

**“Go Ye Unto the World: the Defining of the Missionary’s
Task in America and China, 1830–1850”**

MURRAY A. RUBINSTEIN

The American Protestant missionary enterprise in China took shape in the period 1830–1850. In these years representatives of a number of American foreign mission societies came to coastal cities of the Central Kingdom and began the work of setting up mission stations and spreading the Gospel, the Word of Christ. This paper is an examination of the motivations, objectives, and expectations of the early China missionaries and the home boards that sent them. It deals with two facets of early mission development: the nature of the aims and strategies of the home boards and the manner in which the missionaries perceived their objective situation and defined their own approaches to their rather formidable task. The paper is divided into two sections. The first is an examination of home board objectives and the theology which lay behind them as found in the boards’ instructions to their missionaries. The second is a study of both the China missionaries’ perception of the problems they confronted in the “Middle Kingdom” and of their pragmatic evaluation of their task in China in the face of these harsh realities. Both the Americans boards and their missionaries harbored hopes and dreams of transforming a people. In this paper I attempt to define the nature of those hopes and attempt to determine how conditions in China tempered and changed the missionaries’ perceptions of them.

Part I. the Missionary’s Task as Defined by the Home Boards

Missionaries to China were sent out and directed by mission boards and societies. These societies secured the funds necessary to launch and maintain missions in foreign lands, recruited the missionaries themselves, and directed,

at long range, the development of mission related activities. Five mission organizations operated China based missions in the period 1830-1950. The first of these was the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. It had been established in 1810 and in 1830 sent its first representative, Elijah Coleman Bridgman, to China. The second major missionary body was the American Baptist Missionary Society which had been organized in the 1810's and which began sending its people out in the mid 1830's. The third major body was the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Presbyterian congregations had initially supported American Board efforts but in 1837 the Presbyterian leadership had decided upon breaking away and establishing their own independent society. By the mid 1840's Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions' representatives had settled in a number of Chinese cities and had begun mission work. Two other American organizations sent missionaries to China in this early period, but their efforts were rather limited. The first of these was the Protestant Episcopal Church, which sent a few people out in the 1840's and the second was the American Methodist Episcopal Church which established a mission society in the 1830's but did not send anyone to China until the late 1840's. (1) American Protestant assault upon the Celestial Empire had begun.

The Boards that sent men and women to China were composed of clergymen, seminary and university faculty, church leaders and devoted and suitably pious laymen. These men established Boards during a time of emotional religious revival and were determined to spread their newly revived faith among all the peoples of the world. The missionary was to be their representative, their voice, and he had to represent their theological beliefs and fulfill their objectives and aims. Thus they recruited men and women on the basis of the depth of their religious commitment as well as on the basis of the quality of their professional skills. They then familiarized the newly chosen missionary with the grand design the society had evolved as well as with the specific

(1) The earliest general account of this period, and one that is still quite useful is William Dean, *THE CHINA MISSION* (Philadelphia, 1859).

objectives it had for that mission field and that particular station. What was the theology which lay behind this ambitious and many faceted mission movement? What were the grand objectives of the societies and what were their designs for the missionary enterprise in China? Finally, what plans did they have for the individual representative, the lone missionary, the Boards often sent out to China? The home boards defined the missionary's task on three levels, the universal Christian, the denominational institutional, and the individual and it will be these three levels which will now be examined.

For much of the nineteenth century there existed a rather generalized missionary theology which most boards, denominational or non-denominational, shared. This theology was derived from concepts present in Second Great Awakening Protestantism which were modified to fit the needs of mission boards and their missionaries. There were four elements in this theology; the Millennium, Disinterested Benevolence, Christ's Last Command, and the Perishing Heathen.

The first component was Millenarianism. This was a belief in the establishment of Christ's Kingdom upon earth and the institution of His thousand year reign. Millenialism took two forms, each centering around the question of when Christ would first appear. Pre-millennialists believed that Christ would come before the Millennium had begun, acting as a herald for the vast changes about to begin. Post millennialists believed that Christ would only appear after the process of transformation had begun. Most conservative Protestants in nineteenth century America, and in Great Britain, were convinced of the near arrival of the Millennium but did not concern themselves with what appeared to be a rather esoteric debate. Minister and laymen alike felt they saw signs of the impending change. They viewed the political and military chaos in continental Europe as evidence. They saw the simultaneous expansion and deterioration of American urban areas as further proof. American life was in a state of transition and to the pious this represented evidence of an

expected and hoped for transformation of man and his world.⁽²⁾ Mission boards and other benevolent religious bodies viewed the Millenium as not physical (or material), but as a spiritual transformation and felt that it would not come about until all the world had heard the message of the Gospel. Missionaries were seen as preparing the way and were thus seen as engaged in a great and glorious and vitally important task. Millenarianism, therefore served as a cornerstone of the edifice of the missionary enterprise.

