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Progressivism and the Mission Field: Church of the Brethren Women Missionaries in Shanxi, China, 1908-1951

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PROGRESSIVISM AND THE MISSION FIELD:
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN WOMEN MISSIONARIES IN
SHANXI, CHINA, 1908-1951

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the attitudes and activities of Church of the Brethren women missionaries in Shanxi, China, between 1908 and 1951, focusing on evangelism, “woman’s work” programs, education, and relief work. This thesis presents the mission field as an expression of changing gender roles in the Church of the Brethren. In sum, Brethren women missionaries in Shanxi embodied both conservative and progressive ideologies and ultimately moved in a progressive direction, seeking growth, flexibility, and accommodation in their mission endeavor. The expansion of the Church of the Brethren mission field and the denomination’s geographic and cultural boundaries has implications for the evolution and continued existence of distinctive faith communities in the United States.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN AND THE AMERICAN WOMEN'S MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

On September 25, 1908, five Church of the Brethren missionaries sailed to China, inaugurating their mission work. By 1912 they had established two main mission stations at Ping Ting and Liao, Shanxi province. Expanding to other towns in Shanxi Province, the Brethren maintained their mission in China until 1951, despite Japanese invasion in 1937 and a civil war between Communists and Nationalists. War, famine, and political upheaval marked the years of the Church of the Brethren mission in China. Yet for the approximately 100 Brethren missionaries who served during this period, the prominent events of these years were the creation of mission schools, hospitals, and churches, and the conversion of Chinese people to Christianity. Missionaries constantly weighed the political turmoil in China against the backdrop of their mission work and the expansion of the Church of the Brethren in the country.¹

Until the later part of the nineteenth century, though, these Brethren had been peculiar habitants in the world. They wore distinctive plain clothes and refused to swear oaths, fight in wars, or hold public office. They clustered together in separatist, tight-knit faith communities in rural areas. Leading the expansion of the Brethren into new parts of the world and pushing mission work in a progressive direction were Brethren women. During the 43 years of the

Church of the Brethren mission in Shanxi, 65 percent of all missionaries entering the field were women.¹ How did the Brethren transform from a separatist, inward-looking, patriarchal faith community to one that sent women as its representatives to foreign countries with the intention of expanding the faith?

Central Questions and Perspectives

Generally, historians who study the Church of the Brethren and other Anabaptist and nonconformist religious groups claim that the expansion and growth of these faiths during the mid and late nineteenth century compromised the unity of the faith community and its distinctiveness from other Protestant denominations. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were periods of transformation for the Brethren. The Brethren were internally divided between three groups: Old Orders, Conservatives, and Progressives. Many Brethren pursued evangelistic, expansive pursuits while others sought to preserve the old order or the primitive church. Yet, as historian Carl Bowman notes in his study *Brethren Society*, many Brethren held “mixed habits of the heart” and fell somewhere in between these divisions.² The late nineteenth century also experienced a swell in Protestant mission activities in which women played an enormous role. Often women participated in and shaped mission endeavors through working as nurses, educators, or evangelists overseas or by forming

¹ Anetta C. Mow, *Meet Your Missionaries* (Elgin, IL: Church of the Brethren, 1955), 121-122. Historians have documented the overwhelming presence of women in the missionary movement (see historiography section beginning on page 17). By 1890, married and single women missionaries together comprised 60 percent of all American missionaries overseas. Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), xiii.

² Carl Bowman, *Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a “Peculiar People”* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 184.

mission boards at home. Out of this dynamic arise several questions: How did Brethren women, as carriers of culture and religion overseas, shape the Brethren mission field in Shanxi? Did any peculiar Brethren beliefs surface in the China mission? How did Brethren women's faith shape their assumptions regarding Chinese women and gender?

The Brethren missionary movement implied a redefinition of traditional Brethren values of unity and nonconformity, and to a lesser extent, pacifism and piety. Missionaries pushed against the boundaries that separated the Brethren and "the world," working for church expansion, interdenominational cooperation, and generally for Brethren to become less "peculiar" in the world to attract new people to the faith. Mission work demanded that Brethren missionaries make their faith portable and adaptable to the various cultural, political, and geographic requirements of the mission field. In addition, the increasing missionary movement also implied changes to the gender traditions of the German Baptist Brethren. It threatened to alter the gender structure of the Old Order, which was largely patriarchal. The Brethren women who went to China challenged the assumptions of Brethren Old Orders and Conservatives by identifying Chinese women as crucial to church growth in China, assuming leadership roles, and playing a large role in packaging Brethren beliefs and practices in a manner they deemed appropriate for Chinese society. Through their mission work in China and their enlargement of gender roles, these women represented a progressive impulse in the denomination. In addition, the cross-cultural and gendered nature

of the mission field presented Brethren missionaries with a space for progressive action.

Yet at the same time, these missionaries of the early twentieth century combined their progressivism with a conservative theological outlook. Early Brethren missionaries incorporated aspects of the Social Gospel—which sought to apply Jesus’ critique of wealth to present-day society and meet the physical as well as spiritual needs of people—into their mission work by providing famine relief, medical services, and education in Shanxi. But they also believed that an end to societal ills such as vice, poverty, and corruption could not be achieved without conversion to Christianity. According to these conservative missionaries, evangelism remained an essential part of any societal reform effort. Often, when missionaries carried this belief in the primary role of conversion overseas, a sense of cultural superiority accompanied them. According to missionaries of the early twentieth century, the people of China were “heathens” in need of Christianity to lessen their burden and give them a new life. Missionaries often sought to transplant western religious and social institutions in China and were frequently arrogant in their assumption that their Christian beliefs would transform an entire nation. Additionally, revealing another aspect of missionary conservatism, Brethren women missionaries chose their occupations from sanctioned forms of religious work that the Church of the Brethren offered them—Sunday School teacher or domestic or foreign missionary. American denominations at home encouraged women to pursue mission work and thus, while some missionaries

were ambitious and sought new realms of work, their actions were sanctioned by their religious communities.³

Consequently, within the Church of the Brethren mission in Shanxi, China we see a paradox: missionary women sought to alter the culture and religion of Chinese people and convert the entire nation of China to Christianity, yet in their pursuit of this goal they often made concessions, accommodations, and ultimately found themselves in new situations, reshaping their message to meet the needs of Chinese. This thesis will examine the lives, beliefs, and work of Brethren women missionaries in Shanxi, China, focusing on evangelism, “woman’s work” programs, education, and relief work. This account presents the mission field as an expression of change in the Church of the Brethren. In sum, Brethren women missionaries in Shanxi, China, embodied both conservative and progressive ideologies and ultimately moved in a progressive direction, seeking growth, flexibility, and accommodation in their mission endeavor. This trend touched more than the Shanxi mission—it also revealed the growth of progressivism in the Church of the Brethren.

The Dunkers of Schwarsenau

The Church of the Brethren evolved from a group of Anabaptist-Pietists known as the Schwarsenau Brethren. In 1708 a group of eight Germans gathered at the Eder River in Schwarsenau, Germany, and baptized each other in the tradition of the radical Anabaptists. The Anabaptist movement in Europe had

³ Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, xvi, 252; Stephen Longenecker, *The Brethren During the Age of World War: The Church of the Brethren Encounter with Modernization, 1914-1950* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2006), xxi-xxii.

been growing since the late sixteenth century and followers of this movement had experienced state-sponsored persecution and displacement from home communities. While adult baptism linked the Brethren, or “Dunkers” as contemporaries derisively called them, with the sixteenth-century Anabaptists, they were also heavily influenced by the Pietist movement. Pietism stressed one’s individual relationship with God and encouraged emotional intimacy with the Divine. Pietists held that individual reflection, interpretation, and meditation were essential to living a fulfilling Christian life. In addition, early Pietists gathered for prayer and Bible study in small groups in each other’s homes, fostering a sense of community among the believers.⁴

In one sense, Pietism can be understood as an attempt to revive religious spirituality during a period when the official state religion in the German Palatine was prone to internal bickering, scandal, and divisions. During the previous 150 years the official state religion had changed three times, from Roman Catholic, to Lutheran, and finally to Reformed. The “Brethren,” as the eight called themselves, gathered in homes for prayer, scripture reading, and hymn singing. The state did not approve of private religious gatherings though, and participants of these meetings, if arrested, were subject to jail, confiscations, and expulsion. As suppression of private gatherings heightened, so did the Pietists’ belief that church and state should remain separate.⁵

In 1717, facing economic hardship and state repression, the Brethren migrated to the New World and settled in eastern Pennsylvania. The Brethren

⁴ Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers’ Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1968), 120-122.

⁵ Ibid; Dale Brown, *Another Way of Believing: A Brethren Theology* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2005), 18-20.

quickly formed isolated farming communities centered around the community of believers and became known as the German Baptist Brethren. Over the next 170 years the Brethren continued to grow and migrate southward and westward across the United States. During the late nineteenth century several issues divided the Brethren, including doctrinal unity, higher education, inter-denominational interaction, and plain dress.⁶

Change at the Turn of the Century

In 1908 the German Baptist Brethren changed their name to the Church of the Brethren. This was no simple decision for the Brethren. It highlighted the church's transformation from a nonconformist, secluded, German Anabaptist group to an English-speaking denomination beginning to resemble more closely other contemporary Christian Protestant denominations—now Brethren even had the word “church” in their name. At the turn of the nineteenth century the German Baptist Brethren had to reassess their core values of nonconformity to the world, simplicity, pacifism, and piety. Church unity regarding these issues began to disintegrate. Several groups within the Brethren emerged out of the struggle, the largest of which desired to keep its distinctive faith practices, such as adult baptism, feetwashing, and simple, if not entirely, plain dress. This faction, however, also continually moved in new, progressive directions.⁷

During the early nineteenth century, plain dress was a mark of nonconformity and unity for the Brethren. For many Brethren, dressing in a

⁶ Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 11.

⁷ Donald Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine: A History of the Church of the Brethren* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1997), 384-409.

distinctly simple, otherworldly manner provided a clear marker between church members and the world.⁸ Typically Brethren cited Romans 12:2 when providing a scriptural basis for their plain clothes: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”⁹ Brethren interpreted this passage to mean that the community of believers should remain visibly distinct from “the world.” Plain dress also meant that Brethren could easily recognize their fellow brothers and sisters and the world could easily identify them. In addition, plain dress could act as a form of protection for church members, dissuading them from appearing in public places that might be “questionable,” such as taverns.¹⁰ Between 1804 and 1926, Annual Meeting, the denomination’s policy-making body that meets once a year, produced more than forty statements on dress, commenting on beards and mustaches, jewelry, hair styles, hats, neckties, and uniforms.¹¹

⁸ “Dress,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), I: 400-401. The Brethren had not always practiced a uniform standard of plain dress. The early Brethren in Europe did not dress differently from the general population due to a desire to remain inconspicuous and avoid persecution. In addition, the early Brethren objected to the use of force to enforce doctrinal unity in religion. The simple and utilitarian dress of the Brethren distinguished them as German immigrants of an artisan or servant class in America. Thus, early dress patterns among Brethren reflected more a common cultural and ethnic background than a church-prescribed practice.

⁹ Brown, *Another Way of Believing*, 152.

¹⁰ Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 387.

¹¹ “Annual Conference Minutes Subject Index,” *Church of the Brethren* (2005), <http://www.brethren.org/genbd/bhla/Minutes/D-G.html>.



Figure 1.1. Plain Dress of Early Nineteenth Century Brethren. Photograph taken in 2003 at Bridgewater Church of the Brethren (Bridgewater, VA)¹²

In addition to the markers of nonconformity that Brethren debated during the early twentieth century, they were confronted by Fundamentalist views that were also disturbing Presbyterian and Baptist denominations. Fundamentalism was divisive within the Church of the Brethren. As Progressives pushed the denomination to adopt new modes of worship and church organization, Conservatives pressed for a preservation of the primitive order. On one hand, the Fundamentalist belief in Biblical infallibility and inerrancy appealed to many Conservative Brethren. In addition, Fundamentalism's anti-modernist stance attracted many Brethren who were also wrestling with their beliefs in a rapidly changing world. In 1923, in the midst of the Fundamentalist-modernist debates, Annual Conference felt the need to clarify Brethren doctrine and they approved the revision and updating of "The Brethren Card," a pocket-sized statement of

¹² Naomi West, "Grandmother's Dress: A Description of Plain Clothes Dress from the Early 1900s," *Bridgewater Church of the Brethren* (Bridgewater, VA: 2003) <http://www.bwcob.org/heritage/garb/clothing/clothing.shtml>.

Brethren beliefs and practices. The Card stated their firm acceptance of “the fundamental evangelical doctrines” of the inspiration of the Bible, the personality of the Holy Spirit, the virgin birth of Christ, the deity of Christ, the “sin-pardoning value of His atonement,” the resurrection, ascension, and visible return of Jesus, and the resurrection both of the just and the unjust. Fundamentalism was divisive within the Church of the Brethren, with many members attracted to its anti-modernist sentiment, but also deterred by its militant stances.¹³

However, Annual Conference adopted the resolution for the Brethren Card, with the understanding that it not be considered a creed. This step of recording Brethren beliefs, was in opposition to the longtime Brethren belief in “no creed but the Bible,” specifically the New Testament. Jacob Spencer and August Hermann Francke, leaders of the Pietist movement in late seventeenth-century Europe, presented the dilemma of creeds for Pietists. On one hand, they agreed with the creeds included in the Lutheran *Symbolical Books*—a collection of creeds, Lutheran symbols, and Luther’s catechisms. Yet Spencer and Francke were concerned about the elevation of creeds to a level higher than that of scripture and about a strong understanding of doctrine replacing an emphasis on daily living. The Brethren inherited this emphasis on noncredalism, choosing to adopt the New Testament as the denomination’s sole creed. In 1887, seeking clarity and unity of doctrine, the German Baptist Brethren produced the first “Brethren’s Card.”¹⁴ This document identified the Brethren as “a people who, as little children, accept the Word of the New Testament as a message from heaven,

¹³ Brown, *Another Way of Believing*, 8-9.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 3, 7.

and teach it in full.”¹⁵ This Brethren Card identified practices central to the community of believers: believers’ baptism by trine immersion; the “Lord’s Supper” and “holy kiss;” communion; the “doctrines of Christ,” including peace, love, and good works; nonswearing; opposition to war; and the anointing and laying on of hands.¹⁶

The Brethren Card clarified the denomination’s essential tenets and practices, but the question of whether Brethren ought to attend, or even found, institutions of higher education continued to be debated. Old Order Brethren shared with Fundamentalists skepticism of liberal theologians who had attained higher education credentials. Some Fundamentalists, especially those a part of the movement to found Bible schools, believed that any education that did not incorporate Biblical education was of lesser value. Fundamentalists believed in anti-elitist common sense realism—that any person with common sense could read the Bible and understand God’s truth. In some cases, Fundamentalists spoke out loudly against extensive education that was not Biblically based. In 1922 William Jennings Bryan proclaimed “It is better to trust in the Rock of Ages, than to know the age of the rocks; it is better for one to know that he is close to the Heavenly Father, than to know how far the stars in the heavens are apart.”¹⁷

While Fundamentalists criticized higher education, they were also active

¹⁵ Brown, *Another Way of Believing*, 8.

¹⁶ Ibid; Harold S. Martin, *New Testament Beliefs and Practices: A Brethren Understanding* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1989), 113. Martin distinguishes between formal creeds and doctrinal statements in this. He explains that creeds are authoritative and can be used for disciplinary purposes whereas a doctrinal statement, like the Brethren Card, is a summary of a particular group’s beliefs

¹⁷ William Jennings Bryan, *In His Image* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1922), 93 quoted in George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 212.

educators within their own circles. Numerous independent and non-denominational Fundamentalist evangelists founded Bible institutes such as Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. At these institutions curriculum focused solely on Bible study, mission studies, and practical coursework with the goal of training lay people for mission work and urban ministry.¹⁸

Views on education among the Brethren have varied somewhat as the church evolved. The early Brethren in Germany and colonial America were literate and participated widely in publishing religious tracts and educational treatises that assisted in unifying the Brethren. The most notable example of this is the Sauer press, a print shop established in 1738 by the Sauer family in Germantown, Pennsylvania. The Sauer press became one of the leading German-language presses in Colonial America and in 1743 he published the first Bible in a Western language (German) to be printed in America. While the press was a private entity, the owner, J. Christoph Sauer, apparently sympathized with the Brethren and his son, Christopher Sauer II, joined the German Baptist Brethren and became an elder.¹⁹

Conservative Brethren, though, objected to higher education, viewing it as a corrupting influence on the community of believers. However, Progressive Brethren wanted to create institutions where young Brethren could be trained to

¹⁸ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 62, 119, 128-130.

¹⁹ "Education," *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), I: 426; "Sauer Press," *Brethren Encyclopedia*, 1145; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 240-241; see also Stephen Longenecker, *The Christopher Sauers: Courageous Printers Who Defended Religious Freedom in Early America* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1981).

enter teaching and the ministry. What resulted was the establishment of numerous colleges. In 1905 the denomination founded Bethany Biblical School, located in Chicago, Illinois. Bethany had two different tracks of study for its students. First, the school served as a seminary to educate Brethren college graduates for the ministry. Second, Bethany trained students for leadership positions in the church, especially for mission work. The creation of Bethany Bible School and other Brethren colleges intensified the already existing rift between Brethren who wished to preserve the traditional order and Progressives, who sought to expand new Brethren educational endeavors.²⁰

The debates among the Brethren over higher education and plain dress, in addition to the paid ministry and revival meetings, culminated in the 1880s what has been called the “Big Divide.”²¹ Three factions—Old Orders, Conservatives, and Progressives—emerged from the division, forming the Old German Baptist Brethren, the German Baptist Brethren (later becoming the Church of the Brethren), and the Brethren Church. The Old German Baptist Brethren largely sought self-preservation and upheld the importance of community, nonconformity, and “a self-denying lifestyle.”²² In 1881, the Old German Baptist Brethren left their fellow Brethren, forming their own body. Feeling hindered by the desire of the Conservatives to cling to the past, the Progressives formed the Brethren Church in 1883 and chose to emphasize individual freedom and

²⁰ In 1931 Bethany Biblical Seminary formally changed its name to Bethany Biblical Seminary. It retained the undergraduate leadership training program which was called Bethany Bible Training School. “Bethany Theological Seminary,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), I: 125-127; “About the Colleges,” *Church of the Brethren Website* (2005) <http://www.brethren.org/links/AboutColleges.htm>.

²¹ Brown, *Another Way of Believing*, 168.

²² *Ibid*, 169.

modification to meet the needs of the modern world. In the middle were the Conservatives or the German Baptist Brethren, who would in 1908 become the Church of the Brethren. Conservatives wanted to remain distinct and apart from the world, yet disagreed with the increasingly conservative and rigid doctrinal stance of the Old Orders.²³

Women and Gender in the Church of the Brethren

Most discussions of Brethren during this period of transition focused on changes in community, unity, conformity, and theology without addressing the place of women in the church. Three women were among the first eight members of the Brethren in Schwarzenau, Germany in 1708. In addition, the pietistic roots of the Brethren emphasized the worth of all humans as made in God's image and the importance of the individual's relationship with God. Some have argued that pietism, with its emphasis on every individual's ability to form a personal relationship with God, created communities of tolerance and acceptance.²⁴ Reflecting this belief in the equality of all believers before God, Brethren women participated in congregational decision-making by casting their votes in congregational business meetings. Despite these inclusive practices, though, Brethren women were not allowed to be church delegates to Annual Meeting until

²³ Brown, *Another Way of Believing*, 169; Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 126.

²⁴ For more on the theme of the relationship between pietism and tolerance see Stephen Longenecker, *Piety and Tolerance: Pennsylvania German Religions, 1700-1850* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1994) and Jon F. Sensbach, *Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

around 1900 and the structure of the German Baptist Brethren and the Church of the Brethren remained largely patriarchal.²⁵

The limited participation of women in communion and Love Feast services exhibited the patriarchal nature of the Brethren community. The issue of women's participation in the Brethren ordinance of Love Feast, a traditional ordinance of the Church of the Brethren, surfaced in a 1849 query at Annual Meeting. During Love Feast, women were not allowed to break communion bread or pass the cup to each other, in the way that male participants did. Instead, an elder, who would have been male, administered the bread and the cup to each woman individually. The 1849 query submitted to Annual Meeting suggested that sisters take the bread and the cup in the same way that their brothers did. Annual Meeting responded by deciding to preserve the traditional administering of communion. Again in 1857, a query came before Annual Meeting, asking "Why do not the sisters break the bread and pass the cup to each other in the same manner as the brethren do at the communion?"²⁶ Annual Meeting responded that due to "man being the head of woman and having it been the practice of the church, from time immemorial" there was no reason to change the practice.²⁷ In addition, Annual Meeting replied that they were aware of no scripture that would support women's full participation in communion.

While Brethren Conservatives were concerned with the dress of both Brethren men and women, fashionable women's clothing afforded women more opportunities to cross the boundary lines between Brethren and "the world." To

²⁵ Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 382.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

many Brethren, short hair styles, prayer coverings, skirt lengths and hoops, jewelry, and makeup all presented a threat to the preservation of plain dress and the primitive order. The enforcement of plain dress among men and women was inconsistent. Women were more likely to be admonished for dressing in a worldly manner, whereas male lay members of the denomination often received less scrutiny. As debates over plain dress escalated in the church during the late nineteenth century this discrepancy became more apparent. An 1897 Annual Meeting query and a 1911 Annual Meeting report expressed dismay over the gap in enforcing plain dress between men and women by explaining that the denominational restrictions placed on women regarding dress did not also apply to men. The 1897 query objected to this situation, saying that “the wearing of hats by the sisters is made a test of fellowship, while the brethren are allowed to wear many of the styles and fashions, and still retain their membership.”²⁸ The following year, Annual Meeting produced a report explaining that in order to retain “Gospel plainness” Brethren women ought to don plain bonnets and wear garments that didn’t have ruffles or adornments. Brethren men were not to wear fashionable hats, neckties, or gold.²⁹ This gap of enforcement between men’s and women’s dress surfaced again in 1911 when D.A. Crist proclaimed to Annual Meeting that he could “not tolerate the idea of the brethren running rampant,

²⁸ *Minutes of the Annual Meetings of the Church of the Brethren: Containing All Available Minutes from 1778 to 1909* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1909), 654, 669-670 in Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 200.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

while the sisters [were] wearing the prayer veil.”³⁰ The cause for Crist’s concern was the growing number of Brethren men who were wearing neckties.

During the late nineteenth century while the denomination focused on regulating women’s plain dress, Brethren women were organizing around their own church work. While many Protestants, particularly evangelical Christians, stressed an individualistic religion centered on salvation, the Social Gospel encouraged many Christians to re-focus on broader humanity and tackle societal problems stemming from industrialization, immigration, and urbanization. By the late nineteenth century, Church of the Brethren women were working collectively by forming congregational Sisters’ Aid Societies. These women not only reflected the progressive direction of the Church of the Brethren, but also mirrored the national trend of Protestant women turning their attention toward “woman’s work”—applying their Christian values to society by addressing the needs of women. Women’s missionary societies instigated denominational support for girls’ schools in China and India. Prior to the 1885 Annual Meeting, women organized the first National Conference of Women and presented to the General Mission Board an offering of approximately three hundred dollars. During this stage, Brethren women’s groups were local and reflected a variety of concerns, including missionary education, mother-daughter groups, sewing circles, and support for temperance and peace activities.³¹ Brethren missionary women were at the front of the progressive movement within the church.

³⁰ *Full Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren, 1911* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1911) in Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 200.

³¹ “Sisters’ Aid Society,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), I: 1187.

Conspicuous within their missiology was an emphasis on reform including participation in temperance movements.

