

**PROPAGATING THE DEMOCRATIC GOSPEL:
WESTERN MISSIONARIES AND THE DIFFUSION OF
WESTERN THOUGHT IN CHINA, 1830-1848**

By
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Introduction

In the third decade of the Nineteenth Century, Protestant missionaries, with the support and cooperation of Western China merchants, prepared and published magazines and books about European and American political systems and ideologies and distributed these among the people of the coastal provinces of southern and central China. While the missionaries saw themselves primarily as preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they also felt they had to serve as proselytizers of a "democratic gospel." They believed that Christianity and Western civilization were so closely linked that the Chinese could not understand or appreciate Western religion without knowing something about the larger culture which it had sprung from. They also felt that the Chinese were in need of both political and religious transformations, and would, in time, adopt Western political thought as well as convert to Christianity.

In this paper I will discuss the missionaries' attempts to spread this "democratic gospel." I will show how they were able to create a communications network and diffuse their ideas among the Chinese. I will then discuss the impact their political message had upon their target audience. The missionaries were men with an abiding faith in their religion and in their political ideology;

they were almost contemptuous of Chinese religious and political systems. In the 1830's and 40's they launched an information campaign designed to show the Chinese how superior Western culture was. This paper is an examination of that campaign and its impact.

I. The Society for Diffusion of Useful Knowledge: Origins and Development

A communications network has its source—those who create or develop a message. This message is transmitted through a medium to a receiver.⁽¹⁾ In the network the missionaries created in the 1830's the source was the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China. In this society missionaries and merchants joined forces in a concerted attempt to teach the Chinese about the West. The origin and development of the SDUKC will now be examined.

Mission boards and other American and British religious organizations were willing to send missionaries to China and were willing to underwrite the diffusion of Christian literature among the Chinese. In the 1830's and for many decades thereafter, the American Tract Society and the American Bible Society contributed funds which supported translation and publication work in South China.⁽²⁾ These religious bodies were unwilling to subsidize a secular diffusion effort, however. Missionaries were in China to win hearts, not minds; a democratic China was not something boards were willing to expend funds to bring about. Thus, the missionaries living in Canton were forced to look to the Western merchant community itself for help in this non-religious

(1) On communication networks, see:

James H. Campbell and Hal W. Hepler, eds. *Dimensions in Communication* (Belmont, 1965). Wilbur Schram and Donald F. Roberts, eds. *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication* (Urbana, 1972).

On the relationship between politics and communications, see:

Richard R. Fagan, *Politics and Communication* (Boston, 1966). Bernard Rubin, *Media, Politics, and Democracy* (New York, 1977).

On the diffusions process, see:

Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* (New York, 1962). Gerald Zoltman, Philip Kotler, Ira Kaufman, eds. *Creating Social Change* (New York, 1972).

(2) Bridgman maintained contact with the American Tract Society during the 1830's and 40's. Bridgman to American Tract Society, June 2, 1834 in American Board of Commissioners papers (Houghton Library, Harvard University) 16.3.8 Vol. I.

activity. They used their own English language magazine, the *Chinese Repository*, as a platform and in numerous articles, written over a span of six years, argued for the creation of and continued support of a campaign of diffusion of secular information.

In these articles, Elijah Bridgman, an American Board missionary, and Charles Friedrich Gutzlaff, a German representing the Netherlands Missionary Society, first praised China and then damned her. The Chinese, they wrote, had created, over many centuries, a well organized government, staffed by highly trained, carefully selected scholar-officials. They had also developed a rich cultural tradition which stressed the linkage between morality and the pursuit of knowledge. Finally, the Chinese people had created a sophisticated pre-industrial economy which was capable of producing many types of goods and was able to transport this merchandise throughout much of their empire. However, the Chinese had their faults and the missionaries were more than willing to discuss these, at some length. The Chinese were haughty and arrogant. They believed that their nation was the center of the world and often referred to their empire as T'ien Hsia—all under heaven. They looked upon the rest of the world as uncivilized; they called the Westerners I(夷)-Eastern Barbarians. They believed that the outer world needed their products but felt that they had no real need for Western goods. They were contemptuous of foreigners and kept them at arms length through the mechanism of the Canton System. Finally, the Chinese were hostile to all religious traditions from the outside world. Christianity was considered as heterodox and missionaries were not permitted to preach their faith or to convert the Chinese.

