

OBSTACLES TO MISSIONARY SUCCESS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY CHINA

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ALTHOUGH THE FOREIGN MISSIONARY AND TRADER IN MID-19TH century China tended to go their separate ways, they had one thing in common: both were excited by the challenge of China's vast population. The trader was inspired by the prospect of selling his goods to hundreds of millions of customers. The missionary saw the same hundreds of millions as lost souls, in need of the gospel of salvation. Over the decades that followed the opening of China in 1842, both the trader and the missionary tried to reach the Chinese masses. Neither found the Chinese very receptive. The growth of the China trade fell far short of the trader's dream. The missionary found, in the words of the parable, that his seed was falling on rocky ground.

The unwillingness of most Chinese to accept Christianity can hardly be attributed to lack of effort on the missionaries' part. During the nineteenth century, the various missionary societies responded to the challenge of China's unconverted millions with great energy and devotion. The number of Protestant missionaries (including wives of missionaries) at work in China grew from 81 in 1858 to 189 in 1864; 436 in 1874; 618 in 1881, and 1926 in 1889. Altogether, more than 2,500 Protestant missionaries had come to the China field by 1889. By the end of the century, however, Protestant Christian converts were still counted only in tens of thousands, not hundreds of millions. Latourette puts the number of Protestant Christians in 1889 at 37,287.¹

The question why Protestant missions in China were not more successful is exceedingly difficult to get at. Looking at the problem theologically, some troubled missionaries confessed their inability to comprehend why an "outpouring of the Holy Spirit" had been withheld. For a modern scholar to produce a thorough understanding of the problem would require all of the insights and skills of the sociologist and the psychologist, and it would have to be based on a thorough understanding of cultural differences between China and the West at a particular time in history. The present modest effort is based on the hope that some partial insights may come from an intensive study of the available evidence of what the missionaries did, observed, and thought at a single important center of missionary work in China over a period of several decades. The place chosen is Foochow in Fukien province. Foochow was an important administrative center, being the city where the Governor of Fukien and the Governor-General of Fukien and Chekiang were located. As a center of prefectural and provincial examinations, and the residence of a large number of gentry, it was a major cultural center. It was one of the five ports opened to foreign commerce and residents (pursuant to the Treaty of Nanking) and

¹ All statistics in this paragraph are from Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), 405-406, 479.

was, accordingly, one of the earlier centers of Protestant work in China. Protestant mission in Foochow began in 1847, and the present article, which is part of a larger study, deals with the period from 1847-1880.²

Three Protestant missionary societies worked in Foochow in the decades following the opening of the port. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (the Congregationalist Society) and the American Methodists came in 1847, and the Church Missionary Society (Church of England) followed in 1850. During the first four years of missionary work in Foochow, some twenty-seven missionaries—including wives—arrived at the port. By 1860, the total number of missionaries who had come to Foochow reached fifty, of whom twenty-four remained in the work.³

Although this quite large force of workers began their work with great enthusiasm, they found before long that their task was terribly difficult. As foreigners, they were something of a curiosity and they attracted attention. Curious people visited their homes and came into their chapels. The astounding fact about early missionary work in Foochow, however, is that it took the missionaries nine years to win their first convert. It was not until 1856 that the American Board baptized its first convert;⁴ the first Methodist baptism came a year later;⁵ the CMS did not baptize anyone until 1861.⁶ The slowness of results was hard for the missionaries to bear. One wrote that the lack of converts "humbles us in the dust."⁷ Another found the fact "rather depressing,"⁸ and still another confessed that at times his "weak faith" led him "almost to despondancy."⁹ Eventually, the Foochow missions enjoyed some modest successes, but there would seem to be no doubt about the fact that mission work in Foochow was extremely difficult. Why?

The difficulties which the missionaries faced in their efforts to convert the Chinese had many dimensions. At the outset of the work in Foochow, an immense task of adjustment to a new environment and of preparation for the work which they had come to do, absorbed much of the time and effort of

² The author of the present article hopes to publish a book on Protestant Missions in Foochow, 1847-1880, in the near future.

³ Statistics given in this paragraph will be closely documented in my forthcoming book. Main sources for the data are Wade Crawford Barclay, *History of Methodist Missions*, Part II; *The Methodist Episcopal Church 1845-1939*, Vol. III; *Widening Horizons 1845-95* (New York: Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, 1957), 367-380; *Reports of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, published in Boston by the Board; *Missionary Herald* (to be cited below simply as *Herald*), published by the American Board in Boston; *Church Missionary Record* (to be referred to below simply as *Record*) published by the Church Missionary Society in London; Eugene Stock, *The Story of the Fuh-kien Mission of the Church Missionary Society* (3rd. ed.; London, 1891), *passim*.