Women's organizations continued to become more formalized in structure. When gathering before the 1910 Annual Meeting, women from the Sisters' Aid Society came together to make their body an official denominational agency. The Sisters' Aid Society was an autonomous body, not subordinate to Annual Meeting, but no public disputes over belief or practice arose between the two groups. By the late 1920s the work of Brethren women increasingly became categorized according to their specific field of work. In 1929, the Sisters' Aid Society created five sub-organizations for women's work including the Mothers and Daughters' Association; the Children's Division; Missionary Societies; Bible Study; and the Aid Society (formerly the Sisters' Aid Society). This organizational shift presented new opportunities for women to assume leadership roles in the church. Each of these five divisions selected a leader or secretary and the missionary societies and Bible study groups elected their leaders by congregational vote. In total, these women leaders comprised the Council of Women's Work of the Church of the Brethren.³²

As Brethren women began to organize and collectively identify issues of concern to them the situation of women in other societies came to the forefront of concern. For women, mission work represented one of the few denominationally sanctioned forms of leadership. The attraction of a life overseas in service to God was especially strong for single women because mission work afforded them opportunities for freedom of movement, responsibility, travel, education, and

³² Brubaker, *She Hath Done What She Could*, 75; "Sisters' Aid Society," 1187.

leadership in the church. These opportunities, in part, explain so many women sought careers as missionaries and why by the end of the nineteenth century women were the majority of all missionaries overseas.

According to a 1928 Commission on Women's Work report, the denomination had more applications for missionary positions from women than it had positions available. The Commission suggested that congregations make use of Brethren women who expressed an interest in ministry by placing them in "assistant pastor" roles.³³ In 1922 the Church of the Brethren began to license women to preach in the church, but the commission report did not specify whether these potential missionaries were to be licensed in order to serve in a pastoral role.

While many women supported the Conservative and Old Order branches of the Brethren, they were particularly strong among the Progressives, partially because the new methods of church organization and worship afforded them more opportunities for participation and leadership. With full ordination of women not to come until 1958, Brethren women sought outlets by which to fulfill their desires for involvement and leadership. These women would challenge the constraints of Brethren patriarchy, stretching the church in new directions, across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans to new continents. If Brethren women were moving the church in a new direction, how did they identify the boundaries of the world? In stretching the faith, to what extent did these women retain their Dunker distinctiveness?

³³ Pamela Brubaker, *She Hath Done What She Could: A History of Women's Participation in the Church of the Brethren* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1985), 112.

Historiography of the American Women's Missionary Movement

Broadly tracing the historiography of the American women's foreign missionary movement is helpful in creating a context in which to understand this activity in Church of the Brethren missions. The early histories written on missionaries in China omitted the roles of women and largely analyzed their nature and impact in terms of denominational and national policies. By the 1980s, historical works on missions in China began to address specifically the women's missionary movement, often adding to the analysis gender, domesticity, and women's power dynamics. However, the voices of Chinese women were often omitted from these histories. The scholarship of the late 1990s and early twenty-first century reflects a desire to incorporate sources and histories of non-westerners. By the early twenty-first century, the historiography on American women missionaries in China had undergone several transitions, reflecting the emergent inclusion of gender analysis and Chinese perspectives.

Representing early historical interpretations of the American mission movement is John K. Fairbank's 1974 edited volume, *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*. Fairbank's introduction to this work, as well as Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s essay, "The Missionary Enterprise and Theories of Imperialism," focus on the tensions between evangelization and civilization in the mission enterprise. Fairbank argues that the encounters between missionaries and Chinese had ambiguous results due to the tensions between evangelization and civilization within the mission enterprise. He credits missionaries with bringing significant social, political, and technological change to China, yet notes that the actual

number of Chinese converts to Christianity was low. While missionaries were not successful in their evangelical efforts, their presence in China, according to Fairbank, had a significant societal impact. Missionaries sought to alter religious and social mores in China, but they were reformers and not revolutionaries. Fairbank characterizes the cultural exchange that occurred between American missionaries and Chinese as “a people-to-people phenomenon,” arguing that historians ought to examine this cultural exchange from a broad perspective, looking at the movement’s impact on the Christian Church, Chinese life, and even American foreign policy.³⁴

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., expanded on Fairbank’s premise of cultural exchange in “The Missionary Enterprise and Theories of Imperialism,” in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, interpreting the American missionary movement as a form of cultural imperialism. Later histories also use Schlesinger’s theories, evaluating missionaries as cultural imperialists. Unlike Fairbank, who describes the mission movement as “a people-to-people phenomenon” of exchanging ideas, Schlesinger argues that missionaries, by their nature were an “aggressive psychological caste,” due to their certainty of possessing ultimate truths.³⁵ Schlesinger explains that political and economic coercion did not always accompany the cultural imperialism of missionaries. But cultural imperialism extended deep “into the soul of native societies,” having a

³⁴ John K. Fairbank, *The Missionary Enterprise in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 1-19.

³⁵ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “The Missionary Enterprise and Imperialism,” in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, 360. For another example of an historical work that assesses American missionaries primarily as exporters of American culture see Paul Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952* (New York: Octagon Books, 1977).

demoralizing impact.³⁶ Both Schlesinger and Fairbank, though, do not dedicate significant analysis to the role of women in exporting culture overseas.

During the 1980s, new historical works on American missionaries appeared that examined the relationship between gender, domesticity, and power on the mission field. Several new case studies examined women missionaries in China, focusing specifically on their contributions to the formation of the missionary movement.

Jane Hunter's 1984 *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* explores notions of women's roles in society, showing that missionary women were caught between the restrictive Victorian ideal of domesticity and a desire for a more public life. Hunter argues that to a certain extent, mission work gave women the opportunity to escape this tension by working overseas. However, once settled in their mission stations, American women often sought to recreate the Victorian household on foreign soil. The home was contradictory: on one hand, the home was vulnerable and a place of retreat from a hostile world, but it was also a source of moral reform for society. Missionary women were then caught between "domestic outreach" and "domestic retreat," between public and private roles, between expansion and protection.³⁷ Within this paradoxical context, Hunter explains that missionaries formed intimate relationships with Chinese women as a tool for mission. Single women, without the community of a husband and children, were particularly

³⁶ Schlesinger, Jr., "The Missionary Enterprise and Imperialism," 364-365.

³⁷ Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, xiv.

likely to cross racial lines and form close relationships with Chinese female converts.³⁸

Building on Hunter's work, Patricia Hill's 1985 *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920*, reveals the role of American women missionaries in building and transforming the missionary movement. Unlike Hunter, Hill shows the evolution of approaches to mission work, focusing on how cultural change in the United States impacted the movement. According to Hill, during the late nineteenth century the initial appeal of the mission field to American women was a belief that women were well-suited to reach indigenous women in non-Christian lands. Supported by their home congregations and mission boards, American women missionaries accounted for a massive growth of the worldwide missionary movement.³⁹ However, a cultural transformation in the 1920s and 1930s led to a decline in the numbers of women serving overseas as missionaries. According to Hill, a professionalization and secularization of Protestant denominations occurred, which led to social service and reform taking precedence over evangelism on the mission field, resulting in strife and divisions. In addition, World War I created a strong sense of disillusionment with Western culture, which led to a decline in mission projects. Hill views these trends, along with the modernization of American society, as forces that transformed the United States into a secular culture. Women missionaries embraced modernization for its

³⁸Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, 191.

³⁹Patricia Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1985), 3.

material and social progress, yet ultimately Hill argues that its secular approach undermined their evangelistic efforts. The new increasingly secular, professional mission movement did not carry the same appeal as the Victorian model, with its belief that women were distinctly well-suited for mission work. According to Hill, post-war isolationism and the Fundamentalist-modernist debates also exacerbated the decline of the women's mission movement.⁴⁰ Some historians, such as Dana L. Robert, would focus less on secularization in the United States and offer a different explanation of the decline of the women's missionary movement (see page 26).

Finally, Leslie Flemming's 1989 edited collection of essays, *Women's Work for Women: Missionaries and Social Change in Asia*, contributes additional insight into gender relations on the mission field. Flemming's introduction to this work places the essays that follow in the context of the "women's work for women" ideology.⁴¹ This American Protestant ideology held that God called Christian women to uplift their "sisters" in heathen lands. It was influential in forming the theories, strategies, and motivations for American women's missions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Flemming and the other authors in this volume are primarily concerned with the ways that mission contact impacted gender relations, investigating ways that American women reproduced and altered American gender norms in Asia. For example, she cites instances when missionary women had more opportunities for education in the medical field and for preaching. However, Flemming explains that in some situations

⁴⁰ Hill, *The World Their Household*, 1-7.

⁴¹ Leslie A. Flemming, *Women's Work for Women: Missionaries and Social Change in Asia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 1-10.

gender roles remained the same, as seen in the replication of gendered domestic duties overseas. In addition, Flemming's volume exhibits a growing trend to include perspectives of the indigenous groups who came into contact with missionaries, as she seeks to "preserve dual views, assessing both mission motive and Asian response."⁴² This trend continued in historical works of the 1990s and early twenty-first century. Leslie Flemming's work, which incorporates both gender analysis and some indigenous perspective, acts as a bridge to later works that built on her methods and conclusions. In sum, studies on American missions completed during the 1980s have broadened historical perspectives on women's mission theory and gender dynamics on the mission field.

A final historiographical shift occurred during the 1990s and early twenty-first century when historians increasingly sought to incorporate Chinese perspectives and sources in studies of American missionaries. The use of non-western sources and perspectives began minimally in the 1980s, but historians such as Daniel Bays and Dana L. Robert, writing in the 1990s, strengthened this trend by creating a more balanced analysis of encounters between American and Chinese women. In addition, historians writing during 1990s increasingly took a more nuanced view of women's mission theory.

Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present, edited by Daniel Bays, addresses the growth and evolution of Christianity in China from a Chinese perspective. In contrast to John Fairbanks' edited volume, *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, which includes few writings from non-western historians and little mention of women, Bays' work includes several

⁴² Flemming, *Women's Work for Women*, 10.

Asian historians and dedicates one section to “Christianity and Chinese Women.”⁴³ This work reflects a shift away from studying western missionaries to assessing Chinese perspectives on Christianity in China. Also, *Christianity in China* marks a shift from viewing Christianity as a western, Eurocentric religion toward viewing Christianity as a global religion.⁴⁴ The various authors in this study do not exclude missions, but only include them when they are central to the development of Chinese Christianity. Bays notes that the use of Chinese materials is given high priority in this study.⁴⁵

Historian Dana L. Robert’s works have expanded the understanding of American women’s missiology and indigenous perspectives of their encounters with western missionaries. In her 1996 *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice*, Robert views the decline of the American women’s missionary movement differently than historian Patricia Hill does. Rather than viewing it as a result of the vast secularization of American culture, Robert argues that the primary force behind the decline of the movement was the erosion of its institutional base,. This erosion came through mergers and the destruction of long-standing women’s missionary boards, such as the Women’s

⁴³ Daniel Bays, *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) xvi; Kwok Pui-Lan, “Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in *Christianity in China*, 194-200. Kwok Pui-Lan’s essay treats Chinese women not as “missiological objects,” but as historical subjects. Stressing the agency of Chinese women who converted to Christianity, Pui-Lan notes the ways that missionaries had to adapt to Chinese gender norms and the active roles Chinese women assumed in new churches. Furthermore, Pui-Lan argues that studying Chinese women can aid the understanding of how religious identity impacted the growth of feminist consciousness and how Christianity adapts to new environments. Pui-Lan concludes that while western missionaries influenced Chinese women, internal changes in Chinese culture were also responsible for the increasing feminist consciousness of Chinese women.

⁴⁴ For more on Christianity as a world religion—as opposed to a western religion—see Lemin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).

⁴⁵ Bays, *Christianity in China*, i-xvii.

Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1939 and the Woman's American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society in 1955.⁴⁶ Women consistently attempted to halt the mergers, but having few laity rights in their denominations, they could not prevent the destruction of their mission boards. Some denominational leaders wanted to increase their institutional efficiency and saw no need for two mission boards within the same religious body.

Robert shows that as the 1920s and 1930s progressed, many male clergy, such as Presbyterian moderate Robert E. Speer, grew skeptical of the division between women's missionary work and that of the rest of the denomination. Some increasingly resented the autonomy and financial success of women's mission boards.⁴⁷ In addition, as women lost control over their mission boards, many focused their attention on strengthening women's rights in their denominations by seeking full ordination, leadership roles, and voting privileges for women. Robert also reveals the destructive impact of the Fundamentalist-modernist controversy on the women's missionary movement. While outspoken women such as Helen Barrett Montgomery and Lucy Waterbury Peabody argued for a Biblical basis for women's missionary work, the Fundamentalist-modernist debates polarized many denominations over doctrinal issues, including the perceived lack of Biblical basis for women in the ministry.

Finally, Robert argues that the increasing view of "world friendship" in missions undermined the women's missionary movement. "World friendship"

⁴⁶ Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 302-303.

⁴⁷ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 305-306; "Robert E. Speer," *Time Magazine* (March 3, 1924), accessible at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,717856,00.html>.

included the belief in cooperation and ecumenism and an optimistic view of the growth of equality between men and women. The “women’s work for women” ideology seemed out-dated.⁴⁸ The image that Robert portrays of the decline of the women’s missionary movement, unlike that of Patricia Hill, does not stem from a secularization of American culture, but instead from declining institutional support for women’s missionary work.

Dana L. Robert’s 2002 *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers* further develops women’s mission theory, while also integrating Asian sources. The overall theme of this volume of essays is the paradoxical nature of the women’s mission movement—on one hand missionaries used the Bible as justification for women’s liberation and uplift; on the other hand American denominations and mission groups often shared the same patriarchal biases as the cultures they entered. For example, women missionaries at times acted as mentors to recent male converts on the mission field, yet they would not be permitted to assume leadership positions such as elder.⁴⁹ Robert, like Hunter and Flemming, focuses on the contradictions present in women missionaries’ work on the mission field. But through her inclusion of essays from Asian perspectives, such as Silas H. L. Wu’s “Dora Yu: Foremost Female Evangelist in Twentieth-Century Chinese Revivalism,” Robert also exhibits a slightly different approach than that taken by Hunter or Flemming.

Supporting the call of historians such as Flemming, Bays, and Robert for more Chinese perspectives in missionary studies, Silas H. L. Wu’s “Dora Yu:

⁴⁸ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 307, 312, 313.

⁴⁹ Dana L. Robert, ed., *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 28.

Foremost Female Evangelist in Twentieth-Century Chinese Revivalism,” in *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers*, portrays the mission movement from the perspective of a Chinese evangelist. Wu explains that through studying evangelist Dora Yu, historians can learn more about the origins of western women’s medical schools in China, the role of female Chinese medical students in mission churches, and the role of “Bible women” in missions.⁵⁰ The case of Dora Yu also sheds light on the question of why women’s roles as evangelists declined after 1927. Wu suggests that both political developments in China and the increasing Fundamentalist leanings of many American evangelists and church leaders. This case study illustrates the increasing attention of historians to women’s mission theory as well as incorporating Chinese perspectives.

Church of the Brethren Historiography

While no historian has written a comprehensive volume on women missionaries from the Church of the Brethren, several seminal works by Pamela Brubaker, Donald Durnbaugh, Carl Bowman, and Stephen Longenecker address women and change in the denomination during the twentieth century. Each historian confirms the shift of the Brethren toward the American religious and cultural mainstream, yet they often situate women in this era differently.

In *She Hath Done What She Could: A History of Women's Participation in the Church of the Brethren* (1985), Pamela Brubaker records the contributions of influential women on the foreign mission field, including Anna Newland Crumpaker, Blanche Cover Hilton, and Nettie Senger. Brubaker’s major

⁵⁰ Silas H. L. Wu, “Dora Yu” in *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers*, 86.

assertion is that Brethren women were active participants and shapers of denominational mission and relief efforts.⁵¹ Next, in *Fruit of the Vine: A History of Brethren, 1708-1995* (1997) Donald Durnbaugh portrays the early twentieth century as a time of “cultural evolution” in the Church of the Brethren. During this period Brethren reconsidered their traditional stances on nonconformity, freedom of conscience, the ministry, and higher education. Unlike Brubaker, who mostly documents the activities of Brethren women, Durnbaugh interprets foreign mission work as an expansion of opportunities for Brethren women. He argues that in some overseas missions women could work in areas not open to men. For example, female nurses and doctors were needed in regions where it was unacceptable for a male doctor to meet with female patients.⁵² Durnbaugh continues by describing the impact of women missionaries on the denomination once they returned, serving as “talented, energetic, and even daring role models” for American Brethren women.⁵³ Overall, Durnbaugh views the mission movement as an expansion of possibilities for Brethren women.

Similar to Durnbaugh’s work, Carl Bowman’s *Brethren Society* (1995) focuses on cultural transformation among the Brethren. He argues that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, evangelism gradually began to take precedence over preserving distinctive Brethren traditions. In the quest to bring new members into the church, progressive Brethren questioned certain traditional practices that repelled potential converts, such as baptism by immersion, the holy kiss, feetwashing, and plain dress. Out of this struggle between Conservatives

⁵¹ Brubaker, *She Hath Done What She Could*, 97-100, 113.

⁵² Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 381-82.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

who sought to preserve their distinctiveness and Progressives who favored evangelism came an “altered moral landscape” among the Brethren. Bowman explains that the Brethren came to a new understanding of “us” and “them,” emphasizing less the distinctions between themselves and “popular Christianity,” focusing more on non-Christians in foreign countries as “the other.”⁵⁴ Other Protestant groups, when compared to heathens, seemed more like companions in a common cause. Both Durnbaugh and Bowman portray the Brethren mission movement as a progressive cause that prompted the denomination to transform itself culturally to resemble mainstream Protestant groups. However, unlike Durnbaugh, Bowman does not offer insight into the role of the woman missionary within this context.

Finally Stephen Longenecker’s *The Brethren During the Age of World War* (2006) situates the Brethren missionary movement and changing gender roles in the denomination as a part of a larger trend: the church’s conflict with and acquiescence to modernism. Longenecker focuses on the creation of the new Brethren woman during the 1920s. The American “New Woman” of the 1920s, with her bobbed hair, new fashions, and air of confidence, alarmed the Brethren. Yet during the 1920s, with the discarding of prayer coverings and the licensing of women preachers, gender norms began to change in the denomination.⁵⁵ In 1922 Annual Conference voted to grant Brethren women licenses to preach. The growing trend of women discarding their prayer coverings alarmed many Conservatives and a study committee on the matter affirmed at the 1926 Annual

⁵⁴ Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 324, 326.

⁵⁵ Longenecker, *The Brethren During the Age of World War*, 109.

Conference that women ought to wear the coverings, but that refusing to do so would not bar a woman from being a member. In 1922, during the movement to license women to preach in the denomination, Longenecker notes that Wilbur Stover, a missionary in India, argued for the licensure of women due to its utility on the mission field. Separately Longenecker discusses the Church of the Brethren mission and relief efforts in China, including excerpts from women missionary writings during the Japanese invasion of 1937 and World War II. Longenecker emphasizes the change in the denomination's mission goals that occurred during World War II, when service and relief came to take precedence over evangelism. In addition, he devotes time to the impact of World War II on the China mission and the internment of missionaries in the Philippines. However, Longenecker does not explicitly draw connections between gender and the missionary movement in the denomination.⁵⁶

In one sense, this thesis will conceptually connect the works of Brubaker, Durnbaugh, Bowman, and Longenecker by showing the interaction between women, mission, and the trajectory of the Church of the Brethren. Instead of portraying the mission movement solely as an outgrowth of progressivism or modernism in the Church of the Brethren, this thesis shows how the mission movement reflected a tension between conservatism and progressivism and

⁵⁶ Longenecker, *The Brethren During the Age of World War*, 108-114, 231-239, 259-260; There are several other early historical works on the Church of the Brethren China mission: Galen B. Royer, *Thirty-Three Years of Missions in the Church of the Brethren* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1914); *A Brief History of the Church of the Brethren in China* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1915); Frank H. Crumpacker, et al., *Brethren in China* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1937). These works served mainly to communicate the happenings of the China mission field to the denomination at home.

eventually pushed the denomination in a new direction, distancing the Brethren from its distinctive Dunker heritage.

Conclusion

The story of Brethren women missionaries in China is also an account of progressivism and changing gender relations in the Church of the Brethren. Despite the conservative doctrinal and cultural tendencies of Brethren women, the mission field and the pursuit of new converts fostered a dynamic that sought growth, flexibility, and accommodation. This thesis partially supports the arguments of Brethren historians Carl Bowman, Donald Durnbaugh, Pamela Brubaker, and Stephen Longenecker, who have asserted that during the first half of the twentieth century, the Church of the Brethren gradually became a more “worldly” church by combining new modes of worship, organization, and belief with its primitive Dunker ways. Yet, the story of the Church of the Brethren’s mission in China takes the argument of these historians one step further by placing the Brethren in a cross-cultural and gendered context, which presented Brethren women with opportunities to act in new, progressive manners. Conventionally, Brethren historians writing about the church during the early twentieth century have not focused on the implications of gender changes for the long-term direction of the church. Discussions of women in the church have largely revolved around the issue of achieving full ordination and have not fully addressed the positions women filled in mission endeavors. While Brethren historiography has not thoroughly examined women’s roles in mission work, the

broader literature on Protestant missionaries has largely ignored the contributions of Anabaptist women. This oversight has been partially due to the relatively low numbers of Anabaptist missionaries when compared to other Protestant and Catholic mission groups and because of the perception of Anabaptists as withdrawn and isolationist. In addition, historians of mission movements have not thoroughly investigated the impact of missionary women on their denominations in the United States.

Studying Brethren women missionaries in China is important because of the implications for the survival and evolution of religious groups that remain outside of the dominant religious mainstream. Were changing gender roles more disruptive to the Brethren than other forms of change? How did church growth impact the distinctiveness of a faith community? Can a denomination be a group of growth and outreach, yet still preserve its distinctive heritage and values? These questions point to the underlying dynamics of cultural change—the tension between new and old, between preserving the faith and moving in new directions.

CHAPTER 2

ADAPTING THE FAITH: THE EARLY CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MISSION IN SHANXI

In October 1908 Brethren missionaries Frank and Anna Crumpacker, George and Blanche Hilton, and Emma Horning found themselves in a new country, planting the seeds of their new mission. While in 1908 they only numbered five at the time, their group would soon grow exponentially and would soon enter into a multi-faceted relationship with the people and villages of Shanxi province. Through this process, the mission field became an expression of the tension between conservatism and progressivism in the individual missionaries and in the Church of the Brethren. Despite the assumptions of cultural superiority missionaries held, the mission field and the pursuit of new converts fostered a dynamic that valued growth, flexibility, and accommodation. Throughout the early years of the Church of the Brethren mission in Shanxi, doctrinally conservative women missionaries often pushed for new, progressive methods of evangelism.

Late-nineteenth-century changes in America, including urbanization, immigration, and heightened industrialization, gave rise to Progressive era and Social Gospel reformers who worked to eliminate poverty, vice, and corruption, mostly in American cities. Historian Robert Wiebe has characterized this period as an era of great change, when the isolated homogenous “island communities” of a largely rural America transformed into an increasingly diverse, urban, industrial

society.¹ How did religion inform the way that Americans, particularly women, respond to these changes? More importantly, how did early twentieth-century changes in American Christianity alter the missionary movement?

The Social Gospel movement represented one way that Americans dealt with a changing society. The Social Gospel was a movement among mostly American Protestant denominations to apply Jesus' critique of wealth and poverty to society. From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, crowded tenements, poverty, and corruption, prompted progressive Protestants to search for ways to combine their religious beliefs and social action. Adherents to the Social Gospel were highly optimistic about their ability to reform society and they enthusiastically worked to alleviate urban poverty and transform social and economic institutions they saw as oppressive. Theologically, Social Gospelers did not see themselves as breaking with traditional Christianity. They focused on the work of the historical Jesus and viewed religion in practical terms, instead of in abstractions. Their focus was more on the collective sins of society and less on sins of individuals. Social Gospelers conceptualized sin and its causes within a larger social context. Poverty, vice, and disorder were seen as obstacles to achieving salvation. Salvation was also a social matter and Christians ought to be concerned with the spiritual status of those around them in the world.²

Theologian Henry P. Van Dusen called the liberal religion of Social Gospelers

¹ Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), vii.

² Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), xii, 228-229.