The missionaries and other Westerners such as G. T. Lay argued that the Chinese had to be shown the error of their ways. They proposed to introduce the Chinese to Western ideas through the use of the printed word. They asked that they be supported in their efforts to write articles about Western political theory, geography, economics, and science. If the Chinese officialdom and opinion leaders read this material, they argued, they would soon realize the

superiority of Western civilization and would, with Western help and encouragement, try to transform the government and society.⁽³⁾

Missionaries made use of personal contact as well as the press in their effort to get their message across to their fellow Westerners. This Western merchant community located in the suburbs of a provincial capital of Kwantung Province was a small one and missionaries and merchants met frequently both in the formal environment of church services and in informal daily intercourse. Some merchants, such as Augustine Heard, had little to do with the missionaries, while others such as D. W. C. Olyphant actively supported the cause of Protestant expansion. These efforts in the press and in person met with success for the missionaries were able to convince a number of merchants of the potential benefits of a secular diffusion enterprise. With the merchant's help they were able to organize a society to support this effort.

A preliminary, organizational meeting was convened in late November of 1834. This meeting was attended by American Board missionaries such as Bridgman, Samuel Wells Williams and Edwin Stevens, and by British and American merchants such as Olyphant, James Matheson, James Innes and William Wetmore. Also attending was J. Robert Morrison, the son of the pioneer British China missionary, Robert Morrison, and himself the translator for the East India Company. Motions calling for the creation of the new society were accepted, an operating committee was elected and Bridgman and Gutzlaff were asked to prepare a constitution and plan of operations.

A second meeting was held a week later, on December 2nd. The formal by-laws were presented to the membership and accepted by them, and a document stating the objectives of the society was read and accepted, as well. It is clear from the minutes of the proceedings that the missionaries were the

(3) For example, "Disposition of the Chinese toward Foreigners," *Chinese Repository*, Vol. II, Oct. 1833, 277-281.

"Prospects of China," *Chinese Repository*, Vol. VI, May 1837, 1-8. "Intellectual Character of the Chinese," *Chinese Repository*, Vol. VII, May 1838, 1-8. "Means of doing good in China," *Chinese Repository*, Vol. VII, August 1838, 193-203.

architects of this endeavor. An examination of the list of members and a reading of the minutes of the meeting shows that a number of prominent members of the merchant community were willing to commit both time and economic resources to this new society and to the cause it represented. The missionaries, now designated as Chinese Secretaries defined their objectives in some detail. After first praising the Chinese, as was their custom, they go on to state that the Chinese were still uncivilized and had to learn about the West. "The prime object of this association," they stated, "...will be to publish such books as may enlighten the minds of the Chinese and communicate to them the arts and sciences of the West. Such measures must be taken as will ensure a ready circulation, not solely in Canton, but throughout the empire."⁽⁴⁾

The missionaries and their merchant supporters worked hard to achieve these objective during the next four years, the final years of the "old China trade." Leadership during the first years was in the hands of Matheson, partner in the largest of the opium trading firms. Olyphant served as treasurer of the missionaries in their capacity as Chinese Secretaries planned and implemented the SDUKC program.

In November of 1835 the society held its First Annual Meeting. The records of that meeting indicate what progress had been made. Membership in the new society stood at forty-seven. Twenty-nine of these were residents of Canton while the rest were either honorary or corresponding members. The executive committee reported that "Friends abroad will cordially cooperate with resident members of the society to promote the extension of useful knowledge among those who speak Chinese." While no major works, aside from *The Chinese Magazine* had yet been published, the committee reported that works were either in the planning stage or being prepared and that these would begin to appear. A number of important issues came up for discussion

(4) "Proceedings relative to the formation of a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China," *Chinese Repository*, Vol. III, Dec. 1834, 378-384.

during the course of the meeting itself. One was the location of the printing press. The Chinese government had renewed their attacks upon Chinese Christians and the missionaries were afraid that the government would move against them as well. The society decided to have its Chinese language printing done in Southeast Asia making use of British and American facilities in such places as Singapore and Penang. A second issue was language related. One of the merchant members, Ingalls suggested that the missionaries use the Cantonese dialect when preparing their articles. The missionaries argued against this, defending the use of Mandarin. They felt that by using a simplified form of the classical language they would be able to reach a higher class of readership. The meeting ended with the general membership commending the executive committee for having laid the foundation of future expansion.⁽⁵⁾

The pace of society efforts accelerated in the next three years. Three major works, a universal history and histories of Great Britain and United States were published. *The Chinese Magazine* was also published monthly and reached a large number of Chinese, if we are to believe its editors. Merchant interest in the diffusion effort also remained high. William Jardine's decision to succeed his partner Matheson as head of the SDUKC is one example of this sustained interest and involvement.

