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From James Legge to Evangeline Edwards: The Role of Scottish and Other
Missionaries in the Formation of Sinology in Britain

Over the last half-century, the foreign missionary movement from the West has attracted much academic scrutiny from historians of imperial encounters with indigenous peoples.¹ More recently, scholars have also begun to draw attention to the significance of missionaries, former missionaries or their progeny, as repositories of specialist linguistic and cultural knowledge of Asia and Africa who were indispensable to Western governments and universities and whose influence was sometimes formative in shaping conceptions of the non-European world.² This article addresses one aspect of this broader theme, namely the leading role played by missionaries or former missionaries in the development of the academic discipline of sinology in Britain. Particular emphasis is placed on the contributions of two missionaries with strong connections to Scotland. One of these, James Legge, is well known. The other, Evangeline ('Eve') Dora Edwards, has been almost entirely forgotten.

Missionaries and the making of sinology

¹ This article draws in part on an earlier and shorter publication, 'Afterword: James Legge and the missionary tradition in British sinology', chapter 12 in *James Legge and Scottish Missions to China*, ed. Alexander Chow (Leiden, 2020), 000-000. I am grateful to the editor and the publishers for their kind permission to reproduce this material in this article.

² See, for example, David Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, 2017).

In 1940 the Glasgow publishers Blackie and Son issued a book on Confucius in their 'What They Teach' series of educational texts on leading religious teachers; other titles in the series included Jesus and Muhammad. The author, Evangeline Edwards, was professor of Chinese at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London. The opening paragraph of the book reads as follows:

We in the west find it hard to understand the Chinese attitude towards religion. Applied to the Chinese, 'worship' does not mean worship in our sense of the word. We habitually speak of the Chinese as worshipping ancestors, but in fact in doing so we fall into the same error as Protestants describing Roman Catholics as worshipping saints. The Roman Catholic would hold strongly that he did not 'worship' saints. In like manner the Chinese revere rather than worship their ancestors, and to speak of the "worship" of Confucius, or of Confucius founding a religion, is wholly misleading. Perhaps we should speak of him as having been 'canonized' rather than 'deified'.³

Although there was nothing in the book to alert the reader to the fact, this eminently sensible statement came from the pen of a former missionary. Evangeline Edwards had served with the Women's Foreign Mission Committee of the United Free Church of Scotland in Manchuria from 1913 to 1920. She was the last former missionary to China to hold an academic post in Chinese studies in a British university. I shall return to her at greater length later in this article. At this point we may observe simply

³ Evangeline Edwards, *Confucius*, 'What did They Teach' series (London and Glasgow, 1940), 1.

that Edwards's preface to the book referred her readers to five recommended translations of the *Analects* of Confucius, to all of which she expressed her own indebtedness, and that two of the five were the work of former missionaries. One, on which Edwards was particularly reliant, was the first volume of James Legge's celebrated collection of *The Chinese Classics*. The other was a translation originally published in 1910 in Yokohama, Japan, by W. E. Soothill, then re-issued in 1937 by Oxford University Press in its World's Classics series, with further editions appearing as late as 1955 and 1958.⁴ William Edward Soothill, from 1920 to his death in 1935, held the chair in Chinese in the University of Oxford that was first occupied by James Legge from 1876 to 1897.⁵ Soothill was not a Scot. He was a Methodist from Yorkshire who served with the missionary society of the United Methodist Free Church in Wenzhou, and then, from 1906 to 1911 as principal of Shanxi University, a mission-founded institution established on the basis of indemnity money paid by the Chinese following the Boxer Rising.

Two intertwined and related motifs thus provide the theme of this article. The first, as befits an article published in *Scottish Church History*, is the particular contribution of Scottish missionaries or former missionaries to the origins and

⁴ *The Analects of Confucius* (Yokohama, 1910). See *The Analects, or the Conversations of Confucius with his Disciples and Certain Others*, translated by William Edward Soothill (London, 1937). The 1955 and 1958 editions were edited by Soothill's daughter, Lady Dorothea Hosie (1885-1959). Edwards, *Confucius*, iii, in fact refers to a 1938 edition.

⁵ On Soothill see W. John Young, "William Edward Soothill: missionary and sinologist," *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity* <http://bdconline.net/en/stories/soothill-william> (accessed 2 March 2020).

evolution of sinology as a discipline in Britain. The focus will be principally, though not entirely, on the roles of James Legge and Evangeline Edwards. The former was Scottish in every sense, though he was employed by a London-based missionary society. The latter, as we shall see, was of Scots parentage, and served a Scottish mission, though she was born in New Zealand and educated mainly in England. The second and underlying theme of the article is to highlight the central contribution that missionaries or former missionaries, whether they were Scottish, English, or Welsh, made to the emergence of sinology in Britain.