A second concept was Active or Disinterested Benevolence. This idea had been defined by Samuel Hopkins, the most noted disciple of Jonathan Edwards and the major contributor to the "New England Theology". Hopkins theorized that God worked through man to achieve His holy ends. A converted man, and, even more so, a man dedicated to his faith demonstrated this benevolent spirit within by doing good works and by furthering the advancement of God's Holy kingdom. Disinterested Benevolence was seen by Hopkins as a demonstration of God's power of control and man's weakness. By the early nineteenth century the belief in predestination and in God-the-pupeteer had weakened and most theologians in the major denominations had adopted some form of a belief in man's free will. Disinterested Benevolence now came to mean God working through man but with man's consent and thus man became, as it were, a coworker with God. Both man and God worked toward the conversion of the world and man helped God prepare the world for the establishment of His Thousand Year Reign. For the mission board, and for its missionaries, Active Benevolence became a fact of life and mission boards and their workers felt that every day they gave evidence of the fact that God was working in them, through them, and with them. The term Active or Disinterested Benevolence was not used much after the early decades of the nineteenth century but the concept was still utilized though other words were used to describe it. A missionary and his home board had to feel that God was using him and whether you called it

(2) The most detailed examination of Millenarianism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century is Ernest R. Sandeen, *THE ROOTS OF FUNDAMENTALISM, 1800-1930*, (University of Chicago Press, 1970).

Active Benevolence or God's Spirit, the idea was fundamentally the same. ⁽³⁾

Christ's Last Command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature", were words taken to heart by American missionaries in the nineteenth century. Mission boards looked upon these words as a personal injunction to them to send out men and women willing to carry the message of Christ to all the peoples of the world. Missionaries felt that Christ was talking directly to them, telling them to give up home and family and labor in his name. Twentieth century missionaries of such bodies as the China Inland Mission continued to act in obedience to this scriptural injunction and talk of its power and of the inexorable pull of duty toward the heathen that they themselves felt. ⁽⁴⁾

The object of the mission board and the missionary's efforts was a being usually referred to as the "perishing Heathen". The Perishing Heathen was a native of any of a number of alien, non western lands, who dwelt in poverty, ignorance and degradation and who died without ever having heard the word of Christ. The heathen was doomed to a miserable life on earth and doomed to eternal damnation in the afterworld. The Perishing Heathen also suffered because in lands without the Gospel the forces of the devil and his minions were free to do their work. It was a mission board's duty to send out men who would be able to teach the heathen about his true condition and who would be able to do battle with the very real forces of evil and defeat them with the power of the true faith. ⁽⁵⁾

(3) A nineteenth century Presbyterian perspective was spelled out in John C. Lowrie, *A MANUAL OF MISSIONS* (New York, 1855), 9. A modern scholarly examination can be found in Wolfgang Eberhard Lowe, "The First American Foreign Missionaries: the Students" (Ph. D. dissertation, Brown University, 1965) cpt. VIII.

(4) This analysis of the twentieth century significance of the Last Command is based upon an interview with Mrs. C. Maybeth Bray, a China missionary who served the China Inland Mission in the 1930's and 40's. The interview was conducted on July 12, 1977 in Cold Spring, New York.

(5) In the same interview Mrs. Gray discussed what she believed to be the visible evidence of demon possession and cited instances of occasions when Christian exorcism rites were utilized to fight such possession. The nineteenth century attitude toward the Perishing Heathen is spelled out in Lowrie, *MANUAL*, 10. A modern approach is Lowe, "The First American Missionaries", cpt. IX.

The four elements I have just described did not make up a formal, internally consistent and rigorous theology. Instead, they provided both board and missionary with a workable set of ideas which could provide them with a rationale for missionary development and with personal motivation for a missionary's day to day, little noticed and rather unglamorous, labor. M. Searle Bates has dealt with the question of mission theology in the twentieth century and has discussed the rather pragmatic, accomodating nature of this theology.⁽⁶⁾ It was Bates argument that the missionaries aim, their primary objective, was to prepare the world for the return of Christ and the establishment of his holy kingdom. The world would only be ready when all men and women accepted Christ as their Saviour. The American Board spelled this out when it informed its prospective missionaries that, "The primary object aimed at in missions should be to bring men a saving knowledge of Christ by making known to them the way of salvation through his cross."⁽⁷⁾ But the Board wanted to do more than simply inform people. Missionaries were to attempt to transform the very nature of pagan man. Men were to know of Christ, to accept Christ as their Saviour and then to change the way they believed and the way they lived. The American Board had another unstated, but implied, objective, the societal transformation of the heathen world, and thus this organization may be thought of as a nineteenth century "change agency" and, in a similar vein, its missionaries may be considered as "change agents."⁽⁸⁾ Other societies, such as the American Baptist Missionary Society and the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, shared the Board's desire for conversion of the heathen, but not the Board's implied cultural imperialist aim. The Baptists

(6) On missionary theology see M. Searle Bates, "The Theology of American Missionaries in China, 1900-1950" in John K. Fairbank, ed., *THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN CHINA AND AMERICA* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 143-45.

(7) The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, *MANUAL FOR MISSIONARY CANDIDATES* (Boston, 1849) 41.