Meetings of the society held in 1838 served as forums for discussion and as occasions for the missionaries to summarize what they had accomplished. In November of 1837, the Third Annual Meeting was held. Gutzlaff used the occasion to present a report on Chinese literature, demonstrating to all those present that he was a scholar as well as a preacher and demonstrating to the modern reader how much these men did, in fact, know about the civilization they were attempting to transform. Gutzlaff used the report to widen his criticism of the Chinese for he condemns what he feels is the

(5) "First Annual meeting of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China," *Chinese Repository*, Vol. IV, Dec. 1835.

atheism of Chinese belief systems and attacks what he terms the Chinese inability to understand any nation but their own. The meeting ended with a resolution calling for the wider distribution of society literature.⁽⁶⁾

The next annual meeting held in November of 1838, began once again with the presentation of a report which was in reality a research paper. This report examined local histories and almanacs which the Chinese prepared in each major province. The missionaries proposed that they be allowed to prepare their own "purified" version of such a work for distribution. They suggest that they would be able to greatly improve the quality of this type of publication and use it to introduce a variety of Western subjects. The missionaries then summed up what had been done thus far. *The Chinese Magazine* had now reached four and one-half volumes. Its editors continued to use the publication to present a wide variety of subject matter. *The View of Universal History*, Gutzlaff's attempt to write a full scale world history was also press ready and would soon be distributed. Two other works, Bridgman's *Description of the United States* and another book, *The History of the Jews* were also press ready, the membership was told. In the discussion which followed presentation of the reports the missionaries and the merchants expressed their optimism over the course of the society's progress and over the general trend of events in South China. Bridgman summed up these feelings when he stated:

By education—by the diffusion of knowledge—by the introduction of useful arts and inventions... affairs have taken a new and happy direction and received in that direction a happy impulse. The age of monopolies is now gone... In its stead a better spirit is abroad in the minds of men—one more liberal, more generous, more active. In this spirit, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge was instituted—has been and will continue to be sustained.

(6) "Third Annual Report of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China." *Chinese Repository*, Vol. VI, Dec. 1837, 334-340.

Bridgman was relating the work of the society to the passing of the East India Company's monopoly of the China trade. The British government was now involving itself more directly in the situation and Bridgman and the merchants believed that the opening of China was at hand. The Society, he suggested, was ready to take advantage of the new circumstances and use the situation to continue to promote the Westernization of China.⁽⁷⁾

The SDUKC was thus an active promoter of Western civilization. In this decade of the 1830's its missionary founders and merchant supporters had created a strong foundation for the diffusion of information. The missionaries had a vision of what they wished China to become. They wanted China to overturn its tradition and become a modern, industrial, Christian nation state. Their message was carried in the publications they prepared and distributed under SDUKC auspices. These publications and the "democratic gospel" they contained will be examined next.

II. Medium and Message

The medium is the means by which the message of a communications system is carried. The message is the body of information and ideas which transmit to the network's receivers or audience. In the Twentieth Century the mediums most often used are radio and television, and missionaries both at home and abroad use these mediums quite effectively. In the Nineteenth Century missionaries made use of the spoken word when they could, but in China they relied most heavily on the use of print, and published and distributed countless tracts, Bible lessons, and secular works. The publications the missionaries prepared for the SDUKC and the political message these publications contained are the subjects of this section.

Four works published by the society are considered to have had some impact upon the Chinese public. These four are *Tung-Hsi yang k'ao mei-yueh t'ung-chi-chuan* 東西洋考每月統計傳 (its English title is *The Chinese*

(7) "Fourth Annual Report of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China," *Chinese Repository*, Vol. VII, Dec. 1838, 399-409.

Magazine),⁽⁸⁾ *Ku-chin wan-kuo kang-chien* 古今萬國綱鑑 (The Universal History),⁽⁹⁾ *Ta-Ying-kuo t'ung-chih* 大英國通志 (A Comprehensive Account of England),⁽¹⁰⁾ and *Mei-li-ko ho-sheng-kuo chih-lueh* 美利科合省國志略 (A History of the United States).⁽¹¹⁾ They were prepared for publication in Canton, and before 1834 were published there. The Napier Affair—Lord Napier's attempt to confront the Chinese and open China, without sufficient military support⁽¹²⁾—had the side effect of reviving the Ch'ing government's anti-Christian program and missionaries were thereafter forced to print all Chinese language works in Southeast Asian centers such as Singapore and Penang. The works were published in the Chinese manner with double folio pages and each work is organized into *chüan* (books) and *chang* (chapters).

