eurasia, so now the northwards migration of Chinese settlers into Mongolia formed the background for the new Protestant outreach to the Mongols. The perceived contrast of an expansive settler society with a backward, nomadic people therefore formed an ongoing context for the Protestant missions to the Mongols.

In 1689 Russia and the Qing had signed the Treaty of Nerchinsk.²⁷ The treaty had established a fixed Sino-Russian border in north-east Asia, and marked a striking reversal of the geopolitical situation of four centuries earlier. Then, at its height, the Mongol empire had encompassed China and large areas of Russia. But with the signing of this treaty, the Mongols had become reduced to residents on the peripheries of two more powerful polities.²⁸ The Treaty of Nerchinsk confirmed Qing sovereignty over the majority of Mongol lands and, for a while, the Mongols enjoyed privileged status alongside the ruling Manchus.²⁹ However, over time the Mongol position under the Qing became weaker. In particular, population pressure in north China resulted in increasing numbers of Chinese peasants migrating to Rehe and Inner Mongolia and colonising large tracts of land.

²⁷ For more on the Treaty of Nerchinsk, in particular in the context of the Qing Dynasty, see Perdue, *China Marches West*, pp. 161-173.

²⁸ For the Mongol Empire, and in particular its rule over China, see: Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1988); Rossabi (ed.), *China Among Equals: the Middle Kingdom and its Neighbours, 10th-14th Centuries* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983); Herbert Franke, *China Under Mongol Rule* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1994); Thomas T. Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism: the Policies of the Grand Qan Möngke in China, Russia, and the Islamic Lands, 1251-1259* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).

²⁹ For the establishment of Manchu rule, and the Mongols within this, see: Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton (eds.), *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

Consequently, there had been increasing tension between Chinese and Mongols, which culminated in 1891 in an uprising by Zaili and Jindan, two Chinese religious societies, which brought widespread loss of life and property.³⁰ Subsequently, Chinese settlement in southern Mongolian lands increased, encouraged by the Qing who saw it as a way of safeguarding its northern borders.³¹ In terms of mission work, Chinese immigration meant that both the LMS and the subsequent Echoes mission came to focus their efforts on the Chinese population. The arrival of previously converted Chinese Christians among these immigrants demanded that attention be given to organising and ministering to them. The unconverted Chinese were also generally found to be more responsive than the Mongols and, being settled unlike the semi-nomadic Mongols, it was easier to carry out sustained work among them.

The new LMS mission to the Mongols became the work, almost exclusively, of James Gilmour (1843-1891), who operated there from 1870 until his death in 1891.³² Gilmour's career suffered from many of the same shortcomings that had met the first LMS mission to the Mongols: the difficulty of reaching a nomadic people; the strong attachment of the Mongols to Tibetan Buddhism; and the mental and physical tolls of operating in the harsh climate and isolated terrain. At the end of his life Gilmour's Mongol converts numbered in single figures. However, unlike the first LMS mission, which was quickly forgotten, Gilmour became one of the Society's most popular figureheads, particularly after the publication of his book *Among the*

³⁰ For more on this uprising, see: Burensain Borjigin, 'The Complex Structure of Ethnic Conflict in the Frontier: Through the Debates around the "Jindandao Incident" in 1891', *Inner Asia* 6 (2004), pp. 41-60; Richard Shek, 'The Revolt of the Zaili, Jindan Sects in Rehe (Jehol), 1891', *Modern China* 6 (1980), pp. 161-196. For more on Chinese popular religious societies, see: Daniel Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).

³¹ Borjigin, 'The Complex Structure of Ethnic Conflict in the Frontier', pp. 54-55.

³² For a study of Gilmour's career, see: Kathleen L. Lodwick, 'For God and Queen: James Gilmour Among the Mongols, 1870-1891', in *Social Sciences and Missions* 21:1 (2008), pp. 144-172.

Mongols, which was published in 1883.³³ Kathleen Lodwick, in her study of Gilmour, has described how, despite concern on the part of both Gilmour and the home board over the paucity of returns the Mongolia mission was bringing, the LMS encouraged the growth of Gilmour's cult status among mission supporters. Aside from the growth in support this could bring for the LMS, Lodwick argues that this needs to be seen in the context of Britain's expanding imperial presence in Asia. She has suggested that 'the LMS considered it their patriotic duty to "show the flag" in the remote parts of the world, even if the British government was not directly involved in establishing colonies in those places.'³⁴ This, she claims, was a 'prominent theme' in the *Chronicle of the LMS*, the society's newsletter that was distributed to its supporters, and in which Gilmour's reports featured.³⁵

Lodwick points to a phenomenon, that is, the popularity of failing missionaries, that would be repeated in the case of Sturt, and that needs further examination. In particular, Lodwick's explanation that the LMS participated in a culture of Victorian imperialism is suggestive, but needs more precise elucidation. The following section will seek to connect the expansion of the Echoes mission to Mongolia, and its popularity, with the development of geography and exploration in late nineteenth century Britain, and in particular the drive to gain a more complete knowledge of the world.³⁶ These scientific discourses were combined with a growing millennial

³³ James Gilmour, *Among the Mongols* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1883).

³⁴ Lodwick, 'For God and Queen', pp. 171-172.

³⁵ Lodwick, 'For God and Queen', p. 172.

³⁶ See, in particular: D.N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); F. Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); M. Jones, 'Measuring the World: Exploration, Empire and the Reform of the Royal Geographic Society, c. 1874-93', in M.J. Daunton (ed.), *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 313-336.

influence, in which the complete and rapid evangelisation of the world was sought.³⁷ At the start of the twentieth century, this desire to encompass all spaces of the globe within the Protestant missionary project would take on a more systematic form, and this context would shape the Mongolia mission, as it was now carried on by the Brethren missionaries.

Central Asia and the New Science of Missions

The Echoes mission to Mongolia was started in 1897 by Robert Stephen, who had worked with the mission in Shandong province since 1888. In 1897 *Echoes* reported that Stephen was taking a trip north of the Great Wall in order to find a base from which he could begin a new work. Soon after it was announced that he had chosen the city of Pakou in Jehol territory.³⁸ The precise reason for this choice of location is unclear; though some idea of Stephen's reasoning can be seen in his comment in *Echoes* that 'The soil is really virgin, although it has been visited occasionally by the late Mr James Gilmour and others, besides native colporteurs.'³⁹ The decision seems to have been framed primarily by the desire to find a region heretofore unworked by Protestant missionaries. The prospect of continuing the famous work of James Gilmour provided a further incentive. Following Gilmour's death, mission work had been sporadically maintained by both the LMS and the Irish Presbyterian Mission, who both later handed over responsibility for the region to the Echoes missionaries. So although large areas had received little or no attention from Protestant

³⁷ For a historical study of evangelical millennial beliefs, see: Crawford Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500-2000* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

³⁸ The Chinese name for Pakou is Pingquan (平泉). In present-day China it is part of Hebei province.

³⁹ *Echoes of Service* (March 1898, ii), p. 89.

missionaries, Echoes did inherit some converts, nearly all Chinese, in the towns and larger villages.

The memory of Gilmour served as an enduring reference point and inspiration for the Brethren missionaries. They admired his sacrificial labours born, as they saw it, of his commitment to the ideals of apostolic mission. However, although they saw themselves as continuing in the work and spirit of Gilmour, the strategies of the Brethren missionaries differed in a way that reflected a renewed, but also rationalised, expression of resolve in the wider missionary world at the start of the twentieth century. This new articulation of missionary ambitions is outlined by Brian Stanley in his study of the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, where he identifies two themes that galvanised the delegates. The first was prophetic, expressing a sense ‘that Christianity stood on the threshold of a global expansion of millennial dimensions’⁴⁰ The conference chairman was John R. Mott (1865-1955), who was also the general secretary of the World Student Christian Federation. Mott had authored a book in 1901 entitled *The Evangelisation of the World in this Generation*. This rallying cry, which was taken up at Edinburgh in 1910, became a widely adopted slogan, and was quoted by Sturt in his reports at various times throughout his missionary career.

The second emphasis of this new expansionism was the advocating of what one delegate described as a ‘science of missions’. Delegates called for a more systematic, fact-based approach to planning and executing missions, and the conference itself sought to initiate this by presenting the findings of a number of preparatory

⁴⁰ Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), pp. 2-3.

commissions which had conducted social science-type research into a number of aspects of missionary endeavour.⁴¹ It is this cross-fertilisation of prophetic and scientific discourses that gave a new shape to missions at the start of the twentieth century, and which distinguishes the Brethren mission from that of Gilmour.

One outcome of this approach can be seen in the CIM's initiation of a 'forward movement' to reach China's minorities following the end of World War I.⁴² This was reflective of a larger trend, whereby the scientific approach to missions led to a more systematic appraisal of regions and peoples, and efforts to amend where missionary coverage had been lacking. This in turn led to a renewed focus on minority peoples and less well-trodden regions, including Central Eurasia. Sturt was one of a number of contributors to a book, produced in 1929, entitled *The Challenge of Central Asia: A Brief Survey of Tibet and its Borderlands, Mongolia, North-West Kansu, Chinese Turkistan, and Russian Central Asia*. This formed part of a series which aimed 'to describe briefly and clearly the situation in the various countries of the world as viewed from the standpoint of the Kingdom of God',⁴³ so displaying this mix of prophetic and scientific discourses. *The Challenge of Central Asia* contained brief histories of each region in the title, along with statistical information concerning the native populations and the missionaries working among them.

The added emphasis on Central Asia as an unworked region can be seen in the literature of Echoes of Service. From 1916 to 1918 the Brethren missionary and

⁴¹ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (New York: Orbis, 2002), p. 59.

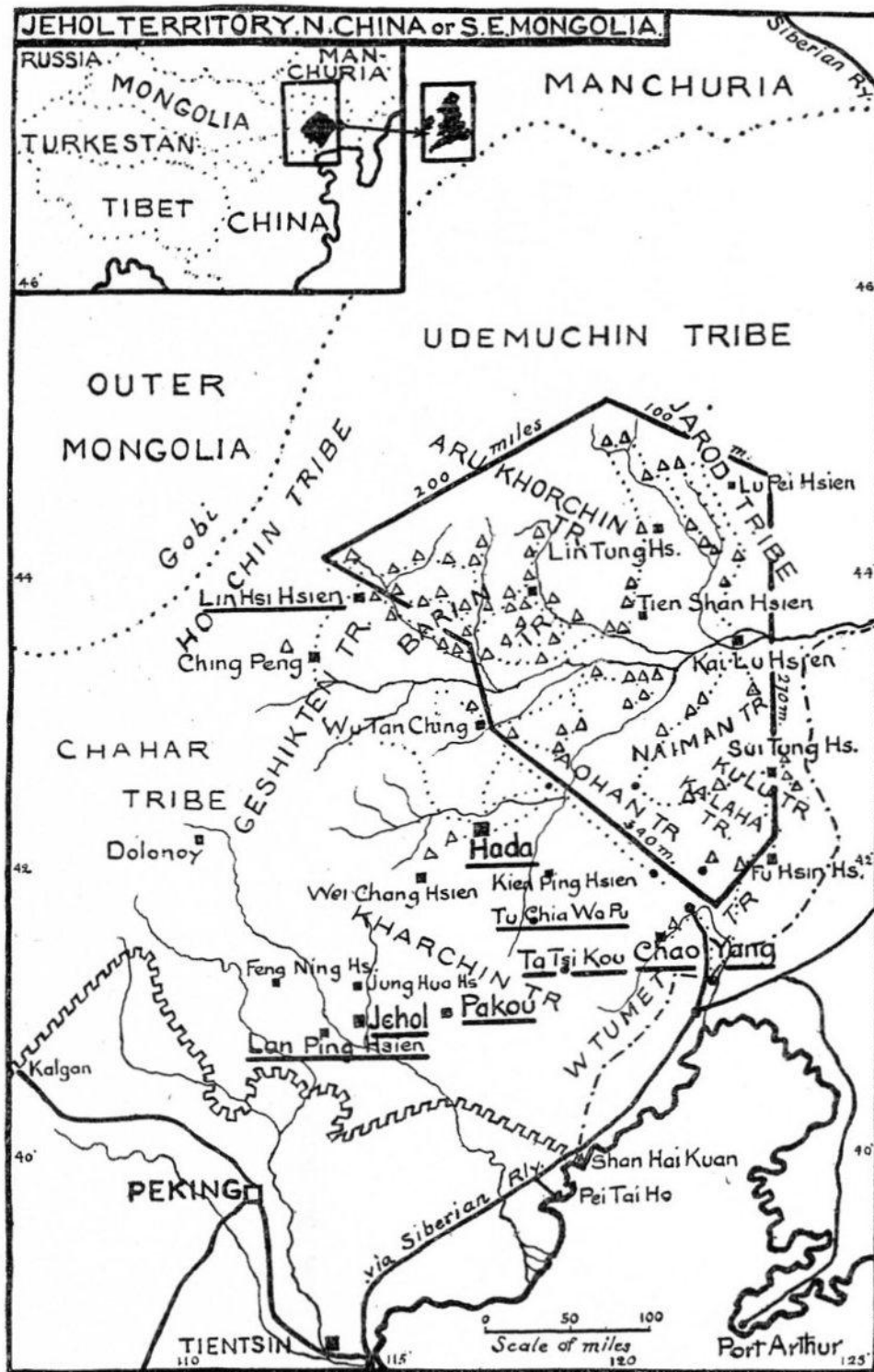
⁴² Austin, *China's Millions*, pp. 431-434.

⁴³ From the preface by Alexander McLeish, series editor, in: Mildred Cable, F. Houghton, R. Kilgour, A. McLeish, R.W. Sturt and Olive Wyon, *The Challenge of Central Asia: A Brief Survey of Tibet and its Borderlands, Mongolia, North-West Kansu, Chinese Turkistan, and Russian Central Asia* (London: World Dominion Press, 1929), p. iii.

writer E.H. Broadbent conducted a long journey from Eastern Europe, through Russian Central Asia to China, in order to provide a report on the needs of the region as a whole.⁴⁴ Similarly, Sturt's map, shown below, which accompanied a report in *Echoes of Service* in 1935, shows a similar attempt to shift the focus on to Central Asia. The size of Tibet, Turkestan and Mongolia are exaggerated in relation to China, and a comparison with the size of Britain further serves to emphasise the huge geographical spaces. The size of a region in Sturt's map seems to bear inverse relation to its missionary coverage. In an article in 1925, he commented that 'in all the huge region which lies directly between Hada and the North Pole, there is not, so far as we know, a single Protestant or evangelical worker for God.'⁴⁵ Sturt's representation of space in Mongolia emphasised its vastness, and his reports nearly always concluded with a corresponding call for more missionaries in order to meet its challenges.

⁴⁴ For a study of the career and major writings of Broadbent, see Tim Grass, 'Edmund Hamer Broadbent (1861-1945): Pilgrim Churchman', in Tim Grass (ed.), *Witnessing in Many Lands: Leadership and Outreach Among the Brethren* (Troon: Brethren Archivists and Historians Network, forthcoming, 2012), pp.143-154.

⁴⁵ Sturt, 'The Marches of the Mongol, Part I', *Links of Help*, Vol. V (1915-1916), p. 104.



Map 6 - Sturt's map of Jehol Territory, in *Echoes of Service* (February 1935), p. 35.

Progress of the Echoes Mission

The Echoes mission expanded by fits and starts. By 1898 it had grown to five missionaries who were based in Pakou but made frequent trips to towns further north, as far as Hada.⁴⁶ Work was abandoned for a while in the aftermath of the Boxer uprising, but it soon expanded again, with new centres opened in the cities of Tuchiawoapu and Jehol by 1906, both of which were based around existing Chinese congregations.⁴⁷ Sturt joined the mission at the end of 1906. He was initially based in Jehol and, along with other Echoes missionaries, made long itinerations, travelling ever further north, and in 1909 going beyond the Shira Muren river (which runs west to east above the town of Wu Tan Ching on Sturt's map). Sturt sought to rent buildings in order to open outstations in a number of small towns and villages, including Lan Ping Hsien and Feng Ning Hsien, so that regular visits and preaching could take place. In 1912 and 1913 new permanent centres were opened in Chaoyang, Ta Tsi Kou and Hada, with Sturt, along with his new wife who was a fellow missionary, moving to Hada.⁴⁸

The progress of the mission was constrained by the almost continuous political upheaval that affected the region.⁴⁹ On December 29 1911, following the collapse of the Qing in October of that year, an independent Mongolian state was declared, under the initiative of a number of Mongolian princes. However, this new state constituted only the geographical area of Outer Mongolia, with Inner Mongolia

⁴⁶ For ease of reference, the place-names used in the following analysis will be those employed by Sturt in Map 1.

⁴⁷ Jehol was the name of a city, as well as the name used for the province. The Chinese name for Jehol is Chengde (承德).

⁴⁸ The Chinese name for Hada is Chifeng (赤峰).

⁴⁹ For a political history of the China-Mongolia frontier during the Republican period, see: Liu, *Reins of Liberation*.

remaining part of the new Republic of China (ROC). In 1913 an attempt was made by Outer Mongolian leaders, and some supporters in Inner Mongolia, to unite the two. Fighting took place during the autumn and winter to the north of Hada, which then was the northernmost permanent base of the mission. The Mongols made some advances, taking the city of Ching Peng, but were eventually defeated by Chinese forces. An attempt in 1919 by the ROC to annexe Outer Mongolia prompted the formation and rise of the Mongolian People's Party which, with Soviet assistance, established the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) in 1924. Although the USSR acknowledged the ROC's sovereignty over all of Mongolia, the MPR remained effectively a Soviet protectorate.⁵⁰

The rise of Communism in Outer Mongolia did not impact significantly on the Brethren mission, although its close proximity was something that concerned Sturt.⁵¹ Far more disruptive, however, was the fragmentation of the ROC after 1916 into warlord-controlled regions, with Jehol becoming a focus of contestation between the Fengtian and Zhili warlord cliques.⁵² Warlord conflict continued sporadically until the unification of the country under the Guomindang during the Northern Expedition (1926-1928), so that during this period Sturt's work often became limited to Hada and its immediate surrounds.⁵³ Following the reunification of China he was able to

⁵⁰ For the rise of Socialism in Mongolia, see: Irina Y. Morozova, *Socialist Revolutions in Asia: The Social History of Mongolia in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2009).

⁵¹ For example, in 1926 he commented on 'the urgency of the need to do what we can *while we may*, ere the forbidding Red hand of Bolshevism descends, as it already threatens to do from Outer Mongolia and Russia' (*Echoes of Service* (February 1927), p. 36).

⁵² For studies of the Warlord Era, see James E. Sheridan, 'The Warlord Era: Politics and Militarism under the Peking Government, 1916-28', in John K. Fairbank (ed.), *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 12: Republican China, 1912-1949, Part 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 284-321; Diana Lary, *Warlord Soldiers: Chinese Common Soldiers, 1911-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁵³ For the Northern Expedition, see: C. Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

engage in more regular and longer itinerations, although his own ill health and family situation brought frequent long absences from Jehol.

Sturt's Itinerations

Hada remained as Sturt's primary base for the duration of his time in Mongolia, although he would open out-stations further north. By the end of 1925 there were thirty-three Echoes missionaries based in Jehol Territory, as listed in *Echoes*. Along with the Sturts, there were three others in Hada, with the rest spread between Chao Yang, Ta Tsi Kou, Pakou and Jehol. The work remained predominantly based around the existing Chinese congregations, with conversions coming almost entirely from the Chinese population. While others sometimes accompanied him on his tours north, Sturt was now the only one of the missionaries concerned primarily with reaching Mongol populations and extending the mission further north.



Figure 9 – ‘A group of Christians in Hada, N. China’ in: *Echoes of Service* (August 1926), p. 178. Sturt can be seen standing at the back, on the right-hand side of the photograph.

From Hada Sturt conducted extensive and systematic northern tours, in particular from 1925 onwards. Itineration was central to this strategy. Sturt also worked among the established converts in Hada, but he saw this as a secondary task, and his reports on these occasions always indicate an impatience to be on the road again.⁵⁴ Sturt's itinerations lasted weeks at a time, sometimes even several months, during which time he traversed hundreds of miles. Until 1929, when he acquired a car, which he referred to as the Gospel Coach, travel was carried out on mules, donkeys and ponies, sometimes with a cart for carrying bedding, food and books. Consequently, the pace of travel was slow. Scattered groups of converts in remote areas were visited and given teaching, but the main purpose of itineration was evangelism. Trips were made to small towns and villages, but journeys were more frequently made in order to correspond with local fairs and markets. At these, stalls would be set up where Bibles and other Christian literature would be sold and preaching given to those attending, often numbering in the thousands at the bigger fairs.

As Sturt travelled further north into predominantly Mongol areas, he organised his journeys around visits to lamaseries, described by him as 'the centres of Mongol life'.⁵⁵ Sturt frequently took advantage of the hospitality offered to him at the lamaseries, giving gifts of tracts and Bibles in return for food and accommodation. He conversed with the pilgrims and lamas he encountered, but he preferred to visit many settlements and lamaseries in order to leave literature, rather than carry out

⁵⁴ Compton indicates that Sturt was criticised by other missionaries for his view that the nurturing of new converts was not the job of the missionary (Compton, *Children of the Wilderness*, pp. 334-337). However, the difference between Sturt and his colleagues seems to have been one of degree, as they all prioritised further advance over consolidation.

⁵⁵ *Echoes of Service* (February 1927), p. 34. For Buddhism in Mongolia, see: Michael K. Jerryson, *Mongolian Buddhism: The Rise and Fall of the Sangha* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2007); Delege, 内蒙古喇嘛教史 [The History of Tibetan Buddhism in Inner Mongolia], (Hohhot: Inner Mongolia People's Publishing House, 1998).

prolonged work at a few centres. In this way, Hugh Kemp has summarised Sturt's contribution to mission work in Mongolia as 'saturating Mongolia with gospels and tracts.'⁵⁶

Sturt's maps, such as the one above, with its bordered area of a region traversed in a recent itineration lasting almost five months, are characteristic of his strategic approach to mission work. The report accompanying the map comments: 'Save for an extreme north-eastern corner tribe or two – which time did not permit visiting this year – the whole of the Mongol-speaking territory nominally controlled from Jehol was carefully and systematically traversed and pioneeringly sown with the Word of God (viz., Genesis, the Gospels and Acts), and much other good literature, all in Mongolian and Thibetan.'⁵⁷

This comment, and Sturt's strategy of itineration, exemplify the combination of prophetic and scientific discourses discussed above. In particular, there were two aspects to this: geographic coverage and speed. The language that Sturt used in his reports constantly contained biblical references. Above he describes how an area was 'pioneeringly sown with the Word of God', so making reference to Jesus' parable of the sower, where a farmer's seed is taken to represent the propagation of Christ's teaching. Three years after his arrival Sturt had summarised his intention as follows: 'We long to see this whole district, in an ever-widening circle, in some adequate sense evangelized.'⁵⁸ The emphasis, therefore, was not necessarily on gaining converts, but rather on maximising the geographical coverage of the mission and the

⁵⁶ Kemp, *Steppe by Step*, p. 405.

⁵⁷ *Echoes of Service* (February 1927), p. 34.

⁵⁸ *Echoes of Service* (October 1909 ii), p.390.

numbers of people who had been contacted through either the written or spoken word.

There was also something systematic and scientific in Sturt's strategy. The map above shows a careful delineation of both the geographical terrain and the correspondence of different regions to the various Mongol tribal groupings. Sturt's knowledge of eastern Mongolia became detailed and respected: he was admitted as a fellow of the Royal Geographic Society⁵⁹ in 1934 at the recommendation of the explorer and geographer Owen Lattimore, who had been impressed by Sturt's cartographic efforts in what was a previously unmapped region.⁶⁰ Sturt was also in correspondence with the Royal Central Asian Society⁶¹, who sought information from him regarding archaeological remains in Mongolia.⁶²

Sturt also acquired a strong linguistic command of the region, and was working on a Mongol grammar and primer when he died. In this way Sturt showed himself to be a practitioner of the science of missions, generating detailed and organised knowledge of Mongolia in order to more effectively carry out his missionary task. In this way, *The Challenge of Central Asia*, in a concluding section discussing 'Suggested policy of missionary advance', claimed that: 'The recently created Central Asian prayer fellowship has resulted in a more comprehensive knowledge of, and deeper interest

⁵⁹ For the Royal Geographic Society, see: 'Measuring the world: Exploration, Empire and the Reform of the Royal Geographical Society, c. 1874-93', in M. J. Daunton (ed.), *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 313-336.

⁶⁰ Kemp, *Steppe by Step*, p. 413. In *Royal Geographic Society – A List of the Honorary Members and Fellows of the Society, Corrected to 30th September 1935* (London: Royal Geographic Society, 1935), Sturt's entry reads: Sturt, Reginald W. Care of T. H. Dunlop, The Farmers Trading Co., Auckland, New Zealand; and Ling Yuan Hsien, Jehol Province, Manchuria.'

⁶¹ For a history of the Royal Central Asian Society (now the Royal Society for Asian Affairs) see: Hugh Leach, *Strolling About on the Roof of the World: The First Hundred Years of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

⁶² Reginald W. Sturt (letters, photographs), Royal Society for Asian Affairs Archive, RSAA/M/196.

in, these lands, and will enable the missions concerned to devise more concerted policies of advance.’⁶³

In addition to the concern for complete geographic and demographic coverage, there was an emphasis on haste in Sturt’s strategy. This was again taken from a biblical inference, whereby it was understood that Jesus’ second coming would not take place until a witness to the gospel had been carried out to all peoples.⁶⁴ Sturt’s missiology, therefore, had a millennialist element at its core, with the mandate to preach the gospel to all peoples seen primarily in terms of speeding Christ’s second coming.⁶⁵ A further example of this can be seen in a report by Sturt in 1922. Remarking on a group of converts he was training to become preachers and evangelists, he wrote: ‘Prayer should be constantly made for these, and for the raising up of many such labourers for the rapid ingathering of the whitened and still largely unreaped harvest here and in the regions beyond.’⁶⁶ Again, an agricultural metaphor, also drawn from Jesus’ teaching in the New Testament, is used.⁶⁷ The end, for Sturt, was not the progressive conversion of the world, but the calling in of those chosen for salvation before the arrival of the final judgement.

Sturt’s geographical evocation of Mongolia conveyed both size and boundedness, reflecting his view that its evangelisation was a task at once sizeable and attainable,

⁶³ Cable et al, *The Challenge of Central Asia*, p. 111.

⁶⁴ This understanding was drawn in particular from a literal reading of Jesus’ words to his disciples in Matthew 24:14 (King James Version): ‘And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.’

⁶⁵ For discussions of the impact of millennial beliefs on missionary work, see: Andrew Porter, ‘Evangelical Enthusiasm, Missionary Motivation and West Africa in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Career of G. W. Brooke’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 6:1 (1977), pp. 23-46; Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), pp. 76-8.

⁶⁶ *Echoes of Service* (June 1922), p.130.

⁶⁷ John 4:35 (King James Version): ‘Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.’

and one that he called Brethren to apply themselves to with immediacy and haste. The urgency of the mission owed much to its millennial impulses, but it was also shaped by its modern context. Edward J. Gitre has argued that the technologies of the railway and the printed press interacted with the spiritual impulses of the Welsh revival of 1904-05 to produce a religious culture that emphasised the uncontrollable speed and spontaneity of spiritual awakening.⁶⁸ In a similar way, modern technologies both informed and facilitated a missionary culture that asserted its potential to overcome boundaries of time and space.

This can be seen in how the main strategy advocated by the authors of *The Challenge of Central Asia* was Bible distribution:

The few missionaries actually at work all agree in testifying to the value of the printed Gospels with which they are regularly supplied. They bear their testimony to the fact that this is one of the greatest contributions to the spread of the knowledge of the Gospel, even in those closed lands into which missionaries are not permitted to enter. The Word of God is not bound; and doors closed to foreign missionaries are often open to the printed page.

It must be remembered that most of the peoples living in Central Asia speak languages like some form of Chinese, or of Turkish, or Russian, or Tibetan, or Mongolian, which are used widely outside of their own particular territory, and in all these widely-spoken languages the Scriptures, either in whole or in part, are available. Even the more provincial tongues, such as the various dialects of Kashgar, or Kirghiz, are increasingly being enriched by books of Christian Scripture. In all the principle languages encircling Central Asia as well as those spoken within this great tract, the Bible Society is supplying, and is always ready to supply, portions of God's Word. Travellers have told us that the number of those who are able to read is much larger than might be expected. Most monasteries and religious houses impart a certain amount of instruction, and most villages contain at least a few who are literate.⁶⁹

Only a tentative statement is given as to the comprehending of this material by its target audience. Instead, the main justification given for the use of printed literature

⁶⁸ Edward J. Gitre, 'The 1904-05 Welsh Revival: Modernization, Technologies, and Techniques of the Self', *Church History* 73:4 (2004), pp. 792-827.

⁶⁹ Cable et al, *The Challenge of Central Asia*, p. 111.

is the plentiful supply and the potential speed of its dissemination. By the combination of linguistic knowledge and modern technology, it was hoped that the barriers of space and time could be overcome, and the speedy evangelisation of Central Asia achieved.

Sturt sought also to utilise modern transport to facilitate his work. In 1927 he included the following in a report on a recent itinerary:

Russians are to be found living and doing business up in these Ujumchin regions by means of motor cars, for which the flat grasslands and beautifully smooth level hard roads are ideal. The trader spins along comfortably in a few hours where the messenger of the Cross, if he ventures at all, crawls painfully and wearily along in as many or more days! Will it always be so, I wonder? Or will the anointed vision and consecrated giving and business-like co-operation of the Lord's people and stewards in the Homelands make the evangelization of these 'uttermost parts' *quickly* possible ere the Lord returns?⁷⁰

The combination of 'anointed vision and consecrated giving and business-like co-operation' again displays the mixing of prophetic and modern discourses in heightening the speed and urgency of the Mongolia mission. Sturt's call was heeded, and in 1929 the 'Gospel Carriage' was put into service. But it did not provide as ready a solution as had been hoped. 'Flat grasslands and beautifully smooth level hard roads' only formed a small part of the terrain of eastern Mongolia, and heavy rains and flooding meant the Gospel Carriage was only capable of intermittent action.