(8) One approach to the study of missionary enterprise, which the author is now exploring in a search for a broad, social science based analytic framework is *Applied Social Change Theory*. An introductory work to such theory is Zaltman, Kotler, Kaufman, ed., *CREATING SOCIAL CHANGE* (New York, 1972).

concentrated upon spreading the good word, and were less interested in transforming areas of the non-west into societies which were easier for Westerners to relate to. The Presbyterians, for their part, while sharing the American Board's social and cultural goals, also wished to see the establishment of a strong, independent native church which could then be organized into Presbyteries and synods as were the American and Scottish churches. ⁽⁹⁾

Mission boards also developed specific strategies which were designed to help achieve their basic aims. These were usually referred to, in missionary publications and in unpublished correspondence, as missionary labors. Walter Lowrie, first president of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions stated that, "other branches of missionary labor will consist of translating and printing the Bible and religious tracts and publications; and, wherever practicable, taking oversight of common education in all cases giving it encouragement." ⁽¹⁰⁾

There were other types of labors societies suggested its workers engage in. The American Baptists laid great stress upon preaching. A hundred years after the establishment of the first Baptist mission, an American Baptist Mission Society official could still write that, "the genius of the American Baptist is to emphasize the work of direct evangelism at home and abroad. Missionaries are selected on the basis of evangelistic spirit and qualifications. They have given themselves to this task—deeming no sacrifice too great if only they might personally proclaim the Gospel message to a people living in spiritual darkness." ⁽¹¹⁾ The other boards agreed with the Baptists on the need for preaching, but did not give it the same centrality in their scheme of things. The Baptist Board also called upon its missionaries to translate scriptural ma-

(9) Baptist objectives were spelled out in the published reports of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society's triennial meetings. Presbyterian aims were defined by Walter Lowrie, Sr., first president of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in his first annual report to the Board; John Lowrie, MEMOIRS OF THE HONORABLE WALTER LOWRIE, (New York, 1896).

(10) Lowrie, MEMOIRS, 22.

(11) Howard Grose and Fred Howard, ed. THE JUDSON CENTENNIAL OF THE AMERICAN BAPTIST FOREIGN MISSION SOCIETY, (Boston, 1914) 6.

terials. An editor of Judson Centennial volume stated that, "faithful translation and circulation of the scriptures in the language of the people is regarded of fundamental importance to missionary work."⁽¹²⁾ While these words and those previously cited were written in 1914, they were similar in tone to those written by the founders and early organizers of the Baptist effort. A final type of missionary labor, begun in the early decades, was medical work. Mission boards often recruited medical men and urged its missionaries to establish mission clinics and hospitals. The boards and societies felt that missionaries could reach souls by healing bodies and sent medical men, of sufficient piety, out at the earliest opportunity.

A mission board's hopes and its objectives for a specific field were often spelled out in its instructions to the new missionaries it was sending out. The drafting of these instructions often helped to define a mission board's aims for a specific area and let the new representative know what his home society expected of him. An in-depth examination of one such set of instructions will demonstrate this point and also show how a board's general objectives and its perception of missionary labors were redefined and refined when applied to a specific field of missionary endeavor. The instructions which are to be examined are those which were given to Elijah Coleman Bridgman, a representative of the American Board and the first American missionary to China. These instructions were drafted in the fall of 1829 and presented to the pioneer missionary as he set sail for Canton in October of 1829.

In the instructions, the American Board first made Bridgman aware of the significance of his role as first missionary. They wrote that:

There is a peculiar responsibility.....resting on the man who makes the first offer of the Gospel to a heathen people, and whose preaching is perhaps the only statement they have heard of its doctrines and whose

(12) Ibid, 7.

character and example are the only exhibition of its practical influence. ⁽¹³⁾

This theme of a missionary's responsibility was elaborated upon still further. The Board expanded upon the importance of this new enterprise, informing Bridgman that, "There is perhaps no service in the Christian Church at the present day, that could be assigned to any man, which opens a wider field, affords opportunities for more varied and painful exertion or contemplates greater results."⁽¹⁴⁾ The Board, and other bodies, felt they had to encourage their new missionaries and convince them more deeply of the significance of the task they were to perform. These societies learned from hard experience that missionaries might enter a field full of energy and enthusiasm but that the climatic and socio-cultural conditions would soon take their toll and dampen the spirit of even the most dedicated individual. Thus they tried to inspire the new missionary and convince him of the value of the effort he was to devote his energies and even his life to. But the Board also interjected a final note of hope, telling Bridgman that the Gospel would ultimately triumph, no matter how desperate the situation appeared to be at first. It told him to "Encourage yourself with this thought and let a holy enthusiasm be kindled in you, exerting every power of your soul to strenuous effort and unwearied perseverance, with the hope that you, as a soldier of Christ, may soon have a part in such an achievement."⁽¹⁵⁾

The optimism voiced in the introductory passages of Bridgman's instructions cannot be considered the mere verbalization of the desperate hopes of a group of men contemplating a vast and almost hopeless task of widescale evangelization. The Board and later organizations were well aware of the difficulties their representatives faced in a forbidding and hostile China. The optimistic spirit the Board

(13) The American Board's instructions to Elijah Bridgman are found in the American Board collection housed in Houghton Library of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. A printed version of these same instructions are found in Eliza Bridgman's memoir of her husband (Eliza Bridgman, *Pioneer of American Missions in China*, New York, 1864). The published version will be cited in this and the following footnotes. Bridgman, *Pioneer*, 20.