The Chinese Magazine was first published in 1833 and monthly issues were prepared and printed for the remainder of the decade. Its purpose was straightforward to demonstrate the superiority of Western civilization to the Chinese. Each issue differed in content though certain types of articles were included on a regular basis. Most issues, for example, contained information on current events. Articles on trade between China and the West were also frequent. A typical issue of the late 1830's began with an article on the British parliament. This was followed by a piece on history, one on geography, another on trade and finally an article on current events.⁽¹³⁾ While this issue concentrated heavily on geography and politics, others focused on science, literature and religion.⁽¹⁴⁾ The writers were not trained scientists, so articles

(8) *Tung-Hsi-yang k'ao mei-yueh t'ung-chi-chuan* 東西洋考每月統計傳 (Canton, 1833-38), hereafter cited as *THYK*.

(9) *Ku-chin wan-kuo kang-chien* 古今萬國綱鑑 (Singapore, 1838), 20 *Chüan*, hereafter cited as *KCWK*.

(10) *Ta-Ying-kuo t'ung chih* 大英國通志 (Malacca, 1834), hereafter cited as *TYKTC*.

(11) *Mei-li-ko ho-sheng-kuo chih-lueh* 美利科合省國志略 (Singapore, 1838), hereafter cited as *MLKHSK*.

(12) On the Napier affair, see the Chinese perspective printed in Shin-pao Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), Chapter III and the Western perspective presented in Peter Ward Fay, *The Opium War* (Chapel Hill, 1975), Chapter 6.

(13) *THYK*, 1838, #4.

(14) *THYK*, 1837, #9, 1838, #1.

on those subjects lacked any degree of sophistication, but the pieces on politics, history, and literature⁽¹⁵⁾ did reflect the missionaries' rather wide reading in these subject areas. The many articles written over the years provided the missionaries with a ready reservoir which would be dipped into when the occasion demanded it. Many of the other books published by Gutzlaff and Bridgman make use of pieces published originally in *The Chinese Magazine*. The last sections of *The Universal History* were taken from *Chinese Magazine* articles. Gutzlaff's *Wan-kuo ti-li ch'üan-t'u chi* 萬國地理全圖記 (Universal Geography) was also put together from *Chinese Magazine* pieces. Thus, the magazine not only provided Chinese with their first introduction to many topics but also provided the missionaries with masses of already prepared material which could be recycled and republished at a later date.

The Universal History was Gutzlaff's ambitious attempt to present his Chinese audience with a coherent view of the Western historical experience. The missionary developed his narrative in a straightforward manner, beginning with the story of creation and concluding with a survey of the states of modern Europe. The book made use of such sources as the Bible and works on ancient Greek and Roman history in its first two sections. The final third of the book which dealt with early modern and modern history also relied on available materials in its discussions of the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. This work, which went through a number of editions was the first comprehensive book published by the society.⁽¹⁶⁾ *The Universal Geography*, which Gutzlaff wrote in the next decade, is another example of this type of SDUKC publication.

In *A Comprehensive Account of England*, Gutzlaff drew a detailed portrait of the Western nation he viewed as the most advanced. The fact that

(15) *THYK*, 1837, #8, 1837, #11.

(16) Fred Drake has discussed *The Universal History* in his article "T'ien-Hsia Unbound" (Luce Conference on Sino American Studies, Harvard University, July, (1978), 12-4. Jessie Lutz has also examined this Gutzlaff authored tome in her article, "Karl Friedrich August Gutzlaff: Missionary Extraordinaire" (Luce Conference on Sino American Studies, Harvard University, July 1978), 18-19.

many of the SDUCK's financial backers were British no doubt influenced his decision to write such a work, but it can be argued that Gutzlaff's deep seated admiration for the British social, political and economic systems was quite sincere. In this book, Gutzlaff made use of a fictional Chinese traveller to tell his tale and make his argument. His spokesman was a scholar named Yeh who had visited England and upon returning home had penned an account of his adventure. This device allowed Gutzlaff to compare Chinese and British thought and institutions. In this work, the role of religion in English life was focused on. The author also dealt with the British political and social systems in some detail. Gutzlaff also introduced us to another Chinese, a friend of Yeh, who voiced more typical Chinese attitudes and opinions. In the debates which followed, Yeh, the spokesman for the British viewpoint, usually came out ahead. The use of Chinese narrators and debaters allowed Gutzlaff to make many comparisons and to demonstrate to his Chinese readers where Britain and China were alike and where they were different. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Elijah Bridgman, the first American missionary in China, also prepared a work of history. This was his *History of the United States*. This was a two volume work which was intended to introduce the Chinese to the political institutions, societal patterns, and religious practices of the then sixty year old nation. In the first volume he discussed each of the twenty-six states, giving details about climatic conditions, commercial enterprise, urban development, and population characteristics. In the second volume, the missionary presented a narrative of his homeland's development and an introduction to its political system. Bridgman used Gutzlaff's technique of having a Chinese to narrate his account and also tried to contrast and compare Chinese and American civilizations. ⁽¹⁸⁾

(17) *TYKTC*, Books I - V.