“bridge theology.”³ With “one foot firmly planted in Modern Thought, the other deeply rooted within Christian experience,” Social Gospelers bridged two ways of viewing the world.⁴ They drew from modern thought a belief in science and history, regard for truth, and faith in progress. From their Christian faith, Social Gospelers took a desire to emulate the historical Jesus and a commitment to Christian churches.⁵

American women were active in the Social Gospel movement. Susan Curtis’ *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* reveals that in some ways the Social Gospel altered gender norms, while in other instances it perpetuated existing social standards. She argues that the family, and women’s role within it, came to be viewed as more cooperative and egalitarian during the early twentieth century and that the rhetoric of Social Gospelers regarding God the Father and Jesus the Son mirrored and reinforced this notion. God came to be viewed as less stern or judgmental and more as a friend, present with humanity on earth.⁶ However, during the late nineteenth century the discursive Victorian belief in “separate spheres”—where men supposedly functioned in the public world of work and politics while women remained in the private sphere of the home—continued to define accepted roles for men and women.⁷ Most early twentieth-century Protestants viewed theology as a male

³ Henry P. Van Dusen, *The Vindication of Liberal Theology: A Tract for the Times* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963), 22 quoted in Robert T. Handy, *The Social Gospel in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 8.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Handy, *The Social Gospel in America*, 4-8.

⁶ Ibid, 80-81.

⁷ The separate spheres ideology that isolated women from public roles such as politics and the ministry had existed in the United States since the founding of the early republic. For more on separate spheres ideology in early America see Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood:*

endeavor while women applied their Christian beliefs to their social work. Their theological thoughts about that work were ignored and women were not seen as intellectual definers of the Social Gospel movement—historians have reserved those roles for figures such as Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch. Curtis cites examples of women who combined their professional desires and perceived domestic duties by becoming “public housecleaner[s],” crusading against filth in cities, investigating the meatpacking industry, and inspecting orphanages, asylums, hospitals, jails, and schools.⁸ This “public housecleaning” also reflected the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century trend toward the professionalization of work.⁹ Historians differ, though, on the extent to which women influenced the formation of Social Gospel theology. Some cite prominent intellectual women such as settlement house founder Jane Addams and Christian Socialist Vida Scudder while others emphasize women’s significant actions instead of their intellectual contributions.¹⁰

While Susan Curtis addresses the intellectual contributions of women to the Social Gospel movement and effectively illustrates how the movement combined aspects of Victorian religion and modern secular culture, she does not

“*Woman’s Sphere*” in *New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997). Some historians dispute using the term “separate spheres,” arguing that the term applies a static social model to dynamic relationships—the public and private spheres overlapped and many women, even in nineteenth century Victorian America functioned in public roles. For more on the usage of “separate spheres” see Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *The Journal of American History* 1, vol. 75 (June 1988), 9-39.

⁸ Curtis, *A Consuming Faith*, 61.

⁹ Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, viii, 166. In this work, Wiebe argues that the American middle class, reacting to the societal disorder caused by growing cities and new immigrants, sought to create a world that was highly structured, managed, business-like, and professional.

¹⁰ Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, *Gender and the Social Gospel* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 5.

investigate the relationship between the Social Gospel and the American foreign missionary movement. Paul William Harris' article "The Social Dimensions of Foreign Missions: Emma Rauschenbusch Clough and Social Gospel Ideology" in Wendy Diechmann Edwards's and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford's *Gender and the Social Gospel* portrays the Social Gospel as extending beyond the borders of the United States with missionaries into other countries. Emma Rauschenbusch Clough sought to examine the social dimensions of the mission field—to show that indigenous people could be effective at spreading Christianity throughout their country. Clough's understanding of indigenous people contrasted the view that non-Christians in foreign countries were passive subjects for conversion. She also believed in the "women's work for women" ideology, which extended women's work overseas to uplift their non-Christian "sisters."¹¹ This ideology led Clough, and many other missionary women, to view non-Christian women as burdened not only by their unfamiliarity with Christianity but also by oppressive social forces.

As seen in the example of Emma Rauschenbusch Clough, missionaries expanded the traditional definition of the American Social Gospel movement by stretching their concerns beyond the borders of industrial America. Kendal Mobley's essay, "The Ecumenical Woman's Missionary Movement: Helen Barrett Montgomery and *The Baptist*, 1920-30," addresses this expansion of the movement. Several points of convergence between the Social Gospel and women missionaries existed. First, both groups often shared the goal of creating the

¹¹ Paul William Harris, "The Social Dimensions of Foreign Mission: Emma Rauschenbusch Clough and Social Gospel Ideology" in Deichmann Edwards and De Swarte Gifford, *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 87-88.

kingdom of God on earth. In addition, missionaries and Social Gospelers, while often critical of American society, shared a common understanding of the basic goodness of American society. Finally, a deep religious faith often motivated both group. However, the missionary movement's concern with the world beyond the borders of the United States stretched it beyond the geographic boundaries of the American Social Gospel and applied the Social Gospel to elevating the status of women in foreign countries.¹²

Supporters of the Social Gospel movement shaped their faith around a changing world, but some American Protestants resisted modernism, determined to preserve what they considered traditional doctrine and practice. George Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelism* outlines Fundamentalism's intellectual and cultural segments. The scholarly devaluation of the Bible from the source of ultimate truth to a historical text disturbed numerous groups of evangelical Americans. In their view, the purpose of education was to build morality, not to criticize the Bible. Many Fundamentalists adopted Premillennial Dispensationalism, which viewed civilization as in decline—their duty was to curb evil until the return of Jesus, not to improve the world in preparation for the second coming of Jesus. Fundamentalists typically detached social issues from religion. Evangelist D. L. Moody increasingly deemphasized the social aspects of sin and salvation. Whereas previously Moody had believed that evangelism and charity work were both essential to uplift non-Christians, he came to view direct social service as a

¹² Kendal Mobley, "The Ecumenical Woman's Missionary Movement" in Deichmann Edwards and De Swarte Gifford *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 169-170.

hindrance to evangelism. Articulating this view he said, “If I had the Bible in one hand and a loaf in the other, the people always looked first at the loaf; and that was just the contrary of the order laid down in the Gospel.”¹³ Moody’s social beliefs came from his conviction that paying too much attention to social concerns would hinder evangelism. In his view, the best way to show compassion for a person was to be concerned with his or her soul.¹⁴

The Fundamentalist-modernist debates spread into the missionary movement. In 1917 Baptist theologian Augustus H. Strong published *A Tour of Missions* in which he expressed his dismay over liberalism on the mission field and stated that Baptists were “losing [their] faith in the Bible” and “gradually abolishing, not only all definite views of Christian doctrine, but also all conviction of duty to ‘contend earnestly for the faith’ of our fathers.”¹⁵ Strong argued that much of this loss of faith was the result of Baptists sacrificing core beliefs for the sake of cooperation with other denominations.

The American Social Gospel movement and the Fundamentalist-modernist debates had a significant impact on the American missionary movement and the role of women in Protestant denominations, yet historians have typically questioned how American cultural and religious shifts altered the trajectory of the missionary movement, refraining from investigating how missionaries shaped these trends to meet their evangelistic goals on the mission field. The Brethren

¹³ W. H. Daniels, ed., *Moody, His Words, Work, and Workers* (New York, 1877), 431-32 as quoted by George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelism, 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1908), 37.

¹⁴ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 37.

¹⁵ Augustus H. Strong, *A Tour of Missions: Observations and Conclusions* (Philadelphia, 1918), 192 quoted in George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 166.

women missionaries in Shanxi exhibited aspects of the Social Gospel and Fundamentalism in China, but they also molded their religion to adapt to the geographic, social, and political contexts of China.

The Early Lives of Brethren Women Missionaries

The background and life stories of Brethren women missionaries follow several trends. First, these women typically grew up in Church of the Brethren or Protestant households, but could clearly identify when they were converted or joined the church. Normally, there was a defining moment, during adolescence, when these women made what they felt were conscious decisions to live their lives as Christians and become a part of the faith community. Typically preceding this defining moment were several years of regular church attendance and participation Sunday schools. Occasionally, young Brethren women who would later become missionaries also mentioned attending special revival meetings where after hearing a series of preachers they would then be baptized and make a commitment to the church. Finally, Brethren women missionaries had usually completed some formal higher education, often at one of the Church of the Brethren colleges, the denomination's seminary, or at a nursing training school. The early life stories of Brethren women missionaries help to reveal their religious mindset prior to working in China and their motivations for becoming missionaries.

Anna Newland Crumpacker, one of the first Brethren missionaries to Shanxi, was born in Marion County, Kansas, on September 29, 1882. Her father

was from Kentucky and her mother was from Illinois. Anna was the second of seven children in the family. She desired an education, but few opportunities existed in rural Kansas. Instead, she focused on attending a Sunday School Union class where she heard preachers such as John Wise, J. F. Neher, and J. L. Thomas. When Anna was seven years old, the family moved to Wichita where at a revival meeting she “resolved to become a Christian.”¹⁶ Shortly after, the Newland family moved to Carlisle, Arkansas, where Anna began to attend a German Baptist Brethren congregation and teach Sunday school. In October 1895, after a series of meetings held by Elder D. L. Forney, Anna decided to be baptized and joined the German Baptist Brethren. In 1897 she continued her schooling and entered the Normal and Business College in Conway Springs, Kansas. Later, from 1900 to 1908, she studied religious education at McPherson College in Kansas.¹⁷

Fewer details exist of the life of single missionary Minerva Metzger, from Roseville, Indiana, prior to her application for missionary appointment in 1910. After receiving degrees from Indiana State University and Bethany Bible School, Metzger taught in the Roseville public schools while also teaching in a local Chinese Sunday school. Of her conversion experience at age 13, she writes that her faith journey led her to a “greater fullness of life, for from a little girl I felt that Jesus was mine.”¹⁸ Metzger provides an example of the attraction of higher

¹⁶ “Anna Newland Crumpacker,” *The Missionary Visitor* (September 1908): 336.

¹⁷ “Crumpacker, Anna L. Newland,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), I: 354.

¹⁸ “Questions to Candidates for Missionary Appointment: Minerva Metzger,” (Elgin, IL: General Missionary and Tract Committee), completed March 1910, 3.

education to future missionaries. In the Church of the Brethren, higher education for Brethren men and women was still a topic of debate during the early twentieth century. Many Conservative Brethren feared that extensive higher education would have a detrimental impact on the denomination.¹⁹ One opponent of higher education claimed that sending Brethren, specifically ministers, to colleges would lead to “too much intellectuality and not enough spirituality.” Increasing the educational level of the Brethren he feared, meant a “farewell to spirituality.”²⁰ Higher education was a divisive issue within the Church of the Brethren. Founders of Brethren colleges were Progressives. Therefore, the Brethren women who actively sought higher educational opportunities were a part of the progressive segment of the denomination.

Nettie Mabelle Senger also exhibited the desire for higher education common among Brethren women missionaries. Applying for missionary appointment in 1911, Senger was one year away from receiving her Bachelor of Divinity from Bethany Bible School. Senger grew up in Panora, Iowa, and was a member of the Coon River Church of the Brethren. Trained in Latin, German, Greek and Hebrew, singing, and bookkeeping, Senger was the ideal candidate for mission service. She had held several church leadership positions: Sunday

¹⁹ By 1908 nine Brethren colleges existed, but by 1904 that number had dropped to six colleges. Debates over higher education also crossed into debates on the professional ministry. Most Old Orders and many Conservatives opposed the professional ministry because of its reliance on worldly institutions—schools—and because of the denomination’s historic tradition of selecting spiritual leaders from within the faith community. For more on higher education in the Church of the Brethren see “Higher Education,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), I: 603-605.

²⁰ *Full Report of the Proceedings of the Brethren’s Annual Meeting, 1916*, Samuel F. Senger speaking (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1916), 46 quoted in Stephen Longenecker, *The Brethren During the Age of World War* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2006), 17.

school supervisor for six months, teacher of Bible classes for two years, and teacher in the Chicago Chinese Sunday school for one year. These experiences primed Senger for work on the China field.²¹

Participation in the Sunday school movement characterized the lives of many future women missionaries, such as Rebecca Skeggs Wampler. Born in Greencastle, Pennsylvania, she moved with her family to Roanoke, Virginia in 1893 where her entire family attended the Roanoke City Church of the Brethren. According to a 1913 issue of *The Missionary Visitor*, Rebecca was among the inaugural members of its first Sunday school. In February 1895 at age thirteen, she was baptized and became “ever ready and willing to be useful and helpful in Sunday-school.”²² Rebecca served as Sunday school teacher and officer. At age sixteen she graduated from the National Business College and began teaching there. In 1902 she took an office job and then in 1906 began teaching and taking courses at Bridgewater College in Virginia. She graduated from Bridgewater in 1910, returned to the National Business College to teach, and married Frederick J. Wampler of Harrisonburg, Virginia, in 1911. The couple soon left for Chicago where Frederick attended Rush Medical College. During this time Rebecca “took some college and Bible work” and completed a six-month nurses training course at the Nurses’ Training School at the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan. In 1913, after Frederick completed medical school, the couple went to China as Church of the Brethren missionaries, founding the first hospital at Ping Ting.²³

²¹ “Application for Appointment as a Missionary: Nettie Senger,” (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren, 1911), 1.

²² P.S. Miller, “Rebecca Skeggs Wampler,” *The Missionary Visitor* (October 1913): 330.

²³ Miller, “Rebecca Skeggs Wampler,” 330.

Sunday school work received a special emphasis in the description of Cora Cripe Brubaker's life in the same 1913 *Missionary Visitor* issue. Born to a large family in 1877 in Lafayette, Indiana, Cora was a "constant attendant at church and Sunday-school."²⁴ Her father had organized the first Sunday school at the Fairview Church of the Brethren in Lafayette and she spent her early years attending church services regularly. When she was eight, her family moved to the Cerro Gordo Church of the Brethren (Illinois) where again her father was instrumental in creating the first Sunday school. Unlike most of her missionary counterparts, Cora had no education beyond high school but instead worked with the Children's Mission of Chicago from 1895 to 1905. In July 1905 she married Ora George Brubaker, a native of Howard County, Indiana, who was one year away from receiving his medical degree from Rush Medical College in Chicago. After the death of missionary Benjamin Heckman in 1913, Cora and Ora George felt called to China, where they worked in the Liao Chou mission station.²⁵

By the turn of the century, Sunday school participation was common among the Brethren, but Sunday schools, like higher education and the professional ministry, were debated. Old Orders argued that there was no scriptural basis for Sunday schools and that establishing them could lead to the introduction of other changes such as the paid ministry and revival meetings. The White Oak (Pennsylvania) congregation had established the first Sunday school in 1845, despite the advice of the 1838 Annual Meeting regarding Sunday schools

²⁴ A. M. H., "Cora Cripe Brubaker," *The Missionary Visitor* (October 1913): 334.

²⁵ Ibid; Wendell P. Flory and KIM, "Cora and Ora George Brubaker," *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), I: 217.

that Brethren ought to “take no part in such things.”²⁶ Following the lead of White Oak, in 1856 Philadelphia Brethren established a German Brethren Baptist Sabbath School Association. The creation of Brethren Sunday schools led to substantial growth in church membership and at the 1857 Annual Meeting, delegates concluded that “we know of no scripture which condemns Sabbath-schools, if conducted in gospel order.”²⁷ Women were heavily involved in Sunday school teaching.²⁸

Brethren women’s higher education and Sunday school participation show that the religious experiences of these Brethren women were coming to resemble more closely those of other Protestant women. Protestant women were active participants in the Sunday school movement which stemmed from the Second Great Awakening of the early nineteenth century. Women who had undergone conversion experiences sought an avenue for evangelical action and Sunday schools afforded them this opportunity. Sunday school work, home missions, and eventually foreign missions would serve as occasions for Brethren women to express their creative energy. Revivalist Charles G. Finney described this creative energy saying that “If filled with the Spirit, you will be useful. You cannot help being useful.”²⁹ However, few forms of evangelistic work were

²⁶ D.L. Miller, D. E. Price, Daniel Hays, *Revised Minutes of the Annual Meetings of the German Baptist Brethren* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1908) quoted in “Sunday School Movement,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), II: 1237.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 1239.

²⁸ “Sunday School Movement,” edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh, 1237-1239.

²⁹ Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960) quoted in Nancy Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 86; Anne M. Boylan, “Evangelical Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Women in Sunday Schools,” *Feminist Studies* 3, vol. 4, (October 1978): 64. In this article

available for women in the traditional Brethren faith community, so women were particularly attracted to Sunday schools and mission work. Thus, prior to their missionary work, Brethren women had already begun to distance themselves from the Old Order by participating in Sunday schools and pursuing higher education.

Motivations to Mission Work

Most Brethren women applicants to the mission field had formal college training and many studied at Bethany Bible School in Chicago. A common theme appears when applicants discussed their training at Bethany: many of these women first became interested in serving as missionaries in China through working with a Chinese Sunday school in Chicago. Not all Brethren women missionaries attended Bethany Bible School, but for those who did, working in the Chinese Sunday school in Chicago sparked their interest in the China mission field. Eight months before the first Brethren missionaries sailed to China in 1908, Bethany Bible School began a Chinese Sunday school that would eventually evolve in 1959 into the independent Brethren Chinese Fellowship.³⁰ The goals of the Chinese Sunday school were evangelism and teaching English. In this Sunday school, many Bethany students developed an interest in further mission work among the Chinese, some of them in China itself. But why would Brethren women decide to travel to a foreign country instead of remain in the United States and work with Chinese Christian in Chicago? Why did they not remain in the

Boylan explains the role of conversion in leading evangelical women to Sunday school work. After conversion, women were to live differently, devoting their lives to evangelism and exemplarily behavior. The Sunday school movement partially developed from this impulse.

³⁰ "Chinese Sunday Schools," *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), I: 278.

United States, as many missionary women did previous to their overseas work, and participate in urban reform efforts? What prompted these women to leave their comfortable environments to create a new church in a non-Christian country?

The challenge of the mission field was a common motivating force for some Brethren women. Nettie Senger requested to be sent to China because “the field is hard, the language hard and I am willing to take the hard work.”³¹ Senger wanted a challenge and saw mission work in China as that opportunity. For Senger, the Bible’s complexity, length, and harmony prove that the Holy Spirit inspired the authors of the Bible. Senger believed that the Bible provided the only means for humans to “get back to God.”³² In addition to revealing God’s plan for humankind, Senger says that those men who have “taken its teachings into their lives” will command respect, exert authority, and have their actions sanctioned by God.³³

Experienced Brethren missionaries in India and Africa acted as role models for ambitious young Brethren women. Women such as Mary Emmert Stover and Bertha Ryan, who with Wilbur Stover, opened the first mission in Bulsar, India, in 1895, became role models for Brethren women in the United States.³⁴ Brethren women would hear the stories of women missionaries on their furloughs and be excited and energized by them. Brethren missionary Minerva

³¹ “Application for Appointment as a Missionary, Nettie Senger, 1911” (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren), 1.

³² Ibid.

³³ “Doctrinal Statement of Missionary Applicant: Nettie Senger, 1911” (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren), 1.

³⁴ “India,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), I: 649.

Metzger illustrated the influence of missionary role models when she described her call to mission work, which came through “knowledge of the poor heathen,” Bible study, and the example of missionary Eliza Agnew.³⁵ Eliza Agnew, a missionary for forty years in Ceylon with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, never took a furlough during her time of service. She served as a heroic role model for Christian women, exemplifying self-sacrifice and courage.³⁶

Accompanying the ambition of many Brethren women was a growing sense of vocation. Yet the opportunities for Brethren women to hold leadership positions in the church were few, limited to Sunday school teacher, deaconess, and informal roles. Senger attributed her call to mission service to the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20 and the “crying need” of the field.³⁷ In addition, Senger remarked that through reading the *Missionary Visitor* and other missionary literature she became aware of the “great need of laborers in the Lord’s harvest” and she became convinced that “the Lord needed and desired my services for the spread of the kingdom rather than to be engaged in mere secular pursuits.”³⁸ Senger became interested in the missionary movement gradually and she enrolled in a nurses training course with the sense that God “had some service

³⁵ “Questions to Candidates for Missionary Appointment: Minerva Metzger,” Elgin, IL: General Missionary and Tract Committee, 1910.

³⁶ Ann White, “Counting the Cost of Faith: America’s Early Female Missionaries,” *Church History* 1, vol. 57 (March 1988): 28.

³⁷ “Application for Appointment as a Missionary, Nettie Senger” (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren, 1911), BLHA; Matt. 28:16-20 (NIV) reads: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

³⁸ Nettie M. Senger, “Motives that Call Me Forth,” *The Missionary Visitor* (February 1916), 58.

in store” for her.³⁹ Senger’s defining call to the mission field came one year after she completed her nurses training. When her home church, Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren (Pennsylvania), announced its intention to support a missionary from the congregation, Senger saw this as her moment. Senger proclaimed that congregational support of missionaries would end “the great dearth existing in the Lord’s harvest.”⁴⁰

Additionally, as Senger noted, the “crying need” of the Chinese was a motivating factor for her and for other Brethren women missionaries. The idea of “women’s work for women” was an inspiration for many of the Brethren women who went to Shanxi in the 1910s. Although “women’s work for women” would become less influential in the 1920s, the first generation of Brethren women came of age during the Victorian and Progressive eras. “Women’s work for women” combined the early nineteenth-century goal of evangelizing non-Christians with the desire to socially elevate women. Western missionary women believed that Christianity could lift up women in other countries to a higher social position. Additionally, non-Christian religions supposedly degraded women. By seeking to change the position of women in non-Christian societies, “women’s work for women” combined evangelism with social change.⁴¹

Brethren perceptions of Chinese people also shaped the motivations of missionaries. In a 1913 article for *The Missionary Visitor*, Mrs. Aaron

³⁹ Senger, “Motives that Call Me Forth,” 58.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 130-133; Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman’s Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Colonial Rule* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 8, 24. In this work Jayawardena shows how a sense of “global sisterhood” motivated British women to attempt to “liberate” women in India.

Longanecker, not a missionary herself, described Chinese people as “silent, sober, and even sour-tempered.”⁴² Among their positive attributes, Longanecker said that the Chinese are “persevering, industrious, polite and patient,” characteristics that the Brethren should emulate. On the other hand, Longanecker criticized the Chinese for their ancestor worship and superstition, which in her opinion had led to the neglect of children. She commented that the Chinese let children starve to death “on the supposition that they are non-human but of demon origin.”⁴³

Longanecker correlated superstition with a lack of education and as evidence of ignorance. In addition, she criticized Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, devaluing each in comparison to Christianity. In sum, Longanecker viewed Chinese people as “credulous and sympathetic.”⁴⁴ This perceived naiveté made “their minds fruitful soil for the seed of Christianity.”⁴⁵ She viewed the nature of Chinese people as being particularly favorable for evangelism. Though not a missionary, Longanecker constructed an image of Chinese people that was pervasive among Brethren missionaries. This image made Chinese people seem particularly receptive to Christianity, but it also created a stark cultural and racial delineation between Brethren missionaries and the Chinese.

Overseas mission work was one of the few opportunities for Brethren women to attain leadership positions. Women missionaries chaired field committees, engaged in evangelistic work, developed school curriculum, and designed itinerancy programs. Yet in their decision to become foreign

⁴² Mrs. Aaron Longanecker, “China,” *The Missionary Visitor* (April 1913), 113.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

missionaries they did not overtly express a desire for power or a higher status within the denomination. In *The Gospel of Gentility* Jane Hunter explains that American women missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century exhibited a mentality of self-sacrifice. Missionary women, especially single women, were seen as making the sacrifices of home, family, country, and friends, all to minister to non-Christians in foreign lands. Self-denial and self-sacrifice became equated with femininity, and missionary women often accepted this ideology.⁴⁶

The motivations of Brethren women to enter mission work revealed several aspects of their conservative and progressive tendencies. On one hand, Brethren women believed that true reform could only occur when individuals accepted Christianity. Brethren women believed that the Chinese “heathens” were of a lower status in need of elevation, through conversion to Christianity and cultural transformation. Many denominations sent women to the mission field to work with female medical patients or in other areas where men could not work. These women firmly believed that salvation consisted not solely of eliminating societal ills such as poverty and diseases, but in acceptance of Christianity by individuals. Yet also apparent in the motivations of Brethren women missionaries was a strain of progressivism, seen in their desire for adventure and challenge. For these women, mission work fulfilled a sense of vocation and spiritual calling.

⁴⁶ Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 53.

