

Gu Changsheng's

Missionaries
and Modern China
Reprinted

Peter Barry



In May 1983, the People's Press of Shanghai came out with a second printing of the first edition of the book Missionaries and Modern China by Gu Changsheng, professor of modern Chinese history at Huadong Normal University. The book was first published in April, 1981. Six thousand five hundred copies of the book were printed in the first run, and 6,000 copies in the second.

In his foreward, entitled "A Note on the Reprinting," author Gu Changsheng states that some emendations were made in the original text after suggestions were received from many readers, but with the stipulation that at this time the original layout would not be subject to any changes. While most of the corrections are changes in names, dates and places - the so-called facts of history - there are also some changes in phraseology or vocabulary.¹

Evidently Professor Gu plans a completely revised second edition of the book because in his prefatory note he expresses the hope the colleagues and readers will continue to send suggestions in view of a

possible second edition. We reproduce Professor Gu's "A Note on the Reprinting" here:

This book was written under the guiding principles of righting wrongs, liberating thoughts, seeking truth from facts and uniting to face the future, all of which were put forward at the 3rd Plenary Session of the CCP's 11th Central Committee. The writing was also undertaken with the encouragement and support of Huadong Normal University and Shanghai's People's Press, and is based on research and material gathered over a long period of time. This reprinting was made after hearing opinions from all sides and with the premise that any corrections would be done without altering the original layout. However, I feel that in both scope and depth, there are still some incomplete areas. In particular, there is little description of the usefulness of missionaries in acting as bridges to form a link between the cultures of east and west. And there is nothing written about missionaries who sympathized with, and supported change and revolution in China. This is a defect which must be corrected. My one wish was to accomplish the purpose of "throwing a brick to attract the jade," that is, to arouse the interest of intellectual circles that they might undertake research into this particular historical phenomenon.

The book is merely the author's thesis, which is placed in socialism's garden of one hundred flowers to be contended against, that all may seek together the facts of history and receive fresh nourishment. In the wake of deeper research into some questions, some points of view may be corrected and some materials supplemented. I sincerely hope that both the ordinary reader and the scholar-specialist will continue to offer their criticism and help, so that when the time comes for publishing a second edition, the book can be emended and enriched. Many comrades have enthusiastically offered their valuable opinions. I want to convey to them at this time my heartfelt thanks.

An example of a correction in historical fact is given in the very first line of the text: the date of Matteo Ricci's arrival in Beijing has been changed from January 4, 1601 to January 24, 1601.

Another example is the change of the Jesuit missionary Cattaneo's country of origin from Switzerland to Italy (p.3, line 6).

However, in some places, more substantial changes take place in the use of terminology. For instance, the term "cultural aggression" (wenhua qinlie) has been dropped in many instances. One example of this is the change of "imperialism's policy of cultural aggression" to "imperialism's aggressive policy towards China." (p. 284, line 20). Another example is in the charge that religion made use of good works, such as hospitals, as methods of carrying out cultural aggression which has now been changed to "methods of buying the hearts of the Chinese people." (p.295, line 20).

In another place, the author describes religion's use of medical works as a kind of spiritual aggression against the Chinese people. For if a person is cured of a physical ailment, it is thought, he/she might be unconsciously attracted to join the religion. In the first printing of his book, the author described this as a means of cultural invasion which was far more harmful than guns and cannon. But in the second printing, missionary medical works are likened to "a cultural educational activity....meant to enslave the Chinese people." (p.284, lines 11-12).

At this time I would like to praise Professor Gu for finally laying to rest in this passage the ancient rumor that church medical workers plucked out the eyes of patients to make medicine. For he speaks of missionary medical work in this way: "The use of medical works to carry out aggression against China is certainly not the kind contained in tradition, namely, 'the plucking out of eyeballs to make medicine,'.... which resulted in death to the patient, but the use of curing physical ailments to carry out a spiritual aggression...." (p. 284, lines 8-10) One hopes that that slanderous rumor will at last be discredited by Professor Gu's statement.