See also Jessie Lutz's discussion in "K. F. A. Gutzlaff," 20-25.

(18) *MLKHSK*, 20 chüan. Also see Suzanne Barnett, "Protestant Expansion and Chinese Views of the West" (Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, March 1971) 12-14 and Drake "T'ien-Hsia Unbound" 14-19.

These four works—a magazine and three books—were the medium the society used to reach the Chinese public. Each of these publications contained elements of the Democratic Gospel. Articles on Western political systems or on political personalities or on political rights were often included in *The Chinese Magazine*. Chapters in the other books were also devoted to political subjects. Can one use the term Gospel? The primary definition of the term is “the message concerning Christ, the Kingdom of God, and salvation.” The word gospel itself means good news or a good tale. If we extend the meaning, then we can define the word as “something accepted as infallible truth or as a guiding principle.”⁽¹⁹⁾ The missionaries’ faith in the British and American political systems was deep and abiding and when they depicted these systems to their Chinese audience they used only positive terms. They thus preached a secular faith which can be termed a “democratic gospel.”

They couched this gospel and their whole message of social and institutional change in terms and in a style they believed their audience would find easy to understand. Both men were sensitive to the literary and stylistic tastes of the Chinese literati, having studied the language with tutors well versed in the classics. Their use of the language in *The Chinese Magazine* and in their other works reflects the depth of this understanding. Their articles and books were written in a clear comprehensible version of Wen Yen (Classical Chinese). The content of each article was presented in a direct manner but usually was introduced by a quote from one of the Classics. The Chinese philosophical canon might then be quoted again to reinforce a point the author had made. Gutzlaff’s and Bridgman’s use of the dialogue form further reflects this sensitivity to Chinese tastes. Meng Tzu—Mencius as he is usually called—made extensive use of dialogue in his Fourth Century B.C. book. The Twelfth Century philosopher, Chu Hsi, considered Meng Tzu’s work as the centerpoint of the Chinese tradition and wrote extensive commentaries on it. The missionaries studied this tradition and tried to copy the Mencian style when they wrote

(19) Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, 1956), 357.

political essays.⁽²⁰⁾ The missionaries also used a biographical format in some of their pieces. In these instances they were modeling their work upon sections of the standard dynastic histories.⁽²¹⁾ The missionaries tried to write works which their Chinese audience could understand. They were willing to develop a workable Wen Yen style and to use a vocabulary which would be comprehensible to the Chinese elites.

Britain and the United States were chosen as the best examples of democratic societies and, as has been pointed out, many articles were written about the political history and the political structure of each nation. The word 'Gospel' is also used to refer to particular books in the New Testament. By analogy these chapters and articles in SDUKC publications are the Gospels of political salvation for the Chinese.

The British political system was one of Gutzlaff's favorite topics. He depicted Britain as a constitutional monarchy governed by an hereditary monarch who ruled as well as reigned. The ruler set normative patterns of behavior and also assumed responsibility for the government's operation. He pointed out that both the Chinese and British states operated under the principle of the divine right of kings and quoted from the *Shih Chi*—the *Records of the Historian*—to reinforce his argument.⁽²²⁾

Parliament, the missionary recognized, was of central importance to the British governmental system and he felt his Chinese audience had to be well acquainted with it. The lead articles in two successive issues of the 1838 volume of *The Chinese Magazine* were devoted to the topic. In the first

(20) Jessie Lutz develops a detailed analysis of Gutzlaff's style in "K.F.A. Gutzlaff," 14-16. In this author's opinion, Gutzlaff was closer in style to the classical writers than has earlier scholars suggested. At times he modelled himself on Hsun Tzu, the Confucian writer of the Third Century B.C. At other times his work resembles that of Meng Tzu. On Hsun Tzu, see: *Hsun Tzu Duben: Hsin tse*. (Hsun Tzu, a new translation.) (San Min Press, Taipei, 1977) and *Su Shu Duben (The Four Books)*, (San Min Press, Taipei, 1978). A good example of this use of classical style is the essay on Parliament, *THYK*, 1838, #4, and *THYK*, 1838, #5.

(21) Selections from the first two dynastic histories can be found in *Ku Wen Kuan Chih* 古文觀止 (a selection of writings in the ancient style). (San Min Press, Taipei, 1976).

