

# EARLY 20TH CENTURY CHINESE CHRISTIAN WRITERS AND THE CHURCH INDIGENIZATION MOVEMENT\*

By

Samuel C. Chu\*

In the twentieth century one distinct group of Chinese played a special role in Christian literature; these were the Chinese Christian writers. They followed in the tradition of their missionary counterparts. The production of Christian literature had always been a vital part of the missionary endeavor in China. Starting with Robert Morrison, almost all the early missionaries wrote and translated for the Chinese audience. In the nineteenth century virtually all such literature were produced by the missionaries themselves, even though they were helped by Chinese collaborators. By the twentieth century, however, an increasing number of Chinese writers emerged. Their appearance coincided with, and was a part of, the maturation of the Chinese component within the missionary enterprise. When the time came for missionaries and Chinese Christians to engage in delicate and serious debates over the issue of control of the Christian endeavor in China, Christian literature became a key issue over which the two sides clearly disagreed.<sup>(1)</sup> The Chinese writers, functionally identical with the missionary writers and yet very much a part of the larger body of Chinese Christians, found themselves caught in between.

This paper addresses two related sets of questions. First, who were the

---

\* For assistance to this essay, grateful acknowledgement is made to the late Professor Searle Bates of New York, Barbara Griffis and the staff of the Union Theological Seminary library, Dr. Charles Willard of Speer Library of Princeton Theological Seminary, and Margaret Byrne of the Young Men's Christian Association Historical Library.

\* The author is Professor of Ohio State University.

(1) For two sharply contrasting treatments of the entire problem of Chinese Christian-missionary interaction and tension, see Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Asia and the Ecumenical Movement, 1895-1961* (London, 1966) and David M. Paton, *Christian Missions and the Judgement of God* (London, 1953).

Chinese Christian writers, what did they produce, and were their writings any different from those produced by missionary writers? Second, in the course of the increasingly self-conscious effort of Chinese Christians to assert themselves in churchly affairs, how was Christian literature involved, and where did the Chinese writers fit into the picture? To render this inquiry concrete, H. L. Zia, famous Chinese Christian writer active until his premature death in 1916, serves as a prototype.

### Chinese Christian Writers: H. L. Zia and Others

In the nineteenth century the Chinese Christian writers were not yet a distinct group. A perusal of religious publications bears this out. The American Board tract collection has some rare periodicals, including *Hua-pei yueh-pao* 華北月報 (called in English the *North China Church News*), *Hua-mei pao* 華美報 (called the *Chinese Christian Advocate*), *Min-sheng hui-pao* 閩省會報 (Fukien Association Journal), *Fu-yin hsin-pao* 福音新報 (Gospel New Journal), *Chung-kuo chiao-hui hsin-pao* 中國教會新報 (Chinese Missionary Society New Journal), and *Chung-wai hsin-pao* 中外新報 (Sino-foreign New Journal). While most of these titles are represented by only a few issues in the collection, *Hua-pei yueh-pao* exists in a run of an entire year (1891-1892) plus scattered later issues (in 1895, 1896 and 1898). A check of all the articles in this periodical shows that Chinese writers were in the minority, that most of them appeared to be practicing preachers who wrote occasionally, and that their writings were similar to those produced by the missionary writers. Typical examples are essays on footbinding and on the evils of geomancy in the October 1891 issue, and on progress in the Presbyterian mission and on being slaves to sin in the February 1896 issue.

It was not until the twentieth century that a distinct group of Chinese Christian writers appeared. A number of them became full-time writers, holding positions in the religious tract societies and other Christian publishing houses. More important, they began to publish under their own names, and

thereby created a following. In this way the Chinese Christian writers emerged at long last from under the shadows of their missionary counterparts, although the latter continued to be more prominent in the total production of Christian literature.

One of the earliest such Chinese full-time Christian writers was H. L. Zia (or Hsieh Hung-lai, 謝洪賚 but he was always known professionally by Shanghai spelling of his name). Zia was well-known among Christian circles in his lifetime, and remained noted for many years after his early death in 1916. While his life may not be completely typical, it is indicative of characteristics relevant to most Chinese Christian writers of his time.

Born in 1873 in Shaohsing, Chekiang province, as the son of a scholarly Presbyterian Chinese preacher, H. L. Zia had a thoroughgoing traditional education prior to enrolling in Buffington Institute in 1892.<sup>(2)</sup> Buffington provided him with solid training in the English language and science and mathematics. Graduating in 1895, the very year that China's defeat by Japan brought forth a greater awareness among Chinese of the country's weaknesses, Zia was hired to teach at the Anglo-Chinese College in Shanghai, where he also assisted the college president A. P. Parker in translation work. This was the beginning of Zia's literary career. To equip himself better, he also studied Japanese intensively, and later acquired dictionary reading knowledge of French and German.

A life-long lover of books, Zia was equally interested in people, especially the young. Although his teaching career was abbreviated, he made deep impressions upon numerous students, and he kept up these associations long after he ceased to teach. This same interest in young people drew him naturally to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) movement, which began in China in 1895. He became secretary of the YMCA's national board in 1904, a position he kept throughout his life.