The Ideal Missionary Candidate

After a Brethren woman experienced the call to enter the mission field, the General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren sought to measure a potential missionary's doctrinal soundness and qualifications for missionary work. The General Mission Board wanted both men and women missionaries to have completed some higher education and biblical studies. The following questions from the General Mission Board's missionary application exhibit the emphasis on other areas as well:

What languages other than English have you studied?
Do you acquire languages easily?
What is your training in music and leading in singing?
Have you knowledge in bookkeeping?⁴⁷

These questions reveal the importance of communication—through language and musical skills—as well as a practical concern with managing the finances of the mission. In regard to the physical condition of missionary applicants, the Board inquired about the general health of the candidate and also if the applicant's "nervous system [was] sound."⁴⁸ This reflected a concern with the emotional health of missionaries and also, perhaps, anticipation of the psychological stress of living in a new country. Men and women completed identical missionary applications and this question showed a desire to appoint missionaries who were mentally healthy.

In addition, the General Mission Board showed concern for the applicant's ability to adapt in various situations. Specifically, the Board asked about the

⁴⁷ "Application for Appointment as a Missionary," (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren), these questions appeared on applications between 1911 and 1945.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

applicant's ability to "cheerfully acquiesce in the decision of a majority" and if the potential missionary would be willing to forfeit any personal habits with which the community of missionaries disagrees. In addition, the applicant was to consider if he/she could easily adapt to the "new and strange conditions of life in a foreign field."⁴⁹

A final subject of inquiry for the General Mission Board was in the area of the applicant's "domestic relations." Each applicant had to identify whether he or she was married, and comment on a follow-up question: "Is your wife in full sympathy with your missionary purpose?" If a male candidate was single, he was expected to comment on if his betrothed was "in full sympathy" with his mission work.⁵⁰ Both male and female missionary candidates completed this application and the language reflected the presumption of the denomination that primarily married men and single women sought missionary appointments. A woman married to a man who wished to serve the church overseas quickly became labeled as a "missionary wife." Married women on the mission field served an ambiguous role. While they often felt motivated to embark on mission work overseas, any desire they had to craft a missionary career for themselves was viewed as secondary to domestic duties of childrearing, caring for the home, and educating missionary children. Mission boards often sought male missionaries

⁴⁹ "Application for Appointment as a Missionary," (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren), these questions appeared on applications between 1911 and 1945.

⁵⁰ "Application for Appointment as a Missionary," (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren), these questions appeared on applications between 1911 and 1945.

and single women to fill the crucial roles in the mission enterprise, but married women were needed to maintain the domestic work of the mission compound.⁵¹

During the application process the General Board also inquired into the missionary applicant's religious life. The application asked questions such as denominational background, questioning when the applicant "united with the Church of the Brethren," and how regularly he or she attended church.⁵² From that point the questions regarding the applicant's religious life turned toward the authority of the Bible with the opening question: "What is your habit to study the Bible?" Preceding this question, the application asks if the potential missionary believes the Bible to be "the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?" Applicants Nettie Senger, Laura Shock, Myrtle Iney Pollock, Helen Angeny, Bessie Crim, and Marie Brubaker all answered "yes" to this question.⁵³ After establishing their beliefs on scripture, the applicant answered if she or he sincerely believed in the doctrines of the Church of the Brethren.

The emphasis on doctrinal unity and the influence of Fundamentalism can be seen in several other questions on the General Mission Board's application for potential missionaries. Each applicant had to complete a doctrinal statement. At the beginning of the application, the Board provided the following statement of explanation:

In this day of cults and isms it is essential that candidates for missionary service, in addition to being of established Christian

⁵¹ Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, 91.

⁵² "Application for Appointment as a Missionary," (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren), these questions appeared on applications between 1911 and 1945.

⁵³ "Application for Appointment as a Missionary," (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren), 1911, 1916, 1917, 1939, 1936, 1923, respectively.

character, shall satisfy the General Mission Board as to their soundness in the faith on all fundamental truths.⁵⁴

In order to prove themselves doctrinally sound, applicants had to write their views, supported by scriptural references, on the following subjects: the Holy Scriptures (their inspiration and their authority), the “official capacity” of each part of the Trinity, the virgin birth of Jesus, and Man (his fall, state by nature, and “need of regeneration”).⁵⁵ Next, the General Mission Board questioned the applicant’s beliefs on salvation, inquiring specifically about the applicant’s views on atonement and its impact on redemption and salvation and justification by faith. Finally, the General Mission Board inquired about the status of non-Christian souls by asking the applicant to comment on the “resurrection of the body,” the future status of “the saved” and of the “unsaved.” The applicant was also asked to comment on the nature of future rewards or punishment, for Christians and “that of the heathen.”⁵⁶ Here applicants needed to make clear spiritual delineations between themselves and those they will seek to convert.

In 1911, when completing her doctrinal statement, Nettie Senger included a lengthy statement on the future punishment of non-Christians saying that “wrath and indignation comes to the disobedient.” She continued by explaining that God may decide to show mercy to those who had never been acquainted with Christianity, but that there was no scriptural evidence to support this.⁵⁷ Most applicants, though, answered these questions much more succinctly than Senger.

⁵⁴ “Doctrinal Statement of Missionary Applicant,” (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren), statement on applications between 1911 and 1945.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ “Doctrinal Statement of Missionary Applicant,” (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren), statement on applications between 1911 and 1945.

⁵⁷ “Doctrinal Statement of Missionary Applicant: Nettie Senger, 1911” (Elgin, IL: General Missionary and Tract Committee), 4.

In her application, Laura Shock stated that “the punishment of the unrighteous shall be eternal torment. The heathen shall be judged according to the light they have.”⁵⁸ Myrtle Iney Pollock in 1917 evaluated the state of non-Christians as “eternal punishment in hell” she included an additional stipulation saying that “the heathen shall be judged as is his *opportunity* in accepting the manifestations of God.”⁵⁹ Beyond these basic statements, Myrtle Pollock and Laura Shock did not elaborate on the nature of future punishments for non-Christians.

The faith journey of interested applicants concerned the General Mission Board and several questions on the application reveal the significance of the state of one’s religious convictions. Interestingly, the earlier applications before 1910 contain a question asking the applicant to recount his or her conversion experience. This question disappeared from the General Mission Board applications printed after 1911. The General Mission Board still asked applicants to answer the question: “When and where did you unite with the Church of the Brethren?”⁶⁰ However, the details of applicant’s conversion experience were apparently less important.

While these Brethren women missionaries were willing to take their faith into new areas and shape it accordingly, Brethren missionaries were conservative in numerous theological areas. In her application to become a missionary, Minerva Metzger provided a brief statement on “the fundamental truths of

⁵⁸ “Doctrinal Statement of Missionary Applicant: Laura Shock, 1916” (Elgin, IL: General Missionary and Tract Committee), 4.

⁵⁹ “Doctrinal Statement of Missionary Applicant: Myrtle Iney Pollock, 1917” (Elgin, IL: General Missionary and Tract Committee), 4.

⁶⁰ “Application for Appointment as a Missionary” (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren), question appears on applications after 1911.

Christianity,” saying that Bible was the “word of God left to us as a guide to heaven.”⁶¹ The words “infallible” or “inspired” do not appear once on her application.⁶² In her application to the mission field, Nettie Senger confirmed the inspiration of the Bible, saying that the book was written by different authors, but all were inspired by the Holy Spirit. According to Senger, each book of the Bible “harmonize[d] in every respect” and the “prophecies were fulfilled.” These characteristics were proof of the inspiration of the scriptures. She believed that the authority of the Bible did not change throughout history, but instead the Bible resisted “all the fires and criticism of theologians and remains the same book. . . whose author is God.”⁶³

Early Activities and Objectives of the Shanxi Mission

Brethren missionaries went to a China that was in transition. On October 9, 1911, a bomb exploded in Hankou, igniting the collapse of the Qing dynasty. The explosion triggered an outpouring from young radicals and revolutionaries who were discontented with several issues in Chinese society—the encroachment of foreign powers into China, corruption within the Chinese military and political regime, and economic hardship. Anti-Qing revolts erupted across the country, including in Shanxi province where revolutionaries killed the Manchu governor and his family in Taiyuan.⁶⁴ On January 1, 1912, Sun Yat-sen became the

⁶¹ “Questions to Candidates for Missionary Appointment: Minerva Metzger, 1910” (Elgin, IL: General Missionary and Tract Committee).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ “Doctrinal Statement of Missionary Applicant: Nettie Senger, 1911,” 1.

⁶⁴ Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 261.

provisional president of the new Chinese republic. However, the Manchu emperor, Puyi, still retained his position and China temporarily had both a republican president and an emperor. This situation did not last long and later in January 1912 forty-four commanders of the Beiyang army called for the formation of a republic of China. The Qing court agreed to the abdication of emperor Puyi on February 12, 1912, with the understanding that he could remain in the Forbidden City of Peking and would receive a yearly stipend of \$4 million.⁶⁵ But the new republican government lacked much central authority and inherited a country that was experiencing violence and natural disasters. This was the climate in which the Church of the Brethren sought to strengthen its mission in Shanxi.

The primary purpose of the Shanxi mission was to introduce Christianity to the province and bring new Chinese members into the denomination. Secondly, the Shanxi mission sought to create “self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches,” reflected an early interest in fostering Chinese independence from western missionaries.⁶⁶ Interestingly, the Chinese Communist government would use this same language in the early 1950s to promote the independence of Chinese Christians from western missionaries.⁶⁷

Initially, the missionaries in Shanxi divided their work into four categories: evangelistic, educational, medical, and woman’s work. Evangelistic work included chapel services, Bible study and inquirers’ classes, street

⁶⁵ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 263.

⁶⁶ “General Rules of the Church of the Brethren Mission in China,” (Hankow: Arthington Press, Central China Religious Tract Society, 1915), 1.

⁶⁷ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 508.

preaching, and itinerating. The mission's educational endeavors included maintaining primary schools and a middle school, and cooperating with other denominational mission groups to promote higher education. The Shanxi mission wanted foremost to train its students in Biblical studies, so that "all who desire may receive Bible training"—regardless of age, sex, or social status.⁶⁸ For its medical mission the Church of the Brethren in 1915 sought to establish one hospital, with a nurses training school attached, in each main mission station. These hospitals and nursing schools would still be linked to evangelism, as one "native evangelist" was to be employed at each hospital. The distribution of tracts would also occur at these sites. Finally, "woman's work" called for house visitations and Bible classes for women. The Brethren missionaries in 1915 did not detail initiatives other than these two activities, but did note that special attention should be paid to teach Chinese women workers to read.

Several Chinese social customs alarmed Brethren missionaries. A critical issue for the early Brethren missionaries of Shanxi was opium. After the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911-1912, the new republican government sought to build on several reforms previously enacted under the old regime, including the suppression of opium usage. Yuan Skikai, military official under the Qing Dynasty and president of the new Chinese republic, sought to curb opium smoking and production by evaluating all county magistrates in terms of their success in opium suppression.⁶⁹ This measure was widely effective and favored

⁶⁸ "General Rules of the Church of the Brethren Mission in China", 7.

⁶⁹ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 280-281.

the opium refuge work of the Church of the Brethren.⁷⁰ The mission opened an opium refuge at Ping Ting and reported thirty-six patients in 1913 who were able to break their opium addictions. Missionaries combined evangelism with their opium refuge work, believing that those patients who were open to Bible study and attended daily religious services were less likely to “fall” back into the habit of using opium. In other words, “prayers have saved those who would pray.”⁷¹ The missionaries engaged in opium refuge work saw Chinese people from a variety of social groups including “the coolies, the teachers, the wealthy, the poor, the unlearned, and even...the official class.”⁷² Praying with patients daily in the mornings and evenings, Brethren missionaries hoped to heal both physically and spiritually those addicted to the drug.

In addition, footbinding, child marriage, and female infanticide troubled Brethren women missionaries. Reports from the mission field are unclear as to the frequency of these practices in Shanxi, but in their writings published by the denomination women missionaries often included stories of Chinese girls marrying at a young age, the oppressiveness of footbinding, and the devaluation of female babies in comparison to male babies. Critiques of footbinding were the most prominent in Western missionaries’ assessments of Chinese culture and women. By the late nineteenth century, Westerners viewed footbinding several different ways including as a painful fashion, as a perverse means to seclude women, as child abuse, and as a deeply entrenched custom that would only end

⁷⁰ “Annual Report: China,” *The Missionary Visitor* (January 1913): 13.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

with a vast transformation of Chinese society.⁷³ Missionaries often focused on the abusive and grotesque nature of the practice. Adele Field wrote in *Pagoda Shadows*, the first missionary account of footbinding written by a woman, of the pain which Chinese girls experienced when having their feet bound. “The sensation,” she wrote “is said to be like that of having the joints punctured with needles.”⁷⁴ During the early twentieth century many missionaries and Chinese reformers began to formulate their anti-footbinding arguments in nationalist terms. Eliminating footbinding would strengthen Chinese women and China as a nation (see chapter three for more discursion on footbinding, child marriage, and female infanticide).⁷⁵

Brethren missionaries could not undertake these ambitious evangelical and relief programs without a period of training. Vital to being an effective missionary was the ability speak Mandarin and the Shanxi mission placed heavy emphasis on language training. Nettie Senger’s statement that “the language [is] hard” was appropriate and in order to reach Chinese people on a personal, intimate level, the new missionaries would need to master communicating in the foreign language. The Committee on Language Study at the Shanxi mission created a three-to four-year language training program for its incoming missionaries. Each new missionary received a mentor who would supervise his or her language instruction, meet with him or her every week, and administer annual

⁷³ Patricia Ebrey, “Gender and Sinology: Shifting Western Interpretations of Footbinding, 1300-1890,” *Late Imperial China*, vol. 20, no. 2 (December 1999): 11-25.

⁷⁴ Adele Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows: Studies from Life in China* (London: T. Ogilvie Smith, 1887), 27-29 quoted in Patricia Ebrey, “Gender and Sinology: Shifting Western Interpretations of Footbinding, 1300-1890,” 23.

⁷⁵ Ebrey, “Gender and Sinology,” 11-25; see also Hong Fan, *Footbinding, Feminism, and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China* (London: F. Cass, 1997).

examinations. The founders of the Shanxi mission took language study seriously, assigning new missionaries no work outside of language study during their first year in China. Enrollment in the Peking Language School was heavily encouraged. If studying in Peking was not an option, the Shanxi mission provided an outline of study for the new missionary. During this first year of study, the missionary was to memorize in Chinese the Lord's Prayer and John 1:1-18. In addition, during this first year of study, missionaries were to learn the provinces of China and read works on Chinese history and missionary methods. During the missionary's second year of service, three hours per day could be spent on work other than language study and during the third year, half of each day could be devoted to other work. This structure of the first years of missionary services shows that language and communication were highly valued.⁷⁶

Famine and political turmoil marked the early years of the Church of the Brethren mission in Shanxi. The yearly report for 1912 in *The Missionary Visitor* describes the work of the year as "very trying." At the beginning of the year, all of the Brethren missionaries except Frank Crumpacker had left Shanxi for coastal cities, due to unnamed harsh conditions. Later, Frank Crumpacker and George Hilton traveled to Liao to inquire about renting property to open a new mission station there. However, the two soon learned of burning and looting in several cities, including Peking and Tientsin, so Crumpacker returned to Ping Ting and Hilton to Tientsin. While this was occurring, the majority of missionaries remained on the coast and engaged in language study.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ "General Rules of the Church of the Brethren Mission in China," 12-15.

⁷⁷ "Annual Report: China," 10.

In the spring of 1912 famines and floods prompted the Famine Relief Committee of Central China to request workers for their relief stations and the Brethren responded by sending Hilton to work in An Hui Province. The blazing summer heat and “the conditions of the government” prevented the Brethren missionaries from returning to Shanxi, but when Hilton returned from his relief work, the group decided to travel to Ping Ting, Shanxi Province. At the close of the summer, the missionaries decided to organize two churches, one at Ping Ting and a new one at Liao. Winnie Cripe, Anne Hutchison, J. Homer and Minnie Bright, and George and Blanche Hilton would go to Liao to inaugurate the new mission station. Missionary Emma Horning was granted a leave of absence due to health concerns during this time.⁷⁸ The physical difficulties continued throughout the year at the two mission stations in Shanxi when on Christmas day the missionaries at Liao received notice that missionary Esther Heckman—who had remained with her husband, Benjamin Heckman, and the other missionaries at Ping Ting—had contracted smallpox and was extremely ill. While within a few weeks Esther began to heal, her husband, Benjamin, soon contracted the disease and his health declined. Despite sending George Hilton, Hutchison, and Cripe to Liao Chou to assist the sick couple, Benjamin died on January 12, 1913.⁷⁹

The planned expansion of the Ping Ting and Liao Chou stations was ambitious. By 1918 the Brethren missionaries of Shanxi had developed a four-year schedule for new mission buildings. In 1918 missionaries would complete a new house for an evangelist in Ping Ting and a house for a physician in Liao

⁷⁸ Anna Crumpacker, chair; J. Homer Bright, Secretary, “Minutes of the Shanxi Mission Committee,” (January 14, 1912), Shanxi Mission File, BHLA.

⁷⁹ Crumpacker and Bright, “Minutes of the Shanxi Mission Committee,” 12.

Chou, finish the hospital in Liao Chou, and complete two hospital wards in Ping Ting. In the following year buildings projects in Liao would include a girls school, a residence for “single ladies,” and a house for an evangelist. Finally, in 1919 and 1920 the mission completed the hospital at Ping Ting, a residence for a physician at Ping Ting, a residence for an “educational man” at Ping Ting, a new church building at Liao, an additional residence for an “educational man” at Liao, and buildings for “women’s work” at Liao Chou.⁸⁰

As Brethren women moved forward with their educational, evangelistic, and medical efforts they encountered conditions among the Chinese that contrasted with their notions of civilization. Missionaries reacted to the lifestyle and culture of Chinese people in a number of ways. Notions of civilization typically colored the reaction of Brethren women missionaries to their potential Chinese converts. Missionary Winnie Cripe described a scene in a Chinese village saying that “women and children pour out of places one could scarcely describe with the word ‘home,’ so sacred to us; still we don’t feel we have found much civilization, though there are crowds of people.”⁸¹ From the perspective of Brethren women, this lack of civilization meant a prevalence of ignorance.

Cripe expressed curiosity as she described Chinese children, saying “there is something peculiarly interesting about these Chinese children.”⁸² Cripe continued to describe the poor level of cleanliness among Chinese children and explained “still there is something that seems to penetrate all the filth—a certain

⁸⁰ “Shanxi Mission Committee Minutes: Schedule for Buildings,” Shanxi Mission File, BHLA, 1 918, 131.

⁸¹ Winnie Cripe, “Our Little Neighbors,” *The Missionary Visitor* (February 1913): 56.

⁸² Cripe, “Our Little Neighbors,” 56.

look of wistfulness and want, a plea for help, mingled with a smile of satisfaction and appreciation for the little they do have in this world.”⁸³ Here Cripe presented filth and dirtiness as evidence of a faulted Chinese civilization that could change through accepting Christianity. Cripe also described this situation as provoking a certain emotional response, commenting that the situation of China’s children “seems to go straight to one’s heart.”⁸⁴ Cripe described the emotional joy she experienced when she ministered to Chinese children. Missionaries also coupled their emotional connection to Chinese children with an overwhelming sense of being a minority in a new land. While Cripe expressed her belief that Christianity ought to be spread to every nation and appeared confident in her work, she also felt as if she was “a *few* among so many.”⁸⁵ Here she mixed doubt and being different with a sense of purpose. For Cripe, a clear cultural and racial line divided her and other western missionaries from Chinese people.

Adaptive Evangelism

To achieve their evangelistic goals, Brethren women employed a variety of general strategies, revealing their adeptness at shaping religion to match the needs of the mission field. Making Christianity portable and easily understood was crucial to attracting new converts. While working at the Ping Ting mission station in Shanxi, Emma Horning described her use of story-telling as a tool for evangelism. Horning advocated the use of story-telling, saying that it was the “*natural* way of teaching” and that most children acquired folk-lore, history, and

⁸³ Cripe, “Our Little Neighbors,” 56.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 57.

religion through stories. Throughout history, humans have imparted their wisdom through stories. Most convincingly, Horning explained that Jesus used story-telling as a tool for evangelism. Story-telling met the practical needs of the China mission field. By telling Biblical stories, missionaries could make the faith easily understood and transmittable. While increasing literacy among Chinese converts was a central aim, most Chinese peasants could not read and thus missionaries needed to transmit the gospel orally. Horning even discussed specific ways to adapt Biblical story-telling to the context of the China mission field. Horning suggested that, whether in the streets, villages, or churches, missionaries ought to “use the lantern to illustrate” the stories of the Bible.⁸⁶ In addition, Horning recommended a device called the “postcard projector” because of its convenience, cheap cost, and large number of usable illustrations. Other effective story-telling tools included “Sunday School chart pictures, blackboard illustrations, and objects, to illustrate great truths.”⁸⁷ Brethren missionaries used innovative, adaptive tools to increase their reach in China, revealing their desire for progress and growth in China.

An attitude of adaptation could also be seen in missionaries’ approach to ancestor worship. Ancestor worship in Chinese homes concerned Brethren women missionaries and they employed Christianity to alter this practice. Missionaries emphasized that Christian heritage, which linked each person to Adam and Eve, and thus God, ought to be honored more than familial ancestors.

⁸⁶ Emma Horning, “Story-Telling as a Means of Evangelization” from “Woman’s Work in the Far East,” (Ping Ting, Shanxi, China: September 1919), 4. It is unclear what this “lantern” is that Horning refers to. It may have been some sort of slide projector.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 4.

They argued that Christian heritage stretched back further in time and ultimately linked an individual to the divine, while Chinese ancestry did not. In an instructional pamphlet, *What Should be the Attitude of Christians Toward their Children?* the author coached Chinese parents in methods of living a Christian lifestyle, yet also acknowledging their ancestors. The author presents the case of the “Ch’en family” who put away their ancestral tablets in a box and agreed not to regularly worship them.⁸⁸ Instead, the family had several special days of remembrance for ancestors that involved reading Christian scriptures and singing hymns. Here we again see the willingness of Brethren women to stretch and expand their religion to address specific Chinese cultural concerns.⁸⁹



Figure 1.2. Baptism With Portable Baptistery Made of Wood and Canvas (1926). O.C. Sollenberger performing the ceremony. Brethren Historical Library and Archives.

⁸⁸ Irma Highbaugh, “What Should be the Attitude of Christians Toward their Children?” (Shanghai, China: Christian Literature Society, n.d.), 19. While this work was not written by a Brethren women missionary, it was found in Church of the Brethren mission files.

⁸⁹ Highbaugh, “What Should be the Attitude of Christians Toward their Children?”; No mention appears in Brethren writings of the historic eighteenth century controversy between Jesuit missionaries in China and the Vatican regarding ancestor worship. For more information on the Chinese rites controversy see Paul Rule, “The Chinese Rites Controversy: A Long Lasting Controversy in Sino-Western Cultural History,” *Pacific Rim Report* 32 (February 2004) <http://www.pacificrim.usfca.edu/research/pacrimreport/pacrimreport32.html>.

The business-like nature of the Church of the Brethren mission in Shanxi was an additional example of progressivism among Brethren women missionaries. The Shanxi mission operated as a business, with missionaries and the General Mission Board keeping a close watch on the mission's budget and numbers of converts. Descriptions of the Church's mission work were peppered with statistics and figures—of church members, numbers of congregations, and financial status. A Ping Ting women's report from 1923 illustrated this interest in the numerical data of the mission field. The report said that during one week, 38 Christian women and girls divided into 10 groups, visiting 436 homes, and teaching 7,000 people.⁹⁰ In 1926, Missionary I. E. Oberholtzer reported that the Liao station of the Shanxi mission received 37 converts, conducted three Christian funerals and seven Christian marriage ceremonies, and had four communion services. In addition, according to Oberholtzer, missionaries took the "Gospel Tent" out for 20 weeks, reaching eight villages and 20,000 people.⁹¹ Oberholtzer and the author of the 1923 women's report reveal the numbers-orientated nature of Brethren mission in China. Increasing or decreasing numbers of converts of services held was a way that Brethren missionaries measured the success or failure of their endeavor.