(22) *TYKTC*, I.

of these articles, Gutzlaff pointed out that Parliament derived its power from both the king and the common people. He then quoted the political philosopher, Hsun Tzu, to the effect that the Chinese followed a similar principle in ancient times. Hsun Tzu stated that the assembled lords stood between the people and the monarch. Parliament, Gutzlaff argued, occupied a similar place in the political hierarchy. This representative body had the right to honor or refuse the monarch's requests for taxation and revenue. It also had the task of appointing those who would help maintain civil order. Finally it acted as a channel through which the voice of the people might be heard. Meng Tzu's comments on the proper form of political administration were then quoted and the author showed how Parliament was faithful to Meng Tzu's principles.⁽²³⁾

British patterns of political and legal rights were also introduced to the Chinese in the missionary publications. The lead article in the third issue of the 1838 volume of *The Chinese Magazine* was entitled, "Individual Rights" (tsu chu chih li) and examined the rights of the average citizen. In this article, Gutzlaff discussed the British concept of equal justice and demonstrated that all citizens were equal in the eye of the law. Even the authorities were subject to this law. He compared this system and the one which existed in China and pointed out the limitations of the Chinese system. Under British law, citizens' rights were protected. Under Chinese law, they were not.⁽²⁴⁾

In their articles, the missionaries suggested that the British political system underlay British economic and social progress. Under their laws and under their form of government the British had been able to develop commerce and industry and had been able to advance science and learning. The people were free and had a voice in their own government, and lay heart of their nation's rapid evolution to the status of a world power.

The missionaries' discussion of the United States made many of these same

(23) *THYK*, 1838, #4, 1838, #5. Another article on British representative institutions is found in *THYK*, 1837, #11.

(24) *THYK*, 1838, #3.

points. Articles on the United States Congress, on the postal system, and on George Washington all appeared in *The Chinese Magazine*. Bridgman also devoted space to the evolution and the operation of American government in his *History of the United States*.

The missionaries emphasized the role of the gentry in the development of American politics. Gentry were seen as the dominant local leaders who, when they felt oppressed by an evil monarch, led the common people in a full scale revolt. Americans were justified in their revolt, as were the Chinese, when they rose to overthrow a despotic and corrupt dynasty. At this point the Chinese and the American patterns differed markedly; for while the Chinese chose a new monarch, the Americans decided to create a system which had none. The one man who many would have accepted as king refused the crown. The Americans then went on to create a new form of government. This government, based upon a written charter, placed power in the hands of the common people who then chose their representatives. These representatives were empowered to make the laws. The people also chose their president and many local provincial officials, as well. The missionaries were careful to point out the existence of central and local governments which balance power between them. The government taxed little and tore down trade barriers, encouraging their citizens to expand westward and to develop their economic resources. These Americans, Bridgman explained, were guaranteed basic rights and equal justice under law. Most Americans chose to obey the law. Those who did not were punished, but these punishments were fairer and more humane than those administered in China. ⁽²⁵⁾

Americans had their heroes and their great leaders, but these men served the people, they did not take advantage of them. Washington was presented to the Chinese as an exemplary American leader. He was depicted as brave, as honest and as just, and the missionaries tried to show that he did not seek

(25) Bridgman's presentation of America is discussed in Drake's "T'ien Hsia Unbound" 17-19 and Barnett, "Protestant Expansion," 12-14.

power, but that power and honor came to him. American government and American governmental leadership were thus pictured as almost perfect, as without blemish. Bridgman admitted that America did have its problems, but argued that Americans were willing to recognize their flaws and were able to correct them.⁽²⁶⁾

Thus, the publications were the medium and the contents of these publications were the message. But how did these books and magazines reach Chinese hands? The answer is simple. The missionaries oft times put them there. Gutzlaff would often distribute tracts while serving as an interpreter on an opium trader. Other missionaries such as Edwin Stevens went on exploration voyages along the coast or up the rivers of the interior. Those missionaries who did not venture so far from their home base were able also to distribute society materials. Samuel Wells Williams, a missionary printer with the American Boards's South China Mission, was able to hand out tracts and books to villagers living along the waterways leading to Canton. When the missionaries themselves could not personally hand out these materials they found Chinese who would do it for them. These Chinese converts and their helpers often gave tracts to literati and would be literati during the times the provincial examinations were being held.⁽²⁷⁾ It was in this manner that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, the leader of the Taiping rebels received his introduction to Western culture and Western religion.⁽²⁸⁾

Thus far we have examined the source of the missionary network, the SDUKC, and have studied the medium—the press—and the message these society publications contained. One thing remains before the network is complete the receiver. The receiver in this system is the Chinese public. Who they were

(26) *THYK*, 1838, #1,

(27) The text distribution effort is discussed in Rubinstein's "Zion's Corner," Chapter X, 408-418.

(28) An excellent introduction to Hung and his world is Philip A. Kuhn, "The Taiping Rebellion", in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 10, late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part I* (New York, 1978), 264-317.