⁴ C. C. Baldwin's letter of April 14, 1856 quoted in *Herald* (September, 1856), 52.283.

⁵ *Thirty-ninth Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1857* (New York, 1858), 43.49; also Mr. Robert S. Maclay's letter of July 1, 1857, *Missionary Advocate* (January, 1858), 13.77. Hereafter, the annual reports of the Methodist board will be referred to as *Reports-ME*; the *Missionary Advocate* as *MA*.

⁶ *Record* (November, 1861), 32.356, 357.

⁷ R. S. Maclay, quoted in *MA* (May, 1853), 8.11.

⁸ Isaac W. Wiley, quoted in *Christian Advocate* (May 6, 1852), 27.75. *The Christian Advocate* will be cited below simply as *CA*.

⁹ L. B. Peet's letter of June 6, 1859, *Herald* (October, 1859), 55.297, 298.

the missionaries and, therefore, constituted a great obstacle to achievement of missionary goals. Problems of adjustment and preparation were not peculiar to Foochow missionaries (or China missionaries). But it would probably be fair to say that such problems were more serious in Foochow (and China) than in some other parts of the world. The early Foochow missionaries spent a large proportion of their time solving the elementary physical problems of existence: obtaining property, building houses, training servants, learning to function in a different climate, adjusting to different food. These problems were not easily solved. Almost invariably, missionary attempts to obtain property aroused opposition from potential neighbors and from others opposed to missionary work. This was particularly true within the walled city of Foochow; it was true to a lesser extent in the Nant'ai suburb which extended southward from the city to the banks of the Min River.¹⁰ In the early years, the missionaries spent tremendous amounts of time negotiating for the rent or purchase of properties, supervising the erection of houses, and looking after their maintenance. The adjustment to life in Foochow was not easy, even in fairly comfortable houses. The missionaries were quite easy victims to malaria, dysentery, cholera, tuberculosis, and other diseases. The letters of the missionaries show an almost constant preoccupation with matters of health. By 1860, ten of the fifty missionaries who had come to Foochow had died there, or had died elsewhere from sickness contracted there, and several of the missionary families had buried children in the mission cemetery.¹¹

Learning the Foochow dialect of the Chinese language was a tremendous task—really a never-ending one—for each of the early missionaries. It was not just a matter of being able to talk about the material necessities of life. The missionary had to prepare himself to present ideas and concepts that were foreign to Chinese culture without being misunderstood, and to do so with pronunciation and idiom that would not bring ridicule from Chinese listeners, whose culture gave high value to correct and elegant use of language. Finding the words and figures of speech that would enable the missionary to communicate concepts that had no close Chinese equivalent, was a tremendous problem. One of the American Board missionaries wrote home that

Their language is but a visible expression of their thoughts, and as such has not a single word which contains a perfectly Christian idea. Hence we have not only to preach to those who are spiritually dead, but we are obliged at present to make use of a medium of communication... which is fraught with darkness and error. The consequence is that we often seem to ourselves as well as to our hearers to be only speaking into the air.¹²

The long argument among the missionaries over which term to use for God, *shen* or *shang-ti*, was only the best known instance of the difficulty of learn-

¹⁰ One instance of this kind of opposition is described in my article, "The Wu-shih-shan Incident of 1878" in *A Festschrift for Frederick B. Artz*, ed. by David H. Pinkney and Theodore Ropp (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1964), 72-97. A large number of other cases will be cited in my forthcoming book on the Foochow missionaries.

¹¹ See my forthcoming book on the Foochow missionaries.

¹² Letter by Lyman Peet, dated February 7, 1852, located in the archives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, 16.3.3(2), No. 343. This source will be cited below as ABC.

ing how to express Christian concepts in the Chinese language.¹³ In the early decades of missionary work in Foochow, a large proportion of the missionaries' time was spent in their studies, improving their command of the language, and translating and improving translations of the scriptures into both classical and colloquial Chinese. Some of the missionaries never really became competent enough with the language to enable them to do effective work. When they did achieve sufficient competence with the language, it was only after long preparation which took time that could not be devoted to the central tasks of missionary work.