(2) The following summary account of Zia's life is based on materials in the author's private possession except as noted otherwise. See also the biography of Zia (under Hsieh Hung-lai) in Howard Boorman, ed. *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*. Buffington Institute, along with Anglo, Chinese College, was later amalgamated into Soochow University. W. B. Nance, *Soochow University* (New York, 1956), pp. 18-22.

His career as editor-translator started in part-time fashion with the newly-established Commercial Press, where he authored a series of textbooks in mathematics and science. By 1904 he had demonstrated his talent sufficiently for D. Willard Lyon, the dynamic secretary of the YMCA, to persuade him to devote his major energies in heading the Association's publication department. Two years later Zia severed his academic connections with the Anglo-Chinese College and thenceforth spent his time and energies entirely with the YMCA. Under his leadership and active authorship, the Association Press in Shanghai became one of the nation's leading publishers. (3)

As head of the Association Press he wrote and translated on a wide variety of topics. His publications ranged from religious works, works on social service, to those dealing with health, with self-cultivation, in addition to biographies, commentaries and stories. Over the years the annual budget of the Association Press came to exceed \$20,000, a substantial sum for its time. Up to eighty percent of the funds came abroad, but as the chief Publication Secretary he retained complete control of the funds without any "home" interference. (4) A prodigious worker who was personally responsible for some one hundred different titles in a short working life of a little over a decade, Zia was also noted for training a group of younger writers under his aegis. He brought to the Association Press such active Christian writers as T. M. Van and Y. K. Woo 胡貽穀. (5)

Slender in build and never completely in good health in later life, Zia nevertheless pursued an active life even outside his publishing office. In 1907 he was one of the Chinese delegates to the World Student Christian Federation

---

(3) In 1914 the Association Press had a net profit of Mex\$34,748, while its major competitor, Christian Literature Society (of Timothy Richard and Donald MacGillivray), earned Mex\$25,000. China Continuation Committee (hereafter CCC) papers, Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting (1916), in Missionary Research Library (hereafter MRL).

(4) Y. K. Woo, *Hsieh Lu-yin hsien-sheng chuan-lueh* 謝廬隱先生傳略 (*The Life of Mr. H. L. Zia*) (Shanghai, 1917), p. 41.

(5) Letter dated September 3, 1961, from Eugene Barnett to Secretaries of the YMCA in China, in YMCA Historical Library, New York City.

conference in Tokyo. This conference was notable because it was organized by John R. Mott and because it included a sizable number of Asian delegates at a time when similar religious enclaves seldom included active native participants. Both before and after the widely successful visits of Sherwood Eddy and John Mott to China in 1914, Zia prepared study materials and taught bible classes in Hangchow, to which he had returned from Shanghai for reasons of health.<sup>(6)</sup> That same year he was chosen as one of the twenty-one Chinese members of the China Continuation Committee established by Mott and the outstanding Chinese clergyman Ch'eng Ching-yi 誠靜怡, to carry on the work so auspiciously begun at the world-wide missionary conference of Edinborough in 1910. Interestingly enough Zia was the only writer among the Chinese, most of them ministers. Under the China Continuation Committee ten functional committees, mostly headed by veteran missionaries, were set up to study various aspects of the church. Zia headed the committee on Christian terminology, one of only two committees chaired by Chinese (the other Chinese chairman was C. T. Wang 王正廷, of greater national prominence later).<sup>(7)</sup> After completing his report, he asked to be relieved of responsibilities on the grounds of health. Yet his declining vigor did not prevent him from responding to the appeal of the Hangchow YMCA secretary Eugene Barnett in 1914 to head a regular discussion group, which became successful in drawing together the city's political and business leaders.

He first discovered he was afflicted with tuberculosis in 1907. He was persuaded to travel to the United States for convalescence. He spent nearly a year in the healthful climate of Colorado, before returning to resume his Association Press duties. Thereafter he had to carry on his heavy responsibilities while husbanding his strength, visiting periodically the Lushan mountain retreat of Kuling (thus his pen name of Lu-yin, Hermit of Lushan) and moving from Shanghai to Hangchow. He died of the disease in 1916, at the early age of

---

(6) Fletcher S. Brockman, *I Discover the Orient* (New York, 1935), pp 181, 192.

(7) *China Mission Year Book* (hereafter *CMYB*) 1914, p. 498.

forty-three.

In his dozen-year career with the Association Press, Zia wrote and translated a total of 104 titles, ranging from pamphlets of less than 25 pages to substantial monographs exceeding 200 pages.<sup>(8)</sup> Beginning with his first publication in 1904, he kept up an average of ten books yearly. He translated the writings of John Mott, Harry Emerson Fosdick, and Sherwood Eddy and others. He also wrote a number of social commentaries and individual studies on education, health, and history. In addition he served as the editor of *Chung-kuo ch'ing-nien* 中國青年, the Chinese language counterpart to *China's Young Men* (both published by the YMCA) from its inception in 1904 until his death.