A Chinese perspective is to be found in Chiang T'ing-fu *Chung-Kuo Chin-Tai-Shih Ta-Kang* (中國近代史大綱)(Taipei, 1979), Chapter 2, 30-43.

and how the missionaries' message of secular salvation affected them is our next topic.

III. The Target Audience and the Impact of the SDUKC Message

The missionaries and their merchant friends hoped that they could reach a wide audience with their secular works. They also hoped that their books and magazines would reach the hands of the opinion leaders of Chinese society. Their hopes for reaching the leadership were realized. How the Chinese used the information was quite a different matter.

The missionaries distributed most of their publications to people living in the southern Chinese provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien, and on occasion distributed materials to people living as far north as Chekiang. These provinces were trouble spots in an empire in decline. The population was plagued by problems of over-population, inflation (caused by the opium trade), banditry, natural disaster, and widescale government corruption and mismanagement. The local inhabitants, with their differing dialects and their strong regional traditions were looking for solutions to their problems, but rejected Western suggestions as too alien. Instead, they organized secret societies and on a number of occasions began full scale revolts against Ch'ing rule.⁽²⁹⁾

The officials in these provinces first dismissed Western ideas, but in the 1840's after the superiority of Western military power had been convincingly demonstrated, these same officials obtained SDUKC publications and tried to meet with and talk to missionaries and other Westerners. A number of these officials involved themselves in deep study of such works as *The Chinese Magazine*, *The Universal History*, and *The History of the United States*. They then used these works as the basis for long, thoughtful, books on Western civilization and Western political systems. Wei Yuan and Hsu Chi-yu were two scholar officials who contributed the major works in this new field, barbarian studies.

(29) See Frederick Wakeman, Jr. *Strangers at the Gate* (Los Angeles, 1966). and Susan Mann Jones and Philip A. Kuhn, "Dynastic Decline and the Roots of Rebellion", in *The Cambridge History of China*, 106-162.

The first of these new styled works was the *Hai-kuo t'u-chih*. 海國圖志 This *Record of the Sea Kingdoms* was a work of fifty chüan which was first published in 1844 and was reissued, with additional chüan in 1847 and 1852. Wei Yuan, its author, was a "state-craft" expert. He was a member of the ching-shih or practical state craft school of thought. The ching-shih tradition dates back to the Sung Dynasty (10th through 13th centuries) and emerged as a major force in China whenever certain group of scholars discerned evidence of dynastic decline and decay. It re-emerged in the 1820's after the Ch'ing had experienced decades of political corruption and sectarian rebellion. Wei Yuan spent much of his career as political specialist on the staffs of various local and provincial officials. In the summer of 1841 he met Lin Tse-hsu 林則徐, the Ch'ing official who had served as governor-general in Kwangtung and whose actions had provided the British a reason to fight the Opium War. Lin presented Wei with materials on foreign affairs and gave him the task of editing them into some presentable and comprehensible form. In the years that followed Wei prepared three works on foreign affairs; two dealt with the fighting itself, and the third, the *Hai-kuo t'u-chih* dealt with larger issues. Peter M. Mitchell, who has studied Wei's work in some detail, points out the flaws in these works, but then discusses importance. He writes, "Their significance lay in their content and in the attention given foreign countries by a scholar noted for his intellectual abilities in traditional Confucian concerns".⁽³⁰⁾

Wei wrote these works using SDUKC materials. In *Hai-kuo t'u-chih* he presented detailed descriptions of various foreign nations also tried to suggest ways China might cope with these militarily powerful states. He focused on questions of wealth and power and told his Chinese countrymen that England's economic wealth had helped her obtain her military power. He called for the building of arsenals, translations bureaus, and shipyards. He also called for

(30) Wei Yuan's career ideas discussed in Peter M. Mitchell, "The Limits of Reformism: Wei Yuan's Reaction to Western Intrusion" (paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, Washington, 1971).

widescale Chinese involvement in foreign trade. Wei went further in his work, calling upon the Chinese government to reform itself and to adopt a more flexible military defense and foreign policy. Wei learned from the SDUKC works that the Western nations were to be feared and respected. He did not, however, suggest that the Chinese transform their political system into one more democratic or representative. Wei Yuan's work demonstrated an awareness of the threat posed by the West, and his willingness to adopt Western methods in order to confront this alien and aggressive civilization. Errors of fact did not mar weight of wei's Warning to his people. ⁽³¹⁾