Another example of the business-like nature of the Church of the Brethren mission in China can be seen in their establishment of a pay-scale for Chinese Christian workers in 1915. The various categories of Christian workers included teachers and "school-teachers," colporteurs, opium refuge workers, and "Bible

⁹⁰ "Ping Ting Woman's Work—1923," Shanxi Mission File, BHLA.

⁹¹ I. E. Oberholtzer, "Liao Men's Evangelistic Report for 1926," Shanxi Mission File, BHLA.

women.”⁹² Workers with no special training received \$6.50 per month in their first year. This amount increased with each year of service and with each year of training in a mission school, reaching \$13.00 per month for individuals with twelve years of attendance in a mission school and “Bible training.”⁹³ In addition, each worker received \$1.00 per month for children less than twelve years of age and \$1.50 for children between thirteen and eighteen years of age. This stipulation only applied if the entire family was “under our own Christian influence” and ended when a child married.⁹⁴

The business-like nature of the missionaries in China contrasted with the historical aversion to paying church workers in the Church of the Brethren. The Brethren of the nineteenth century were wary of the professional, paid ministry and the Brethren debated the issue during the early twentieth century. The professionalization that occurred within numerous areas of work during the Progressive Era had also begun to shape the way that churches selected, supported, and trained ministers. Increasingly, congregations voted to select their ministers, offered them salaries, and expected them to have graduated from a seminary. However, many conservative Brethren still favored the traditional means of selecting ministers: the Holy Spirit would call a member of the body of believers to serve as a minister and that person would not receive a salary. By 1925, though, fifty-eight percent of Church of the Brethren congregations had either full-time or part-time paid professional clergy.⁹⁵

⁹² “General Rules of the Church of the Brethren Mission in China,” 10.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Longenecker, *The Brethren During the Age of War*, 19, 98.

Interestingly, male Chinese workers who did not have a family would receive fifteen percent less in wages and Bible women would receive twenty-five percent less. This discrepancy in pay for male Chinese Christians and Chinese Bible women reflects a gendered income-scale. Several factors may have influenced this decision to deduct more from a woman's wages than a man's if she did not have a family. First, the work of Bible women may have been deemed of less importance than that of male Chinese workers. Additionally, historian Jane Hunter's argument that missionaries often equated self-denial and self-sacrifice with femininity may apply in this situation. Some women missionaries turned down wages, in the name of self-sacrifice, and they may have also extended that standard to Chinese women.⁹⁶ Acceptance of this income scale reveals a conservative tendency of Brethren missionaries to preserve a gendered hierarchy of work.

The ecumenical outlook of Brethren missionaries was an additional example of their progressivism. In establishing their mission in Shanxi, the Church of the Brethren sought to contribute their missionaries and resources to further the spread of Christianity in China. The "evil forces in the land" also necessitated cooperation with other denominational mission bodies in order to foster "salvation and civilization."⁹⁷ In a January 1912 Committee meeting, the Brethren sought to answer the question, "What shall be our attitude toward those coming to us from other missions and ask[ing] for teaching?"⁹⁸ The committee

⁹⁶ Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, 53.

⁹⁷ F.C. Crumpacker and J. Homer Bright, "Reports of Committees: January 30, 1912," Shanxi Mission File, BHLA, 9.

⁹⁸ Crumpacker and Bright, "Reports of Committees: January 30, 1912," 9.

answered that they sought to maintain “friendly relations with those of other societies” and “avoid all possible criticism from other Missionary Societies.”⁹⁹ Based on these two principles the committee suggested that if any person from another mission group voluntarily approached the Brethren seeking Biblical instruction, missionaries would provide teaching “in a special way endeavoring to deepen his spiritual life.”¹⁰⁰ If the situation arose where a person from another mission body inquired about a distinctive Brethren practice, the committee recommended that Brethren explain the practice in question by using Biblical scripture and also “using precaution not to cause him to become estranged with [*sic*] his own Society or church.”¹⁰¹ This sensitivity to other Christian mission groups seemed to stem partially from a desire to retain a good working relation with these groups on the mission field. Several other mission groups conducted missions in Shanxi, including the independent China Inland Mission. Competition for converts among various mission groups may have existed in Shanxi, but the evidence suggests that the Church of the Brethren worked closely with other denominations and societies.

The Church of the Brethren on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, in Elgin, Illinois, also exhibited ambiguity when confronting specific Chinese cultural practices but inevitably responded in a progressive manner. In an April 1926 General Mission Board meeting, the body addressed several “doctrinal questions in China,” including closed communion, polygamy and church

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

membership, and feetwashing.¹⁰² In regard to closed communion—only sharing the bread and the cup with other baptized members of the church—the General Mission Board advised “such action in each case as would best foster Christian growth of the individuals and the Church.”¹⁰³ This decision would seem to impart a certain amount of discretion to the missionaries in Shanxi to adapt doctrine and practice to meet the needs of new Chinese converts. When addressing plural marriage, the Board cited Biblical scripture, claiming that on one hand “monogamy is right in the nature of things as God created man...and that polygamy is wrong,” but that also “mercy was shown in the matter of plural marriages” in the Old and New Testaments.¹⁰⁴ Its final scriptural reference was to Titus 1:6 and I Timothy 3:2, interpreted to mean that the apostolic church restricted church leadership to men who had only one wife. With these Biblical guidelines, the Board recommended that the missionaries in Shanxi act in a manner resembling the apostolic church, allowing “penitent men” with more than one wife to be church members, without requiring them to divorce their wives. The Board argued that requiring men to divorce their wives “might be gross injustice to both the wives divorced and to their children.” Interestingly, the Board added a note at the end of this decision stating that their recommendations on polygamy “might be misunderstood by the home church to the detriment of

¹⁰² “Minutes of the General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren,” (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren, April, 1926), 192.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

our mission cause,” suggesting that a decision on the subject by Annual Conference “might be wise.”¹⁰⁵

Finally, feetwashing in communion services came under debate. Some women converts had bound feet, which would have made participating in the ordinance of feetwashing awkward and potentially painful. The Board commented that it could not find any scriptural grounds that would support removing feetwashing from communion or love feast services. However, the Board suggested that the Shanxi missionaries take three actions. First, teach the “spiritual significance and practical value” of feetwashing.¹⁰⁶ Second, hold love feast services in separate apartments to allow for additional privacy.¹⁰⁷ Third, refuse to bar church members from love feast services if they did not wish to participate in feetwashing. This decision shows the General Mission Board reluctance to completely eliminate the distinctive Brethren practice of feetwashing from the mission field, but also a willingness to alter the carrying out of the practice.

Conclusion

Brethren women who were a part of the early mission at Shanxi carried with them to China deep religious and cultural assumptions that created a clear and stark line of delineation between themselves and their Chinese converts. Yet

¹⁰⁵ “Minutes of the General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren,” 192

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Traditionally men and women went to separate rooms to wash each other’s feet during feetwashing services. In their suggestion to hold love feast services in separate apartments, the Board may have meant that women with bound feet could participate in the service with other women in a different location. See Carl Bowman, *Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a “Peculiar People”* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 372.

their tools of evangelism and reactions to China's social, economic, and political situation prompted them to work in new progressive ways, shaping their faith so that it would be more applicable to the Chinese and easier to communicate. In turn, the denomination, while still being careful to adhere to scriptural authority, would support these progressive actions, encouraging the Shanxi missionaries to continue to keep the faith flexible and accommodating. As we will see, Brethren women would next enter the homes of Chinese women and seek to bring them into the church. As they stepped into this cross-cultural domestic world, they again stretched their faith in new directions, all with the intention of bringing new converts to Christianity.

CHAPTER 3

“EVERY HOME . . . A CHRISTIAN HOME:” WOMEN’S WORK ON THE MISSION FIELD¹

In fall 1916, Anna Hutchison visited a western neighborhood of Liao Chou in Shanxi Province, China. Her mission was to enter some of the homes of women in this area where Brethren missionaries had not yet had much presence. Hutchison proceeded with trepidation because, despite having been in China for five years, she felt herself to be in “a strange country, among strange people, with even stranger customs.”¹ But the desire to reach Chinese women, many of whom did not leave their homes often, compelled Hutchison to continue walking down the main street of the neighborhood until she encountered six women sitting around the entrance to a home. While Hutchison had never practiced street preaching, she thought to herself: “This is our opportunity.”² Cautiously, Hutchison and an unnamed Bible Woman accompanying her began to converse with the Chinese women, talking about sewing and families and then they began to convey their Christian message of “the true God who gives us rain, food and all that we have.”³ After Hutchison and the Bible Woman had spoken for awhile and had sung several hymns, a young girl emerged from the group of Chinese women. This girl recognized the Bible Woman and she invited Hutchison and the Bible

¹ Anna M. Hutchison, “An Afternoon in the Homes,” *The Missionary Visitor* (September 1916): 290.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

Woman back to her mother's home. Hutchison had achieved her mission: entering the domestic world of Chinese women.

While this encounter represented an opportunity for Hutchison to make connections with Chinese women, enter their homes, and spread Christianity, this instance also signified a larger opportunity. As historian Dana Robert has argued, American women missionaries of the early twentieth century “promoted a holistic definition of mission” that ideologically combined the concepts of civilization and evangelization, of body and soul, and of social context and personal religion.⁴ Women comprised a majority of missionaries in China and their attraction to a “holistic definition of mission” meant that this ideology was very dominant on the mission field. Brethren women missionaries also conducted their mission work using a “holistic definition of mission,” combining evangelism with an attention to social change seen as in the Social Gospel movement. However, intervening political and social events of the 1920s and 1930s on the mission field made evangelism increasingly difficult and prompted Brethren women missionaries to focus more on meeting the immediate needs of Chinese women.

The “New Woman” in American Society

In order to set the context for this shift in theory among Brethren women missionaries, it is necessary to examine the changing status and place of women in American society during the early twentieth century. During the first decades of the twentieth century as the relationship between religion and society changed,

⁴ Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 188.

women's place in society also underwent a shift. Historian Barbara Welter has shown that during the mid-nineteenth century, many Americans perceived women as a source of stability in a rapidly changing, industrializing world. In "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" Welter argues that American women were evaluated in terms of their ability to uphold the virtues of "True Womanhood"—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.⁵ These womanly virtues were a constant in a period of change. In *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg continues this theme of women in a rapidly changing society by evaluating reactions to the rise of the "New Woman" of the late nineteenth century. In her work, Smith-Rosenberg argues that the New Woman represented "a revolutionary demographic and political phenomenon."⁶ These New Women countered the virtues of Welter's "True Womanhood;" by being single, economically independent, educated, and visible in society. This shift in the place of women in American society prompted a debate over the nature of women and the legitimacy of the New Woman. Smith-Rosenberg explains that proponents of the American "bourgeois order" critiqued the New Woman as "unnatural" and as a product of a declining society.⁷ However, the New Women argued for their "social and sexual legitimacy," renouncing Victorian notions of gender roles and womanhood.⁸ Focusing on the 1920s, Dorothy Brown combines the New Woman and the image of the flapper. Brown

⁵ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 153.

⁶ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 245.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

explains that the images of the New Woman and the flapper—ambitious, active, and assertive—continued to raise questions regarding the nature of women. Were women intellectually equal to men or did they have unique characteristics that set them apart? Many feminists of the early twentieth century emphasized their uniqueness, claiming that women should use their special domestic sensibilities and skills to reform society. Others, however, believed in the equality of men and women and encouraged women to attain professional positions that men had traditionally held.⁹

Missionary women were caught between Victorian notions of “True womanhood” and the early twentieth century “New Woman.” Jane Hunter, in *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China*, argues that domesticity played a formative role in the mindset and tactics of women missionaries. Hunter discusses the ambiguous nature of the home for women and the impact of these beliefs on the mission field. While Americans viewed the home as a place of retreat from a hostile world of urbanization, labor unrest, and diversity, it was also the sphere from which women’s reform and outreach stemmed. Women missionaries then existed between “domestic outreach” and “domestic retreat,” between an expansive and a protective outlook.¹⁰ According to Hunter, this dichotomy forced women missionaries in turn-of-the-century China into a constant internal mediation for women as they

⁹ Dorothy M. Brown, *Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 29-33.

¹⁰ Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), xiv.

attempted to fulfill their public evangelistic roles and their private domestic roles.¹¹

One resolution of this internal conflict was the employment of an “intimate evangelism” between American missionary women and prospective Chinese female converts. Chinese women and American women missionaries, especially single missionaries, were able to unite across race lines and form an intimate community in each other’s homes. Single women missionaries, cut off from a family community, were more likely to cross racial lines and form intimate bonds with Chinese women than were married women. Hunter explains that the intimate relationships were part of missionary strategy that encouraged missionary women to live more fully in the Chinese community.¹²

Women’s Work on the Mission Field

For Brethren women missionaries, bringing the gospel directly to Chinese women, often in their homes, was a method of evangelism. The Brethren adopted a results-oriented, efficiency-centered approach to church growth and conversion of the Chinese of Shanxi. Many saw attracting Chinese women to Christianity as

¹¹ Several other works address this tension between training non-Christian women in domesticity and encouraging them to pursue more public roles including: Lydia Gerber, “Gender in Transformation: Women Missionaries and their Female Students in Early 20th Century Shandong,” Paper given at Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, University of San Francisco, April 5, 2006; Marjorie King, “Exporting Femininity, Not Feminism: Nineteenth-Century U.S. Missionary Women’s Efforts to Emancipate,” *Women’s Work for Women: Missionaries and Social Change in Asia*. Ed. Leslie Flemming. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 117-136; Kwok Pui-Lan, “Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. Ed. Daniel Bays. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 194-208; Rita Smith Kipp, “Emancipating Each Other: Dutch Colonial Missionaries Encounter with Karo Women in Sumatra, 1900-1942” in Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 211-35.

¹² Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, 191.

a practical step in the salvation of the entire nation. Women acted as a gate or conduit to the male population of the nation. The conversion of a woman in a household could translate to the conversion of the husband and the entire family. From the missionary's perspective, Chinese women could essentially save humanity through first educating themselves, then sharing their learnings with their husbands, and finally by sending their children to mission schools. Many American missionaries believed that this process would bring entire Chinese families to conversion and accelerate the spread of Christianity in the country.¹³

As they sowed the seeds of the gospel, Brethren women missionaries viewed Chinese women as particularly receptive to their Christian message. In the short play "How a Mission Started in China," Brethren missionary Anna Crumpacker described an encounter between Chinese farmers and a missionary involving a failed corn crop. As Crumpacker creates the story, the Chinese farmers believed that a "black devil" had caused their corn crop to fail and they prayed to a rain god to take away the curse on their corn.¹⁴ But a Christian missionary arrived and discounted the villagers' beliefs, telling them that a disease called "smut" had caused their crop to fail and presented them with a method of sorting their infected seeds. In Crumpacker's tale, all of the Chinese farmers resisted the wisdom and truth of the missionary, except for the Widow Chang who, out of concern to feed her family, tried the missionary's method.¹⁵ Here we see a woman, out of practical need, being more receptive to the

¹³ Emma Horning, et al., "Women's Work Policy," (1917), Women's Work File in the Shanxi Mission File, BLHA, 1.

¹⁴ Anna Crumpacker, "How a Mission Started in China," (n.d.), Shanxi Mission File, BLHA, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid, 2.

missionary's message than male villagers. Crumpacker's play represented the view that women could act as a conduit for Christianity into Chinese families and society. Chinese women served in this role often due to their need to feed their families.

The conditions of Chinese women also alarmed American women missionaries. The Shanxi mission committee for women's work outlined its primary approach, saying that "these [Chinese] women call forth our deepest sympathy and interest because they are in the depths of ignorance, superstition, and suffering."¹⁶ Brethren missionaries desired to work directly with Chinese women because "they are easily led if they receive wise and sympathetic teaching."¹⁷ In the eyes of Brethren women, Chinese women could be easily molded into Christians and they had needs that Christianity could fulfill: light, life, joy, hope, consolation, and love.¹⁸

According to this view, Christianity offered Chinese women enlightenment, freedom, and choices. Common among the woman's work reports were descriptions of the isolation and despair missionaries associated with Chinese womanhood. The young age at which Chinese women married was also an issue of concern for Brethren women. In reaction to observing a Chinese wedding, missionary Minnie Bright reflected on the situation of the young bride: "How my heart ached for her, and I longed just to mother her a few years more!"

¹⁶ Emma Horning, et al., "Woman's Work Policy," 1917, Women's Work File in the, Shanxi Mission File, BLHA, 1.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Emma Horning and B. Mary Royer, "The Women of China: Their Need" in *Twice Born Women: A Sketch of the Evangelistic Work of the Church of the Brethren as Conducted Among Women in India and China* (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board, n.d.).

The bride's youthful appearance and her sad demeanor startled Bright.¹⁹ In Anna Hutchison's play, "Chinese Dialogue for Children," the characters discussed the value of Chinese girls. In this play a Chinese girl, Wha Er, commented to an American girl she had just met that "everybody thinks little boys are nice, but little girls don't count!"²⁰ To this the American girl, Esther, replied saying "Yes, little girls do count, too. My mama says little girls are just as nice as boys."²¹

Their dialogue continued to the subject of footbinding:

Esther—What funny little feet you have!

Wha Er—Oh, our feet are bound. When we are big enough to play and have a good time our mamas bind our toes tight under our feet with long strips of cloth, which are tightened every week, and we can't run any more.

Esther—That would be dreadful, and you must suffer very much!

Wha Er—We suffer pain all the time and often cry, but we don't want people to know it, for we like little feet, and then they are pretty.²²

Hutchison's play illustrates the prominent role that footbinding played in American missionaries' understanding of Chinese womanhood.

Missionaries saw themselves as battling numerous forces of degradation present in Chinese society including child marriage, abusive mothers-in-law, mistreatment of girls and infanticide, opium smoking, frequent suicide, disease, starvation, and isolation of women. Missionaries thought that Christianity would

¹⁹ Minnie F. Bright, "A New Wedding in New China," *The Missionary Visitor* (September 1913): 278-279.

²⁰ Anna Hutchison, "Chinese Dialogue for Children," in *Missionary Programs* (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren, n.d.), 50.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 51.

release Chinese women from these degrading forces, uplifting women spiritually and socially.

Creating Christian Homes

An advertisement sent to the Ping Ting mission from the non-denominational Christian Literature Society for China reminded its subscribers of the “necessity for a conservative magazine that shall uphold Christian ideals for the home.”²³ These values included modesty, filial piety, and obedience, which were also traditional Chinese values. The advertisement promised to provide in its magazines articles on hygiene, “home beautification, hints on child training, cookery, stitchery, etc.”²⁴ The advertisement continued by claiming that the salvation of China will come through its women for “never yet has any nation disintegrated whose women remained clean, courageous, and self-respecting.”²⁵ Calling out and awakening Chinese women to a Christian life women could save the nation.

Transforming the homes of Chinese women was not only a tool for evangelism, but was also seen as necessary in order to improve the lives of Chinese women. From the perspective of women missionaries, Chinese women, in their roles as mothers, could aid the growth of Christianity by adopting American child-rearing techniques and Western sanitation methods in their homes. According to this view, Chinese women needed to shed certain behaviors

²³ L.M. White, Magazine Subscription Letter for the Christian Literature Society for China (1926), Shanxi Mission File, BLHA.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

and beliefs associated with traditional Chinese culture, such as ancestor worship, poor hygiene, and seclusion, in order to become Christians. At the heart of much of the message Brethren women directed to Chinese women was the teaching of “how to live the true Christian life.”²⁶ A sound understanding of Christian teachings, through reading the Bible and participating in practices such as baptism, worship, and love feast, would, with proper Christian homemaking, lead Chinese women and their families to the true “Christian life.”²⁷ The true Christian life involved a conscious conversion to Christianity and to a Western lifestyle. Thus, Brethren missionaries’ emphasis on creating Christian homes reveals their conservative cultural tendencies as well as their equation of American perceptions of motherhood with true Christianity.

A common theme ran throughout missionary writings: non-Christians did not appreciate fully or cherish life. Brethren women missionaries viewed Chinese women as being apathetic regarding the death of children and not valuing children’s lives. Mary Andrews viewed “heathenism” as an ideology that prompted a Chinese woman, when asked about her ill child to say, “We have thrown it away...Just forget it as soon as you can. There is nothing else to do.”²⁸ Brethren women missionaries believed that Christianity would, however, change the homes and hearts of Chinese women and bring them new life—spiritual and physical. According to Andrews, Brethren women missionaries would bring

²⁶ Emma Horning, “Women’s Work in Ping Ting, 1916,” Woman’s Work File in the Shanxi Mission File, BLHA.

²⁷ Emma Horning, “Woman’s Work—Ping Ting Chou, 1921” Woman’s Work File in the Shanxi Mission File, BLHA; “Policy for Women’s Work, c. 1920” Woman’s Work File in the Shanxi Mission File, BLHA.

²⁸ Mary E. Andrews, “What the Gospel Brings to Mother Hearts in China,” *The Missionary Visitor* (April 1913): 131-133.

“such hope, such comfort, such joy into the sad, sorrowing, hopeless hearts of our sisters in that faraway land.”²⁹

Missionaries responded to high infant mortality rates by promoting scientific motherhood—the notion that motherhood required expertise and training in systematic childrearing techniques. Scientific motherhood also often relied heavily on Western medicine.³⁰ In a description of an encounter with some Chinese women, Missionary Winnie Cripe illustrated scientific motherhood. She described several women gathered outside on a clear day, giving their children a “sunbath,” remarking that “in this sunbath we must consider how wondrously God uses their ignorance and indolence to help preserve many a little life that otherwise would be lost because of extreme unsanitary conditions in their homes.”³¹ Cripe did not consider that the Chinese women may also have seen the benefits of the sunbath. While criticizing the knowledge and sanitation of Chinese families, Cripe offered her version of hope for them. Furthermore, she commented that mothers often dressed boys and girls in similar, gender neutral, clothing and with the continued existence of queues, it was at times difficult to separate the sexes among children. Cripe attributed this blending of genders to a lack of civilization in China. This scenario, bothered Cripe who praised the “promise of a future queueless China.” Cripe believed that bringing civilization

²⁹ Andrews, “What the Gospel Brings to Mother Hearts in China,” 131-133.

³⁰ For more on scientific motherhood see Rima D. Apple, *Perfect Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

³¹ Winnie Cripe, “Our Little Neighbors,” *The Missionary Visitor* (February 1913): 56.

to China meant changing Chinese cultural mores to increase sanitation, health, and delineation between genders.³²

Several historical works on motherhood in imperialism offer insight into the promotion of scientific motherhood in cross-cultural contexts. In her article, “Imperialism and Motherhood,” historian Anna Davin clarifies the links between motherhood, imperialism, and national power, proposing that during the early twentieth century there were heightened concerns over ensuring the predominance of British people in the world. Several societal theories, including those of Thomas Malthus, Social Darwinists, and eugenicists, contributed to the desire to increase birth rates among the British in order to ensure national survival and strength. According to this logic, if the birth rate in Britain did not increase quickly enough to occupy the lands within their empire, other nationalities would do so. An increasing population meant national power and in this equation mothers served an important role. Mothers were essential to produce and raise new national citizens and as a consequence motherhood was elevated to a higher status. The health, quality, and number of British children depended on the childrearing skills of mothers. Women needed to be trained in childrearing, and hosts of workshops, agencies, and instruction materials surfaced in order to hone women’s skills of “mothercraft.”³³ Thus, the responsibility of ensuring the survival of an entire nation was largely placed on individual mothers.³⁴

Similarly, in “Redefining ‘Frenchness:’ Citizenship, Race Regeneration, and Imperial Motherhood in France and West Africa, 1914-40,” Alice L. Conklin

³² Cripe, “Our Little Neighbors,” 56.

³³ Anna Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood,” *History Workshop* 5 (1978): 13.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-14.

substantiates Davin’s arguments regarding the role of mothers in ensuring racial dominance, especially in imperial contexts. Conklin explains that whereas the French maintained stark delineations between the colonizer and the colonized, between citizen and subject, it was also possible to bend these distinctions. By the 1920s, there was a growing French-speaking elite of colonized Africans who would challenge French power in Africa. During this period France viewed these Africans as disloyal, and thus not worthy of citizenship. This situation sparked a debate in France regarding the racial, cultural, and gendered boundaries of French citizenship. Conklin argues that in order to create a new definition of “Frenchness” that was largely based on whiteness, relations between the sexes, especially between white women and African men, came to be highly regulated. French colonials sought to prevent miscegenation and to promote a form of imperial motherhood that had as its primary goal the re-creation of white French families overseas.³⁵



“Chinese Womanhood” (1931). Brethren Historical Library and Archives.