On Sturt's 1935 map, the recently-constructed railway lines are prominently marked. These became significant for Sturt in providing fast transit to new fields of itinerary, but also in providing a more direct route to and from Britain. The

⁷⁰ *Echoes of Service* (September 1927), pp. 207-208.

development of the railways in eastern Mongolia and Manchuria demonstrate the ways that the evangelisation of Mongolia intersected with its modernisation, and how this, in turn, was inseparable from its status as an area of political contestation.

Following Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, Japan had gained control of the lease of the Liaodong peninsula, with its important port city Port Arthur, which had previously been held by Russia. Japan also gained control of the region's railways, and the expansion of this railway network, along with the industrial development that it facilitated, became the primary means by which Japan furthered its imperial designs in Manchuria and eastern Mongolia.⁷¹ In 1915 Japan presented the Twenty-One Demands to China, which resulted in the granting of further extraterritorial rights in Manchuria. As part of this, Hada, along with other border cities, were opened to foreign trade. Sturt commented that the Japanese 'intend to tap all these districts by railways as soon as possible.'⁷² Railway development therefore served as a means by which both Russian and Japan sought to integrate these frontier lands into their respective empires. They both sought to bring settled communities who would introduce agriculture, resource extraction and industry, in short to modernise and civilise Manchuria and Mongolia.

Following the Mukden Incident of 1931, Manchuria was seized by Japan, and the state of Manchukuo was formed.⁷³ As can be seen from Map 4, Rehe became part of

⁷¹ Y. Tak Matsusaka, 'Japan's South Manchuria Railway Company in Northeast China, 1906-34', in Bruce A. Elleman and Stephen Kotkin (eds.), *Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China: An International History* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2010), pp. 37-58.

⁷² *Echoes of Service* (November 1921), p. 112.

⁷³ For histories of Manchukuo, and of the Japanese occupation in China, see Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); Yamamuro Shinichi, *Manchuria Under Japanese Domination* (translated from the Japanese, Philadelphia, PA: University of

this short-lived polity, which existed from 1932-1945. But it was a late addition to this territory, being annexed at the start of 1933. As Japanese interests developed in the region, Sturt was quick to point out the benefits:

Already great strides have been made in the development of the country, in the practical elimination of widespread, organized banditry, in the stabilization and reform of the formerly chaotic and worthless currency, the organization of a largely efficient and honest administration and the extension of law and order by the building of new railways and motor roads in every direction, with air routes for mails and passengers. We pray that all this will make for the more rapid evangelization of the people, as well as for the safety of those engaged in the work.⁷⁴

The success of mission work, for Sturt, had become tied to the progress of the modernisation of Mongolia, and this led him to express approval of Japan's imperial expansion into the region.

Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers, and Mark R. Peattie (eds.), *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931-1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁷⁴ *Echoes of Service* (May 1934), p. 126.

were, in Sturt's words, 'fostering... as a purely Mongol country, which included the encouragement and protection of their Lama religion by the Government'⁷⁵, and so the movements of the mission here were restricted. Xing'an also contained the border with the independent Mongolian state, and a number of battles were fought here between Soviet-supported Mongolian armies and Japanese forces. Consequently, when Sturt and his wife strayed too close to this border in October 1939 they were arrested and imprisoned for thirty-five days on espionage charges, which were later dropped. In 1942 Sturt and the other Echoes missionaries in Manchukuo were expelled, and Sturt returned to New Zealand.

Sturt and Tibetan Buddhism

The mission therefore suffered as a result of the turbulence of its frontier context. Sturt, however, provided few comments on the specific circumstances of the conditions he encountered, rather focussing in his reports on the ongoing progress of his itinerations. This was in accordance with his primitivism, whereby a sharp distinction between the spiritual and the political was identified, and involvement with the latter avoided. However, the place of religion in Japan's imperial project exposed an additional point at which the spiritual and the political intersected in the Mongolia mission. In the final few years before Sturt's expulsion in 1942, Japan had sought to protect Tibetan Buddhism in its Mongol territories. This was a policy adopted as Japan came into competition with the ROC for control over Inner Mongolia, and by which they sought to gain the support of Tibetan Buddhist

⁷⁵ *Echoes of Service* (June 1940), pp.109-110.

leaders.⁷⁶ In particular, both Japan and the ROC sought to appropriate the authority of the Panchen Lama and the Janggiya Khutughtu in order to gain support and legitimacy for their designs in Mongolia.⁷⁷ Both regimes therefore supported Tibetan Buddhism in Inner Mongolia: the Japanese in order to counter the appeal of Communism, and the ROC in order to compete with Japan's patronage of the religion. From 1926 to 1931 the Panchen Lama went on a ROC-sponsored tour of Inner Mongolia, during which he sought to persuade the Mongols to be loyal to China. Sturt reported that while on an itineration in 1929 he 'just missed the Panchen-Lama... at the largest lamasery visited, but left Tibetan and Mongol Scriptures and much gospel literature with some of his retinue.'⁷⁸ No information is provided concerning the purpose of the Panchen Lama's tour, and Sturt's comment reflects his determination to narrate the figures and situations he encountered in terms of the imperatives of the mission. However, the political significance of Tibetan Buddhism was one that could not be avoided.

Japan's efforts to appropriate Tibetan Buddhism represented a continuation of a strategy practiced by the Qing emperors, who had set themselves up as patrons of Tibetan Buddhism in order to encourage Mongol and Tibetan submission to the Qing. This was perhaps most powerfully symbolised by the emperors' mountain resort in the city of Chengde (Jehol on Sturt's map), one of the main centres of the Echoes mission. The resort was constructed between 1703 and 1780, and contained several temples designed predominantly in the Tibetan-Buddhist style, and including

⁷⁶ Uradyn Erden Bulag, *Collaborative Nationalism: The Politics of Friendship on China's Mongolian Frontier* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), pp. 67-98.

⁷⁷ There were four 'living Buddhas' who traditionally had held authority in Tibet and Mongolia: the Jepsundamba Khutughtu in Outer Mongolia, the Janggiya Khutughtu in Inner Mongolia, the Dalai Lama in the U area of Central Tibet, and the Panchen Lama in the Tsang area of Central Tibet.

⁷⁸ *Echoes of Service* (March 1930), p. 59.

a replica of the Potala Palace of Lhasa. The location of the resort, at the meeting point of China, Mongolia and Manchuria, along with the symbolism of its landmarks, was intended to provide an expression of the legitimacy of Qing rule both in China and Inner Asia.⁷⁹

This political context informed the accounts of Sturt and other Echoes missionaries concerning the Mongols and their religion. Early Brethren encounters with the Mongols produced positive impressions. For example, Robert McAlpine, after visiting a predominantly Mongol region, commented that ‘Their frank faces contrasted not unhappily with those of the intriguing Chinese.’⁸⁰ In addition the willingness of the Mongols to discuss spiritual issues was something noted by the missionaries, and was seen to be a pleasing contrast to the Chinese. However, while the opportunity to engage in religious dialogue was something welcomed by the missionaries, it was soon evident that the reciprocal Mongol enthusiasm did not equate to a willingness to convert, and the missionaries subsequently developed a very negative view of Tibetan Buddhism.

From 1915-1916 *Links of Help*, the organ of the Brethren missionary study class movement, published a series of four articles introducing the Mongolian missionary field, which were authored by Sturt. Early on in the first of these articles, Sturt asserted that ‘The religious condition of our field is much the same as prevails

⁷⁹ For studies of Chengde in the context of Qing imperial strategies, see: Philippe Foret, *Mapping Chengde: The Qing Landscape Enterprise* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2000); James A. Millward (ed.), *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of the Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde* (London: Routledge, 2004). For a detailed study of the relation between the Mongols and the Qing, and the role of Buddhism within this, see: Elverskog, *Our Great Qing*. For a study of the role that Buddhism has played in relations between Tibet and China, see: Matthew Kapstein, *Buddhism Between Tibet and China: Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2009); Gray Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁸⁰ *Echoes of Service* (July 1907, ii), pp.271-272.

elsewhere in China, with one distinguishing feature super-added, the religion of the Mongol.⁸¹ Sturt referred to this religion as Lamaism, and repeated a narrative that had developed in the West over the course of the nineteenth century, whereby it was identified as a debased form of Buddhism that melded the superstitions of traditional shamanic practices with Buddhism's ethical teachings.⁸²

Lamaism was central to Sturt's understanding of Mongolian history and culture. It was a religion that he saw as responsible for reducing Mongolia from its former greatness:

This feeble remnant is all that remains of the mighty nation that under leaders justly ranked with the greatest world-conquerors of history, were once the rulers of the largest Empire the world has ever seen... Disintegration and decay, setting in with their spiritual slavery, completed their ruin... it was only when their political power, most of their territory, and national independence were gone that the nation accepted the doctrines of Lamaism, as offering them a new road to honour and advancement, in a future life if not in this.⁸³

The Mongol conversion to Tibetan Buddhism was claimed to be a development that accompanied their fall from being a world power. Furthermore, it had served to perpetuate and deepen their decline:

Whatever this system may have done to restrain the Mongols' predatory and savage instincts, and implant certain religious ideas and ideals, it has on the other hand robbed their manhood of its energy and natural ambition, strangled all progress, material, intellectual, and moral... each family gives one or more of its sons to the priesthood, so that the Lamas number more than sixty per cent of the male population. Both they and the multitudinous lamaseries are liberally supported by the laity, while their power and tyranny over the people are scarcely more tolerable than those of the demons they profess to deliver from. Nominally the Lamas are under vows of celibacy, but generally this merely means the absence of ties of marriage. No nation can

⁸¹ Sturt, 'The Marches of the Mongol, Part I', p. 102.

⁸² Sturt, 'The Call and Challenge of Mongolia, Part I', *Links of Help*, Vol. V (1915-1916), p. 138. Because of the pejorative meaning of 'Lamaism' the term fell out of use in the second half of the twentieth century, in favour of 'Tibetan Buddhism'. For an analysis of the origins and development of 'Lamaism', see: Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La : Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁸³ Sturt, 'The Call and Challenge of Mongolia, Part I', pp. 137-138.

stand such a drain upon its vital strength. Clearly the Mongols cannot. Their numbers steadily diminish, and until the power of this dissolute and corrupting priesthood and system is broken there can be no hope of arresting their sure decay or preventing their ultimate extinction.⁸⁴

Tibetan Buddhism was shown to be a drain on Mongolia's manhood, both in terms of its appropriation of large numbers of men to the priesthood, and in undermining the vitality and courage that the Mongol empire represented at its height. In this way, Mongolia's decline was seen as a crisis of masculinity, and Tibetan Buddhism was deemed to be responsible for this worsening state of affairs. Sturt wrote here with an awareness of Mongolia's perilous position in the contest that was shaping up for the control of Central Eurasia in the wake of the collapse of the Qing. In this context, Tibetan Buddhism was seen not only as a barrier to the Mongols receiving spiritual salvation, but as something weakening them as a nation, and that would ultimately lead to Mongolia's 'sure decay' and 'ultimate extinction.'

Sturt was not alone in expressing such opinions. Owen Lattimore, the traveller and geographer, in his account of his travels around Mongolia, used the same phrase to describe Tibetan Buddhism. In a passage reflecting on the differences between the respective outlooks of Western missionaries and Mongolians about religion, Lattimore argued that missionaries in Mongolia were not doing enough to understand the religious worldview contained within Tibetan Buddhism. But he nevertheless agreed with missionaries that 'lamaism is indeed the most debased form of religion.'⁸⁵ The use of this word by both Sturt and Lattimore to describe Tibetan Buddhism is reflective of a more widespread Western discourse on Mongol history and culture, in which a narrative of decline is emphasised. It was a narrative that was

⁸⁴ Sturt, 'The Call and Challenge of Mongolia, Part I', p. 139.

⁸⁵ Owen Lattimore, *Mongol Journeys* (London: The Travel Book Club, 1942), p. 176. For a study of the writings of Lattimore, see: William T. Rowe, 'Owen Lattimore, Asia and Comparative History', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66:3 (2007), pp. 759-786.

also adopted by Mongol nationalists in Inner Mongolia, as they sought for ways to secure Mongolia's future as a nation.⁸⁶ The association of Tibetan Buddhism with Mongol decline is something that has endured to the present-day in historical scholarship, and has been the subject of recent debate.⁸⁷

Sturt presented a contradictory view of Mongolia in his articles. On the one hand Mongolia was shown to lag far behind the nations on its borders and to be threatened with extinction if it did not undergo reform. This was particularly so in the case of its religion, which was seen as something weak and degraded that would be swept away in the modern world order. But on the other hand, the rule of Tibetan Buddhism over Mongolia was shown to be deep-rooted and threatening, and demanding a concerted effort on the part of missionaries if it was to be overcome:

Mission work among the Mongols has, without question, to be carried on under exceptionally difficult conditions. *The scanty population* is scattered over an immense area, and the people, save in two or three cities, are to be met with only in small groups. *The climate* is rigorous in the extreme for several months in the year, and only men of strong physique and iron nerves could stand the hard travelling and almost desert solitudes. Life in tent, or temporary dwelling, is not attractive, and the *peculiar semi-nomadic life of the Mongols* and their complete subjection to Lamaism, and the crushing influence of *the Lamas* are serious problems. But have not equally serious

⁸⁶ Bulag, *Collaborative Nationalism*, p. 96. For a study of Mongol nationalists, see: Atwood, *Young Mongols and Vigilantes*.

⁸⁷ Perhaps the most clear recent reproduction of the Lamaist narrative of Mongolia is in Svat Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Soucek includes two chapters about Mongolia. The first is entitled 'The Conquering Mongols', and outlines the rise of the Mongol empire; and the second, 'The Buddhist Mongols', documents the period following the decline and breakup of this empire, and describes the Mongols' 'total abandonment to a quietist religion in the modern era' (p. 168). Recent critiques include: Johan Elverskog, 'Tibetocentrism, Religious Conversion and the Study of Mongolian Buddhism', in Uradyn Bulag and Hildegard G. M. Diemberger (eds.), *The Mongolia-Tibet Interface: Opening New Research Terrains in Inner Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 59-80; and Christopher P. Atwood, 'Buddhism and Popular Ritual in Mongolian Religion: A Reexamination of the Fire Cult', *History of Religions* (36: 2) 1996, pp. 112-139. Both these studies criticise the over-simplification of Mongol conversion narratives, and the tendency of Western scholars to view Tibetan Buddhism as a corrupted form of Buddhism. For a historiographical study of the concept of religion in Western scholarship, see: Catherine Bell, 'Paradigms Behind and Before the Modern Concept of Religion', *History and Theory*, 45:4 (2006), pp. 27-46.

problems and equally hard conditions been solved and overcome in other countries by the Christian missionary?⁸⁸

The life and aptitude of the Mongolia missionary was here painted in imposing terms, and the contrast between the degradation and dullness of Tibetan Buddhism, and the vigour and activism of the religion of the missionaries was clear to see. While the Mongol people were seen to be enslaved by a religious system that sapped their vitality, it was exactly the masculinity they were lacking that was required by missionaries if they were to be successful in Mongolia. Sturt earlier made a more explicit appeal to the type of missionary he considered needful:

The urgent need is for *men*, and especially *young men*, who with yielded lives and wills, are willing to “spend and be spent”, and for the sake of the Gospel to remain unmarried for several years in order to give themselves to the much needed work of itineration, both near and far.⁸⁹

In light of Sturt’s later criticism of the lamaist system, quoted above, for depriving the Mongols of most of their male population by appropriating them for the priesthood and imposing a rule of celibacy on them, the nature of his appeal here was somewhat ironic. While on the one hand attacking Tibetan Buddhism for causing Mongolia’s political impotence in the modern world, he nevertheless issued a call for missionaries to devote themselves to a primitivist, world-renouncing ideal. *Links of Help*, in which these articles were published, was the organ of the Missionary Study Class movement, and ultimately, then, Sturt was concerned that his presentation of the Mongolian mission field presented a challenge to the young in Britain to continue the primitivist missionary tradition that he had sought to emulate.

⁸⁸ Sturt, ‘The Call and Challenge of Mongolia, Part II’, in *Links of Help*, Vol. V (1915-1916), p. 152.

⁸⁹ Sturt, ‘The Marches of the Mongol, Part II’, *Links of Help*, Vol. V (1915-1916), p. 120.

Sturt and the Performance of Primitivism

Hugh Kemp, in his survey of missionary efforts in Mongolia, sums up Sturt's main legacies as being his maps; his Mongolian Grammar and Primer; and his example of commitment to Mongolian evangelisation.⁹⁰ Kemp's emphasis on Sturt's commitment provides further encouragement to view Sturt's career as a performance of missionary primitivism. This performance had two parts to it: first, as it was acted out in the mission field; and second, as the performance was reproduced in Sturt's reports. The space given to these reports in *Echoes* was frequently far more than was allotted to other missionaries in China. An example of one of these reports can be seen in Figures 10-12.

⁹⁰ Kemp, *Steppe by Step*, p. 413.

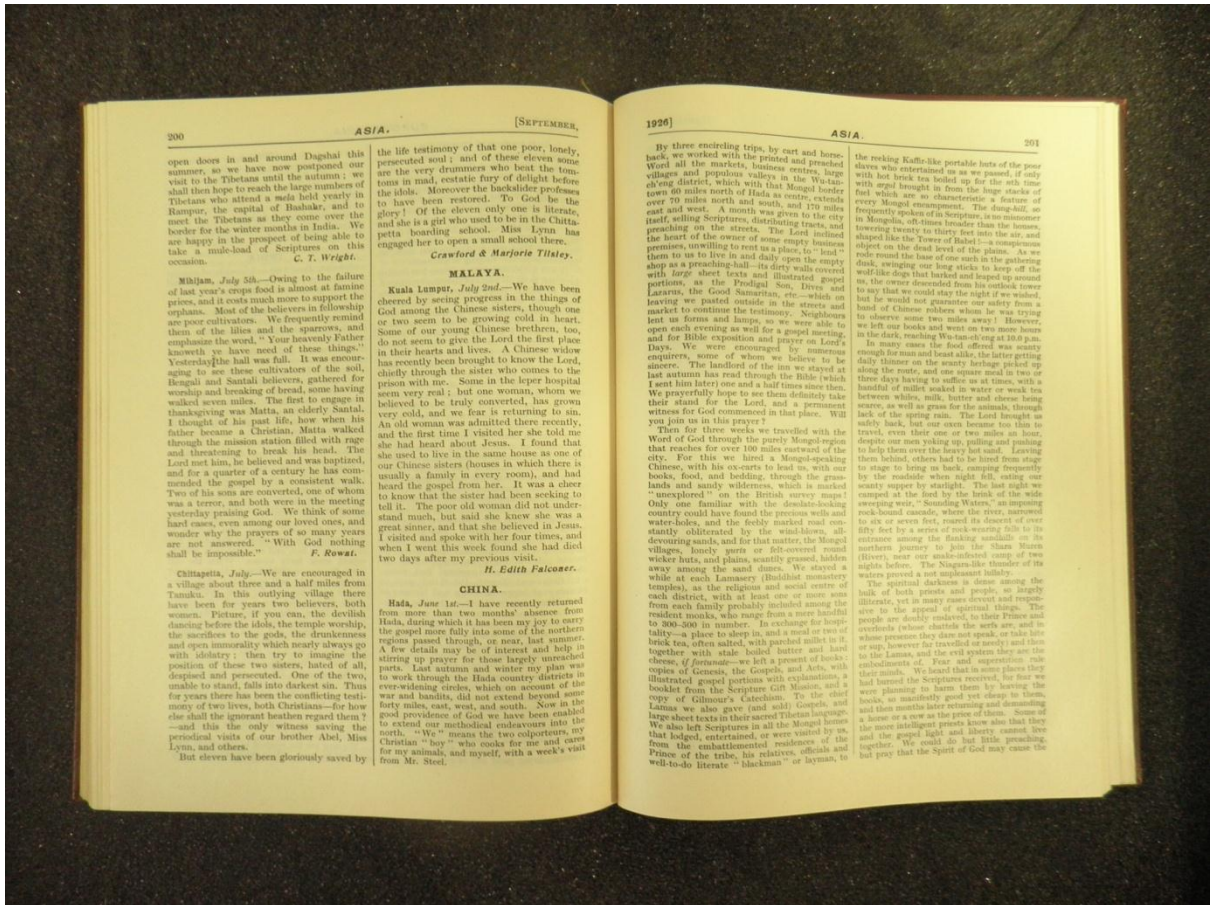


Figure 10 – *Echoes of Service* (September 1926), pp. 200-201. This, and the two shots below, provide an example of Sturt's reports in *Echoes*, in comparison to those of other China missionaries. In this edition, Sturt's reports take up almost three columns, while all the other featured missionaries have less than a column each.

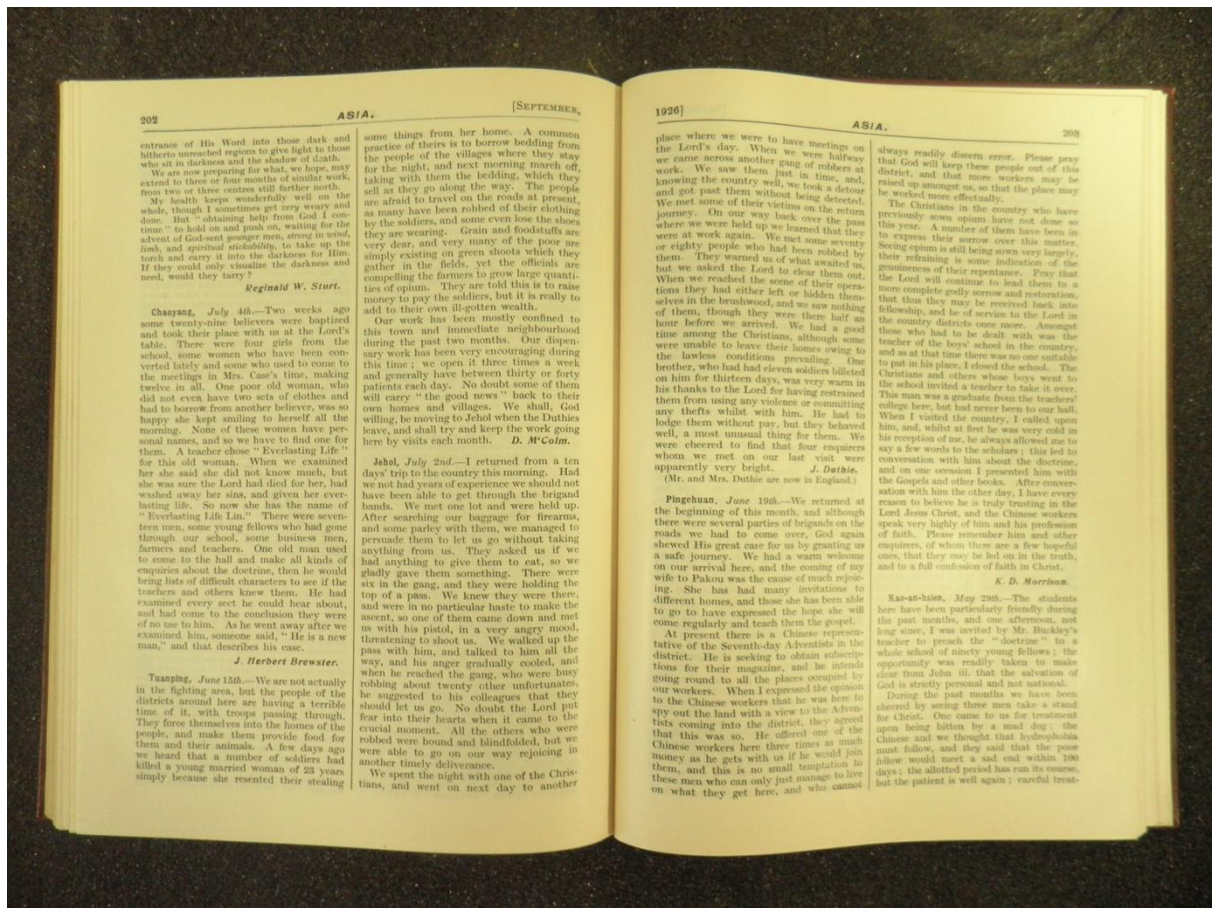


Figure 11 - Echoes of Service (September 1926), pp. 202-203.

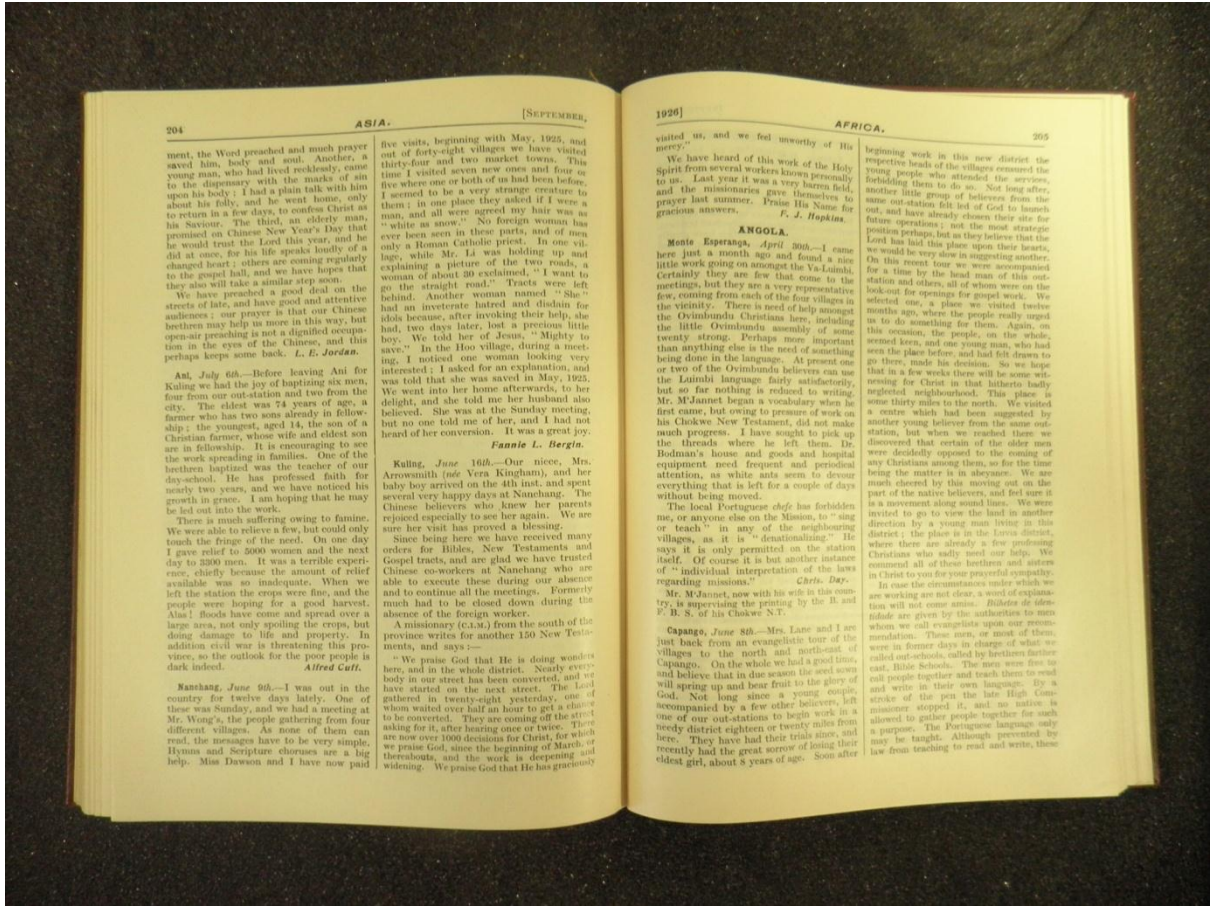


Figure 12 - Echoes of Service (September 1926), pp. 204-205.

five visits, beginning with May, 1925, and out of forty-eight villages we have visited thirty-four and two market towns. This time I visited seven new ones and four or five where one or both of us had been before. I seemed to be a very strange creature to them; in one place they asked if I were a man, and all were agreed my hair was as "white as snow." No foreign woman has ever been seen in these parts, and of men only a Roman Catholic priest. In one village, while Mr. Li was holding up and explaining a picture of the two roads, a woman of about 80 exclaimed, "I want to go the straight road." Tracts were left behind. Another woman named "She" had an inveterate hatred and disdain for idols because, after invoking their help, she had, two days later, lost a precious little boy. We told her of Jesus, "Mighty to save." In the Hoo village, during a meeting, I noticed one woman looking very interested. I asked for an explanation, and was told that she was saved in May, 1925. We went into her home afterwards to her delight, and she told me her husband also believed. She was at the Sunday meeting, but no one told me of her, and I had not heard of her conversion. It was a great joy.

Fannie L. Bergin.

Ani, July 6th.—Before leaving Ani for Kuling we had the joy of baptizing six men, four from our out-station and two from the city. The eldest was 74 years of age, a farmer who has two sons already in fellowship; the youngest, aged 14, the son of a Christian farmer, whose wife and eldest son are in fellowship. It is encouraging to see the work spreading in families. One of the brethren baptized was the teacher of our day-school. He has professed faith for nearly two years, and we have noticed his growth in grace. I am hoping that he may be led into the work.

There is much suffering owing to famine. We were able to relieve a few, but could only touch the fringe of the need. On one day I gave relief to 5000 women and the next day to 3000 men. It was a terrible experience, chiefly because the amount of relief available was so inadequate. When we left the station the crops were fine, and the people were hoping for a good harvest. Now floods have come and spread over a large area, not only spoiling the crops, but doing damage to life and property. In addition civil war is threatening this province, so the outlook for the poor people is dark indeed.

Alfred Cuff.

Nanchang, June 5th.—I was out in the country for twelve days lately. One of these was Sunday, and we had a meeting at Mr. Wong's, the people gathering from four different villages. As none of them can read, the messages have to be very simple. Hymns and Scripture choruses are a big help. Miss Dawson and I have now paid

visited us, and we feel unworthy of His mercy. We have heard of this work of the Holy Spirit from several workers known personally to us. Last year it was a very barren field, and the missionaries gave themselves to prayer last summer. Praise His Name for gracious answers. P. J. Hopkins.