Hsu Chi-yu wrote his study, the *Ying-huan chih-lueh* 瀛寰志略 (a short account of the maritime circuit) four years after Wei Yuan completed his. He was a bureaucrat who had obtained his chin-shih (the highest degree awarded to those who passed the civil service examinations) in 1826. Hsu then served in a variety of posts before coming to southern Fukien where he took the position of acting tao-t'ai (intendant of circuit) in 1840. While in Fukien he helped prepare the defenses of the port of Amoy and learned first hand about Western military power. He was promoted in 1842, when he was given the post of judicial commissioner in Kwangtung. He remained in his new post for about a year, living and working in Canton and gaining deeper insight into the Western "barbarians" and their ways. One of those he worked with during this period was Liang T'ing-nan, a specialist in barbarian affairs. Hsu was transferred again the following year, this time to Fukien Province. He would remain here for over three years, serving as financial commissioner, but also compiling information about the West. His efforts were rewarded for in 1847 when he was promoted to the governorship of the province. His *Ying-huan chih-lueh* was compiled and then written in these

(31) Important new perspectives on Wei Yuan have been developed by Jane Kate Leonard. See her articles "Chinese Overlordship and Western Penetration in Maritime Asia" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, Washington, 1971), and "Wei Yuan and Sino-Nan Yang Traditions" (Columbia Modern China Seminar, January 11, 1979).

The *Hai Kuo t'u Chih* itself is still available in modern editions.

years at Fukien.

Hsu began his book with a general description of the globe. He then moved in a clockwise direction, discussing the nations of Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Russia. In the later part of the book he described the periphery of the Western world, America, and also presented detailed accounts of specific Western institutions and practices. Fred Drake, who has studied Hsu and his writings, believes that the main point the scholar official was trying to make was this:

The Western maritime nations, previously seen as weak, distant, and inconsequential barbarian states now were masters of the largest part of the earth's surface. China, on the other hand controlled less than one half of the Asian continent, itself only one of four in the world.

Hsu attempted to discover the sources of Western power. He believed that the economic system which they had developed provided one source. The true source of Western power, however, was political. The gentry in the major Western nations, as an educated and enlightened elite, had striven to destroy archaic and arbitrary social distinctions and had developed political systems which forged harmonious bonds between citizen and government. Rights had been guaranteed and the people were free to pursue their own ends. These free societies had become the rich and powerful ones.⁽³²⁾

Both Wei and Hsu used the SDUKC publications in preparing their books. Wei excerpted articles and included them in *Hai-kuo t'u chih*. Hsu used the material as a source but then did not leave it in its original state; he used the articles as data to develop his radical perspective or world realities.⁽³³⁾

While both men made use of SDUCK materials, they did not accept the viewpoint these works stressed. While both men urged China to change, they did not wish to see a radical transformation of the Chinese political system.

(32) On Hsu's career and his ideas, see Fred W. Drake, "Hsu Chi-Yu's New View of the Non Chinese World" (paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, Washington, 1971).

(33) The question of missionary impact is discussed in Barnett, "Protestant Expansionism," 14-16.

They used these Western sources to demonstrate the technical and institutional superiority of the West. They felt that China could adopt Western techniques, but did not have to accept the underlying philosophical or religious assumptions upon which these techniques were based. Thus, the SDUKC reached those it wished to reach with its secular message. These receivers of the communications did not read the materials in the way the missionaries wanted them to, however.

Conclusions

The missionaries working under the umbrella of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China established a Nineteenth Century type of communications network with the hope of reaching the hearts and the minds of their Chinese audience. They were quite skillful in the way they presented their message of secular change and political salvation, writing a style of Chinese which would be understood and respected. They hoped that the Chinese were so tired of their civilization that they would abandon it and adopt the dynamic, aggressive Western culture. The missionaries' hopes were, at that moment in time, ill founded. A decade later, however, after China's defeat at the hands of the British, more practical, less tradition bound, members of the scholar gentry were willing to listen, and, as we have seen, were willing to use the missionaries' writings as a basis for their understanding of the West. Missionaries hoped that their works would convince the Chinese to change their system. Instead, these works were used by some Chinese to warn the rest of their countrymen about the seriousness of the Western threat. In the following sixty years the Chinese tried to develop a workable compromise, along the lines first laid out by Wei Yuan and Hsu Chi-yü, and later developed and articulated by such men as Tseng Kuo-fan, Li Hung-chang, and Chang Chih-tung. These Confucian scholar officials hoped to make practical use of Western technical and institutional concepts and techniques, while preserving the essence of Chinese cultural values. At heart, they were

willing to accept Western form but preserve Chinese substance. The missionaries preached their "democratic gospel" with the hope of transforming Chinese form and substance, mind and heart. In this they failed, but they did provide information which forced the Chinese to begin the long and difficult reconsideration of their own values and traditions.