³⁵ Alice L. Conklin, “Redefining ‘Frenchness:’ Citizenship, Race Regeneration, and Imperial Motherhood in France and West Africa, 1914-40” in Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 65-83.

While Brethren women missionaries were not seeking to re-populate China with American families, they did apply their notions of “scientific motherhood” to their work with Chinese women and linked evangelism and civilization in their mission theories. The spread of Christianity in China depended on having strong, competent mothers who could create Christian families (see image above as an illustration). The happiness of children runs as a theme throughout missionary literature on homemaking. Nettie Senger authored several publications on Chinese women and domesticity. Nettie Senger’s “Principles of Child Training” codified the Western Christian principles of child-rearing in a volume for Chinese women. The underlying theme of this instructional book was the child’s happiness. Senger advocated rearing children in a manner that they would be “happy all day, and...pass the time without crying.”³⁶ Mothers were to raise children in a manner that would “enable [the child] to develop into his highest and best personality.”³⁷ Brethren women encouraged Chinese women to monitor the health and diet of their children (see illustration below). Brethren hospitals held a “women’s dispensary hour” every afternoon for women and children to receive medical attention.³⁸ These efforts show how Brethren missionaries combined Western medicine and childrearing practices to foster their perceptions of appropriate mothering techniques.

³⁶ Nettie Senger and Dorothy Barbour, “Principles in Child Training: Book I,” n.d., Nettie Senger file, BLHA, 1.

³⁷ Ibid; Nettie Senger, “People’s Home Education,” (Shanghai, China: Christian Literature Society, 1938), 4-5. For more information on child-centered reform in the United States see Linda Gordon, “Putting Children First: Women, Materialism, and Welfare in the Early Twentieth Century,” in *U.S. History as Women’s History: New Feminist Essays*, ed. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 63-86.

³⁸ Myrtle I. Pollock, “Evangelistic Work, Hiel Hamilton Memorial Hospital, Liao Chou, Shansi,” *The Missionary Visitor* (September 1920): 238.



Figure 1.3. “Overweight does not come with one mouthful” (1940). Sketch by Helen Angeny. Brethren Historical Library and Archives.

In their view, Brethren women promoted a form of motherhood that valued preparedness and planning in homemaking. Susie Vaniman described the sewing endeavors of the mission school in Ping Ting, which entailed mending torn clothes for the winter. This practice took place during the spring which, according to Vaniman, perplexed many students who wondered why they were sewing so many months in advance. Vaniman turned the inquiry into a lesson on Christian domesticity by comparing mending clothes to a moral tale. Not sewing the clothes would be like a person who did not have a roof on her house—when the weather was dry and sunny the woman did not need a roof, but when it rained she could not put a roof on her house. Vaniman concluded that “these people

know nothing of the joy of getting things done and out of the way ahead of time.”³⁹

Brethren women missionaries combined principles of child-rearing with evangelism. In 1934 missionary Emma Horning outlined her proposal for “Character Training Through Animal Toys.”⁴⁰ She lamented that Chinese children did not have pets in their homes because Chinese families “think they are too poor” and “have little conception of the teaching value of pets.”⁴¹ But Horning argued that pets can teach children several Christian values including “love, kindness, thoughtfulness, tenderness, industry, responsibility, [and] cleanliness.”⁴² Here Horning combines values that could be considered religious, such as love and kindness, with cultural values, such as industry and cleanliness. In order to instill these values in Chinese families, Horning suggested holding toy-making classes for Chinese mothers where they sew stuffed animal toys. In these classes missionaries would use songs and pictures to teach Chinese mothers about the usefulness of toys in the home. According to Horning, these methods can reach even “the most simple of mothers.”⁴³ Training Chinese women in toy-making carried with it certain cultural assumptions about the role of children’s play in child-rearing. Brethren women missionaries invested time and resources into transforming Chinese women into Christian mothers who kept clean, ordered,

³⁹ Susie Vaniman, “Report of work for the year 1916,” Woman’s Work File in Shanxi Mission File, BHLA.

⁴⁰ Emma Horning, “Character Training Through Animal Toys” (Ping Ting, Shanxi, China: 1934), Shanxi Mission File, BLHA, 1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Horning, “Character Training Through Animal Toys,” 1.

disciplined homes. However, increasingly Brethren educational initiatives would draw Chinese women outside the home.

The Educational Mission

One of these initiatives that drew Chinese women out of the home was the Church of the Brethren's educational mission. Schools for girls in China—mostly operated by missionaries, but some also run by Chinese—had been growing in number since the beginning of the twentieth century, so when the Brethren arrived in Shanxi in 1908, there was some precedent for female education. Around the same year that Brethren missionaries established their mission in Shanxi, the Chinese government also founded a school for girls.⁴⁴ Chinese who supported female education tended to be based on the belief that educating women would strengthen the Chinese nation. Western missionaries agreed with this principle, but also viewed female education as a means of creating Christian mothers who would cultivate the growth of Christianity in China.⁴⁵

A central purpose of Brethren schools in China was to train Chinese to read the Bible. Implicit in the theology of Brethren women missionaries was a strong belief that an individual should be able to interpret scripture and make a conscious decision to become a member of the church. Historically, the church's pietistic roots heavily shaped this emphasis on the individual, which meshed easily with the growth of evangelical Christianity in the United States during the

⁴⁴ "Hsu Hsien Girls' School, Ping Ting Hsien," *The Missionary Visitor* (March 1916): 99.

⁴⁵ Pui-Lan Kwok, *Chinese Women and Christianity, 1860-1927* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 17.

nineteenth century. Individual reading, comprehension, and contemplation of scripture was essential to being a pious Christian.⁴⁶

Apart from training Chinese to read the Gospels, Brethren missionaries used their schools to transform the lifestyles of their students. In her essay “Our Mission Schools as Institutions for the Transforming of Life and Character,” missionary Winnie Cripe described the “cleaning up” of children entering the school who wore clothes that were “filthy and full of vermin.”⁴⁷ In addition, new students transformed their behavior and changed from an attitude of “grab all you can” to practicing patience, gratitude, and obedience.⁴⁸

During the 1920s, Brethren missionaries increasingly offered what they referred to as “industrial work” programs. Industrial work was practical, skilled labor that Chinese could use to generate some basic income. In 1924 Mary Cline lamented that Brethren schools could not offer more industrial work training for their students because she believed it necessary to give to students “more that they can make use of after leaving school, and that will not only help them to help themselves, but to make China a better China to live in.”⁴⁹ Industrial work for women and girls included needlework, knitting, crocheting, and lace-making. For men and boys, industrial work activities were wood work, making bolts, repairing bicycles, and re-soling shoes.⁵⁰ Anna Crumpacker and Minnie Bright began a small-scale industrial work program specifically for women beginning in 1918,

⁴⁶ Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1968), 120-122; Dale Brown, *Another Way of Believing: A Brethren Theology* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2005), 18-20.

⁴⁷ Winne E. Cripe, “Our Mission Schools as Institutions for the Transforming of Life and Character,” *The Missionary Visitor* (September 1920): 246, 247.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁴⁹ Mary Cline, “Educational Work in China,” *The Missionary Visitor* (June 1925): 199.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

which grew to a twenty-five-member program by 1924. According to Bright, several of the women in the program were widows and they supported their families through their needlework products. Bright did not comment if Chinese women already had needlework skills or if the missionaries were teaching them. Women mostly completed their projects in their homes. The entire women's industrial work program was self-supporting, requiring no funds from the denomination. In a 1924 article in the *The Missionary Visitor* Bright seemed proud of the program and its participants: "They want to live honorably, and some of them are made of the best qualities to be found anywhere, and are 'jewels.'"⁵¹

Brethren women missionaries expanded their industrial work programs in the 1930s. In 1931 Nettie Senger began a wool industry program at Ch'in. The residents of Shanxi raised sheep and produced wool for sale, but paid a high price for imported cotton to make their clothing. This "poor judgment" troubled Brethren missionaries and in response, Senger began an education campaign to encourage Chinese to keep their wool and weave it into clothing in their homes.⁵² Senger faced several obstacles including "how [to] keep the middle man away" and how to convince Chinese not to sell their wool for profit.⁵³ Brethren missionaries quickly began teaching weaving in their schools and these classes were popular. From the perspective of Brethren missionaries, their wool industry program reflected an attempt to alleviate a debilitating economic problem of the people of Shanxi, yet their solution may not have taken into account some of the

⁵¹ Minnie F. Bright, "Women's Industrial Work," *The Missionary Visitor* (June 1924): 196.

⁵² E. M. Wampler, "The Wool Industry at Ch'in Chow," *The Star of Cathay* (1933): 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

realities of Chinese life. With their emphasis on keeping wool products in the home, the people of Shanxi would lose what little price they received when they previously sold their wool. It is not clear whether the residents of Shanxi were in need of warmer clothes, or whether the Brethren missionaries were most alarmed by what they perceived as a poor economic policy. Additionally, the Brethren wool industry program reflected an ethic of self-sufficiency imbedded in rural Brethren communities in the United States. In these communities, the belief in separation from the world fostered an economic ethic that relied on independence and self-sufficiency.⁵⁴ It is possible that Brethren missionaries applied their ethic of self-sufficiency to the wool industry program at Ch'in.

Brethren women missionaries relied on Chinese women to aid in spreading the Gospel. American Brethren women constantly sought to train Chinese Bible women to carry Christianity into homes and into new regions in Shanxi Province. The participation of Chinese women in leading mission schools and outreach endeavors lent credibility to the American missionaries, in addition to much needed language and cultural skills. Missionaries distinguished between Chinese students and Bible women by the level of understanding regarding scripture and completion of training. A Bible woman was considered to be competent and independent—she could venture to homes alone and teach other women without the assistance of American missionaries. Identifying a potential Bible woman required selecting a student who was particularly adept at learning to read and retaining lessons and then giving her special attention and instruction.

⁵⁴ “Ethics,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), I: 458.

Training independent Chinese women to spread the Gospel to their Chinese sisters was central to the evangelization strategy of Brethren women.⁵⁵

In her 1921 woman's work report, Emma Horning offers an anecdote that illustrated the perceived benefits for a Chinese woman of becoming a Bible Woman. Mrs. Chang, the wife of an official in Tai Yuan Fu, lived a comfortable life until her husband died, leaving her a widow. According to Horning, Mrs. Chang went to live with her brother and sister-in-law, but her unhappiness impelled her to attempt suicide three times. News of the Brethren missionary school for girls prompted Chang to enroll and at the school she "found peace and happiness and her soul was satisfied."⁵⁶ After an unspecified time of training, Chang became a Bible woman, going into women's homes and teaching them Bible verses and missionary home-making techniques. Horning notes that "all the women like her very much and she is especially welcome in the best class homes of the city." Overall, Horning portrays the missionary's girls school as a source of hope and social elevation for Chang. For Brethren women, a Chinese Bible woman not only served the evangelical needs of the mission but improved her own life. Lulu Ullom, head of the Women's Bible School at Ping Ting, described the various motivations for Chinese women to enter the school. Ullom cited one woman who came with her three children during the winter seeking a warm place to live. While shelter was her initial impetus for coming to the mission

⁵⁵ Emma Horning, "Woman's Work—1917—Ping Ting City," Emma Horning Collection, BLHA.

⁵⁶ Emma Horning, "Woman's Work—Ping Ting Chou," Emma Horning Collection, BLHA.

compound, she attended the required courses and “she woke up and took a real interest in her studies.”⁵⁷

In June 1925 the first class of seven students graduated from the Liao Women’s Bible School. These graduates ranged in age from twenty-six to forty-five. All were poised to assume positions as teachers or Bible women along with American Brethren missionaries. One graduate, Mrs. Ch’I Fu Ling, was married to a graduate of the Men’s Bible School in Ping Ting. Anna Hutchison commented on her excellent performance in the Women’s Bible School saying that “she has more native ability, possibly, than her husband, but he seems proud of her and they are a happy family together.”⁵⁸ Here Hutchison gives a higher value to a female student’s academic capabilities than her male counterpart. The Church of the Brethren also ran a Women’s Bible School in Ping Ting and in 1924 sixty-one women were enrolled in the two schools, about three times the number of male students enrolled.⁵⁹ While always under the supervision of an American missionary, these women who graduated from Bible schools gained designated leadership positions in the Shanxi mission.

As Brethren missionaries pursued new coeducational endeavors, they found themselves in situations that they did not foresee. Beginning in 1924, occasional mention of unrest in Brethren schools appeared in missionary periodicals and field reports. In a 1924 yearly mission report published in *The*

⁵⁷ Lulu Ullom, “Report of Women’s Bible School, Ping Ting Chou, for 1921,” Woman’s Work File in the Shanxi Mission File, BLHA, 1.

⁵⁸ Anna Hutchison, “First Graduating Class of the Liao Women’s Bible School,” *The Missionary Visitor* (September 1925): 330.

⁵⁹ Minor M. Myers, “The China Mission: Report for the Year 1924,” *The Missionary Visitor* (June 1925): 199.

Missionary Visitor, missionary Minor Myers noted that the “first disturbance of any consequence in our schools” had occurred in the form of student strikes.⁶⁰ Myers did not offer details as to what prompted the strikes, or even at which schools these strikes occurred, but explained that “those in authority coped with the situation in a creditable manner.”⁶¹ Offering a few more clues, Myers commented that the students who went on strike had been “used as tools by a jealous teacher or two to further their selfish ends” and did not bear sole responsibility for the strikes because they had been influenced by Chinese teachers. Beyond these statements Myers’ account of unrest in a Brethren school does not include the motivations of the strikers or clarify the reactions of the missionaries.

Mary Cline’s report of Brethren schools in China in 1924 offered slightly more information. Cline attributed the recent problems in Brethren schools to China’s tenuous political climate where the provisional president was a “tool of the militarists” and regional militaries were constantly in conflict. The reigning “spirit of selfishness” was so pervasive that it had infiltrated Brethren schools by displays of rivalry between Chinese teachers. Cline is unclear about how this jealousy manifested itself, only saying that “trouble among the teachers, had arisen that altered the outlook and made necessary a few changes.” In Liao students held a strike against the Chinese principal, but like Minor Myers, Cline attributed this disturbance to relations between teachers, asserting that two

⁶⁰ Myers, “The China Mission: Report for the Year 1924,” 194.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

teachers and an out-station evangelist were jealous of the principal.⁶² She does not offer any indication explaining why the teachers and evangelist were jealous of the principal. Finally, in Anna Hutchison's biographies of the first female Bible School graduates at Liao, she notes that one of these women, Mrs. Wang Ch'un Fang, was married to a Chinese man who attended the Men's Bible School at Ping Ting and "was ringleader of the strike in the schools for more financial help." From this statement, it is not clear who specifically was seeking financial help and why she did not receive it. When the school reopened, Mrs. Wang Ch'un Fang's husband was neither allowed to re-enroll nor given employment by the mission.⁶³

At their mission in Shanxi, the Brethren had early encounters with Communist forces, one of which came in early 1925 when an uprising of students and teachers threatened to disrupt the school and surrounding community. According to an education report by Brethren missionary Ernest Varniman, a series of investigations revealed that several middle school boys and Chinese teachers had been conducting covert Marxist meetings, planning an uprising on January 19, 1925. According to Varniman, that morning the community of Ping Ting awoke to find signs posted on windows and walls proclaiming "Kill! Kill! Kill!"⁶⁴ But the police confiscated the signs and arrested the Marxist conspirators before much of the uprising could be carried out. What followed in missionary accounts of the uprising was a heart-felt account of repentance and forgiveness

⁶² Cline, "Educational Work in China," 200.

⁶³ Hutchison, "First Graduating Class of the Liao Women's Bible School," 330.

⁶⁴ Ernest D. Varniman, "A Review of the Boys' and Girls' as Ping Ting Chou—1925," Shanxi Mission File, BHLA, 1.

where Chinese students who had participated in the conspiracy voluntarily came to the office of two missionaries who turned their office into “a confessional for many young men and has been made sacred by them as they told the truth and showed their wish to be true friends and desired a friend.”⁶⁵ This account includes no specific details regarding the issues prompting the Marxist group to organize and start an uprising. It is not clear how Marxism first entered the school, whether through a teacher or a student or some other outside influence. It is entirely possible that the author of this report, Ernest Varniman, knew some of the underlying information and did not include it in his report. However, the report has an anxious and uncertain tone, leaving the reader to speculate that Varniman was experiencing a time of confusion and did not know many of the specific details. This story, while vague and incomplete, does illustrate the extent to which Communism was a disruptive force for the Church of the Brethren mission.



Figure 1.4. Ping Ting Middle School (1927-28). Brethren Historical Library and Archives.

⁶⁵ Varniman, “A Review of the Boys’ and Girls’ as Ping Ting Chou—1925,” 3.

A rise in Chinese nationalism fueled many of these strikes and uprisings recorded in missionary accounts. Sparked by the May Fourth and May Thirtieth movement, members of both the Chinese Communist Party and the Guomindang launched strikes in foreign and Chinese-owned factories and schools. A variety of factors motivated those who chose to strike—anti-imperialism, low wages, poor working conditions, and patriotic sentiment.⁶⁶ While most missionaries seemed to respond slowly to this wave of nationalism, they did finally react by placing more emphasis on Chinese leadership in mission work and addressing the economic plight of rural Chinese.⁶⁷

The student strikes in Brethren schools during the 1920s seemed relatively calm compared to the turmoil occurring in government-run middle schools. Shanxi warlord Yen His-shan had not been successful in quelling the growing nationalist sentiments sparked by the May Fourth Movement of 1919 among young Chinese. In 1925 a mob of angry students stormed the home of Shanxi warlord Yen, demanding that he discharge officials whom the students considered to be pro-foreign. In addition, they demanded that Yen hold a boycott against British and Japanese goods. The students became increasingly radical and volatile, participating in strikes and demolishing officials' homes. Fearing rebellion, Yen installed a new liberal principal at the People's Normal School and gave control of the school to the radical group, Student Association.⁶⁸ The

⁶⁶ Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution: 1895-1949* (London: Routledge Press, 2005), 204.

⁶⁷ Paul Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952* (New York, Octagon Books: 1977), 194-211.

⁶⁸ Donal G. Gillin, *Warlord: Yen His-shan in Shansi Province, 1911-1949* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 73-74.

student strikes that appeared in Brethren missionaries seemed smaller in scale and less disruptive. Either Brethren missionaries living in the small towns in Shanxi were not aware of the extent to the student strikes or they downplayed their significance in their writings.

The gap between the goals and outcomes of missionary activity has been well documented. For many missionaries, cultural conflict, war, natural disaster, disease, and financial hardship were simply barriers to converting Chinese to Christianity and creating self-sustaining churches. In 1921, missionary Anna Hutchison viewed a famine, which impacted their mission region in Shanxi, as an “interruption in our regular Mission work.”⁶⁹ Administering famine relief detracted from holding Bible classes and religious services, yet Hutchison acknowledged that supporting famine victims was “a different phase” of mission work and would ultimately benefit their evangelistic aims.⁷⁰

As the Brethren responded to heightened nationalism, women missionaries combined progressive approaches to missions with traditional Brethren beliefs. As nationalism intensified during the 1920s and 1930s, Brethren women missionaries combined their innovative uses of technology, business mentalities, and ecumenical work with their distinct Brethren outlook on religion and society. The story of Li Jung Chen provides an example of Brethren distinctiveness on the mission field during the 1930s.

Li Jung Chen, a high school senior of Peiping (formerly, and later, called Peking), attended Brethren primary mission schools in Ping Ting and according to

⁶⁹ Anna Hutchison, “Report of Liao Women’s City Work for 1921,” Shanxi mission file, BLHA, 1.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

missionaries was “a brilliant student and active in many phases of Christian work.”⁷¹ Li’s brilliance came to the attention of missionaries and government officials during a speech contest in January 1935. The Ministry of Education requested that high school students participate in a speaking contest on the subject of “The Anti-Narcotic Movement and Rejuvenation of China.”⁷² Representing her high school, Li delivered her speech in the Sun Yat Sen memorial building on a Sunday afternoon. She won first prize and reluctantly agreed to be photographed. Over the next few weeks various newspapers and groups sought her out and offered her prizes. As Li tells the story, the Aviation Department was the “most interesting delegation to call on me.”⁷³ The Aviation Department representatives invited Li to participate in a christening of five government airplanes in Nanking. After inquiring about the use of these planes and learning that their purpose was “To fight our enemies,” Li declined the offer.⁷⁴ She explained that “My God is a God of peace and I follow him and dare not disappoint him in giving my influence to kill.”⁷⁵ The aviation officials persisted, offering to name a plane after Li, but she continued to reject their offers. Missionary Minnie Bright was proud of Li and praised her for her humility and support for Brethren pacifism.⁷⁶

This speech contest and the ensuing response of Li and Bright illustrate the extent to which Brethren missionaries combined Brethren distinctiveness and

⁷¹ Minnie Flory Bright, “Miss Li Scores Two Points,” *Meet Miss Li and Her Mother: Chinese Women with the Spirit of Lindbergh* (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board, 1935), 2-8.

⁷² Minnie Flory Bright, “Miss Li Scores Two Points,” 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

progressive attitudes in their mission work. Here was a Chinese student and Brethren convert participating in a government-sponsored competitive activity. The account of this event contains no reluctance at cooperating with the state, which would have caused hesitation in Brethren two decades earlier. In addition, the presentation of one's intellect to be judged by a secular authority is also not an issue. On the other hand, Dunker humility and pacifism are present in Li's and Bright's responses. Li's inquiry into the use of the planes, or possibly being prompted to do so by her missionary teachers, demonstrates a deliberate attempt to retain a separate stance from a militaristic society. The touch of humility is also an example of the Brethren dislike of pride and attribution of success to God and not human talent.⁷⁷

Conclusion

When five Brethren missionaries gathered in Shanxi on October 23, 1917 to talk about their work, their question was how to reach the women of China, their homes and their families. The Brethren committee of four decided that their aim was to make "every home in every city, out-station and village a Christian home."⁷⁸ In this statement these missionaries revealed the extension of the Church of the Brethren far past the traditional boundaries of the local community and meetinghouse into the homes and daily lives of women on the other side of the world.

⁷⁷ Carl Bowman, *Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a "Peculiar People"* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 33-35.

⁷⁸ Emma Horning, et al., "Policy for Woman's Work," Shanxi Mission File, BLHA, 1

Brethren women missionaries were, for the most part, social conservatives, believing that the primary role of women converts should be to create Christian homes and raise Christian children. But gradually through their interactions with Chinese women, Brethren women missionaries moved in a new progressive direction, increasingly addressing the social concerns of Chinese women on the mission field. Often Brethren missionaries' efforts to improve the lives of Chinese women coincided with attempts to create Christian homes, but increasingly throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, their work with Chinese women strayed from simply promoting Victorian domesticity. With the establishment of women's Bible schools and a variety of women's industrial work programs, Brethren women missionaries increasingly sought to meet the larger social needs of Chinese women, such as increasing literacy, providing more leadership opportunities in mission work, and facilitating economic growth. In part, this shift reflected the influence of the Social Gospel movement on Brethren mission work. While Brethren women missionaries did not view themselves as a part of the Social Gospel movement, its principle of societal change was interwoven in their work. Brethren missionaries frequently communicated with other mission groups in China such as the China Inland Mission and missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. It is possible that these relationships acted as a conduit for Social Gospel thought to the Brethren. However, much of Brethren women missionaries' attention to the social concerns of Chinese women was also a practical result of the political and social turmoil and famines of the 1920s and 1930s—they adapted their work to the need they

perceived around them. Brethren women went to China with the goal of evangelizing and uplifting Chinese women through Christianity, the realities of Chinese women's lives often shaped mission policy in new practical directions.