As the missionaries undertook the task for which they had come to Foochow, they had to cope not only with resistance and unresponsiveness, but also with outright hostility and opposition, particularly from the Chinese gentry. In other words, the missionary task was not just to persuade China's millions, but also to counter the influence of opponents who were determined to prevent the spread of Christianity in China. The present study started with the assumption that opposition to Christianity in the 19th century was probably something that was generated out of the frictions between missionaries and the Chinese with whom they came in contact—or something that developed anew after the intermission that had separated the great Jesuit mission of the 17th and 18th centuries from the revival of missionary work in the 19th century. The fact is that the opposition was there when the missionaries arrived, and it did not need to be aroused. It was rooted, no doubt, in that pervasive, stubborn "culturalism"—a strong pride in the Chinese cultural heritage, paralleled by something approaching contempt for the "barbarians"—that had been so prevalent in China, particularly among the gentry, for hundreds of years. What has been called the "anti-Christian movement" is well described by Paul Cohen in his recent book, *China and Christianity*.¹⁴ Hostility to Christianity showed up most clearly in an extensive anti-Christian literature, notably the *Pi-hsieh chi-shih* (a record of facts to ward off heterodoxy), which labeled Christianity as "heterodox," and accused the Christians of all sorts of immoralities.¹⁵

The history of Protestant missions in Foochow confirms the reality of the "anti-Christian movement," and this movement must be counted as one of the important obstacles to missionary success in Foochow. Foochow had its anti-Christian literature, most importantly a book entitled *She-ying-lou shih-hua*, which was published in 1851. The author, a second degree holder named Lin Chang-e, was reported to be a relative of Lin Tse-hsu, whose efforts to stop the opium trade had precipitated the Opium War. According to the British Consul, the book was widely distributed among students who came to Foochow in 1851 to take civil service examinations. The book contained many of the standard charges against Christianity. The foreign religion destroyed morals. Men and women gathered together in the churches for immoral purposes. The Christians renounced ancestor worship. Christian tracts were written in a foolish style; they denounced Confucius and Mencius; and they were

¹³ This controversy raged for decades. See the *Chinese Recorder*, *passim*.

¹⁴ Paul A. Cohen, *China and Christianity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 45-59.

full of other false ideas. The missionaries paid people to become Christians; some people became Christians because of poverty, but men of conscience were repelled by the heterodox faith. The missionaries took the eyes from the dead.¹⁶

Opposition to Christianity and missionaries took many other forms. Mention has already been made of gentry efforts to prevent the missionaries from acquiring property, especially within the walled city of Foochow. In 1850 the gentry and some officials brought great pressure on the Foochow authorities to evict the Church Missionary Society from its premises on Wu-shih-shan (Black Stone Hill), and it was only the strong support of the British consular authorities that prevented them from succeeding.¹⁷ In 1867, one of the CMS missionaries reported that a "gentry anti-Christian association" was working to prevent the missionaries from acquiring property. "The streets are at this moment placarded with notices, threatening most extreme measures against any who shall dare sell or rent houses in the city to 'barbarian men.'"¹⁸ In 1878 opponents of missionary work in Foochow resorted to violence—the burning of a new mission school building—in the course of a successful effort to force the CMS missionaries to leave Wu-shih-shan.¹⁹ After the second treaty settlement of 1860, the missionaries extended their work to the south, west, and north of Foochow. In the "outstations," particularly in the larger district and prefectural cities, the missions encountered opposition comparable to that in Foochow. In the great prefectural cities of Yen-p'ing and Chieng-ning, opposition was so great that for two decades the missionaries were unable to make any substantial headway; missionaries were expelled and their chapels were destroyed.²⁰

Even when the missionary (with the help of the consul) acquired the property he needed and managed to exercise his right to preach Christianity provided in the treaties, the fact that he was a foreigner teaching a foreign religion was still an obstacle to overcome. He had to contend with the view that barbarians should learn from the Middle Kingdom instead of spreading their own corrupt doctrines. C. C. Baldwin of the American Board—one of the more scholarly missionaries in Foochow—wrote of having encountered "inveterate prejudices against foreigners, all strengthened by a consciousness of immeasurable superiority to surrounding barbarous races..."²¹ In making the point that Christian doctrines could not possibly be true, an educated

¹⁶ The original text of the She-ying-lou shih-hua has not been located. The book was discussed at some length in two dispatches from the British Consul in Foochow, Mr Walker, to the Governor of Hong Kong, Mr. Bonham. These dispatches are in the Foreign Office correspondence in the Public Record Office in London: Walker's dispatch of 10 December 1851, F.O.228/128 and his dispatch No. 4 of 8 January 1852, F.O.228/144. See also Mr. R. S. Maclay's journal for October 25, 1852, MA (April, 1852), 8.3 and a letter of June 12, 1853 from a CMS missionary, Mr. W. Welton, to the American Board missionary, Stephen Johnson, forwarded with Johnson's letter of June 19, 1852 to the American Board, ABC 16.3.3(2), No. 308.

