

BOOK REVIEWS

Christianity in China: Early Protestant Missionary Writings

Suzanne W. Barnett and John K. Fairbank, editors. Cambridge,
Harvard University Press, 1985.

reviewed by Donald MacInnis

This is the second collection of scholarly papers on Protestant mission history in China to be published by Harvard University Press in recent years. The first was The Missionary Enterprise in China and America (1974), also edited by John K. Fairbank. In each case we have research papers of high quality drawing heavily on the special collections in the Harvard libraries. This volume is the result of a research conference organized by Suzanne Barnett at Harvard in 1978.

The contributors are all scholars based in secular institutions. Their writing is objective and fair, thoroughly researched, and without the anti-missionary bias one senses in similar writings by some of their peers in

past years. Dr. Fairbank's well-known support for historical research of China mission records is reiterated in his introduction: "In China's nineteenth century relations with the West, Protestant missions are still the least studied but most significant actors in the scene." Later, commenting on the comparative neglect of Christian missions by modern historians, he writes: "...the expansion of Christianity has thus remained a specialty for the missiologist, not in the mainstream of American history."

He is right, of course, but incorrect in one respect: Catholic missions are even less studied than Protestant missions, and they, too, were "significant actors" in the China scene, enrolling more converts by far than the Protestants.

One could argue, however, that the Protestants made a greater impact in certain kinds of endeavor: higher education, for example, or the publishing of Christian tracts and other kinds of literature. This volume documents the nineteenth century efforts of the early Protestant missionaries in translation, writing, and publishing.

Most of the missionary publications described here are in the Chinese language. Since Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary, came in 1807, and China was not opened to foreigners until 1842, the early missionaries began their work among Chinese emigres in southeast Asia. It was there that they studied the language, recruited Chinese colleagues, and began their work of translation, writing, and printing.

Tracts were the main product of those early efforts, and it was a tract by Liang Fa, a convert, which led to the conversion of Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, the leader of the Taiping Rebellion. Liang Fa's work is analyzed by P. Richard Bohr.

In addition to tracts, Bible translation, and other Christian writings, the early Protestant missionaries wrote and published in Chinese on a wide range of secular subjects. E. C. Bridgman's Short Account of the United States of America, and the publications of the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge are examples. Chinese intellectuals, educated in the classics, were the target for books and

essays on everything from astronomy to modern agriculture. One of the most prolific of the early missionaries was Karl Gutzlaff, a missionary entrepreneur who wrote and published in three languages: Chinese, English and German. His work is described by Jessie G. Lutz and Fred W. Drake. Evelyn Rawski asks and answers the question: What values did Christian missionaries transmit through their elementary schools? Daniel Bays has two chapters, one on the early Christian tracts, and the other describing parallels between Chinese religious sectarianism and Christianity. He documents Christian conversions from these popular sects, suggesting that literature was the bridge.

Other chapters describe the literary work of later missionaries in China: William Milne, W. H. Medhurst, Justus Doolittle, and Arthur H. Smith, who lived with his family in a Chinese village for many years. His Chinese Characteristics, the most widely-read work on China in his time, describes Chinese life and culture as he perceived it. Charles Hayford, in his scholarly appraisal of Smith's book, finds that it still is a remarkable, insightful work of popular sociology, although flawed by the use of his middle-class American values as a reference point.

These secular scholars make no value judgments on the evangelistic work of the China missionaries. Their fair, balanced and thoroughly-researched essays describe and appraise the quality of the missionaries' publications in Chinese, and the effect they had on pre-modern China. The missionaries' writings influenced China's leaders in their search for power and equivalence among the nations, a search that continues today.

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The Call,

New York, Alfred Knopf, 1985, 701 pp.

reviewed by Donald MacInnis

Missiologial journals review scholarly works, not novels. Yet John Hersey's novel, The Call, should be re-