CHAPTER 4

“HUMAN BROTHERHOOD KNOW[S] NO BOUNDARY LINES:” WAR, RELIEF, AND A TRANSFORMED MISSIOLOGY¹

The problematic relationship between the foreign missionary movement and cultural imperialism came to the forefront beginning in the 1920s and 1930s. Two forces shifted Church of the Brethren missiology from a focus on strictly spreading the Gospel to one that emphasized administering relief and serving the people of China. These forces were first, the Japanese invasion in 1937 followed by World War II, and second, a growing belief that the Church of the Brethren was part of a global community and had a responsibility to serve that community. Thus, on the one hand, missionaries focused their attention on relief efforts due to the practical considerations of the mission field: the need for food, clothing, and agricultural assistance. However, an ideological shift also occurred within the denomination, questioning the sense of cultural superiority that accompanied mission work. While Brethren missionaries shifted their focus to relief work, both out of necessity and an altered missiology that emphasized human needs, evangelistic goals never completely vanished. In addition, the propensity toward relief work and service had been growing throughout the 1920s and did not surface as a sudden change of direction. Rather, the altered relief-centered missiology of Brethren missionaries that increased in the late 1930s and 1940s reflected a continuation of their previous approach to mission—an approach that

combined a certainty in the superiority of Christianity with a willingness to accommodate and adapt to events and new situations as they arose on the mission field.

As this shift toward more emphasis on relief and service occurred, the role of women in overseas extensions of Christianity changed. The first Church of the Brethren women missionaries were heavily involved in previous progressive movements in the Shanxi mission, such as encouraging the use of technology, working ecumenically with other mission groups, and making their faith mobile by entering the homes of Chinese women. Women missionaries such as Nettie Senger, Myrtle Pollock, and Bessie Crim even incorporated aspects of practical training for Chinese women in their mission work as they developed educational, technical, and nursing training programs. But when war altered the landscape of the mission field, the role of women missionaries changed. The Church of the Brethren relief work programs were often gendered, geared toward young, single, healthy males who could undertake physical labor overseas. As relief work became more important, the role of Brethren women in China became increasingly limited.

Cultural Imperialism and Missionaries

Preceding the 1937 Japanese invasion and the subsequent shift to relief work was a debate across several Protestant denominations regarding the relationship between the missionary movement and Western imperialism. The questioning of the cultural imperialistic implications of the missionary movement

was apparent in *Re-Thinking Missions*, a series of recommendations published by the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry in 1932. This report offered solutions to what was called "the biggest Protestant question of a century," seeking to probe the validity of Christian missions in the twentieth century.¹ The authors of *Re-Thinking Missions* included representatives from seven Protestant denominations—Baptist (Northern), Congregational, Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Protestant Episcopal, Reformed Church in America, and United Presbyterian.² These authors represented the liberal segments of Protestantism, believing that modern science served an important role in the world and that Christianity was not the only religion that contained truth.³ The Laymen's Report marked a departure from missiology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that viewed the world as divided between Christians and heathens. By 1932 the authors of *Re-Thinking Missions* had come to view the world as divided between the religious and the secular. The Laymen's report proposed that materialism, secularism, and idolatry were real threats to the world and that Christians could collaborate and cooperate with a variety of cultures and religions to defeat these threats.⁴

¹ William Hocking, "Re-Thinking Missions," *Time Magazine* (November 28, 1932), <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,744802-1,00.html>. This article describes the main arguments of the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry and their publication, *Re-Thinking Missions*.

² William Hocking, "Re-Thinking Missions," <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,744802-1,00.html>.

³ Paul Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952* (New York, Octagon Books: 1977), 167.

⁴ William R. Hutchison, "Modernism and Missions: The Liberal Search for an Exportable Christianity, 1875-1935," in ed. John K. Fairbank, *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 127.

To ensure the primacy of religion over materialism, the Laymen's Report made several recommendations. First, it noted the considerable financial hardships of rural churches in China and suggested that they adapt and shift to holding religious services in smaller groups that mirrored indigenous meeting patterns. Similarly, the Inquiry proposed that missionaries experiment with differing types of worship services. Finally, the Inquiry emphasized that evangelism should not overshadow social work and relief efforts.⁵

World War II and the Holocaust also had a transformative impact on American religion and its place in the world. Seeking to cope simultaneously with the atrocities of the Holocaust and an increasingly pluralistic America, many Protestants embraced a new sense of ecumenism. Declaring solidarity among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, the term "Judeo-Christian tradition" became more commonly used in ecumenical circles.⁶ In addition, Americans began to understand their future as intertwined with the destiny of the entire world. Isolationist attitudes contributed to the coming of World War II and many Americans were converted to a new sense of internationalism.⁷

For Church of the Brethren missionaries, the incorporation of relief work into their mission efforts reflected an attempt to meet the practical needs of Chinese in Shanxi and also to correct the racism and bias of cultural imperialism. However, Brethren missionaries in the 1930s and 1940s would not have framed their altered approach to mission in terms of becoming less culturally

⁵ Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats*, 168.

⁶ Randall Balmer, "In God We Trust," in ed. Jon Butler, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), 366.

⁷ Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats*, 274.

imperialistic. Instead, Brethren spoke of ending racism in missions and supporting indigenous Chinese Christians in becoming independent from the West. Additionally, American missionaries who administered direct relief or trained Chinese in Western agricultural techniques incorporated a certain amount of cultural correctness in their administering of relief. The shift of the Church of the Brethren from evangelism to service on the mission field has been well-documented. With increasing famines, political turmoil, and war, the Brethren turned their attention to serving the immediate physical needs of Chinese in Shanxi.⁸ As seen during the 1920s, Brethren women missionaries increasingly sought to meet the social and physical needs of Chinese women through their educational and industrial work programs. In part, the mission work of Brethren women during the 1930s and 1940s can be seen as an extension of that trend.

The Second Sino-Japanese War

The rise of Chinese Nationalism created disruptions for the Brethren mission at Shanxi, particularly in their schools. Like most missionaries in China, the Church of the Brethren was slow to react to the surge of Chinese Nationalism in the 1920s. They finally responded by placing more emphasis on Chinese leadership in mission work and addressing the economic plight of rural Chinese.⁹ But the Japanese invasion of 1937 altered the terrain of their mission field so drastically that their efforts soon shifted almost entirely to relief work and even

⁸ Bradley Kent Geisert, "Brethren Rural Reconstruction in China, 1920-1950," M.A. Thesis (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 1975).

⁹ Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats*, 194-211.

forced their temporary withdrawal from the province. A series of encounters with Japanese soldiers conveyed the realities of war to Brethren missionaries in China.

In December 1937, in the town of Shou Yang, situated in Southern Shanxi province, missionaries Minneva Neher, Alva Harsh, and Mary Hykes Harsh had transformed their mission compound into a refuge for Chinese Christians, their families, and “leading gentry, merchants, and officials” of Shou Yang. The Shou Yang officials inside the compound had an agreement with the Japanese forces in Shanxi that kept their compound safe from attacks. On the evening of December 2, Neher and the Harshes received an “urgent call” from a home located close to the mission compound.¹⁰ According to reports, the three secured permission from local authorities and left the compound to answer the distress call. But the three never returned and only speculation provided an answer for their disappearance. Conflicting reports circulated that Japanese soldiers killed Neher and the Harshes, while others accused Communists from remote parts of Shanxi for their disappearance.¹¹ No new information or evidence surfaced regarding their disappearance and the circumstances of the story still remain uncertain today.

In August 1940 encounters between Brethren missionaries and the Japanese military further threatened the presence of the Brethren in Shanxi. That summer, the Japanese arrested Chinese men and women who had been working as evangelists, teachers, doctors, nurses, and students with the Church of the Brethren mission in Liao Chou. A series of arrests and imprisonments took place

¹⁰ “Statement Concerning Our Three Missing Missionaries,” *Minutes of the General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren* (April 1938), BHLA, 494.

¹¹ “Statement Concerning Our Three Missing Missionaries,” 494; Stephen Longenecker, *The Brethren During the Age of World War: The Church of the Brethren Encounter with Modernization, 1914-1950* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2006), 233.

throughout the summer and fall of 1940. Missionary Anna Hutchison believed these arrests occurred in order to identify any collaborations between Chinese Brethren and Chinese Communists, who had a presence in the outlying parts of Shanxi Province, and also to force the missionaries to leave China.¹² According to accounts of the various arrests, Japanese soldiers questioned and inflicted torture upon Chinese Christians that they arrested. Relief worker Ernest Wampler recounted that on October 13, three of a group of eight Chinese who had been arrested were bayoneted by Japanese soldiers. The next morning, three women from this group of eight who had been arrested were released and reported that they had been raped by Japanese soldiers. On October 19 Japanese shot eight more of the arrested Chinese Christians. In his account of these killings in *China Suffers, or My Six Years of Work During the Incident*, Wampler commented:

One method the invading army used in forcing in the Chinese people to submit to Japanese rule was to threaten to punish some innocent person or the family if they did not obey orders. . . . So they used that method on us. Outwardly they were friendly, but when we did something they did not like or failed to follow their wishes they would punish some of the Chinese who were the most faithful to us and the church. That method brought us more pain than if they had punished us. It was subtle and often we did not know for sure just why the punishment was inflicted.¹³

While the Japanese military focused their attacks on Chinese Christians, they also questioned the American Brethren missionaries and searched their homes on the mission compound. Four American Brethren, including Hutchison, were “discourteously ordered by one of the officers to leave, with the threat that if

¹² Anna Hutchison, *Thirteen Brethren Martyrs of Liao Chou, China* (Elgin, IL: Church of the Brethren, c. 1941), 1-2.

¹³ Ernest M. Wampler, *China Suffers, or My Six Years of Work During the Incident* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1945), 161-63 in Longenecker, *The Brethren During the Age of War*, 234.

we didn't they would arrest all of our people.”¹⁴ Shortly after, in December 1940, all Brethren missionaries left Shanxi province, traveling to cities on the coast of China or to a Chinese language school in the Philippines, or returning to the United States. While all missionary activity in Shanxi had been postponed, the Church of the Brethren sent Ernest Wampler and O. C. Sollenberger to China to serve on the American Advisory Committee for China Relief.

The Japanese detained several Brethren missionaries on the coast of China including Grace Clapper, Minor Myers, and Hazel Rothrock. After six months the Japanese released them and they returned to the United States. The eight Brethren missionaries who had gone to the Philippines, though, spent most of the war in a Japanese internment camp, living in crowded, unhealthy conditions. The Brethren in this camp remained cut off from outside communication until American troops arrived in the Philippines in 1945.¹⁵

“Relief as It Will Help Evangelism”

The Japanese invasion and World War II sparked a vast missiological transformation, from the first years of the Church of the Brethren mission in Shanxi. The relationship between evangelism and relief work is not necessarily a dichotomous one. While evangelism seeks to meet the spiritual needs of a person and relief work the physical needs, many missionaries saw these areas as intertwined. In fact, while some denominations strongly debated the merits of placing more emphasis on relief over evangelism in the mission field, the Church

¹⁴ Hutchison, *Thirteen Brethren Martyrs*, 2.

¹⁵ Longenecker, *The Brethren During the Age of War*, 259-261.

of the Brethren's transition from evangelism to relief work seemed to have occurred rather smoothly. This may have been because their missiology viewed evangelism and relief as intertwined, or perhaps because a strand of progressivism ran throughout the missionary movement in the denomination.

Missionary writings from the 1920s and 1930s described relief efforts as a way to attract new converts. In 1935, Myrtle Pollock summed up the function of the three Brethren hospitals in Shanxi saying, "Many are those who have been ministered unto both physically and spiritually and who have gone away rejoicing that the heavenly Father has been good to them through the means of the mission hospitals."¹⁶ Brethren missionaries believed that the transformative power of Western medicine would also change the lives of Chinese patients, compelling them to accept Christianity. Often missionaries cited the example of Jesus as "the world's greatest Physician and Teacher" as a basis for their missiology that combined what they viewed as physical and spiritual healing.¹⁷ Established during the 1920s, the Church of the Brethren medical mission in Shanxi emphasized practicing medical work as a means to "exemplify the Great Physician in His Love and healing ministry" and to expose the residents of Shanxi to "the Abundant Life for body, mind, and spirit."¹⁸ Thus, in the 1920s and 1930s missionaries saw their Western-style hospitals at Ping Ting, Liao Chou, and Show Yang not only as meeting the immediate health needs of Chinese, but also as a tool for evangelism.

¹⁶ Myrtle F. Pollock, "Teaching and Healing," *The Gospel Messenger* (June 1, 1935): 34.

¹⁷ W. Harlan Smith, "Teaching the Gospel While Bandaging Hands," *The Gospel Messenger* (June 1, 1935): 34.

¹⁸ "Medical Policy, c. 1920" Shanxi Mission File, BHLA, 1.

In “Relief as It Will Help Evangelism,” O. C. Sollenberger argued that the current suffering in the world caused people to contemplate “the real values of life, and the source of these values.”¹⁹ Sollenberger described the various opportunities for relief work that had created in the Chinese a stronger desire to learn the gospel—medical care, food and shelter for refugees, rebuilding schools, the creation of co-operatives after the destruction of Chinese factories, and the rebuilding of homes and the creation of relief centers. These combined relief efforts meant, according to Sollenberger, that “no people are more open to the teachings of the gospel than are the Chinese.”²⁰ To support this claim, Sollenberger noted that the American Bible Society had reported that in 1944 more Bibles were distributed in China than any other country. Relief was key to mission work and Sollenberger argued that when physical suffering is present, “simply preaching to them is mere mockery.”²¹ Food, clothing, and other services were offered to the Chinese without requiring attendance of a church service. Finally, Sollenberger explained the shift from emergency or direct relief to “work relief.”²² “Work relief” meant that in relief camps missionaries give the Chinese jobs such as grinding grain into flour, weaving cloth, or making rope. The goal of “work relief” was to reduce the incidences of Chinese coming to mission camps solely for food and to provide some practical work for the Chinese to do.

While the Brethren medical missions still relied heavily on evangelism, they also adopted a number of initiatives to foster the growth of the hospitals as

¹⁹ O.C. Sollenberger, “Relief as It Will Help Evangelism,” *Star of Cathay* (Elgin, IL: Church of the Brethren) Spring 1944, 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

²² *Ibid.*, 19.

“self-supporting and indigenous programs.”²³ Western medicine and religion were the basis for missionary hospitals, yet gradually these institutions would become Chinese institutions. First, Brethren hospitals were to serve as training grounds for Chinese nurses, doctors, and “country practitioners.”²⁴ Secondly, Brethren medical missionaries sought to collaborate and cooperate with public health initiatives of the local government. Finally, the superintendent of each hospital would be a Chinese doctor.²⁵



Figure 1.5. Group Operating Scene at Church of the Brethren Hospital in Shanxi (n.d.). Brethren Historical Library and Archives.

In 1938, signaling the Church of the Brethren’s commitment to relief efforts, the denomination sent Howard Sollenberger, son of missionaries O. C. and Hazel Sollenberger, to Shanxi province to coordinate relief work. In early 1938, Sollenberger had been a student at Manchester College in Indiana, but he

²³ Sollenberger, “Relief as It Will Help Evangelism,” 19.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

convinced the General Mission Board of the denomination to send him to China as a full-time relief worker. Sollenberger was a much-needed asset to the strained Brethren missionaries in Shanxi. He organized a home industry for women where he provided cotton for women to spin, distributed grain and at times cash to peasants, and practiced amateur medicine. Sollenberger and his fellow American and Chinese relief workers dispensed their aid in a manner that Sollenberger described as “guerrilla relief.” Sollenberger chose this term because “we have to use guerrilla tactics to distribute. It’s give and run before the Japanese and their helpers know where you are and what you are doing.”²⁶ In addition to Sollenberger’s relief efforts, missionaries Ernest and Elizabeth Wampler attempted to establish a loan co-operative that would provide funds for Chinese to rebuild homes and buy animals and farm tools and an agricultural improvement program that experimented with cross-breeding breeds of hogs and breeds of sheep.²⁷

Post-World War II Missions

When World War II ended and Brethren missionaries returned to the Shanxi mission field in 1946, they had to reassess their goals and purposes in China. An optimism regarding evangelistic opportunity was a feature of the post-war Church of the Brethren mission effort in China. According to Brethren missionary Nettie Senger, the reaction of Chinese Christians to the war was one of

²⁶ Howard Sollenberger manuscript, “Two Years in Guerrilla Relief: Howard Sollenberger’s Diar, Journals, Letters, and Recollections, 1938-1940,” edited by John Wampler, v-vii, in Longenecker, *The Brethren During the Age of War*, 236.

²⁷ Ernest and Elizabeth Wampler, Letter from Peiping, China (October 4, 1938), Shanxi Mission File, BHLA.

“deepened religious faith and of increased spiritual power.”²⁸ From this, Senger drew the conclusion that the Christian church was “stronger spiritually” than before the war. Senger viewed the Chinese people as resilient and combined with Brethren missionaries they would be able to “find a way out of their social difficulties at this time.”²⁹ The spiritual strength of the Chinese Christians encouraged Brethren to reinvigorate their mission activities after the war.

Nettie Senger, in “The Post-War Challenge of China,” presented an inclusive, concise view of the Brethren mission effort in China. Senger began by portraying the post-war world as being in a “perilous epoch [it was] possible for all civilization to collapse.”³⁰ To prevent this collapse of civilization, Senger argued that leaders and people needed to adopt a long-range perspective making possible “an interchange of national cultures” contributing to a “world brotherhood.”³¹ In this world community, which resembled the internationalism other missionaries would call for, China had the potential to be a strong participant. Senger asserted that the missionary presence in China had aided in destroying the “ancient customs [that] had become scales on her eyes which hindered clear mental vision.”³² China stood at a crossroads and Senger argued that the missionary should direct the country’s path. Here the role of the missionary was one of guidance and direction. Four areas of work presented themselves for the missionary—relief camps, spiritual direction for industrial co-

²⁸ Nettie M. Senger, “The Post-War Challenge of China,” *Star of Cathay* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1946): 25.

²⁹ Senger, “The Post-War Challenge of China,” 25.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

³² *Ibid.*, 29.

operatives, reconstruction and rehabilitation, and evangelism. The evangelism needed during this post-war period was what Senger called a “practical evangelism” which would “put a motive into the new teeming life and give it a goal toward which to move.”³³ Senger’s thoughts reflected a shift in the missiology of the Church of the Brethren to focus heavily on relief, yet also to promote evangelism.

While previous discussions in the 1920s and 1930s regarding the relationship between Christianity and other religions addressed issues of cultural superiority among Western missionaries, after World War II racism increasingly became seen as an issue that foreign missions needed to address. In a 1944 issue of *Star of Cathay*, E. L. Ikenberry addressed this question in his article “Racial Equality and the Future of the Foreign Missions.”³⁴ Ikenberry cited two recent events that, to him, were encouraging steps in promoting racial equality throughout the world. First, Ikenberry applauded the renunciation of the Allied nations’ concessions in China. Second, Ikenberry saw as promising the 1943 repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, passed in 1882 to restrict Chinese immigrants from coming to the United States. But Ikenberry warned the church and the nation that “this racial issue must be settled, and settled right, if foreign missions are to go forward in the postwar world.”³⁵ In order to solve the “racial issue” Western nations should adopt “a platform for racial equality.”³⁶

³³ Senger, “The Post-War Challenge of China,” 29.

³⁴ E. L. Ikenberry, “Racial Equality and the Future of the Foreign Missions,” *Star of Cathay* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1944): 23-24.

³⁵ E. L. Ikenberry, “Racial Equality and the Future of the Foreign Missions,” 24.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

In addition, the approach of the Church of the Brethren continued to place importance on the role of the indigenous Chinese Christian church. Due to concerns regarding racism in the mission movement, the Brethren mission increasingly expressed a desire to support the indigenous Chinese Brethren church. In 1943 Wendell Flory wrote a *Gospel Messenger* article calling for increased cooperation and trust between American and Chinese Christians. Flory wrote that “neighborliness goes both ways.”³⁷ In order to be neighbors with China, American missionaries ought to “give them the same rights and privileges which we enjoy, including a proper place in the world neighborhood of nations.”³⁸ In addition, missionaries ought to be willing to receive and consider “the things which they have to offer for world betterment.”³⁹ This reciprocal relationship that Flory called for was one component in creating a world community. Addressing the global problems of the world community meant looking beyond “the family, the state, the community or the nation.”⁴⁰ These issues of the world community “encircle the world [and] what happens to any one of the peoples of the world affects all of its peoples.”⁴¹ This dual call for internationalism and strengthening the Chinese indigenous church set the Brethren mission on an altered course following World War II—one that held as its core values cooperation and a reciprocal relationship between American and Chinese Brethren.

Finally, the earlier trend toward relief efforts increased in the post-war Brethren China mission. In 1947 the Church of the Brethren cooperated with the

³⁷ Wendell Flory, “Missions in the World Community,” *The Gospel Messenger* (1943): 55.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in forming units of young male volunteers that would train Chinese in the use of tractors in areas that had been ravaged by the war, specifically to repair breaks in Yellow River dikes. The Brethren Service Committee provided fifty volunteers for the project while the UNRRA supplied the tractors, funds for travel, and stipends for the volunteers. These Brethren workers or “tractor boys,” as they came to be known, illustrate the mission’s shift from evangelical pursuits to directly addressing the needs of Chinese. Overall, the post-war Brethren missionaries remained hopeful of their prospects in China, yet they were also increasingly sensitive to the pre-war racism that had been a part of the mission movement and expressed a desire to shift from evangelism to relief work.⁴²

Gender and Relief Work

Women missionaries traditionally filled roles of educator or evangelist, but nursing represented an area where women could contribute to relief efforts. Brethren missionary Bessie Crim worked as a nurse in the internment camp in the Philippine Islands and in China between 1940 and 1950. During that period Crim administered medicine to numerous patients. In her autobiography she recounted an incident in 1948 when an unconscious pregnant woman was carried into her hospital. The woman had high blood pressure and Crim could not hear her heartbeat. Crim administered the only medicine she had available, “I.M. phenobarbital and I.M. magnesium sulfate,” and eventually the woman gave birth

⁴² “Tractor Unit,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), II: 1268.

to a set of male twins, each weighing slightly more than three pounds.⁴³ As Crim's story shows, nursing provided Brethren women with opportunities for direct relief work in China. Each Brethren hospital conducted nursing training programs and in 1950, a year before the Brethren withdrew from China, the hospital at Ping Ting graduated five Chinese nurses.⁴⁴



Figure 1.6. Nursing School Graduates (1950). American missionary Bessie Crim pictured first row, right. Brethren Historical Library and Archives.

During the last decade of mission activity in China the percentage of women missionaries going to China declined from 73 percent between 1930 and 1939 to 52 percent between 1940 and 1951, a 21 percent drop overall (see chart below).⁴⁵ While the denomination was proportionally sending fewer women missionaries to China than it had in previous years, women still comprised the

⁴³ Bessie Crim, "I am a violin: The Story of One Missionary Who Worked as a Nurse for Ten Years (1940-1950) in China and the Philippine Islands," (Greenville, OH: B.M. Crim, 1984), 61-62.

⁴⁴ Inscription on back of "Nursing School Graduates" photo (1950) Shanxi Mission File, BHLA.

⁴⁵ Anetta C. Mow, *Meet Your Missionaries* (Elgin, IL: Church of the Brethren, 1955), 121-122.

majority of Brethren entering the mission field. During the last decade of mission work in China a decline in the influence of women missionaries occurred due to the shift in the denomination’s attention toward relief efforts. While during the previous decades women missionaries developed programs specifically to change the lives of Chinese women, the Church of the Brethren’s relief efforts did not include any intentional attempts to address the plight of women in war zones. In addition, increasingly the Church of the Brethren was questioning the relationship between missions and cultural imperialism. Most notable during this period, though, was a gradually more gendered notion of relief work within the denomination.