¹⁷ See Carlson on "The Wu-shih-shan Incident..." op. cit., 75-78.

¹⁸ Report by John R. Wolfe (CMS) quoted in the *Church Missionary Review* (July 1, 1867), 18.217. This periodical, known during part of its lifetime as the *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, will be cited below simply as CMS.

¹⁹ See Carlson on "The Wu-shih-shan Incident..." op. cit., particularly pages 85-90.

²⁰ See my forthcoming book on the Foochow missionaries.

²¹ *Herald* (March, 1862), 58.83.

Chinese with whom McCaw of the CMS was conversing asked, "How is it that our great Confucius never knew them nor taught them."²² One interesting manifestation of the contempt which the gentry had for the missionaries and their religion was the unwillingness of some of the educated Chinese (whom the missionaries employed to teach them the language) to be seen publicly in their company.²³

In speaking of Chinese contempt for the missionaries, some mention must also be made of the opium trade. Foochow, like other cities on the southern coast, imported and consumed great quantities of opium, brought to the port by foreign ships. The fact that Englishmen and Americans brought opium to Foochow was deeply resented by many Chinese and served to strengthen the Chinese conviction that these men from afar were in fact contemptible barbarians. The missionaries faced no easy task in persuading the Chinese that there was a distinction to be made between opium traders and missionaries. Making the distinction was all the more difficult because of missionary dependence on the opium traders in the early years. For a short time after his arrival in Foochow—via opium ship—the first Protestant missionary in Foochow (Stephen Johnson of the American Board) lived with an opium captain; one of the first houses acquired by the missionaries was one formerly occupied by an opium captain. For a number of years, the missionaries had to visit the opium ships outside the harbor in order to get their foreign drafts changed into silver dollars.²⁴

As they went about their lives and work in Foochow, the missionaries were never allowed to forget the opium trade; their letters and diaries give abundant reason to believe that Chinese resentment against the foreigner's opium was a major obstacle to Chinese acceptance of the foreigner's religion. In 1852, Mr. Welton—one of the English missionaries—wrote that the opium trade "is attaching such a stigma to the English name and character that some of us . . . would almost be glad not to be known as such. . . ." He went on to report that he often faced the rebuff, "Why do you bring us opium?"²⁵ In 1855, another English missionary—Mr. McCaw—wrote that his Chinese teacher was "continually seeking an opportunity of bringing forward the question of opium and English merchants."²⁶ Mr. Peet of the American Board wrote in 1856 that

No questions have been more frequently put to me by the people of this place during my sojourn among them than those which relate to the subject of opium. Is it not brought from your country? Are not your Jesus Christ's men engaged in selling it to us?²⁷

As late as 1877, Mr. Wolfe of the CMS wrote

God knows how often and often is our message of peace and salvation contemptuously thrown back in our face with the scornful remark, "You destroy us

²² *Record* (December, 1857), 28.370.

²³ See, for example, R. S. Maclay's report of September 26, 1856, quoted in *MA* (March, 1857), 12.89.

²⁴ Johnson's letter of January 8, 1847, *ABC*, 16.3.3(2), No. 290; Johnson's letter of October 4, 1847, *ABC*, 16.3.3(2), No. 297.

²⁵ *CMS* (December, 1852), 3.274.

²⁶ *Record* (February, 1856), 27.40.

²⁷ Peet's letter of January 28, 1856, *ABC*, 16.3.3(2), No. 358.

with your opium, and now you insult us with your offer of peace and salvation." How often and often are our best efforts as missionaries rendered abortive amongst this people by the knowledge that we belong to the country which forces the opium traffic upon China! ²⁸

It was not only by bringing opium to Foochow that the missionaries' countrymen embarrassed them. One of the missionaries reported that the Chinese with whom he conversed in his chapel, told him about foreigners who "keep mistresses and seem to be very wicked." ²⁹ Another missionary deplored the business which foreign residents of Foochow gave to the Cantonese prostitutes who followed the foreigners to the port. ³⁰

The quickness of the Chinese to point out the moral shortcomings of the foreigners, leads us to one of the more paradoxical aspects of the position of the missionaries in China. They had come to China with a deep sense of the depravity of man. They were convinced that hundreds of millions of Chinese were perishing and were, therefore, in dire need of knowledge of Christianity through which they could be saved. ³¹ But the Chinese to whom they addressed their message of salvation were less impressed with their own sinfulness than with the immorality of Englishmen and Americans. Just how this Chinese lack of a sense of sin is to be explained is not a question that the present writer feels qualified to answer. When scholars become able to answer this question, what they say will doubtless be somewhat more complicated than the explanation offered by an American diplomatic historian when he says that "The Chinese had no sense of sin for the simple reason that he actually lived up to the ideals set before him. . ." ³²

