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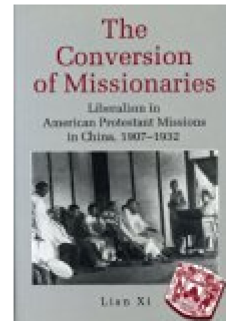
Lian Xi. *The Conversion of Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907-1932.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997. xiv + 247 pp. $38.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-01606-1.



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Abundant scholarship has been produced on Protestant missions and Sino-American relations; however, most studies have sought to explore how missionaries attempted to impose their own nation's social, political and economic systems upon the Chinese. Seeking to go beyond historical explanations which reduce missionaries to "a mere wing of American expansion," Lian Xi's *The Conversion of Missionaries*, eschews an oft-trodden path (pp. xi, xii). Instead, this book offers readers the complex and richer story of how China's culture and her national awakening changed American missionaries and shaped the formation of early twentieth-century liberal Protestantism. By so doing, Lian Xi, Assistant Professor of history at Hanover College, Indiana and former Fujian Normal University instructor, offers an important contribution to scholars of religious studies and the history of United States culture and foreign relations.

In the first of two parts, Lian Xi uses the personal writings and publications of Dr. Edward Hume, President of Yale-in-China, Frank J. Rawlinson, editor of the *China Recorder* and novelist Pearl Buck to illustrate the unique conversion experience of three former missionaries. Lian Xi presents their stories as "windows to understanding the change toward a broad theological and cultural liberalism in American Protestant missions in twentieth-century China (p. 13). Influential figures for the Protestant missionary movement, American perceptions of China and Protestant thought in the United States, these three central characters are doubtlessly a valid focus for this work; however, Lian Xi admits that any claim to their "representativeness" is problematic and, in Part II, provides readers with the background from which the three developed.

Using the Centenary missionary Conference of 1907 and the 1932, Laymen's Report as the defining milestones in Liberal Protestant thought, Part II of this work delineates the particularities of fundamentalist-modernist controversies: the growth of inter-denominationalism, the emphasis upon medical, educational and social endeavors over evangelism, reconciliation with Higher Criticism and the theory of evolution and, by 1932, the understanding of and appreciation for oriental religions. In addition, Lian Xi offers glimpses into the views of other liberals such as John Leighton Stuart, Henry W. Luce, E. C. Lobenstine, Earl H. Cressy, Gilbert Reid, and Edward Thomas WIlliams.

Lian Xi's treatment of Hume's Rawlinson's, Buck's and the broader liberal movement's shift away from nineteenth-century evangelism to twentieth-century liberalism is commendable for its depth and diversity. The three missionaries and the centrist liberal majority all rebelled against the "hellfire theology of their fathers." The catalysts for this change were a growing appreciation for Chinese culture and the influence of Chinese Nationalism; however, Chinese influence took distinct forms and brought about a myriad of Liberal Protestant conversion experiences, carefully depicted by Lian Xi.

One such experience was that of Eward Hume, who arrived in Changhsa, capital city of the Hunan province, in 1905 eager to begin work for the Yale Hospital. Considering himself the only doctor in that city of 300,000 (and ignoring the Chinese doctors already there), Hume set out to replace Chinese superstitions with Western medicine and Christianity. By the 1911 revolution, however, Hume would begin to reassess his original goals.

Lian Xi reconstructs the important episodes influenc-

ing Hume's understanding and respect for the scientific validity of Chinese medicine and his cognizance of its complex relationship with oriental religions. The author explains how Hume's change in perspective was accelerated in the mid-1910s, as Chinese Nationalism reached its peak and as the colleges of Yale-in-China were set aflame with anti-imperialism. By the 1920s, with the Burton Commission's recommendation that Yale-in-China be moved to a new site as part of a six college union, Hume had replaced his doctrinal views with a belief in international service. Nationalist demands that missionary institutions be administered by the Chinese led Hume to relinquish the presidency of Yale-in-China to make way for the appointment of a new Chinese president. By 1927, he would resign his missionary work altogether, finding it irreconcilable with his growing respect for Chinese national and cultural self-determination.