However, perhaps Professor Gu does not yet have a completely balanced view of missionary medical work. To this reviewer's knowledge, the primary concern of the missionary medical worker was the health of the patient. If by being cured, the non-Christian patient became interested in Christianity, inquired about and studied its doctrines, and finally came to the conclusion that he/she believed in it and became baptised, then that was the patient's free decision. No one was forced to accept Christianity or enter the church, though the missionary was no doubt/happy when someone did so. At the same time, it should be

pointed out that no one was forced to go to the missionary hospital or clinic for treatment in the first place. Thus, it is hardly accurate to describe missionary medical work as "buying the hearts of the Chinese people," nor was such work meant "to enslave the Chinese people".

The passage questioned by John Tong who reviewed the original work in Tripod, #7 (p. 62) about the missionaries leading a luxurious life in China has been altered to read "some missionaries." (p. 115, line 16-17). This shows that the author is aware that no blanket statements about missionary activity can be made. However, the same passage still raises a lot of questions which need to be answered because Professor Gu provides only slight proof (by quoting one source) for the allegations made. The author writes that "some missionaries" during spring and autumn ("tourist seasons," he calls them) were in the habit of traveling everywhere in China in the name of preaching the Gospel to gather intelligence and to interfere in China's internal affairs. During the summer, the missionaries would take vacations at China's resorts, such as Beihaid. In winter, the author continues, the missionaries used to hold meetings during which they would exchange information about their activities in China and make plans for expanding their church's influence in order to better serve the aggressive policies of the countries from which they originated.

To this reviewer, the whole passage seems exaggerated. Perhaps the missionaries did have a standard of living which seemed luxurious in comparison with that of most of the Chinese people at the time. But for the most part they made an attempt to adapt to conditions in China and their standard of living was generally lower than that to which they were accustomed in their home countries. However, in response to the charge about gathering intelligence, what is the definition of "intelli-



Many Chinese scientists were trained by foreign missionaries.

gence?" Or what kind of intelligence was gathered? Also, no proof is offered for the allegation that the purpose of missionary expansion was to serve the aggressive policies of the missionaries' native countries.

Actually, Professor Gu does note that not all missionaries could be accused of imperialistic aggressive activities, and that those who were, were only so unconsciously. At the conclusion of Chapter Four, entitled "Missionary Organizations and Their Activities," in which the abovementioned "four seasons" passage appears, the author writes:

Summarizing what has been written above, colonialism and imperialism's use of religion to invade China was carried out by the missionaries. Therefore, speaking as a whole, missionaries were the pioneers of imperialism's aggression. They brought disaster to the Chinese people. They hastened China's entrance into a semi-colonial state, and also hindered China's revolutionary process. But this is not to say that every missionary was an agent of imperialism. With regard to concrete persons it is necessary to make a concrete analysis. The majority of missionaries pursued a policy of aggression unconsciously. Because they were unemployed, some came to China seeking a livelihood. Few of those who taught in church-run schools or practiced medicine in church operated hospitals had animosity for China. Some missionaries nourished a sympathetic attitude for the Chinese people, and some even rendered assistance during the war against Japan. Therefore, the situation is very complicated. We must make a balanced evaluation with an attitude of seeking truth from facts. (pp. 124-5)

I agree with the last two sentences quoted from Professor Gu's book, and I suggest that better organization, selection and use of material would be helpful in arriving at a "balanced evaluation" of a "complicated situation". The generally negative tone regarding missionary activity in China, which comes across to the reader, is no doubt due to the tendency to choose only negative material. Also, the tendency of the author to draw general conclusions by citing one or two sources could be corrected by a more balanced selection of materials. Perhaps a trip abroad to do direct research in the archives of missionary organizations would be helpful for Professor Gu in increasing the amount of materials available to him.

I am in admiration at the breadth of Professor Gu's work, covering

as it does all Christian missionary activity (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox) from Matteo Ricci's arrival in Beijing in 1601 to Leighton Stuart's departure in 1949, a period of about 350 years. With the suggestion that more work is needed on depth and balance, I look forward to a second edition of Professor Gu's book which will hopefully give the more "balanced evaluation" which the author himself advocates.

FOOTNOTE:

(1) The reader is advised to consult the Chinese section of this issue of Tripod for a detailed comparison of the changes in the two printings. A review of Missionaries and Modern China, written by John Tong, appears in Tripod, #7.

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