Whether we are able to explain it or not, there is hardly room for doubt about the fact that many Chinese to whom the missionaries preached, did not feel "totally depraved" or in need of ransom lest they perish. The first missionary to work in Foochow, Stephen Johnson, reported that "Perhaps there are no people on earth who have more of self-complacency, and less sense of sin, than the Chinese." ³³ The CMS missionary, Mr. Wolfe, complained in his journal of the difficulty he had in getting across the idea of universal sinfulness. ³⁴ Mr. McCaw's frustrations in the same endeavor show up in his comment

...when I repeat, with all of my energy of speech, the blessings of heaven and the misery of hell, until wearied, the only response frequently is, 'Is not his shirt very white?' 'How many feet of cloth makes your coat?' ³⁵

Even those Chinese who accepted Christianity, appear to have been somewhat lacking in their sense of sin. Mr. Baldwin of the American Board wrote that

²⁸ CMS (November, 1877), 28.666.

²⁹ C. C. Baldwin's letter of May 21, 1855, ABC, 16.3.3(2), No. 185.

³⁰ Diary entries of Charles Hartwell for May 7, 8, and 10, 1856, ABC, 67.

³¹ Mr. Cummings of the American Board wrote of Foochow's "six hundred thousand inhabitants, all of whom are hurrying rapidly to a wretched eternity. . ." *Herald* (July, 1849), 45.222.

³² Paul A. Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958), 28.

³³ His letter of January 1, 1850, ABC, 16.3.3(2), No. 140.

³⁴ Extracts from his journal covering the period from November, 1866 to January, 1867, sent to the CMS under the heading "Visit to the Cities of Hokiang, Lienkong, and Lo Ngong," archives of the Church Missionary Society, Salisbury Square, London.

³⁵ McCaw's journal entry for March 18, 1857, *Record* (December, 1857), 28.368.

what the Chinese Christians "seem most to lack is a soul-penetrating sense of sinfulness."³⁶

One of the common complaints of both Chinese and Western critics of the missionaries is that they offered material inducements to those they were trying to convert. They are charged with offering jobs or other financial advantage to those Chinese who were low enough to become "rice Christians," and with offering support to converts (through their influence with the consuls) in their lawsuits. The missionaries themselves expressed concern lest some Chinese had become Christians in the hope that they would get some economic advantage.³⁷ At one point, Mr. Cribb of the CMS wrote indignantly about evidence he had found that one of the Chinese helpers had been attracting people into the church by holding out promises of help in lawsuits.³⁸ In the record of missionary work in Foochow, however, it is quite clear that the missionaries did not consciously offer financial gain or other unworthy inducements. On the contrary, they turned away many applicants for baptism when it became known that they were not sincere believers. One of the more dramatic illustrations of this came fairly early in the Foochow career of Stephen Johnson. At one point, Johnson wrote quite hopefully and enthusiastically about a fairly large group of people in a village near Foochow (who seemed to be earnestly interested in Christianity) had come to Johnson's chapel, and had invited him to preach in their village. Not long afterward, however, he had to report that the villagers' interest in Christianity had been based on the expectation that they would be paid for becoming Christians; on being informed in no uncertain terms that they could not expect any payment, they stopped coming to hear Johnson preach.³⁹ Other reports of Chinese who lost interest because of the unwillingness of the missionaries to assure them of money or jobs, were very common in the correspondence of the Foochow missionaries,⁴⁰ as were reports of excommunication of church members who were discovered to be insincere in their profession of Christianity. The fact that there were "rice Christians" only proved that the missionaries could make mistakes in judging the motivation of those who sought baptism.

What is really astounding about the work of the Foochow missionaries is not that they made it easy for Chinese to become Christians, but—on the contrary—that they made it so difficult. If there was one obstacle to missionary success in Foochow which stood out above the others (at least on the basis of what is to be learned from missionary sources) it was the almost prohibitive demands that the missionaries made upon those who were thinking of becoming Christians. The Chinese who became a Christian in the mid-nineteenth century was not just called upon to accept a set of beliefs and attend worship services. He was called upon to change his whole manner of life. The Foochow Protestant missionaries came very close to asserting that "Unless you become as a foreigner, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

³⁶ *Herald* (May, 1858), 54.134.

³⁷ See Peet's letter of October 5, 1869, ABC, 16.3.5(1), No. 217.

³⁸ See his letter of September 21, 1870, CMS archives.