ANGOLA.

Moite Esperanza, April 1926.—I came here just a month ago and found a nice little work going on amongst the Va-Luinibi. Certainly they are few that come to the meetings, but they are a very representative few, coming from each of the four villages in the vicinity. There is need of help amongst the Ovimbundu Christians here, including the little Ovimbundu assembly of some twenty strong. Perhaps more important than anything else is the need of something being done in the language. At present one or two of the Ovimbundu believers can use the Luimbi language fairly satisfactorily, but so far nothing is reduced to writing. Mr. M'Jannet began a vocabulary when he first came, but owing to pressure of work on his Chokwe New Testament, did not make much progress. I have sought to pick up the threads where he left them. Dr. Bodman's house and goods and hospital equipment need frequent and periodical attention, as white ants seem to devour everything that is left for a couple of days without being moved.

The local Portuguese *chefe* has forbidden me, or anyone else on the Mission, to "sing or teach" in any of the neighbouring villages, as it is "denationalizing." He says it is only permitted on the station itself. Of course it is but another instance of "individual interpretation of the laws regarding missions." Chris. Dap.

Mr. M'Jannet, now with his wife in this country, is supervising the printing by the B. and F. B. S. of his Chokwe N.T.

Capango, June 5th.—Mr. Lane and I set just back from an evangelistic tour of the villages to the north and north-east of Capango. On the whole we had a good time, and believe that in due season the seed sown will spring up and bear fruit to the glory of God. Not long since a young couple, accompanied by a few other believers, left one of our out-stations to begin work in a needy district eighteen or twenty miles from here. They have had their trials since, and recently had the great sorrow of losing their eldest girl, about 8 years of age. Soon after

beginning work in this new district the respective heads of the villages resumed the finding them to do so. Not long after, another little group of believers from the out-station felt led of God to launch future operations; not the most strategic position perhaps, but as they believe that the we would be very slow in supporting another. On this recent tour we were accompanied for a time by the head man of this out-station and others, all of whom were on the selected one, a place we visited twelve months ago, where the people really urged us to do something for them. Again, on this occasion, the people, on the whole, seemed keen, and one young man, who had seen the place before, and had felt drawn to go there, made his decision. So we hope that in a few weeks there will be some witnessing for Christ in that hitherto badly neglected neighbourhood. This place is some thirty miles to the north. We visited a centre which had been suggested by another young believer from the same out-station, but when we reached there we discovered that certain of the older men were decidedly opposed to the coming of any Christians among them, so for the time being the matter is in abeyance. We are much cheered by this moving out on the part of the native believers, and feel sure it is a movement along sound lines. We were invited to go to view the land in another direction by a young man living in this district; the place is in the Luvua district, where there are already a few professing Christians who sadly need our help. We counsel all of these brethren and sisters in Christ to you for your prayerful sympathy.

In case the circumstances under which we are working are not clear, a word of explanation is given by the authorities to whom we call evangelists upon our recommendation. These men, or most of them, were in former days in charge of what we called out-schools, called by brethren father-called-out-schools, and teach them to read and write in their own language. By a stroke of the pen the late High Commission stopped it, and no native is allowed to gather people together for such a purpose. The Portuguese language only may be taught. Although prevented by law from teaching to read and write, these

In this report, Sturt gave an account of an itineration lasting two months. He began by giving a precise summary of the scale of the trip and his methodical progression:

By three encircling trips, by cart and horseback, we worked with the printed and preached Word, all the markets, business centres, large villages and populous valleys in the Wu-tan-ch'eng district, which with that Mongol border town 60 miles north of Hada as centre, extends over 70 miles north and south, and 170 miles east and west.⁹¹

Sturt's description of 'working' an area evokes a systematic and mechanical labour.

This impression continues as he elaborates on his strategy in a particular city:

A month was given to the city itself, selling Scriptures, distributing tracts, and preaching on the streets. The Lord inclined the heart of the owner of some empty business premises, unwilling to rent us a place, to 'lend' them to us to live in and daily open the empty shop as a preaching hall – its dirty walls covered with *large* sheet texts and illustrated gospel portions, as the Prodigal Son, Dives and Lazarus, the Good Samaritan, etc., which on leaving we pasted outside in the streets and market to continue the testimony.⁹²

The primacy of telling the gospel, by the spoken and written word, is clearly emphasised here, with every effort taken to maximise the exposure of the gospel message.

Sturt then described his progression further north, into more remote regions:

Then for three weeks we travelled with the Word of God through the purely Mongol region that reaches for over 100 miles eastward of the city. For this we hired a Mongol-speaking Chinese, with his ox-carts to lead us, with our books, food, and bedding, through the grasslands and sandy wilderness, which is marked 'unexplored' on the British survey maps! Only one familiar with the desolate-looking country could have found the precious wells and water-holes, and the feebly marked road constantly obliterated by the wind-blown, all-devouring sands, and for that matter, the Mongol villages, lonely *yurts* or felt-covered round wicker huts, and plains, scantily grassed, hidden away among the sand dunes.⁹³

Sturt provided a vivid depiction of the Mongolian grasslands, evoking the stark expanse of land and its inhospitable conditions. There is a tone of excitement as he

⁹¹ *Echoes of Service* (September 1926), p. 201.

⁹² *Echoes of Service* (September 1926), p. 201.

⁹³ *Echoes of Service* (September 1926), p. 201.

noted the remoteness of the region they had entered, and this seems to have stemmed not only from the knowledge that they were covering unevangelised ground, but also from the adventure of travel in these ‘unexplored’ spaces.

Again, Sturt’s systematic methods were documented as he toured the lamaseries:

In exchange for hospitality... we left a present of books: copies of Genesis, the Gospels and Acts, with illustrated gospel portions with explanations, a booklet from the Scripture Gift Mission, and a copy of Gilmour’s Catechism. To the chief Lamas we also gave (and sold) Gospels, and large sheet texts in their sacred Tibetan language. We also left Scriptures in all the Mongol homes that lodged, entertained, or were visited by us, from the embattlemented residences of the Prince of the tribe, his relatives, officials and well-to-do literate ‘blackman’ or layman, to the reeking Kaffir-like portable huts of the poor slaves who entertained us as we passed, if only with hot brick tea boiled up for the *n*th time...⁹⁴

Sturt distributes huge quantities of literature, spreading it generously like the sower in Jesus’ parable. In his reports he noted frequent misunderstandings over the purpose of his literature distribution. In this report he recalled lamas who, following his departure, had destroyed much of what he had given them, in fear that Sturt would return and demand something in payment for it. Despite such misunderstandings he persisted with this strategy, in the conviction that it was his task to spread the word as widely as possible. In the above extract he elaborated on this in almost poetic language, as he described how he took the gospel to everyone he encountered, both rich and poor.

As he concluded his report, Sturt expressed his determination to continue, and called for new recruits to come and share in his task:

We are now preparing for what, we hope, may extend to three or four months of similar work, from two or three centres still farther north.

⁹⁴ *Echoes of Service* (September 1926), p. 201.

My health keeps wonderfully well on the whole, though I sometimes get *very* weary and done. But ‘obtaining help from God I continue’ to hold on and push on, waiting for the advent of God-sent *younger* men, *strong* in *wind, limb, and spiritual stickability*, to take up the torch and carry it into the darkness for Him. If they could only visualize the darkness and need, would they tarry?⁹⁵

Sturt’s report formed a graphic and detailed account of his work, communicating the adventure and challenge of his task as a missionary in unreached Mongolia. The prominence of his reports in *Echoes* can partly be explained by their vivid style and exciting content. But these served as a backdrop to illuminate a record of missionary work done according to primitivist methods, and a rallying call for the younger generation to follow the example that he was setting for them. In this way, Sturt seems to have represented something of a figurehead for *Echoes* as they sought to galvanise missionary interest in the inter-war period.

The performative nature of Sturt’s primitivism can again be seen in his activities following his return to New Zealand, having been expelled from Manchukuo in 1942. Sturt was distressed at what he considered to be a decrease in missionary interest among the churches. He shared his feelings with the *Echoes* editors, urging them to maintain their resolve ‘to complete the *unfinished task* of the world-wide preaching of the Gospel to Every Creature of every Tribe & Tongue & People & Nations in the uttermost part of the earth, so that the end may come, as He has said.’⁹⁶

Sturt then set about trying to stir up evangelistic activity in New Zealand and preparing for when missions might resume at the end of the war. He travelled around

⁹⁵ *Echoes of Service* (September 1926), p. 202.

⁹⁶ Letter from R.W. Sturt to *Echoes*, 13 March 1943. (*Echoes of Service Papers*, EOS/Sturt, Mr R.W. and Mrs M.H., John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester).

New Zealand from meeting to meeting, and built up a library of missionary literature. He also began a new publication, 'The Missionary Education', produced 'with regard to the need of God's people being ready, or getting ready now, for the unique opportunities that will undoubtedly present themselves to the church of God for a great forward movement for the completion of the task of world evangelization as soon as this terrible war draws to an end.'⁹⁷ To this end he began advocating a 'Five Year Plan to Evangelize to a Finish in New Zealand', whereby every household in New Zealand would be reached either in person or through literature, within five years. He also continued to raise the profile of the Mongolian mission field, but despaired at the lack of interest he perceived:

Any interest there may have been once in the Home land in regard to the unevangelised parts of the great Central Asia seems to have died a natural, or unnatural, death. Probably there never was very much among our meetings. And yet they are included in 'the uttermost parts of the earth' that were His last uttered thoughts ere the cloud received Him out of their sight!⁹⁸

Sturt's near obsession with the possibility of complete evangelisation, and his fear that the opportunity was being squandered, can be seen here. In 1947 Sturt, now aged sixty-seven and in poor health, returned to China. The Chinese Communist advance meant he was never able to return to his work in Jehol, and a year and a half later he died of pneumonia.

It is uncertain whether Sturt really thought his own age and poor health, along with the civil war conditions in China, could be overcome and the evangelisation of Mongolia completed. It seems likely that his return to Mongolia was made as much out of a desire to demonstrate the commitment he felt to be lacking among the

⁹⁷ Letter from R.W. Sturt to Echoes, 7 January 1944 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Sturt, Mr R.W. and Mrs M.H.).

⁹⁸ Letter from R.W. Sturt to Echoes, 16 October 1943 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Sturt, Mr R.W. and Mrs M.H.).

Christian youth in New Zealand. Sturt's response to the approach of Communism was therefore to reassert the primitivist imperative to reach 'the uttermost parts of the earth.'

Conclusion

The Echoes mission to Mongolia made some advances, but almost entirely among the Chinese population. In terms of Mongols, there were a handful of purported converts and certainly no churches established. It has been argued, therefore, that the prominence given to Sturt's reports in *Echoes* demonstrates the performative nature of missionary primitivism. More important to Echoes than his success in gaining converts was Sturt's adherence to an apostolic model and his prioritising of evangelism to the regions beyond, in accordance with their millennialist convictions. The publicising of Sturt's endeavours therefore served both to affirm Brethren identity in Britain, and to set an example for the younger generation to emulate. Missionary primitivism was therefore as much concerned with preserving a Christian ideal at home, as it was about expanding Christianity's influence abroad.

Sturt's strategy also displayed the mixing of the primitive and the modern that was characteristic of Echoes, and which became accentuated in marginal locations. In particular, Sturt's self-consciously simple and scriptural strategy was combined with a systematic and scientific methodology. Sturt mapped large areas of eastern Mongolia and categorised its peoples and languages, and his expertise was recognised by the Royal Geographic Society. Along with other missionaries, he

identified Central Asia as a frontier space as yet unevangelised. He hoped that by mapping the area and systematically traversing it, particularly with the assistance of modern technologies of transport and printing, he might overcome those barriers of time and space that stood in the way of a speedy resolution of Mongolia's unevangelised state. Yet these technologies were simultaneously those being used by both Russia and Japan to try to bring the Mongolian frontier safely into the civilised realm of their respective empires. They would later also be utilised by the PRC in order to consolidate their new nation-state.

Sturt's mission therefore demonstrates how, in seeking to remain true to primitivist principles, political involvement became more, rather than less, likely. Sturt sought to avoid the implications of this, but his writings place Mongolia's history, people and religion into a political narrative framed by a wider perception of the emergence of a modern world order. In this way Sturt's mission reflected the civilising imperative that emerged at China's Mongolian frontier, and a striving to take possession of these untamed borderlands. In the following chapter, another Echoes missionary encounter on China's margins would produce a very different attempt to resolve this problem of primitivism and politics.

4) Primitivism and Politics: The Echoes Mission to Tibet

Introduction

This chapter will further explore missionary encounters on China's Central Eurasian frontiers. Erik Sidenvall has written of this frontier region in the twentieth century as a 'colonial "periphery" along which adventure was still possible.'¹ He uses the example of the Swedish missionary Frans August Larson, who operated in Mongolia from 1892-1939. As well as being engaged in conventional missionary work for the Christian and Missionary Alliance and the British and Foreign Bible Society, Larson organised scientific expeditions, worked for a Russo-French-owned goldmine, operated a horse ranch, and was the caravan leader for a railway surveying team and for a number of explorers. In addition, Larson had a varied political involvement in Mongolia, being employed as a counsellor by the Republic of China (ROC) from 1913-1914 and being elevated to the lowest rank of the Mongolian aristocracy in 1920.²

This chapter will extend Sidenvall's observation of the possibilities of missionary adventure at the colonial periphery. It will show how, with colonial oversight minimal and political sovereignty ambiguous, charismatic and ambitious missionaries were able to insert themselves as actors into complex socio-political

¹ Erik Sidenvall, *The Making of Manhood Among Swedish Missionaries in China and Mongolia, c. 1890-c. 1914* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 110.

² For a recent study of Larson as part of a larger examination of Swedish missionary masculinity, see: Sidenvall, *Making of Manhood*, pp. 93-114. Larson wrote an autobiography: *Larson, Duke of Mongolia* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co. 1930).

situations, and to use their cultural knowledge to position themselves as mediators. The chapter will focus on the Echoes mission to Tibet, which ran from 1947-1953 and was orchestrated by two such missionaries: Geoffrey Bull and George Patterson.³ There is a growing literature on the history of China's Tibetan frontier.⁴ By examining how missionaries navigated the complexities and potentialities of this frontier, this chapter will contribute to this literature. Particular attention will be paid to the relationship that Bull and Patterson developed with Topgyay and Rapga Pandatsang, brothers from a powerful family of Tibetan traders.⁵ Topgyay and Rapga were significant political actors, and Bull and Patterson became involved in their modernising agenda for Tibet.

Examining missionary activity on the margins brings into distilled focus the relationship between missionary primitivism and Chinese modernity. In seeking to

³ There was initially a third member, Gordon Bell, who separated from Patterson and Bull in order to marry a missionary from another mission society. Geoffrey T. Bull (1921-1999) wrote several books about his missionary experiences in Tibet. They are: *When Iron Gates Yield* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1955); *God Holds the Key* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1959); *The Sky is Red* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965). George N. Patterson (1920-) also wrote a number of books about the mission: *Tibetan Journey* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952); *God's Fool* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954); *Up and Down Asia* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956); *Tragic Destiny* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958); *Tibet in Revolt* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960). Their mission is discussed briefly in historical surveys of Tibet missions: Ralph R. Covell, *The Liberating Gospel in China: The Christian Faith Among China's Minority Peoples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), pp. 56-82; John Bray, 'Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Missionary Images of Tibet', in Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther, *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections and Fantasies* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2001), pp. 21-45; Bray, 'Christian Missions and the Politics of Tibet, 1850-1950', in Alex McKay, *The History of Tibet - The Modern Period, 1895-1959: The Encounter with Modernity* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 489-500.

⁴ E.g. Lawrence Epstein (ed.), *Khams pa Histories: Visions of People, Place and Authority* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Melvyn C. Goldstein, Dawei Sherap and William R. Siebenschuh, *A Tibetan Revolutionary: The Political Life and Times of Bapa Phuntso Wangye* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); Hsiao-ting Lin, *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier: Intrigues and Ethnopolitics, 1928-49* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006); Lin, *Modern China's Ethnic Frontiers: A Journey to the West* (London: Routledge, 2011); Beth Meriam, *China's 'Tibetan' Frontiers: Sharing the Contested Ground* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); J. Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenous Became Chinese* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Wang Mingke, 華夏邊緣：歷史記憶與族群認同 [On Chinese borderlands: historical memory and ethnic identity], (Taipei: Yunchen Wenhua Gongsu, 1997).

⁵ For studies of the Pandatsang family, see: McGranahan, 'Sa spang mda' gnam spang mda: Murder, History and Social Politics', in Epstein, *Khams pa Histories*, pp. 103-126; McGranahan, 'In Rapga's Library: the Texts and Times of a Rebel Tibetan Intellectual', *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, 15 (2005), pp. 253-274.

enter Tibet, Bull and Patterson were motivated by a calling to take the gospel to the ‘regions beyond’ of Central Asia. However, as in the case of Sturt in the previous chapter, although this calling was inspired by a primitivist missionary ideal, it placed them in a situation where the modernity of missionaries was more pronounced. Two aspects of this will be examined: missionary medicine and missionary politics. Bull and Patterson practiced medicine in Tibet.⁶ They had little training, but their success as healers helped their mission to gain legitimacy among Tibetans. In particular, it won the attention of the Pandatsang brothers, and so began an association which was essential to the advance of the mission. Consequently, although their primitivism required that they eschew politics, Bull and Patterson’s relationship with the Pandatsangs led to them becoming involved in what was an increasingly volatile political situation.⁷

⁶ For studies of missionary medicine in China, see: Yuet-wah Cheung, *Missionary Medicine in China: A Study of Two Canadian Protestant Missions in China Before 1937* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988); G.H. Choa, *‘Heal the Sick’ was Their Motto: The Protestant Medical Missionaries in China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1990); Kaiyi Chen, *Seeds from the West: St. John’s Medical School, Shanghai, 1880-1952* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 2001); Douglas M. Haynes, *Imperial Medicine: Patrick Manson and the Conquest of Tropical Disease* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Sonya Grypma, *Healing Henan: Canadian Nurses at the North China Mission, 1888-1947* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008); Iris Borowy (ed.), *Uneasy Encounters: The Politics of Medicine and Health in China, 1900-1937* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009); Connie A. Shemo, *The Chinese Medical Ministries of Kang Cheng and Shi Meiyu, 1872-1937: On a Cross-Cultural Frontier of Gender, Race, and Nation* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2011); Guangqiu Xu, *American Doctors in Canton: Modernization in China, 1835-1935* (Somerset, NJ: Transaction, 2011); Henrietta Harrison, ‘Rethinking Missionaries and Medicine in China: The Miracles of Assunta Pallotta, 1905–2005’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 71:1 (2012), pp. 127-148; Michael C. Lazich, ‘Seeking Souls through the Eyes of the Blind: The Birth of the Medical Missionary Society in Nineteenth-Century China’, pp. 59-86; Timothy Man-kong Wong, ‘Local Voluntarism: The Medical Mission of the London Missionary Society in Hong Kong, 1842-1923’, pp. 87-114, in David Hardiman, (ed.). *Healing Bodies, Saving Souls: Medical Missions in Asia and Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006); John R. Stanley, ‘Establishing a Female Medical Elite: The Early History of the Nursing Profession in China’, pp. 274-291; and Connie Shemo, ‘“To Develop Native Powers”: Shi Meiyu and the Danforth Memorial Hospital Nursing School, 1903-1920’, pp. 292-311, in Jessie G. Lutz (ed.), *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity and Social Mobility* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2010).

⁷ For political histories of Tibet in the twentieth century, see, for the pre-1951 period: Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1989). For post-1951 histories and historical analyses of the contemporary political situation, see: Goldstein. *A History of Modern Tibet, 1951-1955: The Calm before the Storm* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet and the Dalai Lama* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1997); Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* (London:

Bull and Patterson's mission was short-lived: Patterson travelled through to India in 1950 but was prevented from returning to Tibet, and Bull was arrested by the Chinese Communists and imprisoned until December 1953. However, their experiences in Tibet shaped their subsequent activities. Both published successful accounts of their missionary careers, and their writings reflected the complexities and contradictions of their involvement with Tibet. In particular, their convictions as missionaries often sat uneasily beside their sympathy for the Pandatsangs, as well as their antipathy towards the Chinese Communists. Bull and Patterson subsequently sought to reconcile the various strands of their involvement in different ways. This has proven especially difficult for Patterson, who has maintained an involvement, to the present day, as an advocate of Tibetan independence. As the Tibetan situation has continued to evolve, so this has affected the ways that Patterson has narrated his experiences. This chapter therefore speaks to a contemporary, as well as historical, political situation.⁸

The chapter will utilise a number of sources: Bull and Patterson's correspondence with Echoes and the circular prayer-letters and reports sent out to their supporters will be used to trace the progress of the mission, and the reactions and expectations of Bull and Patterson over its course. The published accounts of their experiences will also be consulted, in particular Bull's book *When Iron Gates Yield* (1955) and

Pimlico, 1999); Dawa Norbu, *China's Tibet Policy* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001); Tom A. Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

⁸ For studies of contemporary Tibet, and the dispute over Tibet's political status, see: Wang Lixiong and Tsering Shakya, *The Struggle for Tibet* (London: Verso, 2009); John B. Roberts II and Elizabeth A. Roberts, *Freeing Tibet: 50 Years of Struggle, Resilience and Hope* (New York: AMACOM, 2009); Robert V. Andrews (ed.), *Tibet: A Simmering Troublespot* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009); Barry Sautman and June Teufel Dreyer (eds.), *Contemporary Tibet: Politics, Development and Society in a Disputed Region* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006); John Powers, *History As Propaganda: Tibetan Exiles versus the People's Republic of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Patterson's books *God's Fool* (1954) and *Tragic Destiny* (1958). As well as providing further details relating to the mission, the publication of these books following its termination allows for an examination of the changing ways in which Bull and Patterson narrated their experiences. Finally, Patterson's autobiography *Patterson of Tibet* (2004), along with interviews conducted in January 2010 and May 2011, will be used to examine Patterson's more recent reflections on his experiences. This chapter will therefore provide insights into the ways that individual subjects construct their life stories, and in particular the changing significance that particular events or experiences can take as these stories are re-narrated over time.⁹

In doing so, this chapter will employ the concept of composure in order to elucidate the changes in the way that Patterson has narrated his life story.¹⁰ Composure 'refers to the *composition* of the narrative', as well as 'the way in which a narrator seeks a sense of "composure" from constituting themselves as the subject of their story.'¹¹ The possibility of attaining composure depends on whether the audience of the narrative recognise its coherency or not, which in turn depends on the ability of the subject to place their narrative within certain cultural discourses. It is this context of intersubjective relations that makes the attainment of composure a contingent and often incomplete process. This chapter will deal specifically with Bull and Patterson's narratives of their time in Tibet, placing them in a broader missionary

⁹ This chapter will use a similar method of analysis to that employed by Michael Roper, in his examination of the changing recollections of a former British army officer of his experiences during the First World War. See: Michael Roper, 'Re-remembering the Soldier Hero: The Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War', *History Workshop Journal* 50 (2000), pp. 181-204.

¹⁰ This concept was first employed in: Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹¹ Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), p. 69.

and political context. The next chapter will examine the ways that Tibet has been prominent in their post-missionary careers.

A number of photographs of the mission have also been utilised. These are from an uncatalogued collection recently deposited with the Christian Brethren Archive by the son of Geoffrey Bull. Some of these are organised into albums with captions, and others are loose. There are brief explanatory notes extant for about half of the collection, but overall little contextual information has been provided with the collection. The photos seem to have been mostly taken by Bull, although this cannot be the case for all of them, as he is featured in several. The accompanying notes and captions also appear to be by Bull. A few photographs from this collection are included in this chapter, in order to provide images of the main protagonists in the story of the mission, and also to provide further documentary evidence concerning the people that Bull and Patterson associated with, and the ways they operated among them.

Tibet: the seat of Central Asia

George Patterson was born in 1920 in Falkirk, in Scotland. He left school at fourteen and eventually found employment at a foundry, becoming a lathe-operator. He first applied to Echoes in 1944, stating that God had ‘put before my vision the map of Central Asia’:

Thirty-four millions! and not one of them had heard the Name of Jesus! His hand pointed to the field whitened to harvest and His voice called to – Tibet.

I knew nothing of this land, not even in geography, but His Call was and is unmistakable.¹²

Patterson placed Tibet in the larger context of Central Asia, and this Echoes mission needs to be seen as a response to the call, made by Sturt in the previous chapter along with others, for missionaries to turn their attention to Central Asia, as one of the yet unreached 'regions beyond.'

Three years later, as he made his way across China towards Tibet's eastern border, Patterson wrote to his supporters:

My dear friends, we believe that we stand on the verge of great things – of a mighty work of God – not only in Tibet – throughout the whole of Central Asia. Already Satan is marshalling his forces of darkness to defend his 'seat' as this area is called, and the only way in which this great stronghold of evil can be overthrown and the banner of Christ unfurled is through your 'effectual fervent prayers.'¹³

Patterson's identification of Tibet as Satan's 'seat' echoed a wider missionary literature. By the 1880s, Tibet was one of the few remaining places that had no established Protestant mission, and so its pull as a region that was unreached had become increasingly strong.¹⁴ With access from India blocked by the British, many began to turn their attention to gaining entry through China.¹⁵ This did not bring improved results: the mountainous terrain, political instability, social unrest, brigandage, and the opposition of Tibet's lamas all combined to ensure that no missionaries were able to penetrate into the interior of Tibet and remain there. But this served only to increase the pull of Tibet for missions, with the country being

¹² Letter from George Patterson to Echoes, 14 August 1944 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Patterson, Mr George and Mrs Margaret, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester).

¹³ Circular letter from Patterson, October 1947 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Patterson, Mr George and Mrs Margaret).

¹⁴ Covell, *Liberating Gospel*, p. 65.

¹⁵ For the relationship of British India with Tibet, see: Alex McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj: The Frontier Cadre, 1904-1947* (Richmond: Curzon, 1997).

seen not only as an unreached land, but a fortress of false religion, with its capital, Lhasa, the seemingly unreachable and impregnable centre of Tibetan Buddhism. Tibet had even begun to be seen by some as the final great challenge for the modern missionary movement, and the last bastion to be overcome before Christ's return.¹⁶

This language was echoed by Geoffrey Bull. In a letter to his supporters in October 1949 he wrote:

... the spiritual struggle for Central Asia in this day of grace is on. Our hopes for the piercing of the stronghold are very confident, but the highest is His will for He views with finality – we see but a moment, but to live that moment for the End is our heart's desire.¹⁷

Bull, a bank clerk from Edgware in north London, was a year younger than Patterson. They shared an ambition to preach in Tibet, and both also viewed Tibet as a key to the penetration of the wider field of Central Asia. However, as they journeyed through China to reach Tibet, Bull and Patterson would become part of a Chinese Christian mission that saw Tibet as an extension of their own work in western China.

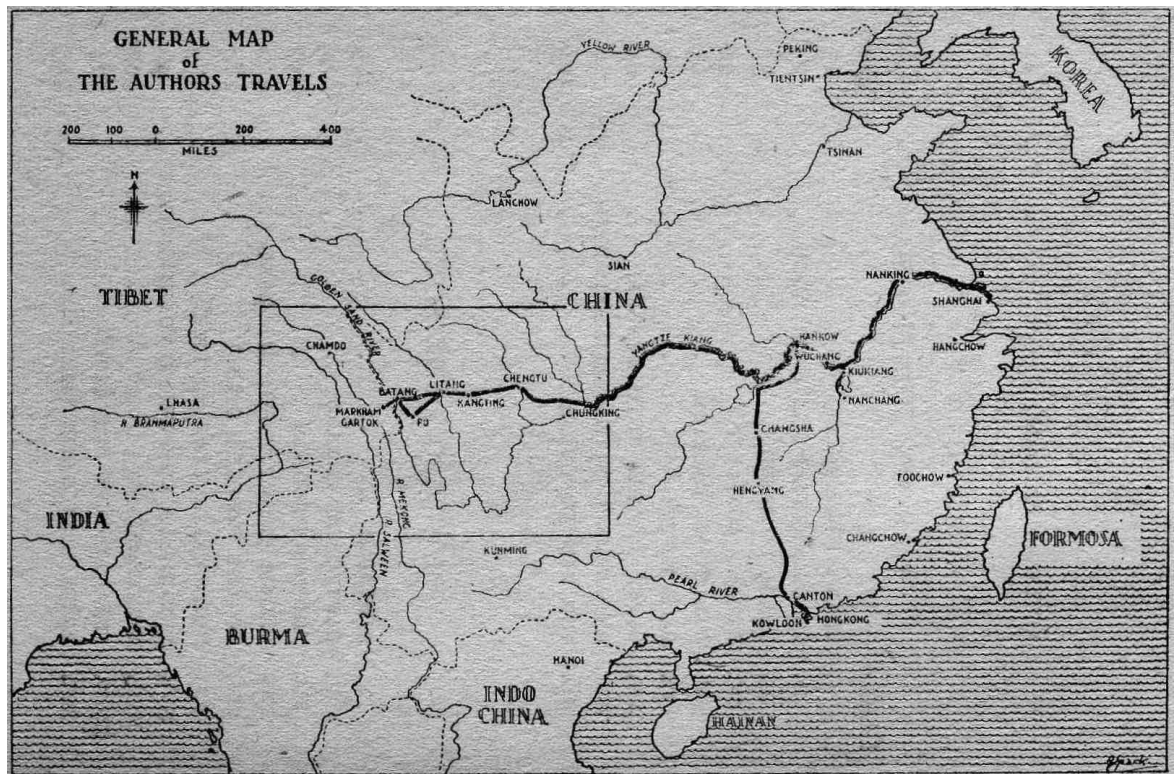
¹⁶ Covell, *Liberating Gospel*, p. 71.

¹⁷ Circular letter from Geoffrey Bull, 14 October 1949 (Echoes of Service Papers, (EOS/Bull, Mr Geoffrey T., John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester).