(14) Ibid. 20-21.

(15) Ibid. 21.

and the other bodies expressed was, instead, a manifestation of the various mission organizations' continuing belief in the coming of the Millenium and reflected the deep seated feeling that the expansion of the mission effort to all parts of the world was an intrinsic part of the universal process of preparation for the Millenium. Boards felt that men and women in China would now be exposed to the Gospel by committed, pious individuals and thus be ready for Christ's return.

The Board knew from prior experience that a missionary had to gain fluency in the language of the indigenous peoples before he could begin to seriously learn about them and begin to communicate with them. The progress made by the American Boards earlier missions in Bombay and in the Sandwich islands hinged upon the linguistic abilities of the missionaries in those fields. The Board was thus willing, as later boards were, to have its missionaries devote their early years in a new field to intensive language study. They informed Bridgman that, "The Committee supposes that your attention will be specially directed for some years to the acquisition of the Chinese language. In this labor you will avail yourself of all helps.....and you will select whatseems to be the best place for the accomplishment of this object."⁽¹⁶⁾ The Board realized that the best place Bridgman could go for language instruction was the Anglo-Chinese College, a missionary educational facility at Malacca in East Indies, but they stressed that he should attempt to use the resources available in South China. In later years the China missions were able to establish language study centers and thus help new members gain a working knowledge of Chinese, but few such resources were available to the first men in. Bridgman, in turn, helped his fellow American missionaries begin their studies, but little formal education was available to either Bridgman or his compatriots and thus they were competent but not sophisticated students of Chinese.

The Board was aware of the dangers of spreading the Gospel openly in China, for Morrison had corresponded with them over the course of the 1820's

(16) Ibid. 22.

and had made them aware of the conditions in China and the attitudes of Chinese government toward the Christian religion. The Board suggested two tactics, printing and distributing tracts and preaching the Gospel. It warned Bridgman that "the Chinese government will not tolerate public preaching of the Gospel" and informed him that, "The great means of introducing a knowledge of the Gospel are printed tracts and books."⁽¹⁷⁾ In subsequent letters, the Board urged Bridgman to set up a press and prepare Chinese language Christian materials. Though the Board was well aware of the dangers of preaching the Word, they were willing to take the chance and urged Bridgman to talk to the Chinese whenever the opportunity arose. They pointed out that, "Conversing with individuals and small circles respecting the doctrines and the duties of Christianity is another kind of labor, on which to some extent you may labor immediately."⁽¹⁸⁾ Thus the Board was looking for a way for its missionary to use the spoken word without exposing himself to undue peril. Other societies put more stress on the spoken word and had greater faith in the power of direct preaching, but in the early years preaching was a way of becoming too easily recognized and no missionary in China could afford this recognition and the government curiosity it might arouse.

The Board, and later societies, also felt that the missionary had an obligation to work with and provide solice and support to the members of the Western community. The American Board urged Bridgman not to neglect those whom it looked upon as sinners, instructing Bridgman to hold services whenever possible and to preach to the merchants and seamen for his own, as well as their, benefit. The Prudential Committee then told Bridgman:

Let it always be evident to them that you are ever mindful of their condition as sinners, of their immortality and of the retributions of eternity. Administer Christian instruction, reproof and consolation with judgment. Be affectionate while you are faithful. Sympathize with them in all times

(17) Ibid. 22-23.

(18) Ibid. 23.

of affliction. Be attentive and kind and especially ready with the instructions and consolations of the Gospel in seasons of sickness and death. ⁽¹⁹⁾

The Board's instructions in this matter had pragmatic intent and were double edged. While the missionary, as a Protestant minister, did have an obligation to cope with the needs of all fellow Christians, he also needed the support and the financial aid of these same Christians. Thus by aiding the merchant the missionary was also building up his base of support. He was well aware of the need to develop cooperation and thus urged its missionary to offer his services with the hope that the favor would be returned in kind. Subsequent events demonstrate that in the case of the Board's China mission the Prudential Committee's hopes were realized, though not as fully as they might have wished. The other boards and societies also urged close cooperation with fellow Westerners but the results were more mixed in these later instances.