He wrote in what was then called the "easy classical" style, one which he used throughout his writing career and in which he was a leading practitioner. He was skilled in using formats derived from traditional practices, with which his readers were familiar, and yet injecting Christian values couched in a morally uplifting tone. To leaven his generally didactic works he interspersed amongst his more serious discussions relevant anecdotes and memorable comments. The result was a rendition of his materials which proved to be highly popular with the readership of his time.

Many contemporaries and later commentators have stated that H. L. Zia was the greatest pioneer Chinese Christian writer in early twentieth century China.<sup>(9)</sup> However, his voluminous writings have never been systematically examined. In the years since his death many of his writings have been lost. Fortunately there are still samples of his work found in the American Board tract collection, the Missionary Research Library, the YMCA Historical Library and in private collections.

---

(8) Information in this paragraph is compiled from lists of Association Press publications as contained in the YMCA periodical *China's Young Men*, 1914, and in *A Classified Index to the Chinese Literature of the Protestant Christian Church in China* (Shanghai, 1933).

(9) A 1922 survey of the China mission field states "we remember with gratitude the able work of H. L. Zia, whose death seems so untimely..." *International Review of Missions* (hereafter *IRM*), 11:23 (1922).

One of his earliest works is entitled *Tsung-chiao-chieh liu ta wei-jen chih sheng-p'ing* 宗教界六大偉人之生平 (with English title *Pioneers of the Cross*). This work is a book of 64 pages containing brief biographies of Robert Morrison, William Carey, Robert Livingston, John Paton, Samuel Gardiner and Billy Sunday. Zia was less interested in the different social or temporal milieux of these great evangelists and more in their biographical details which illustrated the grace of God working in their individual lives. It was his aim to implant these outstanding Christian figures in the minds of Christian youngsters as replacement for the standard historical figures of China.

Lest Zia be thought of strictly as a Christian writer addressing a primarily Christian audience, another work, *Hou-chin K'ai-mo* 後進楷模 (entitled *World Leaders*), 88 pages in the original edition, enlarged to 157 pages later, is characteristic of much of his other writings. This collection of brief biographies includes such figures as Booker T. Washington, Andrew Carnegie, Thomas Edison, Abraham Lincoln, and John Mott. While religious figures such as Mott are included, the majority of the biographies are secular in orientation. The common thread which ties them together is that they were all self-made men, who succeeded through perseverance and hard work to rise above rather humble backgrounds. Thus his purpose here is less to glorify the Christian components of these men than to praise their individual positive qualities.

Of all of Zia's surviving books, the most serious is *Chi-tu-chiao yu k'o-hsueh* 基督教與科學 (Christianity and science). A result of several years' reflection, the book was written as he was approaching the end of his life, a fact he was well aware. This book of 172 pages published in 1915 is a culminating statement of his life-long attitude toward the two major influences in his life, religion and science. Unlike many others at the time, he rejected the view that the two were in fundamental opposition to one another, arguing instead that they merely pursued different paths to arrive at the ultimate truth. He praised the scientific method of observation and experimentation and urged

those interested in religion to adopt similar methods. <sup>(10)</sup>

Because of Zia's temperament, one finds in the bulk of his writings few explicit statements of his philosophy. He preferred to demonstrate by action than by assertion. Most of his writings addressed themselves to some specific and concrete subject with which the reader could immediately come to grips. Zia believed firmly in the limitless benefits of reading. He regarded books as the ultimate window to the world, and believed those who read were freed from the boundaries of time and space. <sup>(11)</sup> He labored to open that wide horizon to his readers. He would no more restrict himself only to religious subjects than he would to scientific subjects, but wrote on a variety of topics in line with his own interests and convictions.

H. L. Zia was the leading Christian writer of his time, but he was by no means the only one. <sup>(12)</sup> Foremost amongst the others were two younger colleagues of his at the Association Press. T. M. Van (Fan Chih-mei 范子美) had worked earlier with Young J. Allen on the *Wan-kuo Kung-pao* 萬國公報. Although Van was converted from his Confucian background to become a Christian, he never wholly lost his vantage point of personally having crossed from one great tradition into another. He wrote a series of books advocating the "easternization" of Christianity. Van believed there was much which could be regarded as common elements between Confucianism and Christianity, and he ardently championed the reconciliation of the two.

Another of Zia's proteges was Y. K. Woo (Hu Yi-ku), who was known for his translations of some of Fosdick's best-known writings (*The Meaning of Faith* for one). Woo was especially close to Zia, and after the latter's death wrote a biography, now rare, which is still a basic source on Zia's life. In

---

(10) Ying Yuan-tao 元應道, "Er-shih-yu-nien lai chih Chung-kuo Chi-tu-chiao chu-tso Chaichi ch'i tai-piao jen-wu" 二十餘年來之中國基督教著作界及其代表人物 (Chinese Protestant writing circles and representative individuals in the recent twenty-plus years), *wen-she* 文社 1.5:9 (1925).

(11) *Ibid.*, p. 10.

(12) The following information is compiled from *ibid.*, pp. 12-27 and from Paul G. Hayes, "Biographical records of Chinese Christians and non-Christian leaders of the twentieth century" (private notebook) in MRL.

the later catalogues of the Association Press in the 1920's one can see the works of Woo gradually replacing those of Zia.