Figure 13 – Geoffrey Bull (left) and George Patterson (right), probably taken in Nanchang. (Source: Geoffrey Bull Papers, GBP/3, John Rylands University Library, The University of Manchester).

The Little Flock and the Chinese Evangelisation of Tibet



Map 8 – Bull and Patterson’s journey across China to Tibet. The line running south from Wuchang to Hong Kong is Bull’s route when he was expelled from China in 1953. Source: Bull, *When Iron Gates Yield*, p. 6.

Bull and Patterson arrived in China in April 1947, and at first joined other Echoes missionaries in Nanchang, in Jiangxi province. In November they moved west to Chongqing¹⁸, and then on to Chengdu¹⁹ in December (marked as Chungking and Chengtu in Map 5). In all three of these cities, Bull and Patterson came into contact with groups belonging to the Little Flock, and were impressed with what they found.

¹⁸ Chongqing (重庆) was the first inland port to be opened to foreign trade, in 1891. It was made a municipality by the Guomindang in 1929, and served as the provisional capital during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). For recent studies of Chongqing, see: Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Joshua H. Howard, *Workers at War: Labor in China's Arsenal, 1937-1953* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Chengdu (成都) is the capital of Sichuan province (四川). For recent studies, see: Di Wang, *Street Culture in Chengdu: Public Space, Urban Commoners and Local Politics, 1870-1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Kristin Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu: Chinese Urban Reform, 1895-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

The assistance they received from these groups, and in particular from Zhang Yilun, Watchman Nee's brother-in-law, was also a major factor in ensuring the continuation of their mission. Bull and Patterson were travelling far beyond the regions worked in by Echoes missionaries. But they were able to continue to receive funds from their supporters as a result of Zhang Yilun arranging to have cheques sent for them cashed in Hong Kong by Watchman Nee's pharmaceutical company. This enabled them to overcome the disadvantageous exchange rates that afflicted missionaries in mainland China as a result of the political instability, caused by the civil war between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communists.²⁰

More importantly, Bull and Patterson were able to use the monies deposited for them with Zhang Yilun to buy medicines to take into Tibet, which were supplied by the Nee family's pharmaceuticals company.²¹ This arrangement highlights the complex configurations of Christian mission and modern medicine in China. Rather than reflecting a unidirectional, modernising transfer from the West to China, this situation shows a Chinese initiative in which modern medicines were supplied to two British missionaries, who then sought to utilise them in Tibet.

Bull and Patterson were therefore being carried on the wave of the Little Flock expansion as they advanced through China. In *God's Fool* Patterson recalled how he and Bull were invited to become more formally part of the Little Flock's programme for evangelising western China, but they decided they had their own calling to go on

²⁰ Interview with George N. Patterson, 28 January 2010. For the decline and collapse of the Guomindang, see: Lloyd E. Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937-1949* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1984); Hans J. van de Ven, *War and Nationalism, 1925-1945* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945-1949* (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield, 1999).

²¹ Patterson, *God's Fool*, p. 171.

to Tibet.²² However, despite asserting their independence in this way, Bull and Patterson were effectively operating as Little Flock missionaries. The Little Flock, and other independent Chinese evangelists (see Figure 14, below) were implementing their own plans to reach Tibet. Bull and Patterson, meanwhile, were practicing a strategy of aligning themselves with ascendant local groups, and they would do so again in order to advance further into Tibet.

²² Patterson, *God's Fool*, p. 151.



Figure 14 – photo in album with caption: ‘John Ting, Chinese/Tibetan evangelist and Nurse Lui in full Tibetan dress.’ (Source: Geoffrey Bull Papers, GBP/3). John Ting was an independent Chinese evangelist. Patterson and Bull first met him in Chengdu, and he also travelled on to Kangding in order to carry out missionary work.²³ In this photo Ting, along with another Chinese missionary, are pictured in Tibetan dress. This further demonstrates the way that Chinese Christians, with no attachment to Western missions, were starting missionary initiatives in Tibet, and adopting missionary strategies of acculturation in order to more effectively evangelise to Tibetans.

²³ See: Patterson, *God’s Fool*, pp. 107-109; 122-126.

The China-Tibet Frontier

Bull and Patterson's journey across China ended in the city of Kangding (康定, marked as Kangting in Map 5), where they arrived in January 1948.²⁴ Kangding had a mixed Chinese and Tibetan population. It held an important position at the confluence of main routes into Tibet, Yunnan and Sichuan, and was an important trading centre, in particular for tea.²⁵ Patterson and Bull had been invited there by George and Pearl Kraft, an American couple working for the CIM, having met Pearl in Shanghai on their arrival in China. The Krafts provided them with lodging and Tibetan language tuition in Kangding and, as their language skills increased, they assisted the Krafts and the other CIM missionaries with their work in the city and in itinerations to surrounding villages.

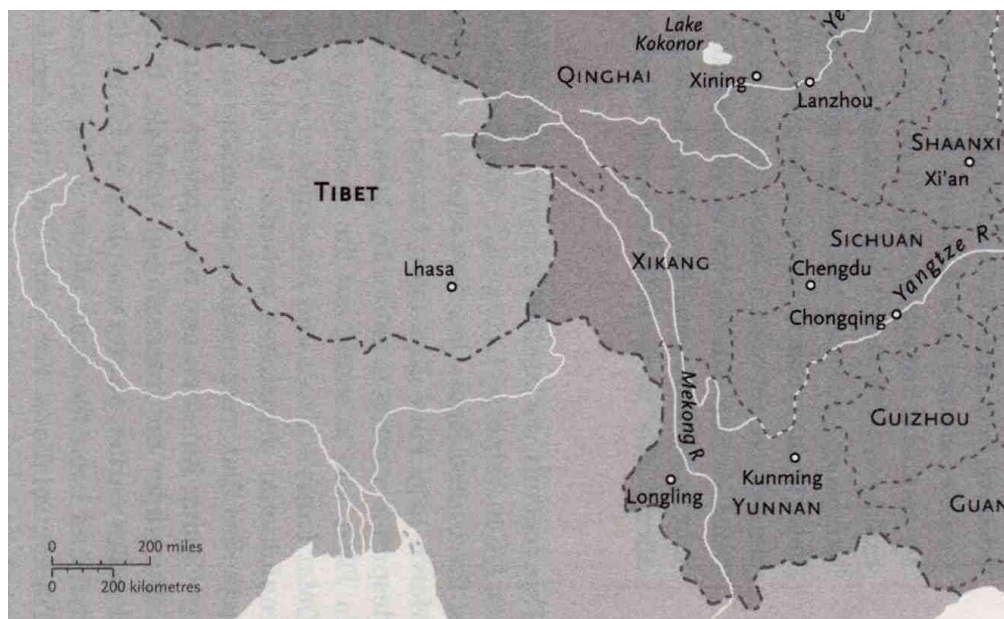
The region's indeterminate status was a result of the decline and collapse of Qing power. In 1727, following their successful military campaigns against the Dzungar Mongols who had briefly occupied Lhasa, the Qing had sought to integrate Tibet more closely into their imperial domain. Two Qing representatives became permanently stationed in Lhasa, and in 1792 a decree issued by the Qing effectively made the authority of these officials higher than that of the Dalai Lama.²⁶ As the nineteenth century progressed the Qing attempted a number of reforms in order to strengthen its power in Tibet, but Qing power weakened with the decline of the

²⁴ Kangding (康定) is the city's Chinese name. It has also been known, in Chinese, as Tachienlu (打箭炉). In Tibetan, the city is called Tartsendo (Dartsendo). Bull arrived in Kangding a few months after Patterson, having stayed longer in Chengdu in order to spend more time studying Chinese.

²⁵ Lin, *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier*, pp. 58-59; Jia Daquan, 川藏道的兴起与川藏关系的发展 [The rise of the Sichuan-Tibet route and the development of the Sichuan-Tibetan relationship], in Hong Quanhu (ed.), 兩岸少數民族問題 [Minority issues on both sides of the Taiwan Strait], (Taipei: Wenshizhe Publishing House, 1996).

²⁶ For a study of the incorporation of Tibet into the Qing domains, see Perdue, *China Marches West*.

dynasty.²⁷ Consequently, shortly after the Qing's collapse in 1911, the Tibetan government was able to expel all Chinese soldiers and officials from its territory.²⁸ Following its success in the Northern Expedition of 1926-1928, the Guomindang, claimed sovereignty over all former Qing domains, including Tibet.²⁹ However, Guomindang rule over western China was weak and only attained with the cooperation of local warlords, and so its claim to Tibet was never fully effected.



Map 9 – Southwest China during the Republican period. (Source: Lin, *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier*, p.4).

²⁷ An example of these efforts is examined in: Tashi Yongdzin, 浅谈康区德格土司与改土归流 [A brief discussion on the Derge native chieftans and the reform of the native Kham cheiftain system], 藏学研究论丛 [Tibetology Research Papers], 7 (1995), pp. 180-193.

²⁸ Lin, *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier*, pp. 8-9. For a study of the late-Qing campaigns in Tibet, see: Xiuyu Wang, *China's Last Imperial Frontier: Late Qing Expansion in Sichuan's Tibetan Borderlands* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).

²⁹ For the unification of China during the Northern Expedition (1926-1928), see: C. Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

With the government in Lhasa effectively operating independently throughout the Republican period³⁰, the focus of contestation was on Tibet's eastern border. Kangding was considered by the Guomindang to be the capital of the province of Xikang, a province that was created following the collapse of the Qing in 1911 (see Map 6).³¹ This administrative status, however, was effectively nominal, with the provincial governor, Liu Wenhui, who had previously been a warlord, operating loose overall control with the cooperation of a number of local chiefs.³² The province straddled the unclearly delimited border between Tibet and China, rather than clarifying its position. Attempts were made by the British to mediate a settlement in 1913, but the Simla Treaty, which referred to an Outer Tibet governed autonomously by Lhasa, and an Inner Tibet under Chinese rule, was rejected by the Chinese.³³ In 1918, again after mediation by Britain, a de facto boundary was established along the Jinsha River, a headwater of the Yangtze, which delimited Chinese and Tibetan areas of administration (the Jinsha River runs just to the east of Markham, on Map 7). However, Tibet's status remained ambiguous, something facilitated by the British in order to safeguard their Indian colonies. The British simultaneously recognised Chinese suzerainty over Tibet, which assured that Russia would be deterred from

³⁰ This appraisal is contested by Chinese historians. For example, see: Shi Shuo, 民国时期西藏独立论质疑 [Questioning the proposition of the independence of Tibet during the period of the Republic of China], 中国藏学 [China Tibetology] 1 (1995), pp. 3-16.

³¹ Xikang (西康) became an official province in 1939, prior to which it had been a Special Administrative Region. See: Liu Jun, 简论西藏建省 [A brief discussion on the establishment of Xikang province], in 民国档案与民国史学术讨论会论文集 [Collected papers on the Republican archives and Republican history], (Beijing: Dang'an chubanshe, 1988), pp. 321-331.

³² Liu Wenhui (刘文辉, 1895-1976) was a warlord in Sichuan. He allied himself with the Guomindang and served as Chairman of the Government of Sichuan from 1929-1935, and then as Governor of Xikang from 1939-1949. He switched allegiance to the Communists in 1949, and subsequently served a number of bureaucratic posts in the PRC. For studies of Liu's life, see: Peng Dixian (ed.), 刘文辉史话 [Historical narrative of Liu Wenhui], (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1990).

³³ For the Simla Treaty, see Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1989), p. 68. The CCP would later adopt this division, with Outer Tibet equating to today's Tibet Autonomous Region, and Inner Tibet incorporated into the provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu.

interfering in the region, but also insisted on Tibetan autonomy, so ensuring that Chinese influence in Tibet would be weak and the region could be kept as a buffer zone.³⁴



Map 10 – Tibet during the Republican period, from a Tibetan administrative perspective. Kangding is marked as Dartsendo, its Tibetan name. (Source: Carole McGranahan, *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. xviii).

From a Tibetan perspective, the western part of Xikang corresponded to the traditional Tibetan province of Kham (see Map 7, above).³⁵ This province, whose inhabitants are known as Khampas, has a distinct culture, including its own Tibetan dialect. Although loyal to the Dalai Lama, Kham had a history of uneasy relations

³⁴ For a study of the policy of British India towards Tibet, and its long-term political and cultural consequences, see: Dibyesh Anand, ‘Strategic Hypocrisy: The British Imperial Scripting of Tibet’s Geopolitical Identity’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 68:1 (2009), pp. 227-252. For the relations of British India with Tibet, see: Alex McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*. See also: Feng Mingzhu, 近代中英西藏交涉與川藏邊情 [Sino-British negotiations over the Tibetan issue and the Sichuan-Tibetan border during the modern era], (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1996).

³⁵ For recent studies of the history of Kham, see: Epstein (ed.), *Khams pa Histories*.

with the central government in Lhasa, where power was dominated by the main monasteries and the closed Lhasa aristocracy. Khampa chiefs held significant local authority, and Liu Wenhui and the Guomindang oscillated between a policy of attempting to force these chiefs into submission, and exploiting their differences with Lhasa in the hope of forming an alliance.³⁶

Missionary Medicine on the Margins

This complex political context is essential for understanding the development of the Echoes Tibet mission. As Bull and Patterson became more involved in missionary efforts in and around Kangding, medicine came to play an important function in their activities, and one of the primary means by which they were able to exploit the opportunities available to them along the colonial periphery. Their informal utilisation of medicine, and the spiritual implications they gave to healing, should not be seen as unusual for this period. Scholarship on missionary medicine in China has typically focussed on the expansion of missionary medical institutions and their modernising impact.³⁷ This reflects a broader narrative, noted by David Hardiman, whereby, during the first half of the twentieth century, missionary medicine became increasingly professionalised and secularised.³⁸ However, as Hardiman highlights, a less noted contemporary trend saw a reaction among some missionaries and

³⁶ Peng Wenbin, 'Frontier Process, Provincial Politics and Movements for Khampa Autonomy in the Republican Period', in Epstein, *Khams pa Histories*, pp. 57-84.

³⁷ For example: Kaiyi Chen, *Seeds from the West: St. John's Medical School, Shanghai, 1880-1952* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 2001); Guangqiu Xu, *American Doctors in Canton: Modernization in China, 1835-1935* (Somerset, NJ: Transaction, 2011); Sonya Grypma, *Healing Henan: Canadian Nurses at the North China Mission, 1888-1947* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008); Timothy Man-kong Wong, 'Local Voluntarism: The Medical Mission of the London Missionary Society in Hong Kong, 1842-1923', pp. 87-114; John R. Stanley, 'Professionalising the Rural Medical Mission in Weixian, 1890-1925', pp. 115-136, in Hardiman, (ed.). *Healing Bodies, Saving Souls*.

³⁸ Hardiman, 'Introduction', in Hardiman (ed.), *Healing Bodies, Saving Souls*, pp. 18-20.

indigenous Christians in which healing began to reclaim a more spiritual significance.³⁹ For example, in the case of China, Lian Xi has identified the practice of supernatural healing as one of the main characteristics of the independent Chinese Christian groups that emerged during the late Republican period.⁴⁰ Patterson's story serves to further demonstrate the continuing religious implications of medicine, not merely as a parallel development or reaction to secularisation, but as something that coexisted with and was in some cases fortified by the development of a more scientific and professionalised medical practice.

Prior to departing for China, Patterson had taken a one-year course at the Missionary School of Medicine (MSM) in London.⁴¹ The MSM had been founded in 1903 in order to provide short courses in medicine and surgery for non-medical missionary candidates, and was an initiative of the British Homeopathic Association. It was intended to provide basic training for missionaries who would be based in locations far from professional medical assistance, and attracted students from a variety of mission societies, although the homeopathic elements of the curriculum found opposition from some evangelicals who linked homeopathy with the occult.⁴² Although the training provided by the MSM was intended for self-treatment, A.E. Davies has shown how missionaries were sometimes able to provide medicines to successfully treat local peoples, often resulting in some advantage to the mission, or to the development of some kind of clinical service. As will be seen, this was the

³⁹ Hardiman, 'Introduction', pp. 21-22. For other studies highlighting the enduring spiritual significance of missionary medical work, see: Ronald Niezen, 'Healing and Conversion: Medical Evangelism in James Bay Cree Society', *Ethnohistory* 44 (1997), pp. 463-491; Kristin Burnett, *Taking Medicine: Women's Healing Work and Colonial Contact in Southern Alberta, 1880-1930* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Henrietta Harrison, 'Rethinking Missionaries and Medicine in China.'

⁴⁰ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p. 15.

⁴¹ For a history of the MSM, see: A.E. Davies, 'The History of MSM - Homeopathy and Natural Medicines', *Homeopathy* 96 (2007), pp. 52-59.

⁴² Davies, 'The History of MSM', pp. 53-54.

case for Patterson in Tibet. That this was not unprecedented for Echoes missionaries can be seen in how, in response to Patterson's reports of his growing medical purview, Echoes sent him £144 from their fund for 'non-professional Medical work' so that he could take more medicines with him into Tibet.⁴³ It can be seen, then, that although this was a period when missionary medical work became increasingly professionalised, the informal practice of medicine remained important for missionaries in more remote areas.⁴⁴

Although there was a hospital in Kangding run by Roman Catholic nuns, Patterson was frequently asked to treat those who 'could not or would not go to hospital, either through fear, suspicion, or superstition.'⁴⁵ While on trips in the surrounding countryside, he also found himself increasingly called upon to provide medical help, finding that reports of his perceived prowess were passed on by travelling caravans.⁴⁶ The prevalence of problems such as stomach worms, which could be easily treated with simple medicines, shows the immediate and striking impact that someone with even a little medical training could have. The use of penicillin to treat infected wounds also had a dramatic impact. Bull, although he had no medical training, learned some basic treatments from Patterson. In one letter he described how he had treated burns, eye infections, stitched a knee and pulled out teeth. He commented finally, 'The Tibetans see no distinction of course. It is I who realise I have had no medical training. As far as they are concerned I might be an MD.'⁴⁷

⁴³ Letter from Echoes to Patterson, 31 December 1948 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Patterson, Mr George and Mrs Margaret).

⁴⁴ For a recent study focussing on the informal practice of medicine by missionaries, see: Ruramisai Charumbira, 'Administering Medicine Without a License: Missionary Women in Rhodesia's Nursing History, 1890-1901', *Historian*, 68:2 (2006), pp. 241-266.

⁴⁵ Patterson, *God's Fool*, p. 130.

⁴⁶ Patterson, *God's Fool*, pp. 140-141. On this occasion the caravan had reported Patterson's cure of a sick horse, which he had successfully treated with some homeopathic pills.

⁴⁷ Circular letter from Bull, 10 August 1950 (Echoes of Service Papers, Mr Geoffrey T.).

One of the ways Patterson used modern medicine in Tibet was as a means of undermining the authority of the local lamas.⁴⁸ In *God's Fool*, Patterson described many of the cases he treated in graphic detail:

Next morning several patients had arrived while we were still at breakfast, news having got round already that the 'foreign doctor' had arrived. Most of them were only suffering from stomach complaints due to worms, but one little girl of about nine was brought forward with her arm in a horrible state of sepsis. She had been having treatment from the lamas for about four months, and from her finger-tips to above her elbow she was a mass of mud, dung, scabs, 'sacred paper' and pus. It was only after an hour's steady bathing in hot water, during which the child screamed all the time, that I discovered that the large whitish substance I had been trying to wash away, thinking it was coagulated paper pulp, was really about two inches of projecting and suppurating bone. The whole arm was in such a horrible mess that immediate amputation was the only answer, but the father refused permission on the grounds that it was better for her to die whole, even if she were young, rather than enter into the next life lacking an arm. After a long argument her father agreed to take her to the hospital in Kangting to see if removal of the bone itself would help at all.⁴⁹

In this account, Patterson's medical work becomes an indictment of the ignorance, irrationality and cruelty of the lamas. The horrific failure of their efforts to help the girl is graphically exposed here, as is the barrier that their teachings form to her receiving the treatment she needs.

This theme is prominent in *God's Fool*, Patterson's account of his time in Kham. The lamas are often shown to be present while Patterson is administering treatment, and he confronts them directly on a number of occasions. On one instance he challenges their instruction not to kill a dog that had mauled several villagers, and

⁴⁸ For histories of Tibetan Buddhism, see: Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (revised edition, Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2007); Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Ran Guangrong, 中国藏传佛教寺院 [A history of Tibetan Buddhism in China], (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1996).

⁴⁹ Patterson, *God's Fool*, p. 136.

when they explained that every living creature has a soul, he countered by insisting they then should not take the medicine for stomach worms that they had requested, as this would result in the death of the worms.⁵⁰ Patterson concluded:

Their reputation and power was being undermined by these foreigners who came with their wonder-working medicine and the new doctrine which told of forgiveness and salvation being free like the medicines they gave.

In this way Patterson was narrating his medical work as an encounter with Tibetan religion, exposing the cruel power of the lamas and depicting their regime as ripe for overthrowing. Though the confrontation is seen by Patterson in primitivist terms as a battle between Christian and Tibetan spiritual forces, it is a modernist discourse of science undermining superstition that he is utilising to further the mission. Here, he seeks to link the free distribution of medicine with the free grace of the gospel. However, Patterson would find it increasingly difficult to control understandings of the relation of the primitive to the modern as the mission progressed.

The Pandatsangs

The most significant impact of Bull and Patterson's medicine was in how it helped to establish a relationship with Topgyay and Rapga, who were brothers from the influential Pandatsang trading family.⁵¹ Topgyay first approached Patterson in Kangding, as he was seeking medical help for a heart problem and had heard reports of the successful treatments that Patterson had administered. Patterson began making frequent visits to Topgyay's house to monitor the progress of the treatment he had

⁵⁰ Patterson, *God's Fool*, pp. 142-146.

⁵¹ For studies of the Pandatsang family, see: McGranahan, 'Sa spang mda' gnam spang mda: Murder, History and Social Politics', in Epstein, *Khams pa Histories*, pp. 103-126; McGranahan, 'In Rapga's Library: the Texts and Times of a Rebel Tibetan Intellectual', *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, 15 (2005), pp. 253-274.

prescribed, and then later at Topgyay's request to treat his children against a measles epidemic that had spread through Kangding. The meetings became more regular after Patterson diagnosed Topgyay's wife with diabetes and gave her a daily injection of insulin.⁵² Topgyay eventually invited Patterson and Bull to accompany them when he returned into the interior of Tibet because, as Patterson described it, 'our medical knowledge would be useful to him and his people.'⁵³

The rise of the Pandatsangs had been recent and rapid, with Nyigyal, the grandfather of Topgyay and Rapga, taking advantage of concessions granted to him by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876-1933) to build up his trading empire into arguably the largest in Tibet. He came to hold a virtual monopoly on the trade in wool, which was Tibet's biggest export. Historically, the Khampa people have had an extensive involvement in trade and have produced many successful merchants, but this has rarely translated into political influence. However, through extensive patronage of the monasteries and by establishing powerful contacts in Lhasa, Nyigyal was able to convert his economic power into social and political influence.⁵⁴ In this way, the Pandatsangs have been identified as the leading members of an emergent Tibetan bourgeoisie, who were seeking to convert their wealth into an articulation for political representation and reform.⁵⁵

The Pandatsang trade empire was continued, following Nyigyal's death in 1921, by his son Nyima. On the latter's retirement in 1933, his half-brother Yangpel became the head of the family and further increased the economic and political clout of the

⁵² Patterson, *God's Fool*, pp. 183-187.

⁵³ Patterson, *God's Fool*, p. 185.

⁵⁴ For the rise of the Pandatsang family see: Carole McGranahan, 'Murder, History and Social Politics.'

⁵⁵ McGranahan, 'In Rapga's Library', p. 259.

Pandatsangs, gaining for himself important government posts.⁵⁶ Rapga and Topgyay were the younger brothers of Yangpel but, unlike him, they both came to take on roles outside of the establishment and frequently in opposition to it. Carole McGranahan has described Rapga (1902-1974) as a ‘rebel Tibetan intellectual.’⁵⁷ Rapga wrote about and campaigned for democratic reform in Tibet, a position that put him at odds with the government in Lhasa. Topgyay, head of the Pandatsang territories in their home town of Markham (see Map 7, above), also sought an alternative to the status quo in Lhasa. A captain in the Tibetan army, he led a failed revolt against Lhasa in 1934 in reaction to the arrest of Kumbela, a government official and friend of the Pandatsangs, who fell out of favour following the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See McGranahan, ‘In Rapga's Library’, pp. 261, 266.

⁵⁷ McGranahan, ‘In Rapga's Library’, p. 253.

⁵⁸ For Topgyay's revolt, see Goldstein, *The Demise of the Lamaist State*, pp. 177-185.

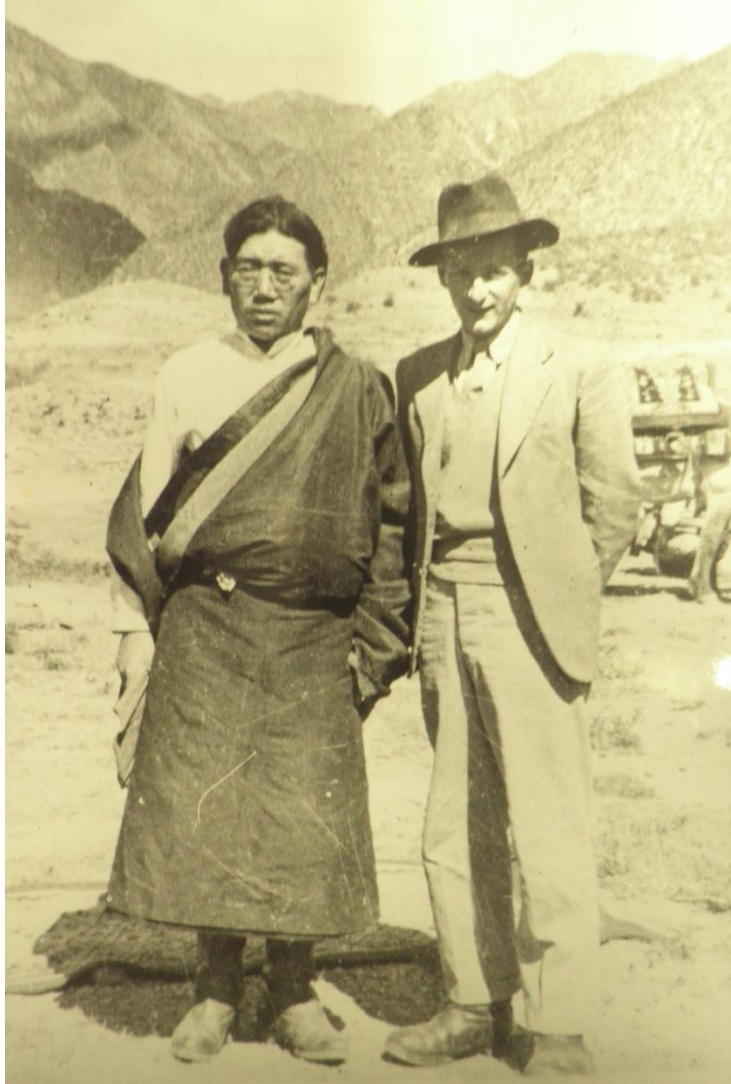


Figure 15 – Rapga Pandatsang (left), pictured with Robert Ford, taken c.1949-1950.⁵⁹ (Source: Geoffrey Bull Papers, GBP/3. In a study of missionary photography of the Luba of South East Belgian Congo, David Maxwell has highlighted an ambiguity in the ways that Luba subjects were represented. Some photographs had a clear missionary purpose, displaying the results of Christian conversion to supporters at home. The missionaries also used photography to de-mystify the practices of Luba diviners and sorcerers. However, many photos also revealed missionary sympathy for, and even appreciation of, Luba art and culture. While these different functions could often be separated into different publishing genres, they were not always so easily compartmentalised. Consequently, they reveal an ambiguity in the missionary encounter with the Luba.⁶⁰ A similar ambiguity is evident in many of Geoffrey Bull's photos. This is particularly the case in his portraits of Rapga and Topgyay (Figure 16), which are framed with a clear respect and even fondness for their subjects, something that is reflected in his writings also.

⁵⁹ Robert Ford (1923-) was a British radio operator who worked in Tibet. Having been part of the British mission to Lhasa in 1945, he returned to Tibet in 1947 and was given a post by the Tibetan government. In 1949 he was sent to Kham in order to establish a direct radio link with Lhasa, which is when the photo above (figure 14) would have been taken. Following the arrival of the Chinese Communists, Ford was arrested in 1950 and imprisoned until 1955, when he was released and expelled. Ford wrote a book about his experiences: *Captured in Tibet* (London: Pan Books, 1957).

⁶⁰ David Maxwell, 'Photography and the Religious Encounter: Ambiguity and Aesthetics in Missionary Representations of the Luba of South East Belgian Congo', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 53:1 (2011), pp. 38-74.



Figure 16 – Topgyay Pandatsang (in foreground). (Source: Geoffrey Bull Papers, GBP/3).

Rapga and Topgyay were two of a number of Khampa leaders who became active during the regency period following the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1933.⁶¹ They sought, primarily, an improved political representation for Kham, and this led them to oppose both the conservatism of the regency in Lhasa and the warlord administration of Xikang. Some, like Rapga and Topgyay, sought Kham autonomy and came to believe that this could best be achieved as part of a greater Chinese republic. Indeed, Rapga was a supporter of the philosophy of Sun Yat-sen, and translated the Three People's Principles into Tibetan.⁶² Both Rapga and Topgyay therefore moved towards a closer accommodation and involvement with Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomintang. Topgyay was made a colonel with responsibility for Kham, and Rapga started the Tibet Improvement Party (TIP) with support from the Guomintang.⁶³

Following the failed 1934 revolt, Rapga had spent time in China. He joined the Guomintang's Commission on Tibetan and Mongolian Affairs, and then moved to Kalimpong, on the India-Tibet border where, in 1939, he started the TIP. This party had as its aim the establishment of an autonomous Tibetan republic within the Republic of China. Rapga's activities elicited a hostile response not only from Lhasa but also from the British, who viewed the TIP as a threat to the status quo they had been endeavouring to maintain in Tibet. Attempts to extradite Rapga to Lhasa failed, as he now had a Chinese passport, but in 1947 the British succeeded in deporting

⁶¹ For a study of some of these groups, see: Peng, 'Movements for Khampa Autonomy', in Epstein, *Khams pa Histories*, pp. 57-84.