Table 1.1. Church of the Brethren Missionaries Entering the Shanxi, China Mission⁴⁶

Years	Single women	Married women	Total men and women	Percentage of women
1908-1919	14	18	49	65 %
1920-1929	5	5	16	63 %
1930-1939	5	3	11	73 %
1940-1951	2	7	17	52 %
all years	26	34	93	65 %

During World War II, as relief work became more central to Brethren work overseas, the denomination sought to institutionalize Brethren service efforts. In 1941 Annual Conference agreed to transform the Brethren Service Committee (BSC) into an autonomous entity, equal in status to the denomination’s other agencies. The BSC’s primary goal was “personal

⁴⁶Mow, *Meet Your Missionaries*, chart created from index of missionary names and dates.

rehabilitation and social reconstruction;” it sought to relieve human suffering and societal forces that contributed to social instability.⁴⁷ Additionally, the BSC supported initiatives of “creative citizenship,” such as the Civilian Public Service (CPS) program for conscientious objectors. Overall, the BSC was to act out service “as a concrete and practical expression of the spirit and teaching of Christ as the Brethren understand and interpret them.”⁴⁸

In this intensification of service initiatives, what role did Brethren women fill? The World War II relief and service initiatives were highly gendered. The denomination needed to meet the immediate needs of Brethren draft-aged conscientious objectors and also the needs of those suffering from the devastation of war. The contribution of women to relief work was largely limited to contributing domestic supplies, such as blankets, clothes, and food. In 1943 “ladies aid” societies in congregations from the Battle Creek (Michigan), Swan Creek (Ohio), and Valley River (West Virginia) churches sent donations of clothing, canned fruit and vegetables, and comforters to CPS camps. Occasionally Brethren women would also take on sewing work to aid the relief cause.⁴⁹ In 1944 the Church of the Brethren created a center at New Windsor, Maryland, where relief goods would be processed and sent overseas. Brethren women volunteers participated in the relief effort by working at this center.⁵⁰

However, the denomination did not encourage Brethren women to participate in

⁴⁷ H. L. Hartsough, J. E. Miller, Ora Garber, eds., “Report on Reorganization and Function of Brethren Service Committee, 1941,” *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Church of the Brethren, 1923-1944* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1946), 180-81.

⁴⁸ H. L. Hartsough, J. E. Miller, Ora Garber, eds., “Report on Reorganization and Function of Brethren Service Committee, 1941,” 180-81.

⁴⁹ “Church News,” *The Gospel Messenger* (May 22, 1943): 14-16.

⁵⁰ J. Kenneth Kreider, *A Cup of Cold Water: The Story of Brethren Service* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2001), 38.

relief work overseas, as was the case for mission work, but instead suggested that women support the relief effort from their home communities.

Aside from supporting Brethren men in CPS, in May 1946 the Brethren Service Committee established the service unit of Brethren men that worked with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in China. This recruitment of young men to go to China and train Chinese men to use tractors reflected the gendered nature of relief work in the Church of the Brethren. While this initiative reflected the shift away from pure evangelism to relief-oriented work overseas, women were only incorporated in this transition through their role as supporters, not direct providers of relief.⁵¹

The 21 percent decline in women missionaries going to China and the increase in gendered relief efforts seemed to reflect an uncertainty regarding the role of women in relief work and the dangers of living in Shanxi. While nursing and home industries gave Brethren women missionaries opportunities to participate in some medical and economic relief efforts, restrictive gender norms may have prohibited women from working in other relief areas, such as agricultural programs. Instead of developing and implementing educational, evangelistic, and relief programs in a foreign country—as Brethren women had for the first thirty years of the Shanxi mission—women were now canning fruit and sewing blankets at home to support male relief efforts overseas.

⁵¹ “Tractor Unit,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh, 1268.

Civil War and Ascendancy of the Chinese Communist Party

As the Church of the Brethren, and most Protestant denominations, were reformulating their post-war mission strategies, the Chinese Communist Party was gaining strength. Mao Zedong's 6,000 mile "Long March" northward with the remnants of the First Front Army to Shaanxi Province—the province immediately to the west of Shanxi—ended with high numbers of deaths and marked a new era for the Communist Party and Maoism. In the town of Yan'an the Communist Party would consolidate, grow, and gain the support of many peasants largely through the events of the Japanese invasion. The invasion destabilized the Guomindang, prompting the retreat of Nationalist forces to the western part of the country and the collapse of the Nationalist government. The Communists took this opportunity to expand their military and political influence in rural areas. Growing popular support for the Communists was largely based on their appeal to national resistance against the Japanese. After World War II, the shaky truce between the Communists and the Nationalists ended completely and civil war erupted. The CCP enjoyed a larger amount of public support than the Guomindang. Despite the larger military force of the Guomindang, the Communists claimed victory and declared the creation of the People's Republic of China in October 1949.⁵²

During the Communists' rise to power, their interactions with Christians varied. Conflicting evidence from Western mission groups reported Communists being cooperative, yet also disruptive and repressive. When Communists took

⁵² Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic* (New York: Free Press, 1983), 50.

control of northern provinces in China they presented themselves as not posing a large threat to the Christian missionaries in those areas, arguing that earlier persecution was due to the faults of local officials. One report from the Kiangsu-Anhwei Christian Rural Service Union even stated that the Communists were attempting to serve the same needs of the Chinese people that the missionaries were working toward.⁵³ Thus the interactions between Christian missionaries and Communists prior to 1949 were varied.

Primarily, Communist leaders viewed Christianity as a threat due to its Western influence. Chinese Christians worked closely with Western missionaries, creating an additional source of authority aside from the CCP and the government. Even worse, in the view of the Communist Party, were Catholics, who owed their allegiance to the Pope. In 1950 the movement to extract Western influence from Christianity in China and make the Chinese Church self-sufficient but subject to control by the government accelerated. In 1950 church leaders and the head of the YMCA, Wu Yaorong, produced a pro-Communist declaration proclaiming independence from the West and called for the education of Chinese regarding crimes of imperialist missionaries. In 1951 Chinese Christian leaders, guided by the Communist government produced the “Three Selves Movement.”⁵⁴ The Three Selves—self-government, self-support, and self-propagation—would free the Chinese Church from foreign funding, foreign influence, and Vatican control. This movement would force many Chinese

⁵³ Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats*, 303.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

church leaders to denounce the Christian mission movement in China as foreign imperialism. By 1951 the majority of foreign missionaries had left the country.

The People's Republic of China and Missionary Withdrawal

With the Communists gaining control of the government in 1949, how, specifically, did the Church of the Brethren respond? What factors prompted their response? The Church of the Brethren expressed less hostility toward the Communists than many American missionary groups did, and in general expressed a sense of trust in the Chinese Christian Church. While they retained the hope of returning to China after withdrawal, the Brethren readily relinquished control of the mission field, placing it in the hands of the Chinese.

Between 1950 and 1951 Chinese Protestant leaders produced two documents that signaled their cooperation with the Communist government and their anti-imperialist outlook. In 1950 a group of Chinese YMCA and Protestant church leaders, after meeting with Premier Zhou Enlai, produced "The Christian Manifesto," which supported the Communist government's anti-imperialistic stance and called for Chinese Christians to support the new regime. In 1951 Protestant church leaders released a second document, "The United Declaration of Chinese Christian Churches and Institutions," which strongly suggested that Chinese Christians sever ties with American mission agencies.⁵⁵ The Church of the Brethren praised the 1950 YMCA-directed manifesto of Chinese Christians for its movement toward creating a more self-reliant church. A 1951 *Gospel*

⁵⁵ Peter Lee, "The Coming and Going of Protestant Christianity," *Inter-Religio* 9 (Spring 1986), <http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/miscPublications/I-R/pdf/09-Lee.pdf>.

Messenger article called for a supportive stance toward the 1950 manifesto, describing Chinese Christians as men and women “true to their faith.”⁵⁶ Calling for “complete confidence and faith in them” the author of this article discouraged any criticism of the signing of the manifesto due to “the conditions under which they are living.”⁵⁷ Stating that the Church of the Brethren ought to continue to send financial support, this article explained the Brethren were “convinced that in the leadership are men of God; that the Spirit of God moves in China. . . . We do not always understand all that the Chinese leaders of the Christian church do, but we do know that as long as they are attuned to God, they are in his plan.”⁵⁸ In December 1951 at a denominational mission board conference, the participants stated that China still ought to be a major mission field for which the Brethren held responsibility. The Church of the Brethren decided to have faith in the Chinese leaders and continue to send missionaries, when possible. Commenting that the Chinese church had “come of age,” the conference participants agreed to continue funding the Chinese church noting that American and Chinese Brethren were now “comrades in the kingdom of God.”⁵⁹

The belief in Christianity as a world religion that would include both Western missionaries and indigenous people in missionized countries continued to grow throughout many mission circles. In a 1951 article in the *Gospel Messenger* the author claimed that a sort of “spiritual communism” existed in Christianity throughout the world. The author cited John 17:10 saying, “All

⁵⁶ “Chinese Christians Sign a Manifesto,” *The Gospel Messenger* (February 1951): 12.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

things that are mine are thing, and thine are mine. . . I am in thine, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one.” The article continued by saying that Jesus created a new generation of people to live on earth in unity. Mission work from this perspective appeared to be a cooperative endeavor.

On the other hand, noticeably absent from Church of the Brethren missionary writings during the post-World War II period is much mention of the Nationalist government. One exception was in an August 1946 editorial in the *Gospel Messenger* by Leland S. Brubaker, missionary to China from 1924 to 1927 and organizer of Chinese relief efforts beginning in 1938.⁶⁰ As he described the political status of China, he comments that “From a political standpoint the communists are doing an excellent job in certain areas. In other areas, they are doing an utterly wretched job. This is also true of the nationalist party.”⁶¹ While Brubaker did not specifically mention the areas in which he believed the Communists and Nationalists were successful and those in which they had failed, he did not elevate the Nationalist cause to a higher level than the Communists. Brubaker believed that the best solution to China’s political turmoil would be a fusion between the Communists and the Nationalists although he again offers no specific details on how and when this might occur.⁶²

The question remains as to why there are not more mention of the Nationalists in Brethren periodicals and other denominational literature. One reason for this may have been the isolation of the Brethren mission in Shanxi

⁶⁰ “Leland Stanford Brubaker,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), I: 218.

⁶¹ Leland S. Brubaker, “Our Church in China,” *The Gospel Messenger* (August 31, 1946), 3.

⁶² Brubaker, “Our Church in China,” *The Gospel Messenger*, 3.

province, where perhaps they did not frequently come into contact with Guomindang forces during the civil war. Also, it is possible that the Brethren viewed the Communists as a larger threat to their mission than the Nationalists, with their Christian leader, and thus the Communists received more attention and reporting. Finally, while during the first half of the twentieth century the Brethren began to look outside the borders of their insular religious community and to begin increasingly to resemble more mainstream Protestant denominations, certain peculiarities remained a part of their faith. Most Brethren still adhered to the principles of nonresistance and conscientious objection, which combined pacifism with skepticism about serving powers other than God.⁶³ It is possible that these beliefs prompted Brethren missionaries to attempt to transcend, or ignore, the political dynamics of China.

Conclusion

The relief endeavors of the Church of the Brethren in China reflected a desire to meet the immediate physical needs of the people of Shanxi. Women missionaries had been formative in shaping this humanistic missiology, on a smaller scale, from the 1910s through the mid 1930s. But the surges of

⁶³ The clearest expression of the Church of the Brethren's beliefs in nonresistance and pacifism during the 1940s was the church's mobilization of conscientious objectors during World War II. The National Service Board for Religious Objectors, an organization founded to assist in the placement of conscientious objectors in alternative service projects, cites that in 1947 there were 1,353 conscientious objectors from the Church of the Brethren, placing the Brethren as the second highest religious group represented in Civilian Public Service. There were, however, 21,481 Brethren who accepted regular military duty during World War II, which reveals that the official peace position of the Church of the Brethren did not speak to all of its members. For more information see: Donald F. Durnbaugh, "World War II," *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 3 vols., edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983),II: 1372.

nationalism, famine, and war propelled relief work to a more predominant place in Brethren missiology and made working and living in Shanxi more dangerous. As Brethren men and women trained Chinese doctors, nurses, and pastors to sustain an indigenous Chinese Christian community in Shanxi, they recognized their declining role as leaders of Christian institutions in China. The Church of the Brethren responded by promoting relief operations at the expense of evangelism. As relief and indigenous leadership became important features of Brethren approaches to mission work, they retained their belief that Christianity was meant to be spread to every continent, and that doing so would uplift all of humanity. Back at home, in the United States, delegates to the 1940 Annual Conference reflected this sentiment in their response to a report from the China mission field: “It is both comforting and challenging to know that the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is not and cannot be limited to any race, color, or continent. The heart throbs of sympathy and human brotherhood know no boundary lines.”⁶⁴ While the scope and breadth of mission work appeared larger than ever, the gendered boundary lines within the denomination kept women close to home.

⁶⁴ A.C. Baugher, et al., “Response to China,” in H L Hartsough, et al., *Minutes of the Annual Conferences, 1923-1944* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1946), 5.

CONCLUSIONS

By the end of 1951 all remaining Church of the Brethren missionaries had left China. Their mission endeavor had come to a close. As many Chinese Christians continued to ally with the Communist government, the Church of the Brethren expressed ambivalence. On one hand, the growing trends of relief work and indigenous leadership seemed to have been signaling the end of their missionary enterprise. But many Brethren men and women had spent large portions of their lives in China and were committed to their mission work in the country. Brethren missionaries reflected these conflicting emotions in their response to the 1951 Chinese YMCA declaration of independence from Western resources and missionaries—the Church of the Brethren was to have “complete confidence and faith” in Chinese Christians as their “comrades in the kingdom of God,” yet the General Mission Board still wanted to designate China as a major mission field.¹ This ambivalence reflected not only the personal emotional attachments that missionaries had regarding their work in China, but also the complexity of missiological and gender-role change in the denomination.

Progressivism and Conservatism on the Mission Field

The story of the Church of the Brethren mission in China has been one largely of adaptation and accommodation. Conservative tendencies, though,

¹ “Chinese Christians Sign a Manifesto,” *The Gospel Messenger* (February 1951): 12, 14.

accompanied each progressive turn. The early Brethren women who went to Shanxi carried with them to China deep religious and cultural assumptions which created a clear and stark line of delineation between themselves and their Chinese converts. Several of the approaches of Brethren women illustrated this cultural conservatism, such as in their use of dichotomous “heathen”-Christian rhetoric, criticisms of Chinese religious and social customs, and insistence on the conversion to Christianity in order to improve the lives of Chinese. Yet their persistent desire to increase the numbers of Christians in China and their response to China’s social, economic, and political upheavals prompted them to work in new progressive ways, often molding their faith so that it would be more applicable to Chinese society and easier to convey. In turn, the General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren would support these progressive actions, as seen in their encouraging Shanxi missionaries to accommodate polygamous marriages and private Love Feast ceremonies, while being careful to adhere to scriptural authority.²

As Brethren women moved into the cross-cultural domestic world of Chinese women’s homes, they again stretched their faith in new directions, all with the intention of bringing new converts to Christianity. Most Brethren women missionaries assumed that the primary role of Chinese women converts should be to create Christian homes and raise Christian children—domesticity was a foundation of this missiology. But gradually Brethren women missionaries began to address the social concerns of Chinese women outside of the home.

² “Minuets of the General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren, April, 1926” (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren), BLHA, 192.

Often their efforts to improve the lives of Chinese women coincided with attempts to create Christian homes, but increasingly throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, their mission work strayed from simply promoting Victorian domesticity. With the establishment of women's Bible schools and a variety of women's industrial work programs, Brethren women missionaries increasingly sought to meet the broader social needs of Chinese women, such as increasing literacy, facilitating economic opportunities, and offering nurses training. Whereas Brethren women went to China with the goal of evangelizing and uplifting Chinese women through Christianity, the realities of Chinese women's lives often shaped mission policy in new practical directions.

The Church of the Brethren China mission entered a new phase during the Japanese occupation and World War II. Missionaries continued the growing trend of meeting the immediate physical needs of the people of Shanxi. A new relief-centered missiology emerged, which had, on a smaller scale, been a part of the early Brethren mission in Shanxi through their famine work and women's industrial work programs. But nationalism, war, and a heightened concern over racism in many American churches propelled relief work to a more predominant place in Brethren missiology. In addition, indigenous Chinese leadership surfaced as a prominent component of the altered Brethren missiology and Brethren men and women trained Chinese doctors, nurses, and pastors to sustain an indigenous Chinese Christian community in Shanxi. However, as with previous adaptations of mission strategy, a conservative tendency prevailed and Brethren missionaries

retained their belief that Christianity was meant to be spread to every continent and that doing so would uplift all of humanity.

Brethren missionary women stretched their faith to attract new members and at times pursued more relief-oriented work over evangelism, but they maintained their stance that Christianity was meant to be planted in China as a means to uplift the entire nation. During the 1940s, at the height of Brethren relief efforts, women missionary applicants still expressed evangelism as their primary motivation to missionary service.³ In addition, Brethren women did not ever elevate Chinese religions to the level of Christianity or note many positive attributes of Buddhism, Confucianism, or Daoism. Thus, while Brethren missionaries were more flexible in their approaches to mission than were some Protestant groups of the twentieth century, they did not alter their view of the elevated status of Christianity. Some missionaries came to form a deep respect for Chinese culture and religious practices, but Brethren women missionaries tended to cling to their conservative belief in the superiority of Christianity over all other religions.⁴

³ “Application for Appointment as a Missionary, Dolores H. Snader,” (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren, 1945), BLHA: 3; “Application for Appointment as a Missionary, Helen Angeny,” (Elgin, IL: General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren: 1939), BLHA: 3.

⁴ Marjorie Jane Harris, “American Missions, Chinese Realities: An Historical Analysis of the Cross-Cultural Influences on the Development of North China Union Women’s College/Yenching Women’s College, 1905-1943” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1994), 315. Harris’ study includes the example of missionary Luella Miner who, straddling American and Chinese culture, respected Confucianism and incorporated Chinese cultural practices in her funeral ceremony.

Changing Gender Roles in the Church of the Brethren

Brethren missionaries were disappointed to see the end of their life's work in China. But the strands of progressivism that ran throughout their mission work in China also touched the denomination at home. Missionary women frequently wrote for the denominational periodicals *The Missionary Visitor* and *The Gospel Messenger* and authored General Board literature. Numerous examples of writings by Brethren women, including essays, articles, pamphlets, and plays, have been used throughout this thesis. The exact extent to which missionary writings changed the attitudes of Church of the Brethren members toward China and Chinese women is unclear, but most likely missionary periodicals and reports painted a picture of China for the Brethren at home. This picture often portrayed Chinese people as culturally inferior and in need of drastic help, yet also upheld the exemplary accomplishments of Chinese Christian converts in the areas of education, evangelism, homemaking, and medical training. Through their writings, missionary women were crucial to providing an image of China to church members in the United States.⁵

⁵ Nettie M. Senger, "Motives that Call Me Forth," *The Missionary Visitor* (February 1916): 58; Mrs. Aaron Longanecker, "China," *The Missionary Visitor* (April 1913): 113. William R. Hutchison, "Missionaries on the 'Middle Ground' in China," *Reviews in American History* 25, vol. 4 (1997): 633. In this article, Hutchison reviews Lian Xi's work, *The Conversion of Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China*, which describes the impact of "missionaries-in-reverse"—missionaries who sought to alter Americans' attitudes regarding China and Chinese people.



Figure 1.7. “Single Ladies of the Mission Field” (c. 1930). Brethren Historical Library and Archives.

However, the influence of women missionaries in many Protestant denominations began to decline significantly after World War II. Typically historians of missions point to the 1920s as a time when after a high point of cooperation and growth among women’s mission agencies, the American women’s missionary movement began to decline. During the 1910s and 1920s, women’s mission boards were consolidated with male-dominated denominational mission boards. Women fought the imminent mergers, but often they lacked the rights, such as voting privileges, that could have prevented this shift. These mergers occurred for a variety of reasons, including financial constraints, the view that the division between men’s and women’s missionary work was an artificial one, and the arguments of the Fundamentalist movement which sought to restrict the social dimensions of missionary work and to limit the teaching and preaching roles of women. According to historian Dana Robert, by World War II this

backlash against American women missionaries in their home denominations meant the virtual end to a distinguishable female missionary movement.⁶

Nevertheless, the relationship between Church of the Brethren women missionaries on the field and in their home denomination did not follow this trend. This difference may have resulted due to several reasons. First, while Brethren women formed small mission societies in individual congregations, they never created a separate women's mission board at the denominational level. Second, Fundamentalism was divisive in the Church of the Brethren, but the theological debates during this era did not significantly alter denominational support for women in the mission field. In 1924, one week after Annual Conference, a collection of conservatives and Fundamentalists split from the Church of the Brethren and formed the Dunkard Brethren Church. These individuals were critical of female leadership in the church, saying that "Christian women may function, and should be encouraged to be helpful in many ways, but a female ministry in the sense of preaching, or a female official in the church, is without Scriptural authority."⁷ But few Brethren left to join the Dunkard Brethren and the trajectory of the Church of the Brethren was, with considerable debate, moving toward sanctioning leadership roles for women in the church.

In 1922 the Church of the Brethren began to license women to preach in the church. Proponents of licensure for women argued that the women were already preaching and that this measure would simply recognize an existing trend.

⁶ Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 302-308.

⁷ "Declaration of Principles," *Bible Monitor* (July 15, 1924): 7 in Longenecker, *The Brethren During the Age of World War: The Church of the Brethren Encounter with Modernization, 1914-1950* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2006), 187.

In addition, some advocates of licensing women to preach argued that the denomination needed talented women who could preach on the mission field and therefore licensure was a practical measure.⁸ In 1927 the General Sunday School Board was the first to hire a woman as field staff.⁹ According to 1928 Commission on Women's Work report, the denomination had more applications for missionary positions from women than they had positions available. The Commission suggested that congregations make use of Brethren women who expressed an interest in ministry by placing them in "assistant pastor" roles.¹⁰ The approximately forty-three years that Brethren women served on the mission field set a precedent for women in leadership positions in the denomination. Eventually, in 1958 the denomination would grant full ordination privileges to women in the Church of the Brethren.

In *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*, Mark Chaves defines institutional gender equality as occurring when "there is no official position that women are formally barred from occupying."¹¹ The Church of the Brethren had voted to ordain women, but practically "the stained glass ceiling" still restricted the leadership roles of women in the church—it would still be another thirty years until a women would hold the position of Annual Conference moderator.¹²

⁸ Longenecker, *The Brethren During the Age of World War*, 173.

⁹ Pamela Brubaker, *She Hath Done What She Could: A History of Women's Participation in the Church of the Brethren* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1985), 122.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 112.

¹¹ Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2.

¹² Sally B. Purvis, *The Stained Glass Ceiling: Churches and their Women Pastors* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995); "Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Locations," *Church of the Brethren Network* (<http://www.cob-net.org/ac/locations.htm>). In 1989

The Church of the Brethren in a Global and Gendered Context

This thesis places the history of the Church of the Brethren into a global and gendered context. While the voices and sources of Chinese men and women who came into contact with Brethren missionaries are not overwhelmingly present in this analysis, the results of their encounters with Brethren missionaries are apparent. Ultimately, the Church of the Brethren mission in China stretched the denomination in new directions and as this occurred numerous issues came under debate, including the primacy of Christianity in the world, Brethren practices such as footwashing and Love Feast, and the role of women in the faith. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Church of the Brethren expanded its boundaries, opening up their religious community to new cultures, conflicts, and concerns. The Brethren adapted, first in their evangelical endeavors and next in their relief and service work. The role of women in the denomination shifted too—Brethren women were representing the church overseas, initiating their own educational and evangelistic programs, and carrying the denomination into new cultural realms. In the 1940s and 1950s the denominational shift to a gendered form of relief work restricted the role of women in overseas church work. The progressive actions of women missionaries overseas would not translate immediately into new roles women in their homes churches, either—those opportunities would not yet come for another twenty years.

Elaine M. Sollenberger became the first female moderator of Annual Conference. See also Harold S. Martin, "A Woman Conference Moderator," *BRF Witness* 5, vol. 22 (September/October 1987), <http://www.brfwitness.org/Articles/1987v22n5.htm>.

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Gwong, Moy Files

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Minutes, records, and reports of the Church of the Brethren mission in Ping Ting

Nettie Mabelle Senger collection

Photograph Albums

Records of Ping Ting Chou Church of the Brethren, Shanxi, China

Shanxi, China mission records, 1912-1940

Bridgewater College Brethren Collection (BCBC)

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