Several writers of Christian background worked outside the immediate Shanghai enclave of major Christian publishing houses. G. Y. Chen (Ch'en Chin-yung 陳金鏞) was a full-time faculty member at Nanking Theological Seminary, but took time away from his teaching duties to collaborate over a decade with J. Leighton Stuart. Chen was himself an Old Testament scholar of considerable reputation. Another influential writer was Chang Yi-ching 張亦鏡, the long time editor of *True Light* magazine. Because of his more fundamentalist beliefs, however, Chang more than any of the others lost much of his younger audience.

Taking these and still others as a whole, we must recognize that there are several common characteristics, to which H. L. Zia also conformed. First, all of them, especially the older Chinese writers, were highly dependent upon Western writers. If they were not active collaborators of missionary writers to start with, they still relied upon the translation of Western writings or the gathering of Western materials for much of their own work.<sup>(13)</sup> Second, all of them were prolific producers. Without a detailed assessment of the writings of all the Chinese writers, it is not possible to state categorically that Zia wrote more than any of the others. What seems clear is that he compacted his writing career into a mere dozen years, whereas virtually all of the other writers exceeded him in longevity. If Zia averaged more titles per year, as seems likely, his labor was greater only relatively, and did not make him quite unique among Christian writers. Third, one must acknowledge that these Christian writers wrote in a tight little working circle of their own. They had more to do with other Christians, including missionaries, than they did with other non-Christian Chinese writers. As a result they largely lost touch with the changing taste of the Chinese readership. At the start of the century the

---

(13) Reference specifically to Zia in this regard is found in George A. Clayton, "Survey of Christian Literature in China," *IRM* 8:376 (1919).

Christian writers commanded the attention of much of the Chinese reading public, Christian and non-Christian. Over time, and especially after the May Fourth Movement, the bulk of this public was lost to the rising new generation of non-Christian Chinese writers.

### Problems of Christian Literature

Shortly after H. L. Zia died, the Chinese Christian leader Ch'eng Ching-yi wrote a survey of the year 1916 for the *China Mission Year Book* of 1917. After paying special tribute to Zia, Ch'eng went on to say,

Again the need of more Christian literature is great and pressing. Speaking generally, the church is not yet a reading church, and the whole Christian literature of China can be shelved in one ordinary bookcase. Four thousand small books, including tracts, represent the entire stock in trade of Protestant Christian literature in China today. A number of these four thousand books and tracts are not suitable for present day use. Chinese writers are few and original works in Chinese are exceedingly meager.<sup>(14)</sup>

Ch'eng was too circumspect in this instance to elaborate on one of the major problems in Christian literature, the relationship between missionary writers and their Chinese counterparts. Ch'eng's time was decades later than that of John Fryer, Young J. Allen and W. A. P. Martin, the great missionary writers of the nineteenth century, but still the old pattern persisted, that of a team of two persons, one missionary and one Chinese, producing those Christian works credited to the missionary. In the early days the Chinese collaborator was not even mentioned. By 1906, however, H. L. Zia was leading the way in arguing the importance of independent Chinese Christian writers, saying that

Although foreign missionaries have taken the initiative in the publication of books as a means of evangelization, let us not run away with the

---

(14) *CMYB* 1917, p. 302.

idea that this is their responsibility alone. In history we find that there is no country in which its religious literature was established by foreign missionaries. The duty of evangelizing our own country rather lies in our educated Chinese Christians. <sup>(15)</sup>

The awareness of this issue notwithstanding, it was not discussed openly until the creation of the China Continuation Committee in 1913. That year the North China conference of the China Continuation Committee (hereafter CCC) appointed a subcommittee on Christian literature, made up of such experienced members as Henry Fenn, Dugald Christie, Chang Po-ling 張伯苓 and Arthur Smith. The subcommittee explored the problems of style, format and distribution outlets. It urged that men of literary ability, in touch with current thought, be sought amongst the Chinese. They should be given full-time employment strictly to write. The YMCA Association Press and especially its series of study pamphlets were cited as models. <sup>(16)</sup>

Such sentiments were not the narrow views of a North China group alone. In a 1916 report to the national CCC, the veteran missionary Hopkins Rees, basing his conclusions upon visits to all the important Christian publishers throughout China, echoed the views expressed by the North China conference. He found the literature generally inadequate and recommended that serious fiction be written to "counteract the evil influences of novels which are sold by hundred of thousands."<sup>(17)</sup> Rees, complaining that the existing Christian literature was too largely the work of foreigners without sufficient Chinese flavor, urged the seeking out of both Chinese writers and other Chinese who could be brought into the administration of publishing houses. Again the Association Press was singled out as being a unique organization where this was done. <sup>(18)</sup> Coming from someone not hitherto identified with Chinese sentiments, Rees' comments strongly confirmed what had been voiced privately among the Chinese

---

(15) *China's Young Men* (July 1906), p. 20.

(16) CCC papers, Proceedings of Peking Conference (1913), in MRL.