Communication with the home board was another subject the Prudential Committee dealt with. They urged Bridgman to maintain close, constant contact with Board headquarters. They informed Bridgman that the information he was asked to send back had great value:

Communications from missionaries, especially from those in the larger and more important fields, have been a means of awakening whatever missionary spirit is now felt in Christendom. The heathen are thus brought into view and almost into contact with the churches. ⁽²⁰⁾

Bridgman was to be an observer as well as active missionary and was urged to "make full communications respecting the character, manners and rites of the people especially so far as those things are affected by religion."⁽²¹⁾ While the Board's instructions were generally optimistic in tone, they also contained warnings to Bridgman that he not expect to be able to accomplish too much. This sober note was interjected near the end of the instruc-

(19) Ibid. 24.

(20) Ibid. 26.

(21) Ibid. 26.

tions. The Board warned that, "It may be long, if your life should be spared, before you see much fruit of your labors.....Do not feel that you will live in vain if you accomplish nothing more than to open the field.....⁽²²⁾ While the Board's information on China was relatively limited its leadership was aware of the problems a Protestant missionary faced and felt the new missionary had to be told not to expect too much. But, as the missionaries perceived it, even these pointed warnings did not go far enough for the problems the individual faced in China was enormous in their breadth and complexity.

These instructions are, I feel, typical, of those presented to the early missionaries to China. Different boards, as has been pointed out, had different tactical emphases, but, in general, it may be said that most organizations were more inspired than pragmatic and, as a group tended to be more optimistic about achieving their goals in China than the circumstances warranted. They were organizations born in times of religious revival and ferment and the leaders and members were caught up in the fervor and hope of an America experiencing great, emotional, spiritual awakening. Boards defined the missionary's task rather simply, felt much could be accomplished within a few decades, and believed that once the task was completed the way would be clear for Christ's Second Coming. Once missionaries reached China they learned that their board's dire (and, it seems, obligatory) warnings and not its optimistic comments better fitted the situation they faced and they began the business of defining their own task in the face of Chinese realities.

Part II. The Missionaries in China: Problems Defined, Methods Developed

The missionaries sent to the Far East by American agencies were intent upon pursuing the tasks their home boards had outlined for them—the promulgation of the Gospel and the conversion of the heathen. Upon their arrival in China, the missionaries discovered that these tasks were going to be almost

(22) Ibid. 24.

impossible to accomplish and that they would have to labor with little, if any hope of seeing their agencies' objectives achieved. Faced with the realities of the Chinese social, political, and cultural, environments and the xenophobia of the Chinese populace they were forced to reevaluate their home boards' instructions and to redefine both their fundamental tasks and the means they had planned to use to fulfill them. Two questions will be dealt with: first, which conditions in China did the missionaries perceive of as acting as barriers to the progress of Christianity, and, secondly, how did the missionaries redefine their tasks and redevelop their activities so as to overcome these barriers they had discerned?

Missionaries viewed China as a gigantic minefield, strewn with traps and with obstacles to the progress of their Christian mission. Their first duty, as they saw it, was to act as sappers, discovering where the mines, the obstacles, were and then defusing them, thus clearing the way for the spread of the Gospel and the eventual conversion of the heathen Chinese. In their letters to the home boards and in their articles for China based publications and American periodicals, missionaries often discussed the "obstacles" they felt existed.

The first obstacle which the missionaries discerned was one which faced all Westerners—China's diplomatic system—and the most direct manifestation of this system, the Chinese policy of confining all foreigners to a single geographic area, South China, and of limiting Sino-Western contact to one carefully defined section, the 'factory' area of Canton's western suburbs. When missionaries reached China in the 1830's the traditional diplomatic structure still stood unchallenged and the Canton System carefully controlled all intercourse—economic and social—between foreigner and Chinese.

Missionaries viewed the diplomatic structure with antipathy. In an article in the *Chinese Repository*, a magazine published by the American Board representatives, one missionary wrote, "the hostile attitude of the government toward all foreigners entering China is odious.....It carries back our thoughts to those days when men acknowledged no duties or friendship beyond their own

clan; when brute force was the only known law.”⁽²³⁾ The analysis and attack on the Chinese diplomatic and commercial system was further developed and broadened in subsequent issues of the magazine. In the August, 1837 issue, for example, G. T. Lay, a British friend of the American missionaries wrote a detailed piece in which he first described the theory and operation of both the larger structure and the “Canton System” and then made a number of suggestions on how it could be altered. It was his opinion, and missionaries echoed this viewpoint, that China had to be opened-by force, if necessary-to Western civilization, i. e. Christianity and Western commerce, and that China had to be brought, however unwillingly, into the family of nations.⁽²⁴⁾ Similar sentiments were voiced in the missionaries letters to their boards. In 1831, in a letter to the American Board, Bridgman expressed similar criticism of the Chinese government and advocated decisive action be taken.⁽²⁵⁾ Williams expressed like feelings in late 1838, on the eve of the Opium War, when he bemoaned the fate of missionaries in a letter to his home board and blamed the Chinese diplomatic system for most of the trouble. He, too, advocated an aggressive or, in the words of the day, ‘forward’ policy, i. e. direct military action by one of the major Western powers.⁽²⁶⁾

By 1842 the diplomatic walls of China had been pierced-primarily by British grapeshop-and by the terms of the Anglo-Chinese Treaty of Nanking Westerners were now permitted to live and work in five cities on the China coast. In this Treaty Port Era, missionaries, now given an extended freedom of movement, were able to expand their effort. Chinese policy remained an obstacle, however, for missionaries were not allowed to visit or settle in the interior, and were not permitted to purchase property in any Chinese city. These policies now came under attack. Again the missionaries lobbied against them, and in some cases took more direct action as members of the

(23) THE CHINESE REPOSITORY, Vol. III, #10.