⁶² For Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) and his political thought, see: Marie-Claire Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen* (Paris: Fayard, 1994); Sidney Chang and Leonard Gordon, *All Under Heaven: Sun Yat-sen and His Revolutionary Thought* (Stanford University Press, 1991).

⁶³ For more on the development of Rapga's thinking, see McGranahan, 'In Rapga's Library.'

him to China, and this marked the end of the TIP.⁶⁴ Rapga now joined Topgyay in Kangding, and it is at this point that they encountered Bull and Patterson.

Bull, in a circular letter, described their growing acquaintance with the Pandatsang brothers in the following summary:

As the days went by new contacts began to open up amongst other Tibetans. Language became a little easier and with increased conversations and one or two very good opportunities for giving help in a medical way, we found ourselves rejoicing in an intimacy with certain influential Tibetan traders that we had not dreamed possible so soon... One day when we were in the house of the leading Tibetan in the town he asked us if we would be willing to travel to his own territory to preach and give medicine. His name is Bangdatshang. He has connections in Calcutta and Lhasa and owns considerable territory some 400 miles west of Kangting on both sides of the Tibetan border proper... this new offer seemed so good that we could not but think that although it was hidden from us, yet the Lord had His own coherency behind it for a future day. From then on the Lord began to dispose the heart of this very wealthy Tibetan towards us. Further, brother Patterson was enabled to help in the treatment of three of his children who contracted measles and two of whom nearly died. He took a great interest in our language study and constantly helped us in conversation in Tibetan. Thus has the contact with this man over the months been built up of the Lord, and the latest evidence of this is that he will now supply us for money here in exchange for Bills drawn on friends in India. This is a remarkable provision from the Lord for sterling is virtually unexchangeable now in W. China, the disruption of the entire country now being almost complete.⁶⁵

Once again, then, Bull and Patterson had overcome the limitations placed on their activities in their marginal location by gaining the support of influential local figures. Having proven their worth in the medical treatment they gave to Topgyay's family, they received his assistance in their language studies, and also materially in the lending of funds that they could later repay through contacts in Calcutta. As they prepared to move deeper into Tibet, this enabled them to buy in plentiful supplies, including spending 'some hundreds of pounds... on medical equipment.'⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Goldstein, *The Demise of the Lamaist State*, pp. 449-463.

⁶⁵ Circular letter from Bull, 14 October 1949 (Echoes of Service Papers, Mr Geoffrey T.).

⁶⁶ Letter from Bull to Echoes, 27 January 1949 (Echoes of Service Papers, Mr Geoffrey T.).

Patterson further described how Topgyay promised to provide food and shelter for the missionaries in return for their medical assistance. He also later built a house for them, in anticipation of their return once the conflict with China was over.⁶⁷ As has been seen, despite concerted efforts, Protestant missionaries had been unable to penetrate any further than the edges of Chinese-controlled Kham. In particular, widespread banditry had made travelling very dangerous, and the lamas also formed a strong opposition to any missionary presence. But Bull and Patterson's association with Topgyay provided them with protection against both of these. By travelling with Topgyay's caravan he had protection from Kham's bandits, who, he claimed, were all Topgyay's subjects anyway⁶⁸, and it seems also to have protected him from the opposition of the lamas. McGranhan has described how the servants in the Pandatsang household used to boast that they were untouchable, such was the power and influence of the family, and Bull and Patterson similarly benefitted from the protection that their relationship with Topgyay afforded them.⁶⁹

David Hardiman has described how medical missionaries often became involved in local power struggles as a result of the connection perceived between healing and political authority. In particular, where colonial power was weak or absent, medical missionaries often had to cooperate with local rulers in order to be able to operate freely. Hardiman uses the example of local princes in India, many of whom provided patronage to medical missionaries, particularly if the missionary had successfully treated someone in their household.⁷⁰ The relationship of Patterson and Bull with the

⁶⁷ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, p. 39.

⁶⁸ Patterson, *God's Fool*, p. 204.

⁶⁹ McGranahan, 'Murder, History and Social Politics', p. 103.

⁷⁰ Hardiman, *Healing Bodies, Saving Souls*, pp. 37-40. For other studies highlighting the ambiguous impact and reception of missionary medicine, particularly in marginal areas or among tribal peoples, see: Hardiman, *Missionaries and their Medicine: A Christian Modernity for Tribal India*

Pandatsang brothers similarly bears a close resemblance to that between a patron and a client. This certainly seems to be the view that Topgyay took of the situation. In one letter, Bull described his discomfort at finding that, having administered medicine to Topgyay's sick wife, Topgyay then also called in some lamas to make their contribution:

Whilst they continued to make the best of both religions as it were, I said that I thought it was highly improbable that God would heal his wife and that she would quite possibly die – if she did get better it was only by the grace of God looking down in pity upon her.⁷¹

Bull attempts here to distance his medical from his religious vocation. To Topgyay, however, the two were inseparable, and he sought to call upon all the spiritual forces at his disposal in order to bring about the healing of his wife.

Therefore, on the one hand, Bull and Patterson's relationship with the Pandatsangs reflected a traditional model whereby a local leader provided patronage to a variety of religious representatives, and sought to accrue benefits as a result of this. However, Rapga seems to have had a slightly different purpose in mind for the missionaries. As Bull commented in the same letter:

Large numbers of children stand around and gaze in wonder. The older folk tell us they have never seen foreigners before, or heard of Jesus, so the kiddies gaze at us in amazement. Pang [Topgyay] remarks to his brother [Rapga] how that very many children have come along; but his brother, a most astute man, brilliant in his perception of what Tibet needs, simply replies, 'Yes, and every one of them is uneducated.' He wants us to build a hospital, school and a 'church' (as he put it). The time may not be ripe for the first two but we shall look for the 'living stones' for the latter.⁷²

(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Shobana Shankar, 'Medical Missionaries and Modernizing Emirs in Colonial Hausaland: Leprosy Control and Native Authority in the 1930s', *Journal of African History*, 48:1 (2007), pp. 45-68; Charles M. Good Jr., *The Steamer Parish: The Rise and Fall of Missionary Medicine on an African Frontier* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁷¹ Circular letter from Bull, 6 May 1950 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Bull, Mr Geoffrey T.).

⁷² Circular letter from Bull, 6 May 1950.

While he was impressed with Rapga's assessment of Tibet's needs, Bull was keen to disassociate himself from Rapga's plans. The Brethren avoided the term 'church', preferring instead the New Testament designation 'assembly'. Bull was therefore alluding to Rapga's misunderstanding of their primitivist missionary agenda. However, in Rapga's eyes, the institutions of church, school and hospital were inseparable, and he sought to harness their reforming potential to his modernising agenda. Bull's efforts to control the meaning of the Echoes mission, with its primitivist intent and its use of modern medicine, was therefore being undone as the mission became appropriated by the agendas of Topgyay and Rapga.

Carole McGranahan has argued that the presence and activities of figures such as Rapga, who moved outside of Tibet and was engaging with new ideas and movements, is indicative of the significant social and cultural change that was taking place in pre-Communist Tibet.⁷³ The interest of Rapga in Bull and Patterson therefore reflected his concern for political reform and modernisation. Something of the direction of Rapga's thinking can be seen in a letter of Bull, where he describes how Rapga was studying Karl Marx's *Dialectical Materialism*, but that 'while interested from the point of philosophical discussion, he nevertheless repudiates and rejects completely the communist system.'⁷⁴ Bull and Patterson's alliance with the Pandatsang brothers was therefore one framed both by the family's traditional tribal authority and their growing articulation of bourgeois political influence, and was based around their perceived medical prowess.

⁷³ McGranahan, 'In Rapga's Library', p. 269.

⁷⁴ Circular letter from Bull, 6 May 1950.



Figure 17 – photo of Patterson, with caption: ‘Gospel literature being explained to herdsmen.’ (Source: Geoffrey Bull Papers, GBP/3). This, and Figure 17 (below), further serve to contextualise the Echoes mission, and in particular to show how Bull and Patterson’s association with the Pandatsang family allowed them to move freely among local herdsmen and to evangelise among them.



Figure 18 – photo with caption: ‘GP [George Patterson] with yak herdsman.’ (Source: Geoffrey Bull Papers, GBP/3).

Primitivism and Politics

In October 1949 Bull and Patterson left Kangding with the Pandatsang caravan. They travelled to the village of Po, where the Pandatsang family had a residence. A few months later, Bull expressed his concern in a letter about the potential confusion over his and Patterson's intentions:

We ourselves have been loaned a log cabin and for the present we shall live here. Later, if the valley is at all peaceful, we hope to build a larger log cabin as a retreat for study, a place for storage and an address for supplies. But we ourselves hardly expect to be here any great length of time, believing that our ministry is more concerned with the breaking open of the whole land and subcontinent to the Gospel of God at this time in its history, with the purpose always in view that those who already have been both called and sent might enter in. We greatly need your prayers as in such an enterprise and with our contact and intimacy with men in high places we are open often to political suspicion. Our one end is that Christ might be known in the vast areas where at present His Name is unknown. But men and governments often do not easily acknowledge the pureness of purpose of the servant of the Lord. Satan is anxious that we should be maligned and the message discredited.⁷⁵

Bull sought to preserve the 'pureness of purpose' of their mission from any suspicion that might arise from what he saw as their necessary dealings with 'men in high places.' The primitivist intent of their mission therefore had unavoidable political implications in such a contested frontier. The relationship of Bull and Patterson's missionary primitivism with the modern politics they became involved in is a complex one, and deserves further examination.

Prior to becoming a missionary Bull had served during World War II in the non-combatant corps. This was a compromise taken by a significant number of Brethren, by which they could be serving the war effort without having to take up arms.⁷⁶ But although Brethren held varying attitudes to conscription during World War II, the

⁷⁵ Circular letter from Bull, 6 May 1950.

⁷⁶ There was some disagreement among Brethren over whether it was acceptable for Christians to fight in World War II. For a summary of this debate, see Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, pp. 327-330.

movement as a whole was generally united in its opposition to involvement in politics, seeing it as compromising a Christian's allegiance to Christ's kingdom.⁷⁷ This makes Patterson's background an unusual one. He grew up in a Brethren family, but his father was a senior mining union activist, an activity most Brethren stayed clear of. Patterson left school at fourteen and went through a number of jobs, eventually gaining employment at a foundry. At eighteen he became a lathe-operator at an engineering works and, on the outbreak of World War II, was transferred to a shell factory. For the duration of the war he worked here and at a factory that produced tanks, with his work exempting him from military service. However, despite his family's political convictions, in going to Tibet Patterson intended to devote himself to a purely spiritual leading. In *God's Fool* he described how, as a teenager, he had weighed up the, as he saw them, opposing claims of Marx and Christ. He had rejected the former, and opted instead to become, in the words of the title of his second book, 'God's fool', that is, someone entirely submitted to God's directing.⁷⁸

So Bull and Patterson both arrived in Tibet committed to an idealised missionary primitivism that eschewed politics. However, while in Tibet they developed a different sort of primitivism that caused them increasingly to sympathise with the tribal rule of the Pandatsangs in Kham. Therefore, although they protested 'purity of purpose' they became increasingly implicated in the complex politics of the China-Tibet frontier.

⁷⁷ On Brethren and politics, see Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, pp. 249-252.

⁷⁸ Patterson, *God's Fool*, pp. 17-26.

Primitivism and Lamaism

In the interactions of Topgyay and Rapga Pandatsang with Bull and Patterson it is possible to see articulations of a Lamaist discourse.⁷⁹ An example of this is displayed in the first appendix to Patterson's book *Tragic Destiny*, where he provides a brief history of Tibet. It opens with the following:

Before Buddhism was introduced into Tibet, a country seven times the size of Britain or a third of the USA, it was a land noted for its warlike people. They had overrun large parts of Turkestan and India and penetrated into China as far as Sianfu in Shensi. In the middle of the 9th century a treaty of peace was concluded between China and Tibet on a footing of equality. They had already exacted heavy tribute from the Chinese Emperor, including the marriage of his daughter to a Tibetan King.

It was through the influence of this Chinese princess and a co-wife, also a princess, of Nepal, both ardent Buddhists, that Buddhism entered Tibet. From being one of the chief military powers of Asia Tibet gradually deteriorated into a nation largely robbed of vitality through the ramifications of the parasitical priesthood which developed and fastened on the vitals of the country. The form of Buddhism which was introduced into Tibet became mixed up with the earlier black practices of shamanistic Bonism, and gradually became a cloak for the worst forms of aggressive demon-worship by which the poor Tibetan was put in constant fear of attacks by thousands of malignant devils both in this life and the world to come. The 'lamas', or priests, multiplied rapidly, soon usurped authority in matters of state, and finally gained full control, overthrowing the king and assuming the kingship from among themselves. The 'priest-king' structure in Tibet, as in other lands, proved a retrograde movement, and the lamas ruled the country entirely in their own interests, keeping the 'laity' in ignorance and abject servitude, until the former virile Tibetans became the most priest-ridden people in the world, with fully a third of the nation's manhood being absorbed into the parasitic structure.⁸⁰

In this account Patterson compares lamas with priests, and describes a 'priest-king' structure which repressed the people. Here he was following others before him by drawing parallels between Tibet and pre-Reformation Europe. According to this formula, Tibetan Buddhism was a corrupt system that repressed the common people,

⁷⁹ For an examination of the origins and development of the concept of 'Lamaism', see Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 15-45.

⁸⁰ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, p. 189.

and that was in need of intervention and reform.⁸¹ Patterson was also echoing these sentiments when he wrote of the advance of Tibetan Buddhism as a degenerative process. Lopez has identified how Buddhologists saw Tibetan Buddhism as a deviation from Buddhism in its original form, to the extent that they considered Lamaism a more appropriate designation. Missionaries, on the other hand, tended to see the emergence of Tibetan religion as a logical outworking of the contradictions of Buddhism, as Patterson does here.⁸² Although the Lamaist discourse originated with and was perpetuated by Europeans, the case of Rapga suggests that Tibetans themselves, particularly in Kham, were also using this discourse to provide a modern critique of their own religious and political system. In a similar way, the Chinese Communists would use the same Lamaist rationale to justify their own sweeping reforms of Tibet's religion and government.⁸³

However, although Lamaism was predominantly articulated as a modern discourse, the passage above shows how it could also be narrated in primitivist terms. Patterson wrote that the original state of Tibet, prior to the arrival of Buddhism, was 'a land noted for its warlike people.' The spread of Tibetan Buddhism, however, resulted in a decline from this former position of strength. So while the reform of a corrupt and degenerative priesthood was, on the one hand, presented as a modern endeavour, the outcome would be that the primitive, 'warlike' Tibetan would be restored.

So, although Bull and Patterson repeated Lamaist critiques of Tibetan backwardness, they also depicted aspects of primitive Tibet in positive terms. For example, on their journey to Po, Bull found himself enamoured with the reign of Topgyay:

⁸¹ Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, pp. 26-34.

⁸² Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, pp. 36-38.

⁸³ Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, p. 44.

As we continued our journey from valley to valley, we were entertained in a very wealthy style. The inhabitants would gather and the representatives of 70 to 100 families would come forward and present gifts of grain and meat to the Pangs. It was a great experience to be in the midst of it all. A mounted party of lamas came a day or so's journey to meet us and an increasing number of riders joined us as we neared Po. So by the time we reached the high pass above the Po valley two hundred or more riders were gathered, in addition to the leading animals. We descended as a great host to the waiting valley. For about five years the great white house of Pangdatshang had stood more or less empty awaiting the return of its lord. Now in feudal style the tenants of the valley and the village gathered in hundreds to line the chalked route up to the huge doorway of the 'castle'.⁸⁴

Bull was impressed with the grandeur of the welcome that Topgyay received, and he used the image of a feudal lord returning to his castle in order to convey the scene he was witnessing.

Patterson similarly used a premodern reference point in order to paint a positive picture of Topgyay. In our interview, Patterson explained his ability to get on with Topgyay in terms of the affinity they were able to build as a result of Patterson's Scottish background. Having compared Topgyay to William Wallace, he elaborated further on the similarities between the Khampas and the Scots:

Each tribe, the tribal leaders were all independently selected, they gave their independent authority like they gave to Wallace, the tribal chieftains gave their independence to [Topgyay]; he ruled just by personality and performance... That was the only thing that held them together – they recognised him, he recognised them... There's this big division in Tibet, there are three provinces in Tibet, the one in the west is feudal, that is, it had an aristocracy and a monastic elite that ran the country. They – two, in the east, Kham, and Amdo to the north, near Mongolia - that was wholly tribal, still, and they had neither time nor patience with the feudal centre, not in any way, shape or form, you know, typical as the Scots operating under our own clan system... Also the language, strangely enough, the Kham version of the Tibetan language which is incomprehensible to the western feudal lot, and vice versa, actually... the language itself was very similar to Scots in that it was guttural, it's very guttural, and the 'r's were broadly our 'a's, and the 'r's were rolled, you know, and so it even sounded like Scots.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Circular letter from Bull, 6 May 1950.

⁸⁵ Interview with Patterson, 28 January 2010.

Patterson saw Topgyay's authority as being based on his 'personality and performance', and in particular the respect he gained from his superior martial skills. As has been seen, the rise of the Pandatsangs was recent, and based on their success in business, but Patterson credits it at a more basic level to their charisma and strength. As someone who had sought, by force of personality, to exploit the opportunities available to him at the colonial periphery, Patterson identified with Topgyay, and saw something essential and primitive in their shared approach to life. He interpreted this in terms of a similar cultural heritage that favoured a simple tribal system over an entrenched feudal and monastic aristocracy, and in so doing suggested a parallel between the relationship of Scotland and England, and that of Kham and Lhasa.

Though this was a far cry from the modern, industrial towns of Central Scotland that Patterson had grown up in, he identified a similar cultural heritage that allowed him to become accommodated among the Khampas. This echoed the experience of other missionaries from minority ethnicities who came to empathise with the cause of minority groups they encountered in the mission field. The growth of ethno-nationalist movements in Europe, with their emphasis on reviving and preserving traditional culture, could influence missionaries in finding affinities and sympathies with other perceived peripheral peoples and cultures.⁸⁶ Both Bull and Patterson produced illusory premodern reference points in order to familiarise Pandatsang and

⁸⁶ For example, Patrick Taveirne has identified how a mission in Mongolia run by the Belgian Fathers of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was increasingly made up of Flemish missionaries who were influenced by the growing Flemish ethno-nationalist movement. These missionaries transferred the language particularism and folklorism of the Flemish ethno-nationalist movement into an emphasis on studying local Mongol languages and customs in order to aid Catholic acculturation. See: Patrick Taveirne, *Han-Mongol Encounters and Missionary Endeavors: A History of Scheut in Ordos (Hetao), 1874–1911* (Leuven: Leuven University Press and the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, 2004), pp. 299-306.

the Khampas. Their primitivism therefore became expanded and took on new forms as a result of their encounters in Tibet.

Patterson displayed a particular affinity with Kham culture. On his arrival in Kangding, he gave the following description of his first encounter with Tibetans:

I looked interestedly at these people from the land that I hoped to enter and liked immediately what I saw. Tall, strongly-built men, with huge sheepskin-lined gowns worn carelessly over the shoulder, colourfully embroidered knee-high boots, fur hats tilted rakishly at the back of their heads; women with ankle-length gowns of sheepskin-lined coloured cloth, an apron of startling, contrasted colours, oiled black hair, braided with coloured silks and hanging down their backs in a long plait; men and women with faces strong, vivacious and quick to laugh.⁸⁷

Patterson's portrayal here emphasised the physical strength of the Khampas, with his description of their clothing creating an impression of a bold and unpretentious character. Patterson appears to have adapted readily to the Kham style of life, particularly out in the hills where he enjoyed the physicality of their existence. He wrote in detail in *God's Fool* about his participation in Khampa shooting and horse-riding competitions, and of the respect he won by his prowess in both these activities. As the above description indicates, Patterson also appreciated Khampa humour, and in particular that of Topgyay, who Patterson seems to have developed a particular bond with.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Patterson, *God's Fool*, p. 116.

⁸⁸ Patterson, *God's Fool*, pp. 193-195.



Figure 19 – photo with caption: ‘George joins in the horse racing.’ (Source: Geoffrey Bull Papers, GBP/3). Alongside his vivid descriptions of Khampa horse racing in *God’s Fool*, this photo illustrates Patterson’s enthusiasm for various aspects of Kham culture.

There is a certain ambivalence about Patterson's depictions of the primitivism of Kham society. As the descriptions of his medical practice earlier in the chapter demonstrated, he was determinedly unsentimental about some features of Khampa life, but he was indulgently enthusiastic about other aspects. One example of this is his depiction of Khampa violence. Other missionaries on Tibet's eastern border saw this as something dangerous, and a number hoped for increased Chinese involvement in the region in the hope that this would bring order and provide a safer and more secure context for mission work.⁸⁹ In contrast Patterson displayed, if not an approval of the violent side of Khampa life, then certainly an attitude that suggested he did not think it something to be apologised for. This can be seen with his Tibetan servant, Loshay. Patterson described on one occasion how, while travelling in the Pandatsang caravan, Loshay went searching for one of Patterson's bowls that had gone missing, and that he suspected has been stolen by one of Topgyay's muleteers. On discovering that his suspicions were correct a fight broke out between Loshay and the muleteer, which ended with Loshay throwing a yak's horn, which hit the muleteer 'in the middle of the forehead, splitting his skull like an eggshell.'⁹⁰ On hearing of the incident Topgyay decided that Loshay had been within his rights to kill the man. Patterson offered to treat the muleteer, only to find that he had disappeared. The whole episode is narrated in a slightly light-hearted tone, and there is a sense that Patterson saw a kind of innocence in this uncompromising world of Khampa justice.

Bull and Patterson therefore had a complex and ambivalent relationship with the Khampa people they sought to convert. Topgyay sought to appropriate their healing

⁸⁹ Bray, 'Missionary Images of Tibet', pp. 29-30.

⁹⁰ Patterson, *God's Fool*, p. 219.

and spiritual skills in order to bolster his personal rule, whereas Rapga saw them as allies in his modernising ambitions. Although Bull and Patterson sympathised with Rapga's agenda, they sought to distance themselves from his plans in fear of being diverted from their primitivist designs. However, their primitivist worldview resulted in them increasingly sympathising with the Khampa cause, and justifying Pandatsang rule. As Bull explained:

It is interesting to see how the people really seem to love Pang [Topgyay] himself and I am beginning to see more clearly how terribly mistaken political efforts are. It is not the form of government that makes the people happy but the people who govern. So that it is not a question of Feudalism, or Socialism, Democracy, or Communism but, that whoever the powers are that be ordained of God, they are responsible to Him to rule the people beneficently. Thus beneficent rule say under a feudal lord is better than a ruthless rule under a Communistic regime, or to be under a beneficent dictator is better than to be under a muddles[sic] democracy. When He comes, whose right it is to reign, He will be an absolute monarch, but the magnificence and goodness of His administration will silence pleas for democratic rule.⁹¹

Bull sees something primitive and right about Topgyay's rule. He sees the rule of a strong, respected and charismatic leader as being superior to a more sophisticated political system with incompetent or uncaring rulers. In this framework, it is modern forms of government that are seen as most at odds with missionary primitivism, and there appears scope for cooperation with friendly 'feudal lords'.

Bull, Patterson and the Pandatsang Revolution

As Bull and Patterson became closely acquainted with the Pandatsang brothers, they also became privy to the brothers' new plans for revolution. Seeking to take advantage of the disintegration of the Guomindang, Topgyay and Rapga planned to

⁹¹ Circular letter from Bull, 6 May 1950.

take control of Kham, while two collaborators in the neighbouring province of Amdo would do the same there. They would then demand the recognition and cooperation of the Lhasa government, and declare Tibetan independence.⁹² However, in January 1950 a communication was sent from the Chinese Communists to the Pandatsang brothers. It offered them support for their planned revolt against Lhasa on condition that the whole of Tibet be then incorporated into the People's Republic of China (PRC). If they refused then the PRC would proceed to liberate Tibet themselves. Topgyay and Rapga opted to move further into Tibet in order to give themselves time to consider their options. They then asked Patterson to go on their behalf to India to communicate with officials from Lhasa, and to try to persuade Indian and Western officials to intervene on their behalf. He would then return to Tibet with a fresh supply of medicines.⁹³

As a result of this development, Patterson had to make a conscious decision about whether or not he was to engage directly in politics, and a chapter in *God's Fool* is devoted to the protracted thought-process that led him to finally agree to Topgyay's request. His conviction that he should become involved came from a vision he received, in which he claimed to have heard the command of God:

You are the only person with the knowledge of Chinese Communist plans to take over Tibet and the other countries of Asia. No one else knows, no one even suspects that China is making for India. Therefore you will go to India take the knowledge you have gained to the authorities there and I will use you to stop the Communist advance, to frustrate the Communist plans for taking over Asia, for I have sent you there and no man or nation can withstand me. I only require that you should be obedient to my every word.⁹⁴

He struggles with this apparent instruction, seeing it as contrary to his belief in

Christian non-participation in politics:

⁹² Patterson, *God's Fool*, pp. 183-189.

⁹³ Patterson, *God's Fool*, pp. 246-248.

⁹⁴ Patterson, *God's Fool*, p. 241.

Modern politics were not based on principle, but expediency... And all parties sought power. How they got it did not greatly concern them... Democracy – “the form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people collectively and is administered by them or by officers appointed by them” – was the inevitable corollary of the glorification of the human being. Communism, or the doctrine of dialectical materialism, was simply a courageous recognition of the implications of such a belief... When Christ came as king to set up His kingdom in peace and righteousness and love then the faithful Christian would share in a government that involved no compromise and admitted no expediency. Till then His kingdom was not of this world and therefore His disciples could not fight – either on the battlefields for the ambitions of governments, or at the polls for the ambitions of parties.⁹⁵

Patterson’s convictions about modern politics are based on a viewpoint that sees it as ‘the glorification of the human being’, and therefore contrary to Christianity, and having its logical conclusion in communism. However, he concludes that to remain entirely apart from politics was neither possible nor desirable:

When my will was finally broken, and the storm of protest stilled, the voice of God came once more calmly and reasonably to point out that I had for some time been aware of, and contending, the inherently ‘political’ character of the modern professional missionaries with their government protection, title deeds to houses and lands, and imposition of western culture and Scriptural interpretation in the countries to which they worked; so that my argument about participating in politics could only be one of degree. As far as God was concerned the modern word ‘missionary’ meant nothing at all and I could call myself what I liked as long as I remained obedient to the heavenly vision and divine control. On the other hand, I seemed to have forgotten that Communism was not politics but a religion. A religion with a hierarchy and doctrine, faith and vision, dogmas and heresies. A militant belief that tolerated no opposition, sought converts and advocated conquest, and openly proclaimed the annihilation of anything that postulated the thought of God. I, and all other Christians, would have to face this issue some time for there could be no co-existence. Some time, somewhere, Christians would be able to run away from Communism no longer and could have to stand and face the implications of defiance. I was simply being asked to do it now instead of some years later.⁹⁶

Despite his criticism of imperialist missionaries, Patterson decided that some kind of political engagement was unavoidable. He also rationalised that, as Communism was opposed to Christianity, some kind of confrontation was inevitable. By this process

⁹⁵ Patterson, *God’s Fool*, pp. 242-243.

⁹⁶ Patterson, *God’s Fool*, pp. 245-246.

of reasoning, then, modern politics was identified as a rejection of faith in God, and seen as leading ultimately to Communism. This, in turn, became identified with China, whose advances on Tibet would therefore have to be opposed. In this way, Patterson's advocacy of primitivist Christianity was rearticulated into a direct involvement in modern politics. China came to embody all that he detested about modernity and, almost by default, Patterson found himself defending a culture that he originally set out to convert.

The opposition of Christianity and Marxism was therefore central to Patterson's justification for accepting his new role. However, in *Patterson of Tibet*, his autobiography published in 2004, Patterson outlined his reasons again but was less specific about his call to oppose Communism, citing instead a general call for Christians to be opposing 'every high thing that exalts itself against God.'⁹⁷ Patterson gave a similar explanation in our interview. I suggested to Patterson that his family background, with his father's mining union involvement, might have made him more willing to engage politically in Tibet. He agreed, but he also insisted that his decision to support the Khampas was primarily a response to circumstances as he encountered them, and not made out of a preconceived political conviction:

It wasn't just theoretical, there were factual circumstances taking place around me, the life and death of the Tibetans themselves, you know. The clash of divine commitment and political reality was increasing all the time, you know, that God sent me to Tibet, that the Tibetans wanted me to stay, but China didn't, so I was going to have to identify with Tibet and not China. It wasn't because of a political decision that feudal politics were better, that tribal politics were better than feudal, feudal politics were better than modern politics... These decisions, were forced upon me. In a decisive sense I didn't have to make any decisions on that because they were all part of an emerging set of circumstances in which I was comfortable being there with God.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ George N. Patterson, *Patterson of Tibet: The Death of a Nation*, (Geneva: The Long Riders' Guild Press, 2004), pp. 104-108.

⁹⁸ Interview with Patterson, 28 January 2010.

Patterson here recognised that the situation he encountered brought about a conflict of interests between his missionary calling and the political situation. This he resolved through reasoning that saw the continuation of his mission to Tibet most likely to be achieved if he backed Tibet against China. By this means, he continues to understand his involvement not as a politically-motivated one, but rather an obedience to the will of God, stemming from his primitivist faith.

This is certainly a more pragmatic interpretation of his actions than is apparent in *God's Fool*, where the spread of Communism across Asia were at the forefront of his understanding of his mission. This consciousness of a battle between Christ and Marx is one of the keys of the narrative framework for *God's Fool*, but provides less salience in his more recent reflections. This is perhaps because of his failure to prevent Tibet's annexation, and as a result of the subsequent decline of Communism, which make his predictions about the Communist conquest of Asia seem a little premature. In this way, Patterson has had to alter his narrative of this section of his life-story in order try to attain composure, which still appears somewhat elusive in the uneasy and open-ended explanation above.