(17) CCC papers, Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting (1916), p. 51, in MRL.

(18) *Ibid.*, p. 54.

for years.

In 1917 CCC appointed a Christian Literature Council, headed by the longtime YMCA Secretary Willard Lyon. Two years later the Council reported to CCC on improving Christian literature. Among his several suggestions Lyon also urged the seeking out of literary talent by means of prizes for promising Chinese writers.<sup>(19)</sup> Unfortunately nothing along this line materialized, but the Lyon report did bear fruit with the launching of *The Chinese Bookman*, a journal devoted to surveying new publications, and the initiation of certain general cooperative practices among Christian publishers, such as uniform discounts, mutual forwarding of orders, and the exchange of sample publications.

Even such minimal steps in encouraging better production and distribution of Christian writings led to an exchange in the pages of the *Chinese Recorder* between two veteran missionaries: John Darroch, long affiliated with the tract societies, and A. L. Warnshuis of the CCC. Darroch, after citing the records of the tract societies, complained that the Literature Council's ambitious proposal of having home boards earmark for literature one percent of their total support for mission activities indicated that the Council was planning to take over the functions previously performed by the tract societies. Warnshuis, aware that this proposal would bring to the Council funds far larger than those received by some of the tract societies from their own denominational boards, tried to reassure Darroch by pointing out that this money would be additional to those already committed to existing organizations.<sup>(20)</sup> As it turned out this entire matter became rather academic when Darroch was appointed to head the Literature Council, while the CCC failed to obtain the suggested one percent from home sources.

For Chinese Christians the National Conference of the Chinese Church in

---

(19) "Plans of the New Christian Literature Council in China," *IRM* 8:238-253 (1919).

(20) John Darroch, "The Work of the Tract Societies and the Chinese Christian Literature Council," *Chinese Recorder and Missionary Review* (hereafter *CR*) 50: 600-604 (1919); A. L. Warnshuis, "The China Christian Literature Council and the Literary Society in China," *CR* 50:604-606 (1919).

1922, the first under the leadership of Chinese churchmen, was a landmark event. The Conference took up every important issue facing the missionary enterprise, including Christian literature. The delegates came with a sense of confidence, feeling that the times were ripe for a major thrust forward. On Christian literature this sense of confidence was also discernable. Without denying the vitality of the May Fourth New Culture movement, the Chinese church sought to meet the challenge head-on.

[The New Culture movement's] outstanding feature is that of independent inquiry and critical attitude. It is intellectual, and counts among its leaders the ablest men of Young China. It is fearless in its advocacy of what it believes. Its aims are democratic, it seeks the social uplifting of the people. Its attitude towards religion is one of full and free inquiry, taking nothing for granted, but prepared to accept any truth that is proved to be truth. Here surely is a challenge. In the very fact that it is prepared fearlessly and frankly to examine whatever claims Christianity or any other religion can show to be well founded, this movement invites the Christian Church to produce its credentials. It will take nothing for granted. We desire nothing else. We plead nothing more nor less than that men shall examine whether these things which we proclaim be so. Here then is the new task set before Christian literature, for it is by this channel and perhaps this channel alone, that those under the spell of the New [Culture] Movement are to be reached. <sup>(21)</sup>

To accomplish this goal, the Conference recommended that appropriate literature be produced for both the non-Christian public and the Christian constituency, and that Chinese talents be discovered by means of special schools of literature and through prizes and scholarships. It also recommended encouraging the production of literature among missionaries by asking home boards to give released time to those who wish to write. The Conference paid special

---

(21) *The Chinese Church* (Shanghai, 1922), pp. 416-417.

attention to the target audiences among the general public: students, teachers, urban professionals, and women. They were to be reached through Christian newspapers, Christian books, and a press bureau to service the secular media. For the Christian community the Conference recommended more books to meet pastors' need and more Christian periodicals along the lines of *Life*, a journal published by a group of Yenching University Christian scholars.<sup>(22)</sup> Addressing the problem of distribution, the Conference recommended a system of regional area agents, and the establishment of a wholly Chinese Christian publishing house, to be funded primarily from Chinese sources.<sup>(23)</sup>

What happened to this confident thrust? At least in the area of Christian literature, the National Conference of 1922 marked a high point rather than a beginning. Four years later a more modest conference was called, involving thirty-two Chinese Christian leaders with a like number of missionaries, to meet with John Mott and assess the situation of the church. From its report the conclusion is inescapable that little forward movement had been generated in the intervening years. The same problems and complexities were aired, the same proposals were put forth. While some modest achievements in Christian literature were noted, the conference participants were all too aware that, compared to the dramatic upsurge in the New Culture movement, in relative terms the production of Christian literature had slipped markedly.<sup>(24)</sup>

### Factors Inhibiting the Growth and Change of Christian Literature

Of all the areas of joint endeavor where missionaries might have given way more to their Chinese colleagues, one would have thought Christian literature could have been among the first. At no time did anyone, Westerners or Chinese, argue that missionaries were more adept at translation work or doing original Chinese writing. All who were involved knew that every missionary

---

(22) *Ibid.*, p. 426. For the periodical *Life*, see Philip West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), pp. 17-18.