(24) THE CHINESE REPOSITORY, Vol. V, #8.

(25) Bridgman to Anderson, A. B. C. 16. 3. 8, Vol. I.

(26) Williams to American Board, in American Board, ANNUAL REPORT, 1839.

American diplomatic corps in China. Chinese opposition to Western demands for major diplomatic restructuring and for further "opening" came to an end in 1860, as the Ch'ing state accepted Western demands in return for its continued survival. The terms of the various treaties of Peking demonstrate that the Western diplomats, their merchant friends, and the missionaries (who aided in negotiations) were granted their respective demands. ⁽²⁷⁾

Missionaries viewed the diplomatic obstacle as a rather all encompassing one, affecting all members of the Western community in China. They faced a more direct threat, however in the Chinese government's hostility to all forms of Christianity. The Ch'ing Dynasty, as dynasties before it, had a long standing policy of opposition to heterodox beliefs. ⁽²⁸⁾ The basis for such opposition was political in most cases and the Manchu anti-Christian policy grew out of reasons of state, rather than questions of faith. The Rites Controversy of the early eighteenth century was a result of questions of pre-eminence and precedent—to whom did a Chinese Catholic owe first allegiance—the Church, i. e. the Pope, or his ancestors and the father figure of the living emperor. Communications between Rome and Peking failed to settle the argument and as a result edicts were promulgated which proscribed Christianity and which forbade Christian proselitization in China. ⁽²⁹⁾ This policy, defined in the early and mid-eighteenth century, was still in force when the American Protestant missionaries arrived in China in the 1830's. These missionaries soon felt they had two enemies—the Chinese state, and the Catholic Church whose errors of judgment had brought the policy about. ⁽³⁰⁾

The Chinese government reactivated its anti-Christian program in the

(27) Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, CHINA'S ENTRANCE INTO THE FAMILY OF NATIONS (Cambridge, Mass., 1960).

(28) Paul Cohen, CHINA AND CHRISTIANITY (Cambridge, Mass., 1964).

(29) Kenneth Scott Lattourette, A HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN CHINA (London, 1929), cpt. VI, VII, VIII.

(30) American Protestant Missionaries were inclined to look with disfavor upon any Catholic efforts. The missionary viewpoint was an expression of those opinions which characterized the Protestant Crusade. See Ray Allen Billington, THE PROTESTANT CRUSADE (New York, 1938).

mid-1830's in the wake of the Lord Napier affair. Chinese Christians, distributing tracts for the American Board missionaries, were arrested and their Chinese language materials were confiscated. A year later, as a result of a further tract distribution effort, this time by the American missionaries themselves, further Chinese action was taken. Missionaries themselves were not touched, but those few Chinese they had reached were persecuted and, in one dramatic instance, were driven out of south China.

The missionaries studied this policy at some length and used their house organ, the *Chinese Repository* as a medium through which they could explain the anti-Christian program to their Western audiences in Canton and in America. In the June, 1837 issue, the American Board missionaries explored the history of Chinese hostility to Christianity, translated the relevant edicts and then described the existing situation, as they perceived it. This 'obstacle' was never again so clearly defined and described. Their conclusion was depressing. It was their opinion that, "Present prospects.....are dark."⁽³¹⁾ These sentiments, expressed formally and in great detail in this article were echoed in the missionaries' letters home. The Chinese policy posed a real threat to their physical security and they lived in what they believed to be imminent danger of arrest and persecution. The letters home also reflected feelings of anger and impotence. Missionaries felt that they were not free to fulfill their purposes, to help the Chinese save themselves. The home boards expressed sympathy, but at the same time exploited their missionaries feelings. The traumatic and often very dramatic letters the missionaries wrote were often published in the boards annual reports and were used to help make the Christian public aware of the plight of the China missions; and of their need for support.⁽³²⁾ In missionary eyes, then, the official Chinese policy toward Christianity represented a threat, a barrier, not easily overcome.

(31) THE CHINESE REPOSITORY, Vol. VI, #2.

(32) For examples of the use of Bridgman's letters, see American Board, ANNUAL REPORTS, 1833-35.