In contrast to Edward Hume's experience, Frank J. Rawlinson's story suggests that missionary work and liberal transformation were not mutually exclusive. Rawlinson's goal upon arrival to Shanghai in 1902 was to elevate the Chinese, "struggling in chains on a low level of civilization" and to thrill "gaping crowds with my preaching" (p. 64). A teacher and evangelist, Rawlinson's conversion was in part spurred by his study of Chinese classics. However, his greatest impetus for change stemmed from the emergence of the New Culture and May fourth Movements of the 1910s, and the Chinese anti-Christianity and anti-imperialism of the 1920s. Rawlinson would be influenced by Chinese intellectuals such as Chen Tu-hsiu (first general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party), who viewed the emulation of the life of Christ, rather than doctrines, as the only redeeming value of Christianity. Rawlinson began to preach and practice a new missionary orientation after World War I: He administered to Shanghai's rescued slave girls and prostitutes at their Christian haven at the Door of Hope. Further, in a series of circumstances which would result in Rawlinson's 1921 break with the Southern Baptist Board, he used his role as editor of the *Chinese Recorder* to support the social gospel and the growing movement for inter-denominational cooperation. Rawlinson urged Christians to appreciate Chinese religious traditions and recognize their own past indifference to the injustices of imperialism and capitalism. Rawlinson's eventual appointment to the American Board (ABCFM) and his efforts to shape a new liberal direction for missions through *The Chinese Recorder* indicate that it was possible for him to reconcile missionary work with his growing respect for Chinese culture. While, as Lian Xi notes, his untimely and tragic death in 1937 prevents us from knowing with certainty, Rawlinson's brand of Liberal Protestantism mirrored that of most centrist Protestant Liberals who managed to reconcile their work as missionaries to their respect for the Chinese.

Conversely, of the three missionaries in this work, Pearl Syndenstricker Buck most embodied the mutual exclusivity of missionary work and Liberal Protestantism in China. Lian Xi describes Pearl's liberalism as contradictory from its inception: She both rejected the nineteenth-century evangelical zeal of her Presbyterian missionary parents', Absalom (Andrew) and Carrie Sydenstricker, and benefited from their obvious admiration for the Chinese. As Lian Xi explains, Andrew had believed Christianity historically indebted to oriental religions. Acting on this belief, he had placed Pearl under the tutelage of a Chinese scholar, Mr. Kung, whose Confucian teachings would make a strong impact upon her development. While she had come to know and love Chinese culture as a child, at the start of Pearl's career as a missionary for the Presbyterian Board in 1914, she too expressed disdain for her host country, noting the "oppressed ... with a realization of how awfully much there is to do" (p. 110). Unlike Rawlinson and Hume, however, Pearl's conversion did not entail a transition from evangelism to social service. While in northern Anhwei as an evangelical and educational missionary, Pearl became enchanted with the earthiness of Chinese farmers, whose existence came alive to her as she walked the streets.

Appreciation for the Chinese deepened in scope during the 1920s, when the married Pearl Buck relocated to Nanking with her husband: There she came in contact with Chinese Nationalism and anti-imperialism. The result of Buck's conversion was, like Hume's, a devotion to international service: Buck came to develop a strong "belief in the human ties across racial differences." She would devote the rest of her life to the development of understanding between East and West. Eager to accept the naturalness of Chinese culture and unwilling to see it changed, Pearl Buck renounced not only her own position as a missionary, but the movement in its entirety. As Lian Xi notes, Buck would bring a theological storm to the Presbyterian Church, declaring missionaries "scornful, vulgar, ignorant ... superstitious," and "disdainful of a great culture" (p. 121).

Buck's charge brings to light an issue central to this book: Most missionaries were astounded by Buck's accusations, and as Lian Xi notes, there existed a centrist liberal majority which had found comfort in a moderate

liberal theology. Their language was often ambiguous, enabling them to see themselves as emulating the lives of Christ while remaining broad-minded. This majority had not found their theological conciliations incompatible with missionary goals. Thus, acceptance and appreciation for Chinese culture was often incremental and did not lead directly or uniformly to the renouncing of missionary goals. This was especially true for women: they comprised sixty percent or more of most missionaries.

The emphasis on social, educational and medical work, characteristic of Liberal Protestant concerns beginning in the 1920s, was discernible among women missionaries immediately upon their arrival to the foreign field, and as early as the mid-nineteenth century. For women, piety and service were synonymous. In addition, many women missionaries shared similarities with Pearl Buck, viewing their missionary goal as that of improving understanding between East and West.

Lian Xi's *The Conversion of Missionaries* offers a valuable approach to the study of Protestant missionaries. It succeeds admirably in its task of illustrating how appreciation for Chinese culture and the influence of Chinese Nationalism transformed the missionary goals of individuals and the broader Protestant missionary movement in China. In addition, Lian Xi's provocative study has enormous applicability to mainstream Protestant Liberals, and women missionaries in particular.

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