Following Patterson's departure, Bull travelled further into Tibet with Rapga, to the town of Markham (see Map 7). In so doing, they crossed the Jinsha River, which marked the boundary between Chinese-controlled and Lhasa-controlled Tibet. Consequently, Rapga then went ahead while Bull waited in Markham to receive permission to travel on to Lhasa. While he was waiting the Chinese forces began their entry into Tibet, and in October 1950 they crossed the Jinsha River and

advanced towards Markham.⁹⁹ The Tibetan Governor of Kham, who was stationed in the town, decided to surrender to the Chinese, and Bull went with him as his interpreter. Bull was arrested following this. His connections with the Pandatsangs led the Chinese to doubt that he was merely a missionary, and so he was imprisoned for three years, during which time he was interrogated as a spy and subjected to political re-education. He was eventually expelled from China, and released in December 1953.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

The Echoes mission to Tibet demonstrates again how it is at the margins that the presence and impact of missionary primitivism can most clearly be seen. The margins held a particular appeal to missionary primitivists. Both Bull and Patterson relished the prospect of preaching in a remote land as yet untouched by Christian witness, and the spiritual confrontation they would initiate there with Tibetan Buddhism. So on the one hand the margins provided arenas where the ideals of missionary primitivism could best be realised. But they were also places where the modernity of missionaries became more pronounced, and where the tensions and inconsistencies in their primitivist identity became more apparent. In particular, Patterson and Bull's use of modern medicine and their involvement in modern political movements challenged the integrity of primitivist discourses, in ways that produced unexpected outcomes. The stories of Bull and Patterson highlight also how

⁹⁹ For the advance of the People's Liberation Army into Tibet, see: Goldstein. *A History of Modern Tibet, 1951-1955*; Carole McGranahan, *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 67-88.

¹⁰⁰ The account of his time in prison formed the main subject of his subsequent book, *When Iron Gates Yield*.

missionary primitivists were often individualists and visionaries, whose personal charisma could give birth to a variety of initiatives, sometimes directly at odds with their original vocation.

The Echoes mission to Tibet speaks more broadly to our understanding of missionaries and Chinese modernity. The dependence of this mission on the Little Flock complicates historical narratives of modern medicine, both in terms of the direction of modernising influences, and the emphasis on a process of secularisation and professionalization. Similarly, Bull and Patterson's dependence on local bourgeois groups, in the form of the Little Flock and then the Pandatsang family, presents an unexpected configuration of missionary activity and modernity in China. Rather than missionaries bringing modernity to China, the Echoes mission to Tibet shows a situation where a primitivist mission was being enabled and appropriated by locally-based modernising forces.

The ways that Bull and Patterson differentiated Tibet from the rest of China also speaks to the growing scholarship on the China-Tibet frontier. Their involvement with the Pandatsangs initially placed Bull and Patterson within a modernising movement that saw advantage in greater cooperation between Tibet and China, at the expense of the traditional government in Lhasa. However, their sympathy for Tibet's plight led them both to produce accounts of Tibet that depicted primitive Tibetan society favourably in contrast with Chinese Communist modernity. In this way, their stories serve to bring a new perspective to the complexities of the China-Tibet border. They also draw attention to the ways that the missionary experience of the

Communist rise to power contributed to a new understanding of the relationship between China and Tibet. This will be examined further in the following chapter.

5) Missionary Primitivism versus Chinese Modernity: Fallout from the Withdrawal from China

Introduction

This chapter will examine the Echoes withdrawal from China and its aftermath, in order to assess the impact this had on missionary primitivism. It will be argued that the ascent to power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)¹ and the subsequent missionary withdrawal led to missionary primitivism being defined increasingly in opposition to Chinese modernity, which was now identified with an atheist regime that did not tolerate missionary work. Departing Echoes missionaries, particularly those who had suffered mistreatment at Communist hands, produced written accounts of their experiences that were framed in terms of this opposition. Chinese Christians also became appropriated into these narratives, and held up as examples of faithfulness under persecution.² With China now closed as a missionary field, many Echoes missionaries relocated to South-East Asia, where they sought to continue their work. A few, however, saw the rise of Communism in China as

¹ For studies of the transition to Communist rule, see: Liao Kai-lung, *From Yanan to Peking; The Chinese People's War of Liberation, From Reconstruction to First Five-Year Plan* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1954); Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (eds.), *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); David Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); Li Hua-Yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948-1953* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Kenneth Liberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin, 1949-1952* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); Tony Saich and Hans J. van de Ven (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995).

² For example: Angus Kinnear, *Against the Tide* (revised edition, Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2005); Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men* (Sevenoaks: Christian Focus, 2000); Lyall, *Come Wind Come Fire: The Present Experience of the Church in China* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1961); Lyall, *Red Sky at Night: Communism Confronts Christianity in China* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969); George N. Patterson, *Christianity in Communist China* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1969).

requiring a rethinking of the missionary vocation. In particular, George Patterson's attempts to revive a radical missionary primitivism led him into a variety of activities, all framed in reaction to the rise of an aggressive, atheistic China.³

There is very little academic literature that deals with the ending of Christian missions in China, and so this chapter will fill a clear gap. Those studies that do exist are shaped by historical narratives that document the rise of the Chinese nation, and therefore give coverage to missions as part of a wider focus on the ending of the foreign presence.⁴ Very few of these studies go beyond this to examine the later activities of the withdrawn China missionaries, or indeed of other parts of the foreign presence.⁵ A number of recent studies have examined the experiences of Chinese Christians in the early years of Communist rule, but these also do not consider the afterlife of the missionaries.⁶ There is a growing body of scholarship on decolonisation, but this tends to focus on those regions where the British imperial presence was strongest, and so gives little coverage to China.⁷ Despite a growing

³ Patterson's account of the Tibet mission and his subsequent activities were recorded in his books: *Tibetan Journey* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952); *God's Fool* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954); *Up and Down Asia* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956); *Tragic Destiny* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958); *Tibet in Revolt* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960). His autobiography, *Patterson of Tibet: The Death of a Nation*, (Geneva: The Long Riders' Guild Press, 2004), documents the subsequent decades.

⁴ See: Beverley Hooper, *China Stands Up: Ending the Western Presence, 1948-1950* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986); Robert Bickers, *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism, 1900-1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

⁵ A notable exception is George Hood, *Neither Bang nor Whimper: The End of a Missionary Era in China* (Singapore: Presbyterian Church in Singapore, 1991), which examines the reactions of the home boards of British missionary societies to the withdrawal.

⁶ E.g.: Daniel H. Bays, 'Foreign Missions and Indigenous Protestant Leaders in China, 1920-1955: Identity and Loyalty in an Age of Powerful Nationalism', in Brian Stanley (ed.), *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), pp. 144-164; Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, 'Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement in Maoist China', *Church History* 74:1 (2005), pp. 68-96; Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁷ For recent studies of decolonisation in the case of the British Empire, see: John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988); Nicholas J. White, *Decolonisation: The British Experience since 1945* (London: Longman, 1999); Frank Heinlein, *British Government Policy and Decolonisation 1945-1963* (London: Frank Cass, 2002); L. J. Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to a Post-Imperial World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002); Roy Douglas, *Liquidation of Empire: The Decline of the British Empire* (Basingstoke:

concern to understand how decolonisation impacted British culture and society, missionaries have received little attention in recent studies.⁸ There is some scholarship that specifically examines missionaries and decolonisation, but this mostly focuses on contexts where an ongoing missionary work was possible under postcolonial governments.⁹ Examining the experiences of China missionaries beyond the withdrawal is important because it allows for a more complete picture of the legacy of the missionary encounter. Current scholarship focuses on the Christianity left behind by the missionaries¹⁰, but it is vital also to consider the enduring influences that China has had on the West as a result of the aftermath of the missionary withdrawal.

The Final Years of the Echoes Mission to China

Following the end of World War II, nineteen new Echoes recruits arrived in China. Of the forty-eight missionaries there prior to the outbreak of war, thirty-one returned following the end of the conflict. The new recruits therefore more than compensated for the seventeen who had not returned, and brought the total number of China missionaries to fifty. However, the ensuing civil war, which was initially fought

Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Martin Lynn (ed.), *The British Empire in the 1950s: Retreat or Revival?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918–1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸ For example: Stuart Ward (ed.), *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁹ See, e.g.: Brian Stanley (ed.), *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire*; John Stuart, *British Missionaries and the End of Empire: East, Central, and Southern Africa, 1939-1964* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011); David Maxwell, 'Decolonization', pp. 285-305; and Robert Edgar, 'New Religious Movements', pp. 216-237, in Norman Etherington (ed.), *Missions and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ For example: Bays, 'Foreign Missions and Indigenous Protestant Leaders'; Lee, 'Watchman Nee and Maoist China'; Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*.

around the CCP strongholds in the north and north-east of the country, meant that attempts to return to the mission fields in eastern Shandong and Rehe soon had to be aborted, although limited work in areas of Inner Mongolia would be possible for a little while longer. However, the work in Jiangxi, in south China, was gradually restarted from 1946. In addition to this, new missions were commenced further west in Guizhou province (贵州), started by John and Betty McGehee in 1947, and in Tibet, with George Patterson and Geoffrey Bull setting out that same year. The first part of this chapter will focus on the experiences of several workers from the missions in Jiangxi and Guizhou.

After crossing the Yangtze River on 21 April 1949, Communist forces made rapid progress south. Jiangxi and Guizhou were both taken by the end of that year, with very little resistance offered. The missionaries were initially unaffected by the change of government, and determined to stay on as long as they could.¹¹ For example, in an article by Frederick Pucknell in the July-September 1949 edition of the *Echoes Quarterly Review* magazine¹², he stated: ‘whatever may be the ultimate situation in this part of China, our commission is to preach the Gospel irrespective of what Government rules the country, or what political party is in power.’¹³ Frederick Pucknell, and his wife Sybil, had arrived in China from Britain independently in 1924, marrying in 1928. They had settled in Tonggu¹⁴ in Jiangxi in 1929, where they remained until being evacuated in 1944. After making short trips back in 1946 and 1947 to survey the state of the work, they had moved back to Tonggu again in 1948.

¹¹ The formal proclamation of the Peoples’ Republic of China took place in Beijing on 1 October 1949.

¹² *Echoes Quarterly Review* ran from 1948-1979.

¹³ F. W. Pucknell, “North-West Kiangsi, Central China”, *Echoes Quarterly Review* 1:4 (July-September 1949), p. 114.

¹⁴ Tonggu (铜鼓) is now administered as a county, under the jurisdiction of the prefecture-level city of Yichun (宜春).

A similar viewpoint was expressed by John McGehee, in Guizhou province, who in February 1949 wrote: ‘it would be foolish to deny that the situation in China is serious’ but that nonetheless ‘wide open doors and relatively quiet conditions at present lead us to make no other plans than to go forward with the work as long as the Lord enables.’¹⁵ John and Betty McGehee first came to China from Memphis, Tennessee in 1940, but soon departed as a result of the unstable conditions. They returned in 1947 and began working in Guiyang (贵阳), the capital of Guizhou province, and were joined later by three other Echoes missionaries. When Guiyang came under Communist control, in November 1949, they found that their work was tolerated and even encouraged. However, John McGehee’s comment in March 1950 that their medical work ‘has the approval of the government as it ministers to the physical needs of the class of people they are particularly interested in’¹⁶ suggests why, at least initially, some aspects of missionary work received support from local officials.¹⁷

Indeed, this proved to be a short respite as the Communists consolidated their control over these inland provinces. In Yifeng (宜丰) in Jiangxi, George Hanlon, a new Echoes recruit, recalled being impressed by the victorious Communist troops, who were disciplined, and courteous towards the people, and allowed the missionaries to

¹⁵ Letter from John McGehee to Echoes, 8 February 1949 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/McGehee, Mr John Jethro and Mrs Betty, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester).

¹⁶ Letter from John McGehee to Echoes, 16 March 1950, (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/McGehee, Mr John Jethro and Mrs Betty).

¹⁷ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker has argued that the Communists had been willing to allow missionaries to stay, but that the Korean War (1950-1953) brought about a hardening of policy towards foreigners. (Tucker, ‘An Unlikely Peace: American Missionaries and the Chinese Communists, 1948-1950’, *The Pacific Historical Review* 1 (1976), pp. 97-116). However, Hooper has convincingly responded to this, arguing that the policy of the PRC towards the foreign presence was preconceived and settled, and that it was out of expediency that missionaries were allowed a brief leave of stay (Hooper, *China Stands Up*).

continue their activities without hindrance. However, conditions began to be made gradually more difficult for them. Hanlon recalls how an original Communist declaration of freedom of religion (宗教自由) was altered soon after to freedom of faith (信教自由), with the latter implying a distinction between beliefs and activities. This, according to Hanlon, was the beginning of growing Communist pressure on their public activities. Shortly after this he was instructed to provide a written transcript of his sermons in advance of church meetings, and Communist officials would attend the services to check that this script was adhered to. The missionaries were then told that meetings could no longer continue in their main hall, and so they had to relocate to a smaller room attached to Hanlon's house. Hanlon himself was summoned to the police station on a number of occasions for long periods of questioning, and as the missionaries came increasingly under suspicion, so also did church activities associated with them. They decided to leave Yifeng in December 1950, concluding that their continued presence was a danger to the church.¹⁸

Similar stories emerge from the accounts of other Echoes missionaries, with pressure being put on churches as part of anti-imperialist campaigns. The Pucknells were among the last of the Echoes missionaries to leave Jiangxi, moving to Nanchang in 1950 to take responsibility for tying up the mission in the province, before departing in 1951. By the time they left the Chinese Christians were being made to hold instruction classes, attend parades and anti-foreign rallies, and hold meetings 'to denounce American imperialism and rearmament of Japan... as well as those charged as reactionaries.'¹⁹ The Pucknells themselves came under close surveillance by the

¹⁸ Interview with George Hanlon, 14 June 2011.

¹⁹ Letter from Frederick Pucknell to Echoes, 23 May 1951 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Pucknell, Mr Frederick W. and Mrs Sybil, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester).

authorities and faced accusations of spying. The meetings of the assembly also came under restrictions and the Chinese Christians were discouraged from associating with the missionaries.

In Guiyang, Betty McGehee wrote that in January 1951 the missionaries had ‘voluntarily ceased attending meetings as much pressure was being brought on the churches to root out “imperialism.”’²⁰ She had subsequently decided to apply for exit permits, noting that ‘it is evident now that there is no place in the new economy for the foreign missionary.’²¹ However, her husband, along with A.J. Clarke, another Echoes missionary in the city, was arrested on charges of espionage. They were interrogated and imprisoned for almost a year before finally being released in September 1952 and allowed to leave the country. The final Echoes missionary to leave China was Geoffrey Bull. He was arrested in October 1950, following the Chinese entry into Tibet, and was imprisoned for over three years, being finally released and expelled in December 1953.

A resolve to continue as long as they were tolerated by the incoming Communist government therefore gradually gave way to an acceptance that missionary work was no longer tenable in China. With a few exceptions, the missionaries were not forced to leave, but the growing anti-imperialist emphasis in Communist policy meant that they came to see that their own position in China was no longer viable.

²⁰ Letter from Betty McGehee to Echoes, 29 September 1951 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/McGehee, Mr John Jethro and Mrs Betty).

²¹ Letter from Betty McGehee to Echoes, 3 January 1951 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/McGehee, Mr John Jethro and Mrs Betty).

Sovereignty and Redeployment: Immediate Reactions to Withdrawal

The departing missionaries produced a significant volume of written reaction to what was, for them, a traumatic turn of events. Frederick Pucknell wrote a series of articles narrating the history of the Echoes mission in Jiangxi province, which were published in 1953 in the Brethren periodical *The Believers' Magazine*. The following extract, coming at the end of the final article, gives a good indication of the general direction of the narrative:

...with the evacuation of the last missionary from this field, sixty-six years of missionary work came to an end. Whether it will ever again be possible to resume the work remains to be seen, but at present there would seem to be very little hope of such an eventuality. For all that has been done through the years, unfeigned thanks and praise must be given to the Lord who has been pleased to bless the work of His servants and use them to win souls for Him.²²

The withdrawal from China was clearly felt as an unexpected and painful event, and the rapid response, in terms of history writing, reflected the need to make sense of it, and to incorporate it into primitivist narratives. While disappointed at having to leave their work, the Echoes missionaries were determined to give a positive tone to their reflections. In the above extract, Pucknell was emphasising how it was important to acknowledge God's sovereignty over events.

This narration of the China withdrawal within this providential narrative was accompanied by the swift redeployment of the missionaries. Out of the fifty Echoes missionaries who returned to China following the end of World War II, forty-seven were now redeployed to new fields, with forty-five of these going to locations in East and South-East Asia. Frederick and Sybil Pucknell and George and Phyllis

²² E.E. Clarke and F.W. Pucknell, 'A Call to Prayer for China: The Closing Years – Chapter XI', *The Believer's Magazine* 790 (July 1954), pp. 137, 143.

Hanlon continued their missionary careers by relocating to Borneo and working among the Chinese population there. In this way, the Echoes narratives sought to emphasise continuity, overcoming the trauma of the withdrawal by highlighting the divine oversight of events and seeking to find new arenas where mission work could be continued. Other evangelical missions also took this approach. Most notably, the CIM was renamed the Overseas Missionary Fellowship in 1964, having redeployed all its missionaries across East and Southeast Asia. The withdrawal was narrated in *China: The Reluctant Exodus*, written by Phyllis Thompson and published in 1979. While expressing grief and disappointment at the termination of their work, the book is primarily a testament to God's faithfulness and power in bringing all the CIM missionaries safely out of China.²³

However, other China missionaries took a different view of the withdrawal. They saw their departure as indicating the failure of their efforts, for which they were being judged by God. One of the most influential responses was by David Paton of the Church Missionary Society, whose 1953 book was entitled *Christian Missions and the Judgement of God*. Paton condemned a number of shortcomings, as he saw them, of the China missions, including the failure of the social institutions of the missions to effectively challenge the injustices prevalent in Chinese society; the continuing Western character of the churches in China; and the differences in standards of living between missionaries and Chinese.²⁴

Missionary reactions therefore converged on two poles. As one reviewer of Paton's work commented:

²³ Phyllis Thompson, *China: The Reluctant Exodus* (Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979).

²⁴ David Paton, *Christian Missions and the Judgement of God* (London: SCM Press, 1953).

There has been no dearth of post-mortems since the closing of China to the Christian mission. While a few persist in the attitude of 'wait until the dust settles' and then continue missions as usual, more realistic missionary statesmen, haunted by the fear that what has happened in China may soon follow in India and Africa, are taking seriously the possibility that 'God's judgment is being executed upon His Church by political movements which are anti-Christian.'²⁵

Most of the Echoes missionaries took the former view. It would be wrong to conclude that they blithely sought to carry on just as before, but there was nevertheless an insistence that their essential mandate had not changed. However, the withdrawal from China had thrown up questions about the relation of missionaries to politics. The extent to which this created tensions within Echoes can be seen in the different paths taken by Geoffrey Bull and George Patterson following the termination of their mission to Tibet.

Geoffrey Bull and George Patterson: Diverging Paths

Patterson had left Kham on 17th January 1950, accompanied by Loshay, his Tibetan servant. They completed the journey to India in slightly less than two months, arriving at the start of March.²⁶ He went to Calcutta, arriving on 8th March, where he met with British, US and Indian officials and passed on his news of an imminent Chinese invasion of Tibet. He then went to Kalimpong, a town just inside the India-Tibet border which was an important centre for trade between India and Tibet. Here he was able to meet Shakabpa, a Tibetan government official who was in Kalimpong

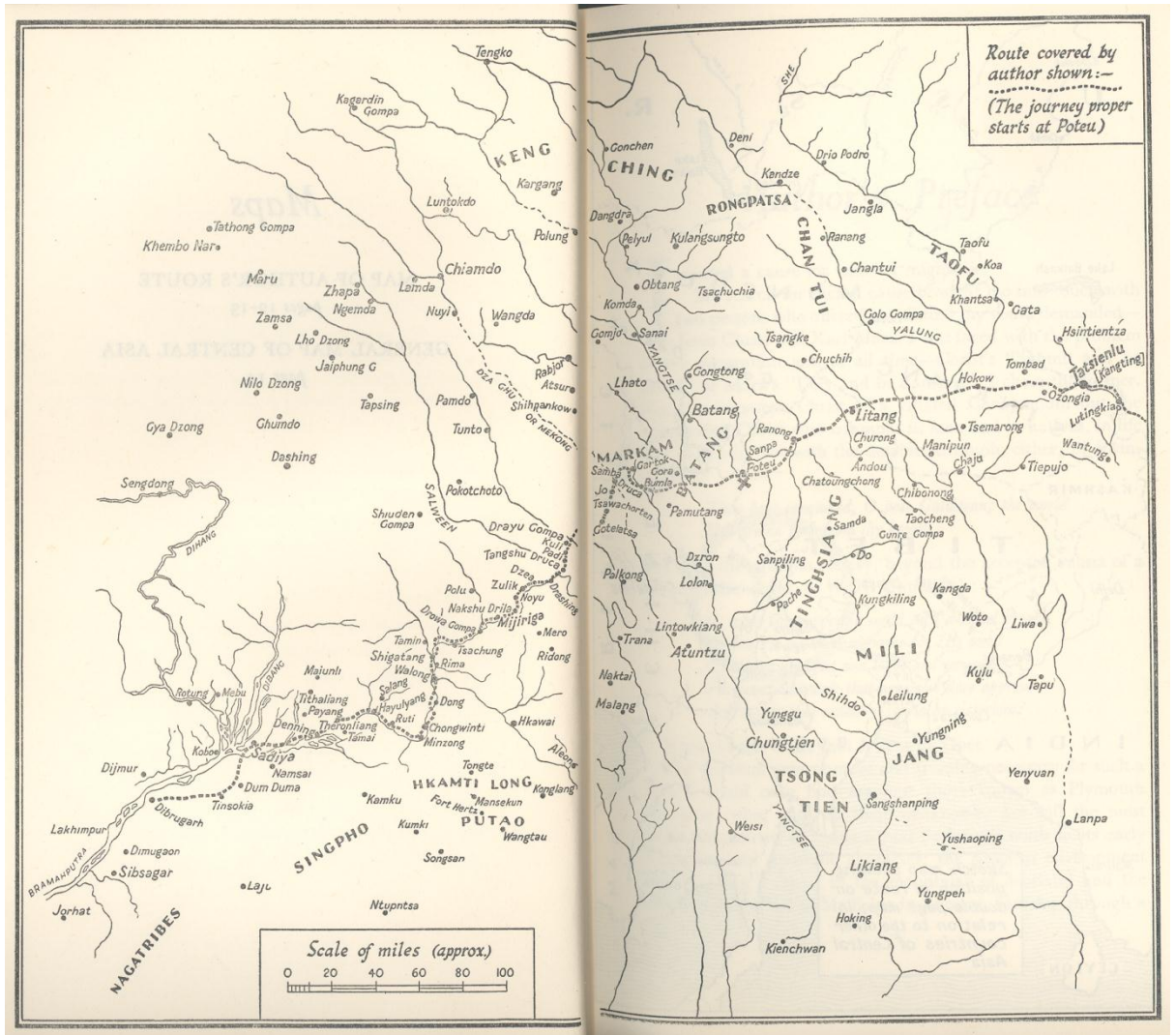
²⁵ James I. McCord, 'Book Review: Christian Missions and the Judgement of God', *Interpretation* 8 (1954), pp. 359-360.

²⁶ The account of this journey formed the subject of his first book, *Tibetan Journey*.

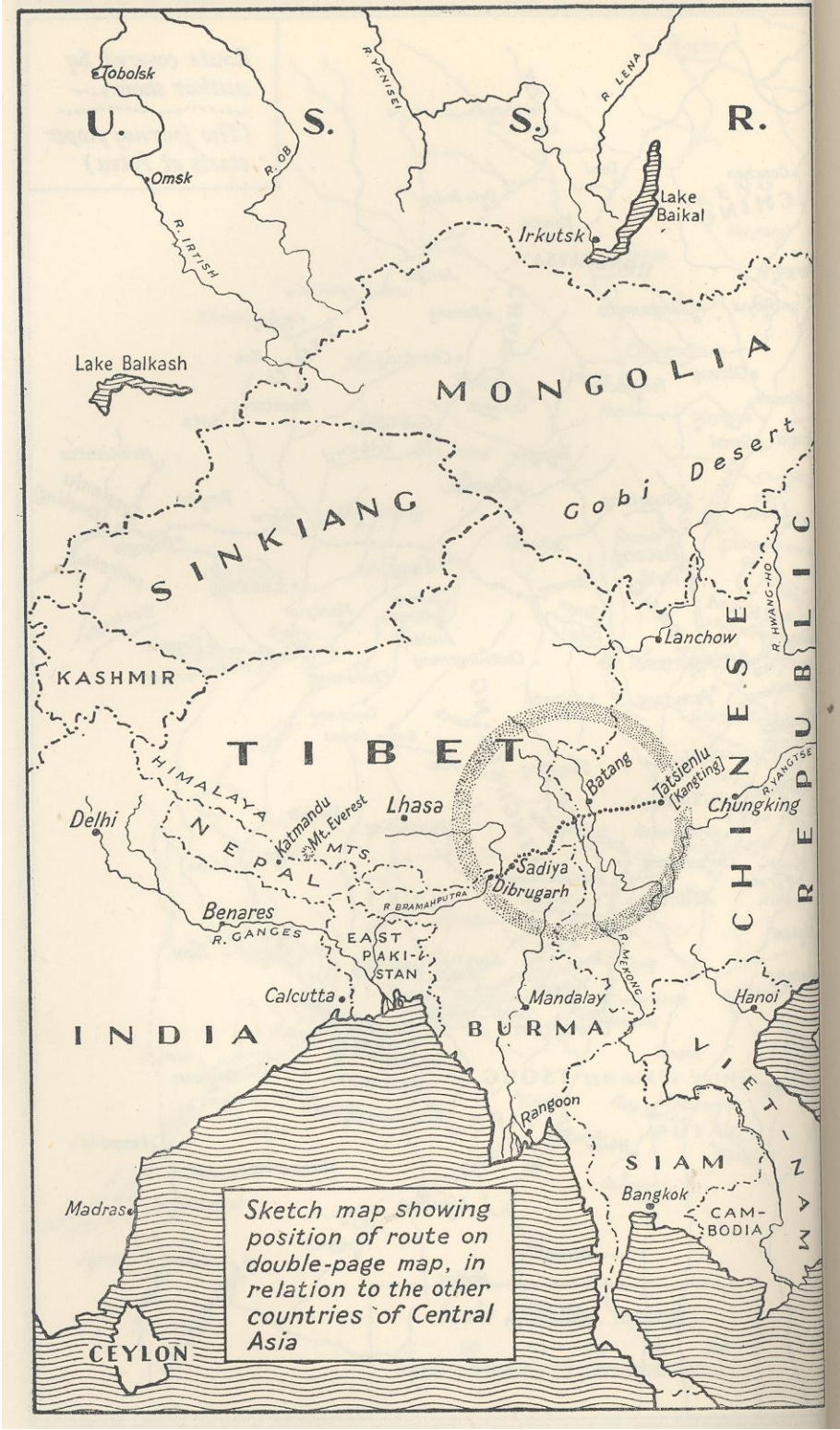
en route to China, where he was to lead a trade delegation.²⁷ Patterson then sought to return to Tibet, but the onset of the summer monsoons and then an unexpected illness meant that this had to be delayed. Instead, he decided to stay on in Kalimpong.²⁸

²⁷ For Shakabpa (1907-1989), see Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1951-1955: The Calm before the Storm* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 41-55.

²⁸ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, pp. 52-53.



Map 11 – Patterson’s route through Tibet to India. (Source: Patterson, *Tibetan Journey*, pp. 12-13).



Map 12 – Patterson’s route in the context of Central Eurasia. (Source: Patterson, *Tibetan Journey*, p. 14).

On 25th October 1950 Peking Radio announced the imminent ‘liberation’ of Tibet.²⁹ Following this, increasing numbers of Tibetan officials fled to Kalimpong and their arrival coincided with that of reporters and academics from the West, seeking to report on the situation and take advantage of rare access to Tibetans. Patterson, as one of very few foreign Tibetan speakers in Kalimpong, was able to find plenty of work as a translator and intermediary.³⁰ He was also approached by reporters and newspaper editors for information and, with his frustration growing both at Indian and Western reluctance to stand up for Tibet, and at Chinese and Indian news reports that asserted a peaceful Chinese consolidation of power, Patterson turned to journalism. He wrote articles for a number of newspapers and periodicals, including *The Statesman*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, and *The China Quarterly*, as well as producing books about his experiences in Tibet.³¹

Patterson’s activities became increasingly unpalatable for Echoes. Something of this can be seen in their correspondence with Bull, following the latter’s release from prison in December 1953. Bull had informed Echoes that, on his return journey to Britain, he planned to stop off in India and to meet Patterson there. Echoes warned him against this:

... our main reason for hoping you will have as little time as possible in Bombay is that George himself seems to be inextricably tied up with politics that we should be very grieved if you should be tarred with the same brush by reason of your association with him. We have not been able to discuss this with anyone in this country because the things he told us were told us under pledge of strictest secrecy. However, they do not relate to the past in which

²⁹ For the advance of the People’s Liberation Army into Tibet, see: Goldstein. *A History of Modern Tibet, 1951-1955*; Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*; McGranahan, Carole. *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 67-88. For a Chinese perspective, see: Yang Gongsu, *中国反对外国侵略干涉西藏地方斗争史* [A history of China’s resistance to the foreign invasion of Tibet], (Beijing: Zhongguo Zangxue chubanshe, 1992).

³⁰ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, pp. 61-64.