The missionaries also believed that there were other obstacles to their progress in addition to the Chinese government's anti-Western and Anti-Christian policies. The nature of Chinese society and the very character of the individual Chinese citizen (or, as the missionaries saw him, heathen native) presented them with great difficulties which they first attempted to analyze and then deal with. These character studies were first undertaken by the early missionaries and most later missionaries to China wrote similar essays, either for their home boards or for the American public. David Abeel, a representative of the Seaman's Friend Society, was the first American missionary to deal with the subject. He had served with Bridgman in China in 1830 and then returned home during the next year. His *Journal of a Residence in China* was the first of many journal/memoirs published. In his book, Abeel admitted that he did not know the Chinese language, and thus could not engage in any meaningful discussion with the people he analyzed, but then went on to make a number of rather hostile comments on Chinese customs and beliefs.⁽³³⁾ Henrietta Shuck, an early Baptist missionary, and one of the first teachers, to work with Chinese children was also quite critical of the Chinese character, as she saw it. The people were, in her eyes, idolaters of the worst sort, and their religious tradition did little to ameliorate the negative character traits she saw.⁽³⁴⁾

The most complete portrait of the Chinese heathen was drawn by Samuel Wells Williams in his book *The Middle Kingdom*. Williams devoted one chapter to dress and diet and another on what he termed "the social life of the Chinese." In these chapters he dealt with such topics as clothing styles and habits of dress, foot binding and cosmetic practices, toilet habits and dietary patterns and food preparation. His attitude toward Chinese cuisine was summed up simply: "the art of cooking has not reached any high degree of

(33) David Abeel, *JOURNAL OF A RESIDENCE IN CHINA AND THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES FROM 1829-1834* (New York, 1834), cpt. II, III.

(34) Jeremiah Jeter, *A MEMOIR OF MRS. HENRIETTA SHUCK* (Boston, 1849).

perfection."⁽³⁵⁾ The chapter which dealt with social life was also both detailed and critical. In the chapter he covered such subjects as the relationship between the sexes, patterns of marriage, the nature of Chinese family life, styles of etiquette and social intercourse, the role of gambling, and finally, the character of the typical Chinese individual. He felt that the Chinese native represented a complex blend of characteristics. His phrase was "a singular mixture." It was his conclusion that, "if there is something to commend, there is something to blame; if they have some glaring vices, they have more virtues than most pagan nations."⁽³⁶⁾

Williams' views were mirrored by other missionaries, writing personal letters to their boards or to their relatives in America. Elijah Coleman Bridgman also felt that there was much that was reprehensible in the Chinese character. He tended to avoid blanket characterizations, at least at first, and concentrated, instead, on writing critical descriptions of those Chinese he was in personal contact with. His Chinese teacher, for example, was castigated for his gambling habit.⁽³⁷⁾ The picture the reader of the letter had to draw from the information he was presented with was not a very pretty one. China, one had to conclude, was a land populated with a host of unpleasant, and in many cases, immoral, people.

The missionaries viewed their Chinese flock quite critically and believed them to be a people with many faults. The very Chinese lifestyle was totally alien to these middle class, rural Americans from the eastern or mid-western sections of their homeland. The Chinese appeared standoffish, if not actively hostile and they seemed altogether too satisfied with the conditions of their existence. This inertia, this sense of timeless contentment with their fate, which missionaries saw in many of the Chinese they came in contact with, was perceived of, though never specifically singled out, as the greatest

(35) Samuel Wells Williams, *THE MIDDLE KINGDOM* (New York, 1883) 781.

(36) *Ibid.* 836.

(37) Bridgman to Anderson, *A. B. C.* 16. 3. 8, Vol. I

obstacle to be overcome. Missionaries sensed that they and their Chinese clients were somehow out of step with each other. The dilemma of this dichronic condition was this; if somehow a missionary did get in step, did accept the pace and the pattern and flow (and the misery) of Chinese existence, then he too often lost touch with his own Western realities, with his Western pace and cultural metabolism. During this early phase of the mission movement, missionaries, I feel, beginning to be aware of a problem many later missionaries would decide was well nigh unsolvable.

These, then, were the obstacles to mission progress---the realities of the Chinese environment. Missionaries felt that these obstacles, great as they were, had to be overcome. Instead of meditating on the challenges, however, they simply waded in and defined and redefined their task as they found pragmatic solutions to real, all too alive, problems. What follows is a brief introduction to the missionaries type of pragmatic problem solving. It is a survey of the methodologies missionaries of various denominations developed in their attempt to overcome the obstacles they were confronted by and in their effort to fulfill the tasks they and their boards had outlined.

The earliest and in some ways the most successful method developed for piercing the diplomatic barrier and for reaching the minds, if not the hearts of the Chinese was publication of tracts, scripture lessons, complete translations of the Christian bible and secular works on Western science and government. These Chinese language materials were then distributed, often at great risk, to the Chinese residents of Canton and Macao and to the peasants who inhabited the farms and villages along the coast and near the banks of the large inland waterways. The American Board, as we have noted, made some slight mention of the method, but when missionaries arrived in China they discovered that text preparation and distribution were perhaps the only means they had of reaching the Chinese with the word of God. Thus one offhand word, or one sentence in a missionaries instructions served as the authorization for what would become an elaborate, extensive and expensive tactic missionaries

of all denominations would employ. ⁽³⁸⁾

The publication effort had a variety of applications and served as a basis for another activity, education. The Chinese and English language materials which the mission presses produced were used in the small schools missionaries and their wives set up at the mission stations in Canton and Macao and in the other treaty port cities. The missionaries were well aware of the deep seated respect which the Chinese had for education and they attempted to create education facilities some Chinese would be attracted to. At these schools they taught a variety of secular subjects but grounded all their teaching in religion and used religious works when teaching Western languages to their students. The missionaries also hoped that the children would bring the message taught in school back to the parents. Thus they developed a sort of indirect proselitization, following the ancient injunction that a child should lead his elders in the righteous path.