(23) *The Chinese Church*, pp. 317-323, 438.

(24) *Report of Conference on the Church in China Today* (Shanghai, 1926), pp. 48-64.

writer relied upon a Chinese co-worker, to whom he generally dictated his translations. The process was then completed by the missionary checking the writing of the Chinese. No missionary wrote in or translated into Chinese all by himself. <sup>(25)</sup>

For years the argument had been made that a Chinese writer, on the other hand, did not command English sufficiently to do translation work by himself either. It was maintained further that the Chinese did not understand the depth and subtlety of the Christian message to write or translate without the guidance of a missionary. But as time went on this assertion became increasingly untenable. Products of the very schools established by missionaries began to write as individual authors. Starting with H. L. Zia, Chinese writers, while still beholden to Western writing for most of their materials, were now doing translations unaided by foreign partners. In time even a modest corpus of original writing began to make its appearance. Yet we have seen that, while Chinese writers came to be recognized, there was no substantial transfer from Westerners to Chinese in the production of Christian literature.

There were many factors why this should be so, some of them in fact also explain the serious difficulties of Christian literature in general. First and foremost, the home boards, in spite of longstanding commitment to the missionary enterprise, did not place a high priority on the promotion of literature. This seems paradoxical when it is recalled that early missionaries were invariably both preachers and writers. But that is precisely the problem. Early missionaries did their writing as an inseparable part of their role as missionaries. By the twentieth century the missionary enterprise had become much more professionalized. For the most part missionaries became administrators and executives, able to maintain their role as preachers but increasingly unable to keep up their writing activities. The home boards, however, were still wedded to the idea of supporting missionaries as missionaries, giving low priority to the

---

(25) Suzanne Barnett, "Silent Evangelism: Presbyterians and the Mission Press in China, 1807-1860," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 49:299 (1971).

support of literature as a separate and distinct activity. The few missionaries who made pleas to their boards to increase support for literature were met with the answer that those in the China field itself did not seem to place literature at a very high priority.<sup>(26)</sup> There was some truth in this statement, for opinions among missionaries varied widely. Some such as E. C. Lobenstine, one of the secretaries of CCC, and Frank Rawlinson, the long-time editor of the *Chinese Recorder*, strongly endorsed putting literature at a higher priority, Lobenstine went so far as to argue that funds should be allocated to literature even at the expense of reducing the number of missionaries in the future.<sup>(27)</sup> Others, notably the veteran missionary A. J. Hoste, were highly dubious about this ordering of priorities. Both E. R. Hughes, later an eminent sinologue, and George Clayton, prominent among those in support of literature, felt that the best writers were those who engaged in other missionary activities concurrently.<sup>(28)</sup> Since even the leading missionary writers took this position, we can surmise that the vast majority of the missionaries felt even stronger that writing should be subsumed as part of the total duties of the missionary calling. In this climate of opinion it was difficult to make a case for the support of gifted writers, be they Chinese or Westerners, entirely for their literary work, other than the already established tract societies and publishing houses.<sup>(29)</sup>

Another factor was denominationalism. Individual denominations at home preferred to channel their support for literature, what there was of it, into publishing outlets of their own. Long after the several denominational tract societies had expanded beyond publishing only tracts into other kinds of

---

(26) *Report of Conference on the Church in China Today*, p. 60.

(27) *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

(28) *Ibid.*; George A. Clayton, "Can the Christian Forces in China Get Together on a Literature Plan?" *CR* 56:288 (1925).

(29) The static situation in Christian literature is the more striking when compared with educational and medical work, for in those areas an increasing proportion of younger missionaries were devoting their energies. As the Yenching and the Peking Union Medical Colleges grew, they turned more to the secular public in the West for their support. It was far easier, then and now, to generate enthusiasm and obtain funds for the training of young minds and the healing of bodies. Publication of books generally did not command the appeal of educational and medical work in public eyes.

publications, they could still count on the support of their home boards because of the assurance that the proper theological position would be maintained. Of the "union" publishing houses, only the Association Press, because of its YMCA affiliation and its early success under Zia, and the Christian Literature Society under the effective leadership of Donald MacGillivray, were able to flourish.<sup>(30)</sup> The various union publishing schemes proposed in China, initiated by Chinese Christians in many instances, invariably suffered from the reservations of denominational home boards.

The control of home boards over their publishing outlets also led to certain procedural abuses. One unfortunate practice, cited in the 1930's but probably long prevalent before, was that of assigning old missionaries unfit for evangelization work to duties with publishing houses. Such a practice not only saddled the houses with men who in most instances were ill-suited to the work, but had the added drawback of giving concrete indication of the relative priorities home boards placed on literary work as against preaching in the field.<sup>(31)</sup>

A related factor was institutional rivalry. The established publishing houses, while welcoming the various reform efforts of the Chinese church, inevitably became concerned lest the requests of the fledgling efforts for funds at home would cut into their own finite support. Quite understandably these publishers already felt that support from home was too meager. To entertain any new union effort would seem to them to be detrimental to their own best interests, even running the risk of courting their own extinction.