³¹ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, p. 101.

both you and he may be slightly involved, but to things which he did while in India after leaving you and which may yet have serious repercussions if what he told us he expects should come to pass. As you know, we ourselves and those usually associated with us eschew politics in any shape or form.³²

Patterson's activities in India were seen to have involved him inappropriately in politics. Interestingly, Echoes assured Bull that his and Patterson's involvement with the Pandatsangs in Tibet was not deemed compromising. It is only Patterson's subsequent activities that transgressed the requirement to 'eschew politics in any shape or form.'

Bull replied, emphasising his commitment to an apolitical definition of missionary primitivism:

I assure you that the stand I believe God would have me take is one of separation from all political issues as standing firm on the ground of our heavenly citizenship in Christ and that my whole future must be lived as being concerned only with God's interests and God's kingdom.³³

He nevertheless still intended to meet Patterson, but assured Echoes that 'Unless he [Patterson] can see his way to take a clear pathway in separation from the political interests of governments and nations, I feel it will be virtually impossible for me to contemplate a joint ministry with him.'³⁴ Following this meeting they went their separate ways. Bull would return to the mission field briefly from 1959-1961, in order to provide temporary cover for another Echoes missionary in Borneo. But he had no further involvement with China or Tibet, and now pursued a ministry as a speaker among Brethren assemblies in Britain.

³² Letter from Echoes to Bull, 27 January 1954 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Bull, Mr Geoffrey T., John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester).

³³ Letter from Bull to Echoes, 18 February 1954 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Bull, Mr Geoffrey T.).

³⁴ Letter from Bull to Echoes, 18 February 1954 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Bull, Mr Geoffrey T.).

Bull's arrest and imprisonment was a result of his close association with the Pandatsang family, which made the Chinese Communists suspect, not unreasonably, that his presence in Tibet had a political intent. However, his long imprisonment allowed him to extract himself from his entanglement in China-Tibet border politics. Bull was imprisoned for over three years, during which time he became the focus of much prayer within Brethren circles and beyond, and his release in 1953 was greeted with much acclaim. Bull wrote about his experiences in his book *When Iron Gates Yield*, published in 1955. The book focussed on his arrest by the Chinese and subsequent three-year imprisonment. He recounted his struggles to resist the attempts of his captors to indoctrinate him, and then his eventual release in answer to his prayers and those of his supporters. The popularity of *When Iron Gates Yield*, which went through several editions and was reprinted as late as 1980, is testament to the enduring appeal of missionary biographies. John MacKenzie, in his study of 'the persistence of empire in metropolitan culture'³⁵, has argued that 'imperial hagiographical biographies continued to be read right through the 1950s.'³⁶ The popularity of the writings of figures like Bull suggests that the influence of the imperial hagiographical tradition was far more enduring, and indeed produced renewed expressions in the postcolonial era.

Despite Bull's efforts to narrate his experiences purely in spiritual terms, his account still carried political implications. *When Iron Gates Yield*, alongside other works such as *China: The Reluctant Exodus*, provide narratives of deliverance from China. This had the consequence of producing a polarised view of the missionary encounter, with Christian missionaries seeking to escape from the oppressive and dangerous

³⁵ John MacKenzie, 'The Persistence of Empire in Metropolitan Culture', in Stuart Ward (ed.), *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 21-36.

³⁶ MacKenzie, 'The Persistence of Empire', pp. 30-31.

forces of Communist China. The cost of maintaining the integrity of missionary primitivism, therefore, was that it had now become opposed to a concept of Chinese modernity that was intrinsically hostile to Christianity. This can be seen in the text of an advert for *When Iron Gates Yield*:

This book records unusual experiences, both of Tibetan life and of Chinese prisons and the methods of mental torture employed in them. But, more than that, it is a shining witness to faith in God's purpose and to the power of prayer. The story of an unbroken spirit, *When Iron Gates Yield* is illumined with that inner strength which must be Christian civilisation's final answer to the menace of materialism.³⁷

Despite his earlier insistence that he operated in separation from politics, Bull's account was being framed within an emerging Cold War narrative that set the Christian West against the Communist East.³⁸

Patterson took a different path to that of Bull, but he too contributed to the emergence of a Cold War discourse in Asia.³⁹ His relationship with Echoes became increasingly strained, and he ended his association with them in 1956. The reason given by Patterson for this decision is that 'God would appear to be leading me more

³⁷ Publisher's advert for *When Iron Gates Yield* (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Bull, Mr Geoffrey T.).

³⁸ For a study of the presence of Christian narratives in Cold War discourse, see: Dianne Kirby, 'Divinely Sanctioned: The Anglo-American Cold War Alliance and the Defence of Western Civilisation and Christianity', *Journal of Contemporary History* 3 (2000), pp. 385-412. Bull was among a number of Westerners imprisoned in the early years of the PRC, and who wrote about their experiences. Other, non-missionary accounts, include: Robert Ford, *Captured in Tibet* (London: Pan Books, 1957); W. Allyn Rickett and Adele Rickett, *Prisoners of Liberation* (New York: Cameron Associates, 1957).

³⁹ For studies of the Cold War in Asia, see: Qiang Zhai, *The Dragon, the Lion & the Eagle: Chinese-British-American Relations, 1949-1958* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994); Peter Lowe, *Containing the Cold War in East Asia: British Policies towards Japan, China, and Korea, 1948-53* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Zheng Yangwen, Hong Liu and Michael Szonyi (eds.), *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Xia Yafeng, *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks During the Cold War, 1949-1972* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); Richard J. Aldrich, Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh Rawnsley (eds.), *The Clandestine Cold War in Asia: Western Intelligence, Propaganda and Special Operations* (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

and more into a political participation.⁴⁰ It also coincided with the publication of his second book, *God's Fool*, which contains Patterson's account of his missionary career up to 1950. In it he launched an attack on missionary work in China, and highlighted the disagreements he had with his fellow-missionaries in Nanchang. In particular, he attacked the missionaries' residence in missionary compounds which, he argued, resulted in them becoming segregated from the local population. It also represented a settled style of work which he saw as unbiblical, and an imposition which reflected colonial power and arrogance.

Despite this criticism of his politically implicated colleagues, Patterson now consciously sought to introduce a political aspect to his missionary involvement with Tibet. He articulated this in his books, *God's Fool* (1954) and *Tragic Destiny* (1958), which are somewhat unconventional missionary memoirs. Though their narratives are framed around his personal spiritual journey, Patterson's growing political involvement makes them an unusual and often uneasy mix of the religious and the political, reflecting the tension of the new direction he was seeking to take. In the preface to *Tragic Destiny*, he explained how the book was intended to continue his 'attacks on and challenge to my generation.'⁴¹ Patterson's writings therefore should primarily be seen as his reaction to the missionary withdrawal from China, and the crisis of confidence it caused in missionary circles.

Patterson's negative appraisal of the withdrawal echoed those, such as Paton, who identified a missionary enterprise under judgement. However, these writers tended also to caution against a purely negative reaction to Chinese Communism. Instead

⁴⁰ Letter from Patterson to Echoes, 11 October 1956 (Echoes of Service Papers, EOS/Patterson, Mr George and Mrs Margaret, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester).

⁴¹ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, p. 9.

they viewed it as an understandable response to unprecedented social and political problems, and encouraged the churches to engage constructively with it.⁴² However, Patterson, while joining in the denunciations against the China missionaries, was equally condemnatory about Communism. The direction he took following the Chinese annexation of Tibet was an exceptional one, but in all his choices he considered himself to be acting in accordance with a primitive, Brethren Christianity.

Patterson and the Khampa Revolt

At the start of *Tragic Destiny* when, on arriving in Kalimpong from Calcutta, Patterson commented:

As we passed through the Tibetan caravanserais, with their milling pack-mules and powerful muleteers, I felt the slow surge of excitement rising up in me again at the thought of the height and distance and majesty and danger that was Tibet, and decided that two months in 'civilisation' would be more than enough for me.⁴³

Patterson's writings can be seen as part of a general wider trend in the West in the mid-twentieth century, in which a new admiration for Tibet came about in reaction to a growing disillusionment with modern civilisation.⁴⁴ However, Patterson's growing sympathy for Tibet developed largely out of frustration at the barring of his own re-entry to the colonial periphery. Wendy Webster, in her study of the impact of the end of empire on British culture, has identified a growing anger stemming from a sense of powerlessness and loss of possibility, as a result of the closing of access to

⁴² Hood, *Neither Bang nor Whimper*, p. 185.

⁴³ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, p. 25.

⁴⁴ Peter Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, Travel Writing, and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), pp. 208-212.

opportunities for imperial adventure.⁴⁵ Something of this can be seen in the tone of Patterson's writings.

In particular, having to this point successfully manoeuvred himself through the China-Tibet frontier, Patterson now became frustrated at having his ambitions impeded by 'the unscrupulous mire of power politics' that he now encountered in India.⁴⁶ On 26th January, shortly after Patterson had set off for India, the country's new constitution had come into effect, so that India changed from being an independent dominion of the British Commonwealth to a federal, democratic republic. This transitional situation therefore affected the way that Patterson was received in India. He was able to arrange meetings with officials of India, Britain and the USA, but while received attentively and politely, he could persuade none to commit to any action.⁴⁷ All three countries were reluctant to get involved with Tibet: Britain was seeking to minimise its involvement in a former colonial territory and opted to defer to the new Indian government, while the USA, though increasingly interested in the position of Tibet in relation to the spread of the Cold War to Asia, sought to avoid direct confrontation with China.⁴⁸ India in turn sought good relations with China as part of its vision for Asian cooperation. Diplomatic relations with the PRC were established on 1 April 1950, and India had hoped for a continuation of the status quo in Tibet, whereby China's suzerainty over the region was acknowledged, but Tibet had effective autonomy and India held trade privileges.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, pp. 199-210.

⁴⁶ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, p. 158.

⁴⁷ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, p. 31.

⁴⁸ John Kenneth Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1999), pp. 57-62.

⁴⁹ Anand, 'Strategic Hypocrisy: The British Imperial Scripting of Tibet's Geopolitical Identity', *Journal of Asian Studies* 68:1 (2009), pp. 232-236.

Therefore, while officials were keen for information on a region about which little was known, Patterson's claim of an imminent Chinese invasion was considered unlikely. Even after it became evident that this was indeed China's intention, appeasement remained the priority. With India and China seeking to consolidate the borders of their new nation-states, it was increasingly evident that the colonial periphery would be organised within this new geopolitical configuration. Patterson's move into journalism can be seen as a last-ditch attempt to prevent this. However, in seeking to re-open his mission field, he increasingly became an advocate of the peoples he had originally set out to convert. One of the ways in which this happened can be seen in *Tragic Destiny*, where the failure of modern politics to act on behalf of Tibet is opposed with the Khampa sense of moral justice. Once in India, Patterson describes with amusement the bewilderment of Loshay, his Tibetan servant, at learning that, despite hearing of threats being made against Patterson's life, he would be held accountable for killing anyone, even in defence of his master. Loshay opts instead to beat up a local Communist as a warning to any would-be conspirators.⁵⁰ Patterson seems to have found the diplomacy of the Khampas a refreshing contrast to the intrigue and subtleties of both the Lhasa government, and the approach of India and the West towards the Tibetan situation.

As well as his journalism, Patterson attempted to make a more direct intervention in the Tibetan situation. In June 1951 he was approached by Thubten Jigme Norbu, the Dalai Lama's brother, who was seeking assistance for himself and the Dalai Lama to escape to the USA. Arrangements were made and successfully executed for Norbu himself to flee, but the Dalai Lama opted to remain in Tibet, despite efforts by US

⁵⁰ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, pp. 96-97.

officials to persuade him otherwise.⁵¹ Patterson had hoped that this would be the start of a US-supported, Tibetan defence against China. Following this he promoted support for a Khampa-led uprising, which he saw as the best means for Tibet to resist Chinese rule.⁵²

This also became the opinion of the US who, interested in Tibet in the context of the extension of the Cold War to Asia, were seeking a means by which to covertly strengthen Tibetan resistance against China. They opted to supply training and arms to Khampa guerrilla resistance fighters. The recent release of CIA documents into the public domain, revealing the full extent of CIA involvement with Tibet, has also served to draw attention to Patterson's role, as he served as something of an intermediary on a number of occasions as the CIA sought to establish connections in Tibet during the 1950s.⁵³ Knaus, in his account of the relationship between the CIA and Tibet, has given the most attention to Patterson's role in events. He narrates this in the context of an escalating Cold War situation in Asia, so that Patterson is seen to be 'caught in a bigger game.'⁵⁴ So although he had attested to a hatred of 'power politics', Patterson had ended up contributing to the extension of the Cold War to Asia.

When the Khampa uprising broke out in 1956, Patterson sought to publicise its progress in the face of, as he saw it, international efforts to downplay and divert

⁵¹ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, pp. 78-90. See also Goldstein, *The Calm before the Storm*, pp. 159-163. Thubten Jigme Norbu (1922-2008) would later become Professor of Tibetan Studies at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. He wrote an autobiography: *Tibet is My Country* (translated from the German, London: R. Hart-Davis, 1960).

⁵² In 1955 he would arrange for Rapga Pandatsang to come to India for discussions with Tibetan and Indian officials. See: Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, pp. 122, 130-138.

⁵³ The CIA operation in Tibet lasted from 1954 to 1970. See: Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War*; Kenneth J. Conboy and James Morrison, *The CIA's Secret War in Tibet* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002).

⁵⁴ Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War*, pp. 57-61; 98-99; 277-278.

attention from Khampa efforts.⁵⁵ In 1959 Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister, criticised Western press reports of the situation in Tibet, specifically criticising Patterson for his ‘exaggerated’ claims and intimating that he would not be allowed to stay in the country if he continued.⁵⁶ Patterson continued his efforts to publicise the Khampa uprising for a number of years, even leading a film crew covertly into Tibet in 1964 to film a Khampa ambush of a Chinese military convoy. The resulting documentary, *Raid into Tibet*, was shown on ITV in 1966, and subsequently in over twenty other countries.⁵⁷ While raising the profile of Tibet, it turned out to be unwelcome coverage for the guerrillas themselves, as it resulted in tensions in their relationship with the CIA, who were displeased at the exposure.⁵⁸

In all of this, Patterson, although increasingly marginalised in the missionary world, continued to assert that he was acting according to his missionary calling. He saw the rise of Communism as a failure of both religion and politics, and a return to primitive Christianity as a way of renewing both. As he summarised: ‘Sterile politics, a vitiated missionary approach – or a forgotten, classic, apostolic Christian

⁵⁵ For the Khampa uprising, see: Carole McGranahan, *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). See also: Ji Youquan, 西藏平叛纪实– 1959年叛亂 [An account of the pacification of the rebellion in Tibet – the 1959 counterinsurgency], (Lhasa: Tibet People’s Publishing House, 1993). Rapga and Topgyay Pandatsang both had a role in orchestrating the uprising, but then retreated from public life following its transition into a guerilla movement operating outside of Tibetan borders. Patterson records that Topgyay subsequently ‘died mysteriously of an unstated disease in Beijing’, while Rapga ‘was shot on the main street of Kalimpong and died soon afterwards’ (Patterson, *Patterson of Tibet*, p. 308). However, Carole McGranahan has stated that, having moved to India, Rapga ‘withdrew from public life, living out the rest of his life surrounded by books, friends, and family, surviving an assassination attempt on his life, and running a modest transport business in the Himalayas’ (McGranahan, ‘In Rapga’s Library: the Texts and Times of a Rebel Tibetan Intellectual’, *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie*, 15 (2005), pp. 253-274).

⁵⁶ Taya Zinkin, ‘Mr Nehru worried by Tibet: Efforts to tone down the reports’, *The Manchester Guardian* (9 March 1959), p. 7; Anon, ‘Censorship’, *The Manchester Guardian* (12 Mar 1959), p. 10; Zinkin, “‘Unhappiness’ about Tibet: Facts contradict Mr Nehru’, *The Manchester Guardian* (19 Mar 1959), p. 9.

⁵⁷ The film was thirty minutes long, and was screened on ITV on 9 May 1966. For further details, see: <<http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/587456>> [accessed 19 October 2012]. Patterson produced a written account of the filming of the documentary: *A Fool at Forty* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1970).

⁵⁸ Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War*, pp. 277-278.

dynamism that had overthrown world empires in the past, re-energized government policies, even given birth in pseudo-form to new world religions by its impact.⁵⁹ His view of Communism as being diametrically opposed to Christianity led to his advocacy of the Kham cause, and subsequently to that of other minority groups. Guy Wint, with whom Patterson would found the International Committee for the Study of Group Rights (ICSGR)⁶⁰, in a review of *Tragic Destiny* wrote the following concerning Patterson's motivation:

He thinks that it is lawful for Christian men to take arms in the just defence of small peoples, and Tibet is his special concern. He has no illusions about non-violence as a remedy for Communism.⁶¹

Having previously being an apolitical preacher of religion, Patterson was devoting himself to supporting violent political action, and not just for Tibet. As well as supporting the Khampa resistance, Patterson wrote a series of articles for *The Observer* in 1960 that highlighted the plight of the Naga people in northwest India, who had appealed to the ICSGR, and in particular the efforts of a guerrilla group resisting the incorporation of Nagaland into the Indian state.⁶²

Patterson's advocacy of violent action can be seen as stemming both from his primitivism, and as part of a wider, modern turn to violence.⁶³ In *God's Fool*, Patterson expressed his frustration at the institutionalisation of the Brethren in

⁵⁹ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, pp. 73-74.

⁶⁰ The International Committee for the Study of Group Rights was later renamed the Minority Rights Group International. For their current work, see: <<http://www.minorityrights.org/>> [accessed 10 May 2012]. For studies of the development of human rights in the twentieth century, see: Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007).

⁶¹ Guy Wint, 'Asia's Victim', *The Observer* (17 July 1960), p. 27.

⁶² George N. Patterson, 'Restless Nagaland', *The Observer* (21 Aug 1960), p. 8; Patterson, 'Naga general: I have Indian "atrocities" proof', *The Observer* (3 June 1962), p. 8; Patterson, 'Nagas: Indians killed one in ten', *The Observer* (10 June 1962), p. 6. See also: Anon, 'Nagas: An Indian reply', *The Observer* (17 June 1962), p. 8. For Nagaland and the Naga people, see: Michael Oppitz, Thomas Kaiser, Alban von Stockhausen & Marion Wettstein, *Naga Identities: Changing Local Cultures in the Northeast of India* (Gent: Snoeck Publishers, 2008).

⁶³ See: Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (London: Allen Lane, 1970).

Scotland, and of missionary work in China. He came to see the imminent Communist ascension as a judgement on the missionaries:

I could well understand how Communism might be used as a whip in the hands of God to scourge His disobedient servants, as a judgement on them for well-meaning malversation of the Scriptures to the detriment of the glory of His name, as a purge to cleanse out the self-deceived – all that was keeping the ‘pure’ from shining forth in testimony to His Son as ‘Christian’.⁶⁴

Patterson saw the violence of Communist revolution as a potentially creative force, by which a stagnant, compromised Christianity would be destroyed, and a true, primitivist faith released. Simultaneously, he saw the encounter of Christianity and Communism as one of irreconcilable differences, so that ‘the conflict must end in the utter annihilation of the one or the other, for it was implicit in their opposing beliefs.’⁶⁵

Patterson’s assertion of primitivism, both in the face of institutionalised Christianity and of the rise of Communism, was therefore confrontational in character, and contained violent undertones. In *Tragic Destiny*, as Patterson’s involvement became more political, his primitivism became translated into a preference for direct action, and an impatience with and distrust of political processes and diplomacy. Hannah Arendt has argued that, in the second half of the twentieth century, violence became increasingly attractive to certain groups, who had become frustrated by their loss of voice in a bureaucratised political system.⁶⁶ Patterson’s support for violent action can be seen in a similar way. His sympathy for the Khampa rebellion, and later the Naga people, grew out of his perception of modern political systems as being repressive

⁶⁴ Patterson, *God’s Fool*, p. 87.

⁶⁵ Patterson, *God’s Fool*, p. 87.

⁶⁶ Arendt, *On Violence*.

forces. In this context, violence became a legitimate means of confronting injustice and achieving political freedom.

Watchman Nee and the Idealising of Chinese Christianity

At the same time as missionary primitivism fostered a negative depiction of the China it had left behind, it also contributed to an idealising of other aspects. The rise of Communism triggered a reversal of attitudes towards figures and movements that had previously been viewed with hostility and suspicion. Two examples will be examined. First, Watchman Nee now received a far more supportive press in Britain. Second, in the case of Patterson, sympathy for the fate of Tibet contributed to the growth of a movement that promotes Tibetan religion and culture.

Following the missionary withdrawal, there emerged a growing sympathy for Watchman Nee which eclipsed the suspicion with which he had previously been treated. Initially, reports of the success of such groups as the Little Flock served to provide a source of hope in the wake of the disappointment of withdrawal. For example, the *Echoes Quarterly Review* in 1951 included an article on the Little Flock. It commented on their recent expansion efforts, and suggested that this gave grounds for hope that the gospel would continue to be spread in China after the missionaries were gone. The article, however, also contained some criticism of the Little Flock, calling it 'extreme' and 'divisive.'⁶⁷ This was reflective of the continuing ambivalence of missionary reactions to the Little Flock. Although they

⁶⁷ Anon, 'An Indigenous Movement in China (Extract from *China's Millions*)', *Echoes' Quarterly Review* 3:2 (April-June 1951), pp. 63-64.

were seen on the one hand as representing the type of locally-rooted, self-sufficient Christianity that could endure in China, they were still viewed with some suspicion.

George Hanlon's reflections on the Little Flock, in a 2011 interview, display a similar mix of enthusiasm and reservation. In our interview, he gave the following recollection of a Little Flock evangelist who he had invited to Yifeng to lead some evangelistic meetings:

I met him off a truck - I met him and we walked down to where we lived. He got into the house, took off his jacket, kicked off his shoes. 'Now', he said, 'let's pray.' We knelt down by my bed and we prayed for about half an hour. You see! Most people would say, 'Let's have a cup of tea, I'm tired.' He said, 'Let's pray.'⁶⁸

As well as being impressed by the evangelist's piety, Hanlon acknowledged that the Chinese identity of the Little Flock was also an important factor in their success:

... here was a Chinese, an educated, brilliant Chinese, standing in a humble Chinese shop - gospel hall - and preaching with power and eloquence, and that made the difference. It's probably true to say that the Chinese... people will never be truly evangelised except by their own people, and the Little Flock did that.⁶⁹

However, his feelings on this were contradictory:

Now, I'll criticise them, if I'm allowed to criticise godly people: they played the nationalist drum. 'We don't need the foreigners.' And that's where the CIM - the preachers of the Little Flock would come in to where there was an established church of the CIM, and they would empty it in 3 months. Because they would say, 'you don't need the foreigners.' And they were right in a sense. But the body of Christ doesn't look upon nationalities. We need each other as believers in Christ, we don't need each other as the English, or Americans, or French, or whatever. And, if I may make a criticism of wonderful people, it was that they maybe realised the only way to waken Chinese hearts was to say 'we're Chinese, and this is for us.' The gospel is for us, it's not an imported - the foreign religion, as they called it, in China was Christianity. It took a long time. And to be fair, how shall we put it? Away back, when Christians, missionaries, first came in to China, they came in on the tail of the military. You see, the military forced the secession of a

⁶⁸ Interview with George Hanlon, 14 June 2011.

⁶⁹ Interview with George Hanlon.

number of ports around the country, the free ports. Hong Kong was one - Britain took that over after the war. That was an unkind act.⁷⁰

While admiring and identifying with the Little Flock's primitivism, Hanlon saw that its establishment in China had involved the mobilisation of nationalist sentiment. He was ambivalent about this, seeing it at once as a necessary process, but also a regrettable excess that was contrary to a Christian spirit. In the final assessment, however, Hanlon conceded that, the Little Flock's anti-foreign streak was excusable, in light of the history of British misdeeds in China. A feeling of colonial guilt therefore served to soften Hanlon's judgement on the Little Flock's nationalism.

Nee's fate under the Communists served to raise his public profile among evangelicals in Britain and the USA, and the translation of his writings into English added to this new popularity. Angus Kinnear, at the end of his biography of Nee, first published in 1973, noted this reversal:

Through the discovery and spread of his devotional writings in the West the name of Watchman Nee became during the 1960s one more rallying point for prayer on behalf of Christians in China generally. Yet this interest in him was quite new, and it is disconcerting to compare it with the suspicion he had earlier aroused in those evangelical mission circles where his work encroached upon established interests. Some of his readers began to feel they had more in common with indigenous Chinese witness such as his than with the foreign missionary enterprise that had so sadly failed to read the signs.⁷¹

Kinnear notes how it was in an atmosphere of disenchantment with the missionary enterprise that Nee's writings, newly translated, found a receptive audience. Nee's expression of Christian faith was seen as something untainted by the compromised traditions of Western Christendom, and as offering a freshness and vitality to Christians in the West. Therefore, at the same time as missionary primitivism was

⁷⁰ Interview with George Hanlon.

⁷¹ Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, p. 299.

being redefined in opposition to Chinese modernity, it was simultaneously being located within modern China.

Kinnear, although he confessed to find this new portrayal of Nee ‘disconcerting’, perpetuates it in his own biography. Its title, *Against the Tide*, reflects the overriding narrative of the book, which depicts an inevitable confrontation between the faith of Nee and the atheist forces of Communism. As has been seen, Nee’s rise was very much a function of the success of the Chinese bourgeoisie, but the strength of his legacy here is built on an opposite perception: that of a man with no other resources than his faith, crushed by an all-powerful and merciless Communist government. He therefore presents Nee as a symbol of the persecution of Christians in China, and as an example of committed and self-sacrificing faith. Nee’s problematic legacy was therefore translated into more familiar and appealing tropes.

The case of Watchman Nee perhaps best illustrates the character and evolution of missionary primitivism. It is the product of a desire for an essential spirituality, a desire that has been fed through its projection and repetition across great distances. This process of repetition produced a difference that has been gradual and subtle in the case of Nee. However, the potential for rearticulations of primitivism to produce radically different meanings can be seen in George Patterson’s changing association with Tibet.

Primitivism and Tibetan Spirituality

In his writings, Patterson was blunt and dismissive both of Tibetan religion and the West's idealising of it. In *Tibetan Journey* he commented on how, 'ten thousand miles away in comfortable chairs beside comfortable fires men and women read of the illusory stupidities of an impossible Shangri-La...'⁷² In this, Patterson can be seen as trying to provide an 'inside' account, and a 'true picture' of the 'real Tibet', an intent that guided much Western literature about Tibet during this period.⁷³ However, although contemptuous about the idealised vision of Tibet as a fount of spiritual wisdom, Patterson simultaneously contributed to the growing Western interest in Tibetan religion.⁷⁴ Sympathy for Eastern spiritual traditions had increased during the nineteenth century, and the development of psychology as an academic discipline in the early decades of the twentieth century served both to deepen this growing fascination and to give it a more scientific context. In particular, it facilitated a belief that Eastern spiritual traditions could reveal valuable truths about the human psyche, which in turn led to a focus on the more esoteric, and occult, aspects of Tibetan religion.⁷⁵

For Patterson, the use of modern medicine to expose the fraudulence of Tibet's lamas had been combined with a respect for the presence of the spiritual, and a need to engage with it as such. In *God's Fool* he described a trip to a village where he encountered a group engaged in prayers and incantations, creating an atmosphere he

⁷² Patterson, *Tibetan Journey*, p. 67.

⁷³ Bishop, *Myth of Shangri-La*, pp. 228-230.

⁷⁴ Bishop, *Myth of Shangri-La*, p. 210.

⁷⁵ Poul Pederson, 'Tibet, Theosophy and the Psychologization of Buddhism', in Dodin and Rather (eds.), *Imagining Tibet*, pp. 151-166.

described as ‘oppressive with the immanence of evil.’⁷⁶ Patterson, and the CIM missionary accompanying him, responded by praying themselves, and their presence served to disrupt the gathering, with Patterson concluding that they had succeeded in opposing and frustrating the spiritual forces they had encountered.⁷⁷ Patterson’s depiction of Tibetan religion was uncompromisingly negative, and was framed within a primitivist narrative that saw a direct confrontation between Christian and demonic spiritual forces.

Once in India, Patterson continued to be simultaneously fascinated and repelled by Tibetan religion, and in particular its more esoteric spiritual practices, such as trances and possessions. In *Tragic Destiny* he attacked the Lhasa government for its use of spiritual consultation in its decision making.⁷⁸ But he also continued to take these practices seriously, and by doing so ultimately tapped into and perpetuated a wider fascination with non-Western religions. In Kalimpong he helped Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark (1908-1980) in his anthropological research into Tibetan culture. Prince Peter wanted to film Tibetan spirit possession, and Patterson was able to find ‘a Tibetan *chod-gyad* who was able to be possessed by nine different spirit-presences’ and they filmed and interviewed him over several sessions.⁷⁹ Despite his belief that such practices were demonic, Patterson helped to construct a scholarly discourse that saw Tibetan spirituality as a reality that could be scientifically described, and as containing insights that the West was blind to. The involvement of Patterson, as a missionary, in such enquiries can be fitted into a wider trend. Both

⁷⁶ Patterson, *God’s Fool*, p. 137.

⁷⁷ Patterson, *God’s Fool*, pp. 137-138.

⁷⁸ Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, pp. 89-90.

⁷⁹ Patterson, *Patterson of Tibet*, pp. 163-164. The film was donated to the University of Copenhagen. Patterson claims that the findings also contributed to the work of the ethnologist René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, who produced the famous work *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956).

Catholic and Protestant missionaries took an increasing interest in local practices of healing and witchcraft, and sought to incorporate their findings into Western concepts of medicine and anthropology.⁸⁰

Patterson would later develop a psycho-spiritual therapy program to run alongside a treatment for drug addiction, called NeuroElectric Therapy (NET), developed by his wife, Meg. His interest in this developed as he identified a connection between the countercultural movements of the 1960s, the growth of interest in Eastern spirituality, and increases in drug addiction. His counselling program encouraged patients to consider submission to God as a means to break the links to the occult that experimenting in drugs had often been a part of.⁸¹ The development and promotion of NET has proven to be the biggest and most sustained project of Patterson's life. More significantly, it displays the ongoing influence of his experiences in Tibet, and in particular his exposure to Tibetan spirituality.