³⁹ *Herald* (July, 1849), 45.221-22; Johnson's letter of January 10, 1848, ABC, 16.3.3 (2), No. 302.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Mr. Lloyd's annual letter for 1880, CMS (August, 1881), 32.477 or Mr. Fearnley's journal for June, 1859, CMS archives.

Looking at what the missionaries demanded, one can hardly wonder that Chinese hesitated to become Christians. Nor can one wonder that modern Chinese nationalists have accused the missionaries of "cultural imperialism."

There is something quite puzzling about the point that has just been made. Most of the Foochow missionaries would have agreed with Griffith John that they had come to China

not to develope [sic] the resources of the country, not for the advancement of commerce, not for the mere promotion of civilization; but to do battle with the powers of darkness, to save men from sin, and conquer China for Christ.⁴¹

In the correspondence of the Foochow missionaries, there is scarcely any sign of interest in the projects of Westernization that were going on at the Foochow Arsenal. If the missionaries were interested only in saving men from sin, how was it that their demands on their converts were so broad?

Part of the explanation lies in the missionary's insistence that the Christian religion which offered salvation was "absolute and exclusive truth."⁴² The corollary was that Chinese religions were false and to be rejected. The convert was required to shun all forms of "idolatry." Among other things, this meant that he was to refuse to contribute to the support of Chinese temples and religious processions and festivals. As Alexander Michie puts it, at the end of the century, the missionaries' "attitude toward Chinese ethics, philosophy, and religion is that of war to the knife. In order to build the Christian Church they require the site to be cleared."⁴³ Mr. Wolfe of the CMS mission in Foochow wrote that as Christianity "openly avows its determination to expel by moral force every rival system from the altars of the nation, it naturally at first seems strange and presumptuous in its claims to this people."⁴⁴ This "war to the knife" is in sharp contrast with the tolerance of the Jesuit mission in China in the seventeenth century.⁴⁵

From the perspective of an increasingly secularized Western culture, it might be argued that rejection of Chinese religion and acceptance of Christianity need not have drastically affected the convert's participation in other aspects of Chinese society and culture. It clearly did, however. One of the main reasons would appear to be that everywhere they looked the missionaries saw idolatry, heathenism, evil, and superstition.⁴⁶ Mr. R. S. Maclay of the Methodist Board wrote

Do we speak to our neighbour, he is a worshipper of an abominable idol. Do we meet an acquaintance in the street, he is just returning from some idolatrous ceremony. Does a stranger salute and address us in the language of kindness, our experience teaches us he desires money. Does a friend call to see us, a Pagan sits

⁴¹ This quotation is from an address made by Mr. John under the title "The Holy Spirit in Connection with our Work," *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China*, held at Shanghai, May 10-24, 1877 (Shanghai: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1878), 32.

⁴² Mr. Wolfe of the CMS asserted that Christianity claimed openly "to be absolute and exclusive truth." Letter of April 1870, CMS archives.

⁴³ Alexander Michie, *Missionaries in China* (London: Edward Stanford, 1891), 35, 36.

⁴⁴ Mr. Wolfe's letter of April, 1870, CMS archives.

⁴⁵ See Arnold H. Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin: The Jesuits at the Court of China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942).

⁴⁶ It would be easy to cite dozens of missionary expressions of a disdainful attitude toward things Chinese.

at my side. Do we look around for instruction or sympathy, to whom shall we address our petition? Oh! there is a desolateness in life here which nothing but the grace of God can render tolerable.⁴⁷

Many other comparable expressions of missionary disdain for things Chinese could be cited. Given this kind of attitude toward things Chinese, it is, perhaps, not too surprising that the missionaries desired—consciously or unconsciously—that the convert should shake off those things which were regarded as idolatrous, heathen, evil, and superstitious. The missionaries assumed that when their converts accepted the offer of salvation which had been revealed by Christ, they should become new persons. Even though they continued to eat Chinese food, wear Chinese clothes, and live in Chinese houses, the converts were under quite heavy pressure to adopt a manner of life that was foreign.

Probably, the most important single illustration of the sweeping generalizations made in the previous paragraphs, was the insistence of the missionaries that their converts stop participating in the traditional ancestral rites. In some instances, the converts even had to give up or destroy the ancestral tablets. Since the family system was at the heart of Chinese society and culture, and the ancestral rites were the most important ritual expression of the value attached to the family, the convert (who turned his back on the ancestral rites) had already moved a long way toward becoming foreign rather than Chinese. The step was a very difficult one for the would-be Christian to take; some simply could not do it. According to Justus Doolittle,⁴⁸ the convert who took the step was

sure to receive insults, reproach, and persecution from family relatives and hitherto personal friends. He always suffers in his reputation and in his business and property.