One example will serve to illustrate the problem. In 1926 a group of Chinese Christians, generally younger and unaffiliated with the existing missionary publishing houses, formed the National Christian Literature Association. This effort did not meet with the approval of long-established publishing houses.

---

(30) Even the Christian Literature Society was not totally free of editorial supervision exercised by the supporting home agencies. *Rethinking Missions: A Layman's Inquiry After One Hundred Years* (New York, 1932), chap. 8.

(31) *Ibid.*

In part reflecting the unhappiness of Chinese writers long affiliated with such houses, who were not involved in this new effort, missionaries affiliated with publishing houses sharply took issue with Chinese Christian leaders who wanted to give special support to this Association.<sup>(32)</sup> Coupled with faulty leadership and over-ambitious planning, this lack of missionary support caused the new Literature Association to become defunct within two years.

If the problem was only money, one may well ask why the Chinese church itself could not have raised the necessary funds. This too proved difficult, if not impossible. Ample evidence exists to show that the Chinese Christian reading public simply was not large enough to mount such a bootstrap operation. There were too many other demands on the limited funds available within the Chinese church.

Money was only part of the problem; the Chinese church also did not foster individuals qualified to produce literature. In their more candid moments the Chinese themselves admitted to this defect. The very success of the missionary movement's educational ventures in fact served to deprive their graduates of the ability to produce their own literature. The Chinese Christian leaders were prime examples. They were all fluent in English. They dealt with missionaries as equals, but the price they paid was a certain denationalization.<sup>(33)</sup> In part this was due to the policies of the Christian colleges. Well into the 1920's they taught only in English. With the sterling exception of Yenching, missionary colleges gave low support to Chinese studies. Until 1919 there was not a single Christian college which emphasized the Chinese department.<sup>(34)</sup>

There was also the problem of the style of writing. The 1920's saw the replacement of the classical style of writing, even the easy classical of Zia, by the Mandarin vernacular. Every year the reports of Christian literature

---

(32) *Report of Conference on the Church in China Today*, pp. 62-64.

(33) *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

(34) *CMYB* 1922, p. 432.

noted this general phenomenon, and yet Christian writers, Chinese as well as foreigners, found it increasingly difficult to use this style successfully. The irony of it was that Christian publishing houses had helped pioneer Mandarin literature more than two decades previously. By this time, however, Christian writers found that they could not maintain their position at the forefront of vernacular literature. One observer concluded that the Mandarin used by Christian writers was already regarded as outdated by the new reading public. <sup>(35)</sup>

This matter of the rapidly changing reader preference had relevance to more than writing style; it had to do with subject matters. Within the Christian community itself clear evidence is provided by a survey of student reading preferences in Christian colleges conducted by the *Chinese Recorder* in 1925. The three leading titles were *Chuang-tzu*, *Lao-tzu* and the *Four Books* respectively, followed by Fosdick's *Meaning of Faith*, H. L. Zia's *Interpretation of the Truth*, and K. Y. Woo's *Science and Religion*. The Bible occupied the ninth place, followed by *Pilgrim's Progress*. <sup>(36)</sup> From this list of preferences in Christian colleges, one can surmise that students in secular schools would be even less prone to favor Christian titles. When students in this survey were asked to voice their major criticisms of Christian books, they responded that much of it was impractical, dull and poorly written. Moreover, such books were hard to obtain from bookstores. <sup>(37)</sup> None of these reactions should surprise anyone familiar with Christian literature at that time, but the indictment is especially damning since it came from that sector of the

(35) *CMYB* 1924, pp. 441-442; interview with Searle Bates, February 22, 1978.

(36) "What Students Are Reading," *CR* 56:307-309 (1925).

(37) *Ibid.* The same issue of *CR* (pp. 299-305) contains a report of a survey of Westerners in China (presumably including many missionaries) as to books they found most useful concerning China. The top five were Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics*, his *Village Life in China*, S. W. Williams' *The Middle Kingdom*, James Bashford's *China, An Interpretation*, and Bland and Backhouse' *China Under the Empress Dowager*. All except Bashford's book were written before the Revolution of 1911. This strongly suggests that by the 1920's Westerners in China were losing touch with the new generation. Most Westerners continued to rely upon books which were influential at the time of their first arrival in China.

general reading public presumably most favorably disposed toward Christian publications. (38)

For Christian literature the first quarter of the twentieth century turned out to be a period of trial which ultimately proved it to be wanting. At the beginning of this period the reading public was eager to imbibe knowledge of the West. The Christian writers, building upon the pioneering work of Fryer, Allen, and Martin, were able to meet this need. At that time there was little to distinguish between the work of missionary writers such as MacGillivray or Chinese writers such as Zia. They both addressed themselves essentially to two audiences, the religiously committed and the non-believers. To the former they provided Biblical commentaries and devotional materials written originally by Western authors. For the latter they translated books of Christian inspiration and general knowledge, again written in the first instance by others in the West. Since the sources were both foreign, their translations into Chinese were similar also, whether done primarily by foreigners or by Chinese.