However, these departures from his original missionary vocation have not led to a softening of his earlier attitudes towards Tibetan Buddhism. This can be seen in Patterson's account of his trip to Tibet in 1987, when he returned to the country as a

⁸⁰ For anthropological studies by Catholic missionaries, see: Aylward Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness* (London: G. Chapman, 1985); Eric de Rosny, *Healers in the Night* (translated from the French, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985). For a study of Protestant missionary interest in non-Western forms of healing, see: Pamela E. Klassen, *Spirits of Protestantism: Medicine, Healing and Liberal Christianity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

⁸¹ See: Meg Patterson, *Hooked? NET: The New Approach to Drug Cure* (Geneva: The Long Riders' Guild Press, 2007); George N. and Meg Patterson, *The Power Factor: The Key to Conquering Addiction* (Milton Keynes: Word, 1986); *The Paradise Factor: Healing an Addicted Society* (Milton Keynes: Word, 1994); George N. Patterson, *Addixion: A Revolutionary New Cure for All Addictions* (Geneva: Long Riders' Guild Press, 2007). See also: <<http://www.netdevice.net/>> [accessed 28 October 2011].

consultant for the film *Seven Years in Tibet*.⁸² The title of Patterson's subsequent book, *Requiem for Tibet*, reflects the pessimistic view that he formed as a result of this visit.⁸³ He gave the following description of Lhasa:

In Lhasa there was life of a sort, but not Tibetan. Long, straight, wide streets were filled with commercial trucks and military vehicles and bicycles, and lined with three-level buildings and tenements of stupefying and drab uniformity. The only remaining Tibetan quarter was a ghetto around the famous Jokhang Cathedral. Here the narrow streets were lined by hundreds of small traders' stalls selling tawdry Tibetan trivia to eager tourists, with sauntering Tibetans muttering the sacred prayer formula *Om Mani Padme Hum*, with devout pilgrims prostrating themselves lengthways and sideways in a fanatical religious commitment. Other Tibetans strolled around looking for a living, a lost contact, chatting with acquaintances or exchanging news.⁸⁴

The contrast here between Chinese and Tibetan is also the opposition of the modern and the primitive. The modernisation of the streets and the buildings of Lhasa is seen as something oppressive, sterile and homogenising, and the last vestige of 'true' Tibetan culture is in the narrow streets of the Tibetan quarter. Tibetan pilgrims are included in this snapshot of old Tibet, but Patterson's description of these figures is ambiguous. As he went on to visit monasteries, he described monks who were more interested in collecting money from tourists than in their religious duties, but he also condemned the Chinese for desolating these once thriving religious centres. Ultimately, antipathy towards Chinese Communism continued to win out over opposition to Tibetan religion.

⁸² The film, released in 1997, was based on the book of the same name by Heinrich Harrer (1912-2006). Harrer, an Austrian, was mountaineering in the Himalayas when World War II broke out, and was detained by the British in India. He escaped in 1944 and fled to Tibet, where he became employed in Lhasa by the Tibetan government. He left Tibet in 1952 and recorded his experiences in *Seven Years in Tibet* (translated from the German, London: R. Hart-Davis, 1953).

⁸³ Patterson, *Requiem for Tibet* (London: Aurum, 1990). A summary is also provided in: Patterson, *Patterson of Tibet*, pp.373-379.

⁸⁴ Patterson, *Patterson of Tibet*, p. 375.

Primitivism and the Dalai Lama

In Kalimpong Patterson became involved in helping the Dalai Lama's family, and this began an association that has continued until the present day. Yet, during our interview, it was with strong reservations that he spoke about his identification with the Dalai Lama's cause, and in particular with his non-violent strategy of resistance:

It's not gonna work, it doesn't work as a theory. It can be admired, so I've said to the Dalai Lama: my conscience is disturbed because I identify with your problems, I identify with Tibet's problems, and I am livid with the Chinese, there's no validity there in any way, historically or otherwise. But the only way for Tibet to win, there is one way in which they can win, and I don't care, I'm not thinking in terms of numbers at all, or whatever, is violence. There's got to be violence at some point, there's got to be objection, to throw out the Chinese.⁸⁵

Patterson had sought to support direct Tibetan action against the Chinese, and he is frustrated at this alternative direction that the Tibetan cause has taken. The Khampa guerrilla resistance had continued until 1974 when it was disbanded, partly as a result of the ending of CIA support in 1969, and partly at the request of the Dalai Lama, who now sought a unified and non-violent campaign of resistance.⁸⁶ This change of strategy was largely due to the thawing of Cold War relations in Asia, facilitated by Nixon's visit to China in 1972. As a consequence of this, Tibet's association with covert CIA anti-communist activities had become a compromising one. The Tibetan government in exile therefore decided to propagate a different, more broadly sympathetic image of Tibet.⁸⁷ Patterson, however, views non-violence as impotent in the face of Chinese intransigence and global indifference, and continues to see violent action as the best means of restoring power to Tibetans.

⁸⁵ Interview with Patterson, 28 January 2010.

⁸⁶ McGranahan, *Arrested Histories*, p. 186.

⁸⁷ Robert Barnett, "'Violated Specialness': Western Political Representations of Tibet", in Dodin and Rather, *Imagining Tibet*, pp. 285-286; McGranahan, *Arrested Histories*, p. 183.

Carole McGranahan has examined the ways that veterans of the guerrilla resistance have struggled to become reconciled to their new identity in the Tibetan diaspora communities. In particular, while many of these veterans are proud of their actions in fighting for Tibet, they remain firm in their loyalty to the Dalai Lama and see it as necessary to remain quiet about their experiences. However, they see this as a temporary closure or, in McGranahan's term, an arrested history, and they hope that in the future their stories will be told and receive the recognition they are due.⁸⁸ Patterson's identification with the cause of Tibetan freedom has taken on a similar character. His stand for Tibet, made in the name of a Christian opposition to Communism, has therefore become subsumed within a very different sort of movement. Elliott Sperling has argued that, although non-violence has long formed a central part of Tibetan Buddhist teaching, the central place that it now occupies is something new.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, it forms part of a discourse that has been mobilised to great effect in the promotion of Tibetan religion and culture, and it is one that Patterson, despite his reservations, has become closely identified with.

During our interview Patterson sought to highlight his concerns about this recent popularisation of Tibetan religion:

The Dalai Lama is very pleasant, I'm a great friend of his, but his decisions will be taken, when anyone goes to him wanting a decision, he will be consulting the gods about it. So Tibet really is demonic, in the sense that it's a structured arrangement of control, of spirit control...⁹⁰

But at the same time he castigated the West for its inability to understand spiritual things:

⁸⁸ McGranahan, *Arrested Histories*, pp.24-27.

⁸⁹ Elliot Sperling, "'Orientalism' and Aspects of Violence in the Tibetan Tradition', in Dodin and Rather, *Imagining Tibet*, pp. 326-327.

⁹⁰ Interview with Patterson, 28 January 2010.

Our whole society, every aspect of it, including schools and everything else, is permeated with the whole system of Enlightenment. The last couple of hundred years, we've lost our ability to understand.⁹¹

A tension therefore remains in Patterson's efforts to reconcile his own spiritual narrative with his ongoing support for the Tibetan cause. Though he has sought to narrate his life as a demonstration of the power of a primitive Christian religion, his story has received most prominence as part of a different and more far-reaching religious narrative: that of the Dalai Lama and the campaign for Tibet.

Since 2004 Patterson has lived in a retirement village, founded by a Brethren trust, in Lesmahagow in Lanarkshire.⁹² His ongoing identification with both the Brethren and Tibetan causes has continued to create new sources of tension in the narrative of his life story. In March 2011 Patterson was awarded the International Campaign for Tibet's 2011 Light of Truth Award, which is given to individuals and institutions that have made significant contributions to the public understanding of Tibet.⁹³ The announcement of this on the International Campaign for Tibet's website described Patterson as having 'earned legendary status as the "bearded Khampa" for his support to Tibetan resistance fighters, and who became one of the first people to report the Chinese invasion of Tibet.' Patterson is said to have 'first travelled to Tibet as a Christian missionary', but nothing else is mentioned of this original intent.⁹⁴ The emphasis on Patterson's Tibetan name, 'bearded Khampa', is perhaps symbolic of how he has come to be identified with Tibet.

⁹¹ Interview with Patterson, 28 January 2010.

⁹² Patterson, *Patterson of Tibet*, p. 389.

⁹³ The International Campaign for Tibet is a nonprofit organisation that, according to its website, 'works to promote human rights and democratic freedoms for the people of Tibet.' It was founded in 1988, and has offices in Washington DC, Amsterdam, Berlin and Brussels, as well as field offices in Dharamsala and Kathmandu (<<http://www.savetibet.org/about-ict/our-mission>> [accessed 28 October 2012]).

⁹⁴ <<http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-press-releases/light-truth-award-presented-legendary-%E2%80%98bearded-khampa%E2%80%99-george-patterson>> [accessed 31 October 2012].

Following his receipt of the award, Patterson was interviewed on *Sunday Morning with Cathy Macdonald*, a faith-themed programme on BBC Radio Scotland. At the opening of the interview Patterson was asked to describe the award he had been given. He replied:

Well, it's got the highfalutin title of being the Light of Truth award, and as far as the Dalai Lama is concerned, of course, that is the concept that he pursues.⁹⁵

This statement encapsulates his ambivalence towards Tibet, and in particular his discomfort at the spiritual associations that have become attached to the Tibetan cause. The manner in which Patterson here sought to distance himself from the concept of truth with which the award is bound up is perhaps an uncomfortable reminder of how he initially conceived his involvement with Tibet as something by which he would demonstrate a different sort of spiritual truth.

Despite this, Patterson is adamant that he has remained within his original primitivist calling. He stated emphatically at the start of our first interview: 'I didn't decide to go to Tibet as a missionary. I had no intention of ever being a missionary.' Later in the interview he expanded on this: 'And yet, biblically speaking, I was more a missionary than twentieth century missionaries are. I was doing what God wanted me to do, and that's what a missionary is.'⁹⁶ This individualised and problematic definition of the missionary vocation highlights the tensions in Patterson's efforts to achieve composure in the narrating of his life story. He has sought to reconcile the many strands of his life within a narrative of obedience to the directing of God. Despite the breakdown of his relationship with Echoes and his subsequent

⁹⁵ George Patterson, during interview on *Sunday Morning with Cathy Macdonald*, BBC Radio Scotland, 1 May 2011.

⁹⁶ Interview with Patterson, 28 January 2010.

involvement in political spheres, he maintains that he has been true to the original calling that led him to Tibet as a primitivist missionary.

Patterson is certainly an exceptional figure, but he is nevertheless a dramatic demonstration of how missionary primitivism, although a tightly defined spiritual discourse, could be readily adapted to reconcile with a variety of situations and intentions. His assertion that 'I was doing what God wanted me to do', sheds light on the relationship between personal charisma and missionary primitivism. Patterson is an example of a figure who, in their conviction of a divine mandate, could creatively and forcefully insert themselves into a variety of situations. However, his absorption into a number of causes antithetical to his own, such as Cold War politics, Khampa guerrilla resistance, and the International Campaign for Tibet, demonstrates the clear limits to the agency of the charismatic missionary.

Conclusion

The missionary withdrawal from China had a variety of impacts. For the majority of the departing Echoes missionaries, the withdrawal was treated as a setback. They sought to overcome this by historicising the event as a divine deliverance from anti-Christian forces, and by redeploying to southeast Asia. This had the effect, however, of redefining missionary primitivism in opposition to Chinese modernity. A similar process affected Watchman Nee, whose reputation in the West was rescued as a result of his imprisonment by the Communists. He was now memorialised as a martyr of the Chinese church, who bravely stood against the forces of Communism.

His writings were translated into English and, in a climate of growing missionary disillusionment, he became idealised as a Christian of pure and vital faith.

The most striking reaction to the missionary withdrawal was that of Patterson. Angry at both a missionary community unwilling to face up to its shortcomings, and a Communist China with intentions on Tibet, Patterson developed his own reinterpretation of missionary primitivism. This ultimately led him far from his original vocation. Whereas before he had sought to preach a gospel of peace to Tibetans, he went on to support their violent resistance to Communist rule. And whereas before he had travelled to Tibet in order to win it for Christ, he later sought to promote its cause to the West, and helped to popularise its culture and religion. However, although Patterson's response set him apart from his fellow missionaries, he shared with them a reaction against the new China, and a conviction that missionary primitivism could have no place alongside Chinese modernity.

The volume of missionary writings that emerged out of the China withdrawal stands in contrast to the coverage it has received in historical scholarship. The abrupt ending of the missionary project in one of its most important fields provoked a reaction of distress and self-scrutiny. Within a historical scholarship that has centered its narratives on the victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949, a missionary literature lamenting its own demise has appeared unsurprising, and in conformity with its own perception of 1949 as a watershed date. Paul Cohen has recently called for historians to join up their accounts of the pre- and post-1949

periods.⁹⁷ Subsequent scholarship has responded to this by narrating the transition to Communist rule following 1949 as a longer and more complex transition.⁹⁸ Similarly, studies of the impact of decolonisation have highlighted a lingering imperial influence on British society and culture.⁹⁹ However, this chapter has argued that the influence of those missionaries who left China in 1949 was far more varied, far-reaching and enduring than has previously been acknowledged. They shaped not only a renewed missionary culture in the postcolonial era, but also contributed to wider political and cultural changes. More attention needs to be given to tracing this complex afterlife of missionaries in the wake of the foreign withdrawal from China.

⁹⁷ Cohen, *China Unbound: Evolving Perspectives on the Chinese Past* (London: RoutledgeCurzon 2003). pp. 131-147.

⁹⁸ For example, see: Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (eds.), *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁹⁹ For example: Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to a Post-Imperial World*; Ward (ed.), *British Culture and the End of Empire*; Webster, *Englishness and Empire*.

Conclusion

The Paradigms of Modern Chinese History

This thesis has examined a number of regional stories about missionary primitivism in modern China. In order to draw some conclusions on the significance of these stories to modern Chinese history, they will be discussed in relation to Paul Cohen's study of Western historiography of China, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past*, and in terms of the four paradigms he identifies: China's Response to the West; Tradition and Modernity; Imperialism; and China-Centered History.¹ Since its publication in 1984, Cohen's conclusions have been the subject of much debate.² However, his paradigms still provide a good reference point by which the contributions of this thesis can be demonstrated. Each of the paradigms will be discussed in turn, and the ways that missionary primitivism speaks to them will be assessed.

China's Response to the West

This paradigm, relating to scholarship produced in the 1950s and 1960s, viewed the changes of modern China as having been brought about through the impact of the

¹ Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

² E.g.: Arif Dirlik, 'Reversals, Ironies, Hegemonies: Notes on the Contemporary Historiography of Modern China', *Modern China* 3 (1996), pp. 243-284; Prasenjit Duara, *The Global and Regional in China's Nation-Formation* (London: Routledge, 2009).

West. Cohen criticised these histories for overemphasising the role of the West, and of defining what is important about modern Chinese history ‘in terms of a set of questions prompted by the Sino-Western encounter.’³ For example, he claimed that this paradigm had led historians to focus on the missionary presence after 1860 as a primary cause of social unrest. Instead, Cohen argued, antimissionary feeling was mostly just a front for deeper antiofficial and antidynastic feeling. In this way the significance of the Western presence had been overemphasised at the expense of internal political conditions.⁴

Cohen’s criticisms have been heeded in this thesis, with a strong emphasis being placed on the regional contexts of the stories examined. Although the focus has been on charismatic individuals, the importance of viewing their actions in relation to the dynamic and mobile world of the Chinese bourgeoisie, in the case of Watchman Nee, or of the power struggles and ambiguous spaces of China’s frontiers, as in the cases of Reginald Sturt and George Patterson, has been emphasised. Furthermore, the focus on marginal spaces, in particular the Mongolian and Tibetan frontiers, has helped to complicate the simple geographic categories implied by ‘China’s response to the West.’ In addition the focus on marginal groups, in particular the Brethren as a marginal missionary group and the Khampas as marginal Tibetans, has served to break down and question the simple processes of ‘impact’ and ‘response’ that this paradigm relies on.

³ Cohen, *Discovering History in China*, p. 52. Cohen was particularly commenting on the influence of John King Fairbank (1907-1991) whose works, including *The United States and China* (fourth, enlarged edition, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) and *The Great Chinese Revolution, 1800-1985* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986) had been influential in putting forward this perspective.

⁴ Cohen, *Discovering History in China*, p. 48.

Most importantly, the focus on missionary primitivism has highlighted the diffuse nature and multiple directions of missionary influences. For example, the performative nature of missionary primitivism has been demonstrated, so that mission work has often been primarily a matter of defining and asserting Brethren identity in Britain. In addition, the embrace of missionary primitivism by Watchman Nee, and then Nee's transformation into an object of emulation for primitivists in the West, has served to highlight the ways that influences circulated freely and unpredictably between China and the West. This has demonstrated the limits of viewing historical change in modern China in terms of Western impact and China response, and also of the opposite tendency, that is, of only considering the Western influence when it served some kind of predefined Chinese purpose.

Tradition and Modernity

This second paradigm, which views modern Chinese history in terms of a transition from tradition to modernity, has many similarities to the first, and has faced similar criticisms. Cohen has highlighted its Western-centric character, in which China is depicted as 'stagnant, slumbering, unchanging, waiting to be delivered from its unfortunate condition.'⁵ Much missionary literature has been produced in this vein, seeking to highlight the 'contributions' that missionaries made to China's modernisation, and focussing on missionary medical and educational institutions.⁶

⁵ Cohen, *Discovering History in China*, p. 57. Cohen was particularly commenting on the influence of Joseph Levenson, most notably his work *Confucian China and its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (first combined edition, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968).

⁶ See, for example: John King Fairbank (ed.), *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China 1857-1927*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Jessie Lutz, (ed.),

This thesis has sought to complicate such narratives through a focus on missionary primitivism. This has allowed for a focus on missionary groups that have been overlooked, because of how they fail to conform to the modernisation paradigm. It has also served to disrupt the teleology inherent in the concept of modernity contained within this narrative. Primitivism was a concept defined in reaction to modernity, but it was therefore also a part of modernity. The primitive and the modern coexisted, and were often mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, by identifying primitivism primarily with the West, and modernity with China, this thesis has served to disrupt the basic direction of the Tradition to Modernity paradigm.

For example, Sturt and Patterson were two radical primitivists who sought to pursue a model of missionary work that involved travelling to remote, peripheral areas, far from the support or resources of modern civilisation. Here, it was believed, missionaries could practice a deeper trust in God. And yet, this desire to traverse wilderness was in itself a modern impulse. Sturt participated in the new science of missions, mapping large areas of Mongolia and categorising its peoples. All this was done in order to aid their more effective evangelisation, but his efforts had their most notable impact in the recognition he received from the Royal Geographic Society.⁷ In a similar way, Patterson relished the prospect of an elemental confrontation between Christianity and Buddhism in Tibet. But in the wake of the Communist annexation of Tibet, Patterson developed a more concerted opposition to the atheist

Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity and Social Mobility (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2010); Kaiyi Chen, *Seeds from the West: St. John's Medical School, Shanghai, 1880-1952* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 2001); Guangqiu Xu, *American Doctors in Canton: Modernization in China, 1835-1935* (Somerset, NJ: Transaction, 2011).

⁷ For the Royal Geographic Society, see: M. Jones, 'Measuring the World: Exploration, Empire and the Reform of the Royal Geographic Society, c. 1874-93', in M.J. Daunton (ed.), *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 313-336.

forces of Chinese modernity, and this led him to become an advocate for a cause that would be responsible for promoting Tibetan religion in the West.⁸

Patterson's relationship with modernity was ambivalent. Despite his insistence on total faith in God, he used modern medicine in order to gain a spiritual advantage in Tibet. Furthermore, he was assisted in this by the Little Flock, a primitivist Chinese Christian movement whose leader, Watchman Nee, was also involved in the running of a large, modern pharmaceutical company. Nee embraced Brethren primitivism, to the extent that he set himself against missionary churches that did not hold to biblical standards. And yet Nee's movement developed a sophisticated and centralised administration, and organised a nation-wide expansion funded largely by the profits of his family business, and the resources of the Little Flock's bourgeois members.

Therefore, missionary primitivism serves to complicate our understanding of the relation between missionary activity and Chinese modernity. The fusion of the primitive and the modern throughout the thesis forces a questioning of historical narratives that view 'modernity' as the antithesis and successor of 'tradition.' It also forces a reconsideration of the geographic location of tradition and modernity, and of how modernising influences flowed between China and the West as a result of missionary encounters.

⁸ For a study of the growing publicity given to the Tibetan cause and culture in the West, see: Robert Barnett, "'Violated Specialness': Western Political Representations of Tibet", in Thierry Dodin and Heinz Rother, *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections and Fantasies* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2001), pp. 269-316. For studies of contemporary Tibet, and the dispute over Tibet's political status, see: Wang Lixiong and Tsering Shakya, *The Struggle for Tibet* (London: Verso, 2009); John B. Roberts II and Elizabeth A. Roberts, *Freeing Tibet: 50 Years of Struggle, Resilience and Hope* (New York: AMACOM, 2009); Robert V. Andrews (ed.), *Tibet: A Simmering Troublespot* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009); Barry Sautman and June Teufel Dreyer (eds.), *Contemporary Tibet: Politics, Development and Society in a Disputed Region* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006); John Powers, *History As Propaganda: Tibetan Exiles versus the People's Republic of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Imperialism

Cohen identified how imperialism has been used in contrasting ways as a means of understanding modern China. In the negative sense, it has been used as the grand narrative of modern Chinese history, covering a period from the Opium Wars up until the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Imperialism is seen, according to this narrative, as the root cause of all China's problems, making her subject to the exploitation of foreign powers and hindering her development. Within this explanation, the Communist rise to power was primarily an anti-imperialist struggle. Imperialism has also been attributed with more positive outcomes, with economic and political developments seen as having come about as a result of foreign incursions. However, in both its positive and negative uses, imperialism also takes Western impact as its reference point, and utilises a modernisation teleology.⁹

The lingering label of 'cultural imperialism', and the hindrances it creates to the historical study of missionaries in China, has been the subject of recent analysis.¹⁰ Missionary primitivism contributes to this critique, and allows for a break from the teleology that continues to dominate arguments for and against viewing missionaries as imperialists. Missionary primitivism had an ambiguous relationship with imperial power. On the one hand it represented a rejection of imperial associations, with missionaries making a point, albeit inconsistently, of refusing any assistance or

⁹ Cohen, *Discovering History in China*, pp. 97-147. See also the debate between Andrew J. Nathan and Joseph Esherick: Nathan, 'Imperialism's Effects on China', pp. 3-8, Esherick, 'Harvard on China: The Apologetics of Imperialism', pp. 9-16, in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 4:4, (1972).

¹⁰ Ryan Dunch, 'Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions and Global Modernity', *History and Theory* 41 (2002), pp. 301-325.

protection they could have claimed as a result of their connections with imperial consulates, and also seeking to work in areas that were outside of Western imperial influence.

However, it is precisely in these peripheral spaces away from colonial influence that missionary primitivists became most involved in imperial politics. In particular, Patterson first got himself into a patron-client relationship with a local Khampa chief in order to safeguard his position in Tibet, and then became an emissary for Kham when the conflict with China broke out. Because of his local knowledge and Western background, he was able to become involved in international politics. While he sought to justify this involvement in the language of primitivism, his advocacy on behalf of Tibet and against China implicated him as an imperialist in the eyes of the Chinese Communists, and met with the disapproval of his missionary colleagues.

The Brethren advocated non-involvement in politics, and asserted that their mission transcended national interests. However, the difficulties of this were clearly seen in the aftermath of the withdrawal from China. Struggling to maintain the integrity of their primitivist narrative in the wake of this disappointment, the departing missionaries slipped into a polarised analysis, opposing their primitivist faith with the atheist modernity that had emerged in China. By doing so, they perpetuated the political narrative that had originally led the Communists to seek their removal from China.

On the other hand, missionary primitivism could be used by Chinese Christians as a means of taking an independent stand against missionaries. With its claim to be

returning to an original Christianity freed from political or cultural accretions, primitivism could easily be turned against missionaries, as it was by Watchman Nee. His movement asserted the redundancy of Western missions, and called for an independent, locally based Christianity. While this brought him opposition from many missionaries, in Britain a disillusioned evangelicalism saw in Nee an idealised spirituality free from the ethnocentrism and imperialism of their own missions.

Cohen framed his analysis of imperialism in terms of a question: ‘reality or myth?’¹¹ However, missionary primitivism highlights the insufficiency of such a framing, exposing the myriad and contradictory ways that imperialism operated discursively, and therefore as both reality and myth. Missionary primitivism was identified simultaneously as both imperialist and a means of being freed from imperialism. It could also be used to justify many different levels of political involvement, from a non-political stance, to a promotion of armed insurrection. In this way missionary primitivism highlights the absence of any normalised concept of imperialism, and emphasises the need to pay closer attention to the various discursive configurations of imperialism within missionary encounters in modern Chinese history.

A China-Centered History

Cohen’s posited solution to the Western-centrism of the previous three paradigms was a China-centered history of China. This new paradigm was to have three criteria: first, that in selecting the events that should be the focus of Chinese history, ‘the

¹¹ Cohen, *Discovering History in China*, p. 97.

measure of their historical importance is a Chinese, rather than a Western measure?; second, that this history should pay attention to distinctions within China, both geographical and social; and third, that social science methodologies should be fully utilised.¹²

Arif Dirlik has made a number of criticisms of the China-centered paradigm, and the problems that he raises are ones that a study of missionary primitivism can speak to. Dirlik has highlighted how Cohen's conceptualisation of China is problematic. Cohen insists on a distinction between an internal Chinese history and a Western-shaped context during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and asserts that the internal history should be the focus of the historian of China. Dirlik has pointed out that this distinction results in a reification of China, and subsequently removes from a definition of 'Chineseness' any Chinese who have themselves made use of or identified with 'non-Chinese' ideas.¹³

This thesis has sought to use missionary primitivism as a means of exploring the ways that 'non-Chinese' ideas were accepted or rejected as part of Chinese modernity. By focussing on a missionary group who identified themselves in opposition to modernity, it has sought to complicate the ways in which the modern is seen to have been defined in China in relation to missionaries. In particular, the embrace of missionary primitivism by Watchman Nee has been used to question the concept of 'Chinese Christianity.' This is a concept shaped in large part by the China-centered paradigm, with its implied distinction between an alien, missionary

¹² Cohen, *Discovering History in China*, pp. 153-154.

¹³ Dirlik, 'Reversals, Ironies, Hegemonies', pp. 264-266.

Christianity and one that is genuinely Chinese in character.¹⁴ Nee asserted that his Christianity was neither Chinese nor Western, but rather primitive and based solely on the Bible. Simultaneously, he used this primitivism to promote a movement that asserted the necessity of Chinese authority and initiative. In this way, missionary primitivism helps to elucidate the processes by which an outside influence, such as Christianity, might overcome its foreignness in modern China.

Dirlik has also drawn attention to how Cohen's insistence on a Chinese measure of historical importance is contradicted by his own call for a greater delineation of Chinese history according to different localities and social groups. These differentiations, Dirlik argues, would serve to undermine Cohen's own conceptualisation of China. Missionary primitivism allows for a further engagement with this problem. The focus on the margins has demonstrated the ways that missionaries differentiated these regions from the rest of China, offering both favourable and unfavourable comparisons. In the case of Patterson, his involvement with the Pandatsangs initially placed him within a movement that saw modernity as an opportunity for greater cooperation between Tibet and China on the basis of the Three People's Principles.¹⁵ But his opposition to Communism led him to identify with a primitive Tibet against a modernising China.

The figure of Watchman Nee has also been a focus of debates over conceptions of Chineseness. Identified by missionaries in the 1930s and 1940s with an assertion of Chinese nationalism, he was then excluded from the new China by the Communists

¹⁴ Daniel H. Bays, *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 265.

¹⁵ For Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) and the Three Peoples' Principles, see: Marie-Claire Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen* (Paris: Fayard, 1994); Sidney Chang and Leonard Gordon, *All Under Heaven: Sun Yat-sen and His Revolutionary Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

under their anti-imperialist campaign. In the West, Nee's imprisonment would feed two polarised views of China: that of atheistic communism, implacably opposed to Christianity; and that of the simple faith of its suffering, but enduring Christians. In this way, missionary primitivism helps to advance our understanding of the development of ideas of Chineseness in the years immediately preceding and following the establishment of the PRC.

Watchman Nee and the Legacy of Missionary Primitivism in China

Following the Cultural Revolution, there has been a huge increase in China's unregistered churches, which form the overwhelming majority of the country's Protestant population, estimated to number over fifty million people.¹⁶ Lian Xi has claimed that 'by far the most important inspiration for the underground church movement came from the Little Flock.' This is as a result of the survival of Nee's teachings, which have 'generated seemingly endless sectarian, and cultic, energy.'¹⁷ Watchman Nee's Little Flock movement has therefore become a large and controversial part of China's popular religious landscape, and is certainly the most significant long-term legacy of missionary primitivism in China.

The popularity of Nee's writings has continued to increase outside of China too, where they have been discovered and rediscovered by Christians in the West and in Africa.¹⁸ Simultaneously, the Little Flock in China is engaged in a new translation

¹⁶ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p. 2.

¹⁷ Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 215-216.

¹⁸ Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 176. Robert traces the transmission of the spiritual writings of the South

project of the writings of T. Austin-Sparks, Nee's mentor at the Honor Oak Fellowship in London.¹⁹ Though interest in Austin-Sparks has largely waned among evangelicals in Britain, his influence and esteem among Christians in China has seemingly continued to grow. Missionary primitivism has therefore produced distinct, local forms, but its impacts and creative potential are best understood as stemming from a circulation of influences between mission field and home churches. In this way, the history of the Brethren in modern China is one of an ongoing and global encounter.

African pastor Andrew Murray to England, where they were taken by Margaret Barber to China. Here they became integrated into Watchman Nee's writings, which in turn have spread to the USA, and from there taken to South Africa, to the descendants of Murray's original readers.

¹⁹ Interview with Little Flock member, 13 August 2012.

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