The mission schools were not taken lightly by missionaries. In the 1840's for example missionaries and merchants, working together in the Morrison Education Society, hired a teacher/missionary, Samuel Brown, who came to China on the eve of the Opium War and who helped organize a well respected and rather extensive educational facility in south China. ⁽³⁹⁾ Brown's school is the most famous one of these early years but other missionaries, such as Williams, and missionary wives, such as Henrietta Shuck also engaged in similar, if less publicized educational efforts and thus helped to spread both Christianity and secular Western thought. Education and the development of educational facilities was not usually a topic boards covered in instructions, but once missionaries were in China they saw for themselves how effective a method of reaching the Chinese it might be.

A third tactic was the development of Western style medical facilities.

(38) Suzanne Wilson Barnett, "Silent Evangelism" in JOURNAL OF PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY, Vol. 49, #4, Winter, 1971.

(39) William Elliot Griffis, A MAKER OF THE NEW ORIENT (New York, 1902).

The American pioneer in the field was Peter Parker of the American Board mission at Canton. In 1835 he set up an ophthalmic clinic in the factory area of the city and two years later, with the support of the Western community, established a similar type of facility in Macao. Parker felt his effort was a success and he proved his contention in numerous, very detailed articles in the *Chinese Repository*. He was also instrumental in forming a medical missionary society which supported both his efforts and the work of later medical missionaries. Parker attempted to mix religion with medicine and when he treated a patient he tried to tell him (or her) about the healing power of faith in Christ. Parker's superiors, felt that their man was too interested in saving bodies and not sufficiently interested in saving souls, however, and criticized him on that account.⁽⁴⁰⁾ American agencies had considered the idea of medical missions but did little to promote the idea until a candidate came to them and volunteered his services. They were hesitant and, as the example of Parker demonstrates, they had ample reason for such hesitation. However, to the missionaries in the field, the medical mission often proved to be the one type of activity which showed any degree of success. The Chinese came for treatment, and once they were there, a captive audience, then they could be talked to. This, alone, was worth the effort and the expense. Here again missionaries and their home boards found grounds for argument.

The final missionary method, one which proved only marginally successful in these early decades, was preaching, the single activity most boards stressed most heavily. The first problem was one of language. Missionaries needed years of work before they reached a degree of proficiency sufficient to enable them to converse freely with the Chinese man in the street. The second problem was the obvious danger a missionary faced by exposing himself as a preacher of a heterodox faith. Yet missionaries did venture out and did try to talk to the people in their own street or village or farm environment.

(40) Edward V. Gulick, *PETER PARKER AND THE OPENING OF CHINA* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973). cpts. 3, 5.

When the missionaries did so they felt excited and renewed. Bridgman talked in enthusiastic terms of his rather halting efforts to meet with the people and other missionaries echoed his sentiments.⁽⁴¹⁾ Little could be done however until missionaries were given both freedom of movement and some degree of protection. This was not possible until after the implementation of the treaties signed at Peking in 1860. The Boards urged their missionaries to go forth and the missionaries wanted to but conditions in China did not permit them to until later decades. Missionaries realized this, but boards, often, did not. Missionaries considered preaching to be an activity carried out surreptitiously and under carefully controlled circumstances; boards considered it a method for all seasons.

The methodologies, the tactics, which have been outlined in the previous pages were the pragmatic responses of men faced with tremendous obstacles. These methodologies represent, in my view a form of missionary praxis; the transformation of idea—the conversion of the heathen Chinese—into action—the initiation of methodologies intended to bring about the desired result. Mission boards had defined their missionaries' tasks rather simply and had suggested a range of methods which might serve to bring those tasks to fruition. They were aware of difficulties, but tended to underestimate the scope and extent of those difficulties. Missionaries, once in China, learned quickly that they faced many barriers which would make their tasks, as defined by their home boards, almost impossible to achieve. Thus they reevaluated their objectives and gave themselves a more realistic set of immediate goals. The Boards, looking at the situation from a point seven thousand miles away, often disagreed with their missionaries' perceptions and their missionaries' solutions. The result was conflict, sometimes subdued, sometimes active, but always just below the surface of the missionary board relationship.

But let us conclude. By 1850, it might be said, the missionary's task in

(41) Bridgman to Anderson, A. B. C. 16. 3. 8.

China had been defined. Missionaries were to confront the majesty and might of the Middle Kingdom and were to convert its teeming populace, thus bringing the world that much closer to the promised and eagerly awaited Millenium.