Wolfe of the CMS reported that he had frequently heard people say, as they left his chapel, "What a pity this Christianity does not tolerate the ancestral tablets."⁴⁹ At least, one missionary drove home the point that ancestors should not be worshipped by teaching that the ancestors were "sinners exposed to the endless wrath of a holy God."⁵⁰ The ancestral rites were not the only thing about the traditional family system that was affected by becoming a Christian. Hartwell of the American Board wrote as follows about the preaching of a Chinese catechist: "Ho Ching spoke for an hour on duties of children to parents and parents to children. He tore the Chinese maxims all to pieces."⁵¹

For the Christian convert, the most important moments and decisions of life became sacramental and were celebrated in the church and within the Christian community. If he was not already married, he was expected to be married to a Christian woman and to be married within the church and

⁴⁷ His letter of April 24, 1849 CA (September 27, 1849), 24.154.

⁴⁸ Justus Doolittle (American Board Missionary in Foochow), *Social Life of the Chinese* (London: Sampson, Low, Son and Marston, 1868), 606.

⁴⁹ Wolfe's report for 1866, CMS archives.

⁵⁰ Johnson's letter of January 1, 1850, *Herald* (June, 1850), 46.189.

⁵¹ His diary entry for June 1, 1872, *ABC*, 67.

according to Christian rites.⁵² He was not allowed to take a concubine; if he already had one, he was required to give her up.⁵³ The missionaries did battle with the dowry system which was regarded as tantamount to "buying" a wife.⁵⁴ When death came, the funeral was Christian. To quote a description of the funeral of the wife of a Chinese catechist, "Those parts of the usual ceremonies connected with dressing the corpse and preparing the coffin, which were heathenish and sinful, were of course dispensed with."⁵⁵

Although becoming a Christian sometimes led to employment by the missionaries as catechists,⁵⁶ teachers, or servants, for others, it might mean actual or threatened unemployment. The person employed in an occupation tainted with idolatry or heathenism, such as in the manufacture of incense burned before idols, or in an immoral occupation, such as the sale of opium, might be denied baptism until the objectionable occupation was given up.⁵⁷ The root of other occupational problems of Christian converts was the requirement that they observe the sabbath. There were occasions when the requirement of sabbath observance appears to have been what kept inquirers from becoming Christians.⁵⁸ In many cases, Christians who failed to keep the sabbath were excommunicated.⁵⁹

In general, the missionaries found it very difficult to compromise with the Chinese way of life. On one occasion, Mr. Walker of the American Board complained that even earnest Christians thought "They must be allowed to obey in Chinese fashion, which is to beat down a little, and, as a matter of course, give only a part of what is asked." Walker was very disapproving, suggesting that to "beat down a little" was comparable to "tinkering with a watch." "Much more God has made his law just right, and it would be folly for us to try to tinker it."⁶⁰

The cost of accepting Christian baptism was made even greater by the fact that the person who managed to carry out the difficult feat of breaking away from many traditional ties and patterns of life was also subjected to reprisals from the society from which he broke. At the very least, he could expect ridicule. Mr. Wolfe wrote that after one of the CMS Chinese catechists preached in the chapel, he "was much abused, called a foreigner, i.e., a foreign

⁵² See, for example, C. C. Baldwin's letter of December 31, 1856, ABC, 16.3.3(2), No. 193, and Mr. Gibson's letter of December 31, 1857, MA (June, 1858), 14.18.

⁵³ See, for example, Mr. Lloyd's letter in CMS (August, 1881), 32.475.

⁵⁴ S. L. Baldwin's report on the Methodist annual conference for 1873 CA (December 11, 1873), 48.396.

⁵⁵ Herald (January, 1858), 54.29.

⁵⁶ Converts who became catechists were sometimes taunted with the words, "You eat Jesus's rice, and you speak Jesus's words."

⁵⁷ For example, in a letter of January 11, 1865, Wolfe writes about a convert having to give up his business in connection with idolatrous temples, Record (April, 1865), 36.98. Similar circumstances are described by Maclay in his letter of January 5, 1858, MA (June, 1859), 15.19 and by Lloyd in CMS (August, 1881), 32.479-80.

⁵⁸ See for example, Peet's letter of August 9, 1869, Herald (December, 1869), 65.416; also the letter from native helpers, forwarded by C. C. Baldwin with his letter of November 8, 1866, Herald (March, 1867), 63.75-76; also Peet's letter of August 9, 1869, ABC, 16.35(1), No. 216.

⁵⁹ For example, see Lloyds report for 1879, CMS archives.