The Chinese Christian writers of the early twentieth century were generally graduates of the schools and colleges established by missionaries. A few had further training abroad, but most had not. They were employed full-time by Christian publishing houses or in some instances by theological schools. They came from a tradition of working closely with their missionary counterparts. In many individual instances the Chinese writer had developed a long-term professional relationship with a given missionary writer. Accordingly these Chinese

---

(38) One other problem was that of distribution and advertising. The most telling evidence is contained in a statement by Elijah Nieh, the first Chinese Editorial Secretary appointed by the Christian Literature Society. Nieh stated in 1924 that "practically all the books produced by Christian societies are unknown to the Chinese public." He cited the specific case of Kerkup's *History of Socialism* translated by a Christian publisher ten years earlier, selling a total of 500 copies in a decade. When that same book was published by the Commercial Press in 1919 it sold more than 20,000 copies in one year. *CMYB* 1924, pp. 438-442. Admittedly the timing of their appearance and the fact that the later edition was in Mandarin had something to do with the discrepancy in sales, but still Nieh's main contention could not be denied.

writers were not accustomed to adopting an openly independent work pattern apart from their Western colleagues. More than that, they believed strongly in the missionary-Chinese partnership, and there was little reason for them to be outspokenly critical of the arrangement under which they derived their professional satisfaction.

With the Revolution of 1911 and the outbreak of World War I shortly thereafter, these earlier professional Chinese writers found another group of Chinese Christians speaking out on Christian literature. This second group of Chinese were leading pastors of churches or faculty members of Christian colleges and were often returned students from abroad. They did not make their living from full-time writing activities, and thus did not have the intimate working relationship with missionary writers. This later group of Chinese Christians were outspoken in asserting that for the Chinese audience the viewpoint of the Chinese writers was more valid than that of the missionaries. Their attitude toward Christian literature was very much a part of their general effort to "indigenize" the church in China.

Since these Chinese Christians were not part of the publishing world, they found themselves confronted by the vested interests of the existing publishing houses. Had the indigenization movement succeeded they might have been able to bypass the opposition of the publishing houses altogether. But the effort to make the church in China more independently Chinese foundered because the Chinese Christian community was not large enough, nor did it have at that time a tradition of substantial giving to make the church self-supporting. Therefore the Chinese church had to continue to depend largely on the largess of the missionary home boards. The legitimate objections of the publishing houses remained one of the stumbling blocks in any effort to change the content and format of the literature. Efforts at improving Christian literature invariably became embroiled in such questions as denominational control, theological purity, and fiscal support.

The Christian writers continued to supply materials for the Christian

community. For in spite of shortcomings in content and format, books for pastoral aid and devotional study commanded a steady market. But with the larger non-Christian audience it was a different story. By the early 1920's the Christian writers were no longer the sole purveyors of things Western. Other commercial publishers, with stronger distribution and advertising facilities, were preempting that type of material. Nor was the West being accepted in China uncritically. Following World War I the aura of superiority which the West had possessed had been stripped away in Chinese eyes. And in the intellectual ferment of the May Fourth period, religion itself was being questioned. In such a drastically altered setting, the younger Chinese Christians, more in touch with their non-Christian compatriots and less dependent upon their missionary colleagues than was the case with the older Chinese writers, found themselves in a continuing bind. For them, to keep producing the kind of Christian literature as had been done previously was obviously inadequate, and yet they could not convince many missionaries and the supporting home boards to create the kind of literature which would satisfy the demands of the larger reading audience. Thus the two related developments mutually hindered one another. Continuing missionary control of the Christian enterprise in China made it virtually impossible for Christian writers to reach the larger Chinese reading audience. At the same time the failure of the Chinese Christians to create their own living literature contributed to the failure of Christianity to become a truly indigenous religion.

## 「二十世紀初期中國基督教作家的教會本土化運動」

### 中文提要

朱 昌 峻

在一八九五年到一九一九年之間的過渡時期，中國讀者對現代世界的認識，有一大部分來自華籍基督教作家的作品。這些作家用淺明的文言文寫作，是五四時期白話運動的先驅，雖然他們的光芒很快地就被新文化運動中崛起的年青非宗教作家掩過，在本世紀的頭二十年中，卻依舊有其不可忽視的重要性。

中國基督教作家的寫作，其對象不分教徒與否，他們同時以虔誠的教徒身分參與一九一〇年開始的教會本土化運動。他們影響力的式微，可歸因於年青非宗教作家的興起，但教會和教徒間的衝突，也是同等重要的理由。

本文以謝洪賚為個案，討論中國基督教作家的作品，追溯一些基督教作家，為使作品更適合一般讀者口味，對改良基督教讀物所作的努力。從之，進而討論這項努力失敗的最重要原因，即教會反對。當時教會經費來自海外，重要的決定皆操諸海外總會，所以儘管有少數教士同情中國信徒的主張，並不起作用。傳教事業的這種權力結構，使基督教讀物一直保持不中不西的面貌。基督教作家也熱愛其祖國，面對這樣的局面，有心加以改變，但實在無能為力。他們的沒落和教會之所以未能成為本地社會一環，息息相關。