⁶⁰ Herald (June, 1886), 82.226.

child or bastard." ⁶¹ Hu Yong-mi, one of the Methodist helpers wrote of fears which he had had in his younger days that he would meet an acquaintance who would ridicule him when he went to church with his brother. ⁶² An elderly man employed by the American Board told Mr. Peet that there were people in Foochow who were convinced of the truth of Christianity but were unwilling to acknowledge the fact openly lest they be ridiculed. ⁶³

It would appear that in a substantial proportion of cases, the convert could expect to suffer the anger of his family. Mr. Martin of the Methodist mission wrote of one convert that "it was hard for him to be told by his widowed mother that he had no respect for the memory of his father, that he had no filial piety to her as her son..." ⁶⁴ In another case, Mr. Peet wrote that an inquirer

meets with the most violent opposition from all his relatives, and his uncles threaten him if he professes Christianity and unites with the church that they will take away all his land inherited from his father and deprive him of all other means of getting a living so far as they may be able. ⁶⁵

The threat of disinheritance appears to have been a real one. Mr. Woodin of the American Board wrote of a man who was "unwilling to become a Christian for fear he would not be able to inherit family property." ⁶⁶ Chinese helpers employed by one mission wrote of the concern of inquirers "lest their clansmen usurp possession of their common patrimony." ⁶⁷

Becoming a Christian could also result in loss of status and prestige. A man who became an ordained priest in the CMS mission lost his honorary official rank at the time he became a Christian. The magistrate who brought about the man's loss of rank charged him with being a "propagator of heterodoxy." ⁶⁸ Another CMS convert with a graduate degree lost the scholars who had been in his school. ⁶⁹

Persecution of converts took many other forms. In the records of missionary activity in Foochow and its outstations, there are dozens of instances in which converts suffered destruction or loss of their property, bodily injury, arrest, and social ostracism. ⁷⁰

In summary, on the basis of the missionary record, it appears that there were serious obstacles to missionary success in the nineteenth century: the missionaries' problems of adjustment and preparation; Chinese hostility, based on "culturalism," to the missionaries' presence and work; their hearers' lack of a sense of their sinfulness and need for salvation; the great price that the

⁶¹ Extracts from journal on "Visit to the Cities of Hokchiang, Lienkong, and Lo Ngong," November 1866 — January 1867, CMS archives.

⁶² Hu Yong Mi, *The Way of the Faith Illustrated* (Chicago: Student Missionary Campaign Library, 1896), 36.

⁶³ Mr. Johnson's report of July 1, 1852, *Herald* (December, 1852), 48.378.

⁶⁴ Mr. C. R. Martin's letter of September 23, 1860, MA (February, 1861), 16.82.

⁶⁵ Peet's letter of March 8, 1866, ABC, 16.3.5(2), No. 202.

⁶⁶ Mr. Woodin's letter of January 28, 1875, ABC, 16.3.5(2).

⁶⁷ Letter forwarded to the American Board by C. C. Baldwin, with his letter of November 8, 1866, *Herald* (March, 1867), 63.75.

⁶⁸ Mr. Wolfe's annual report for 1877, CMS archives: R. W. Stewart's report for 1878, quoted by Eugene Stock, *The Story of the Fuh-kien Mission*, 265.

⁶⁹ G. Smith's letter of July 4, 1861, CMS archives.

⁷⁰ Many instances of such persecution will be fully documented in my forthcoming book.

convert had to pay on becoming a Christian; and the reprisals which Chinese society inflicted upon converts.

If there is any substantial validity to this analysis, it would seem to follow that the missionaries would have had least success in those situations in which these factors were especially strong and that such successes as they had would have come mainly in those situations in which these factors were less strong. The facts seem to support this hypothesis. The missionaries made few converts in the main cultural and political centers in Fukien: the provincial city of Foochow and the larger prefectural and district cities like Yen-p'ing, Chienning, and Lo-yuan. Missionary successes came mainly in the rural areas, away from the urban strongholds of Chinese cultural pride. Converts were most frequently won among poor, unsophisticated people in the country who had least to lose as they became foreign and faced the danger of reprisals, from their countrymen. Success mounted when the missions were able to make extensive use of Chinese catechists. Even though the Chinese helper might be ridiculed for "eating the foreigners' rice and speaking the foreigners' words," and even though the helper had become foreign in many respects in the eyes of his fellow countrymen, the obstacles which stood in his way were not as great as those which the missionary himself faced. At the very least, the fact he was a native speaker of Chinese made him more able than the missionary to explain Christianity in language understandable to his hearers. Foreign as he was, the Chinese catechist did not arouse as much hostility based on "culturalism" as the missionaries themselves. The missionaries agreed that a large part of their limited success was attributable to the work of the Chinese catechists.