These themes are under-explored in scholarship, but they should not surprise us. The role of Jesuit missionaries as mediators between the distinct intellectual traditions of Europe and China in the seventeenth century is, of course, well known. On the one hand they impressed the scholar-officials gathered at the imperial court in Peking with their mastery of astronomy and other areas of Western science. On the other, they disseminated both knowledge and sympathetic understanding of the historic cultural traditions and texts of the ‘curious land’ of China in Europe, to such an extent that some modern scholars identify the Jesuits as the architects of the discipline of sinology.⁶ Yet the shorter-lived nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Protestant missionary movement in China has not attracted the same degree of attention from historians interested in the growth of European understanding of Chinese language, culture, and patterns of thought. Protestant missionaries to China have been studied because of their implication in the wider European imperial impact on China, or their ambiguous role in such upheavals as the Taiping Rebellion or Boxer Rising, or their major contribution to the development of higher education in

⁶ David E. Mungello, *‘Curious Land’: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Stuttgart, 1985).

Republican China. But their contribution to scholarly knowledge about China has been neglected. Protestant missionaries, it tends to be assumed, were doers rather than thinkers, evangelists and educators, but not primarily scholars. James Legge, missionary with the London Missionary Society (LMS) in Malacca from 1840 and then in Hong Kong, before being appointed the first professor of Chinese at Oxford University in 1876, is perhaps the most obvious example of the inaccuracy of such an assumption.

James Legge (1815-97)

James Legge, in company with several other notable Scots who served the LMS – among them John Philip and David Livingstone – came from an originally Presbyterian family but went to the mission field as a Congregationalist. Remarkably, Legge, Philip, and another LMS pioneer to China – William Milne – all came from the same Congregational church in Huntly, Aberdeenshire. This congregation was formed in 1800 by the former minister of the General Associate Synod, George Cowie, after his ejection from the denomination on account of his identification with the vibrant movement of itinerant evangelism led by the brothers Robert and James Haldane.⁷ Legge thus came from a background of activist evangelicalism, but this did not mean that he had little care for the intellect. As a student of moral philosophy at King's College, Aberdeen, from 1831 to 1835, Legge became intimately familiar with the writings of Thomas Reid, drawing from him a confidence in the existence of intuitive moral principles or self-evident truths that were common to all humanity, even if they were expressed in widely contrasting terms in different intellectual

⁷ Harry Escott, *A History of Scottish Congregationalism* (Glasgow, 1960), 257.

systems. These Scottish Enlightenment ideas would later be determinative in inclining Legge to adopt an open mind to the wisdom of the Confucian classics.⁸

The title of this article might appear to identify James Legge as the pioneer of the British tradition of missionary sinology, but this is debatable. Robert Morrison himself has some claim to the distinction, on account of his achievements as a lexicographer and scholar of the Chinese language. Legge was not even the first missionary to hold a chair in Chinese in a British university. He was preceded by his own teacher in Chinese, Samuel Kidd (1799-1843), an earlier missionary of the LMS who, after teaching at the Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca, became in 1837 the first professor of Chinese at the newly-founded University College, London. Kidd's appointment was for five years only, and lapsed after his death. The benefactor of his chair, Sir George Staunton, transferred his funding to the neighbouring and more orthodox institution of King's College, London, whose chair in Chinese survived with some interruptions into the twentieth century.⁹

Kidd does not deserve to be remembered as a scholar of Chinese thought or literature. He was appointed to the post by his knowledge of Chinese deriving from his missionary vocation, and his possession of at least some ability to teach the language to others. Legge testified that Kidd was 'a very competent teacher', although later scholarship has been less kind in its evaluations of his capacity. T. H. Barrett, emeritus professor of East Asia History at the School of Oriental and African Studies

⁸ Lauren F. Pfister, *Striving for 'The Whole Duty of Man': James Legge and the Scottish Protestant Encounter with China*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), I, 63–82.

⁹ T. H. Barrett, *Singular Listlessness: A Short History of Chinese Books and British Scholars* (London, 1989), 69-72.

in London, defends Kidd against the damning criticism made by his SOAS academic predecessor Denis Twitchett with the faint praise that ‘he seems to have had at least half a notion of what he was about’.¹⁰ By contrast, Legge himself was far more than a linguist, or even a translator – he was an astute commentator, interpreter, and mediator of the Confucian classics to an English-speaking audience. He was the first to attempt such a venture, and, unlike most pioneering attempts, his has stood the test of time. In 1914 the eminent sinologist, Herbert A. Giles, the second professor of Chinese at Cambridge, deemed Legge’s translations of the Chinese classics to be ‘the greatest contribution ever made to the study of Chinese’.¹¹ Almost a century later the American historian Norman Girardot could still describe the revised second edition of his five volumes of the Chinese classics as ‘the most prodigious single-handed contribution of British scholarship to sinology’.¹²

Legge’s scholarly credentials and achievement were not, however, universally recognised by his academic contemporaries. As a Scot, and, what was almost certainly worse, a Nonconformist, Legge did not find ready acceptance at the University of Oxford, an Anglican and predominantly High Church institution that had only just been compelled to open its doors to Nonconformist interlopers

¹⁰ Norman J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge’s Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, and London, 2002), 31; Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 72, n.1.

¹¹ H. A. Giles, *Adversaria Sinica* (Shanghai, 1914), 346, cited in Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 79.

¹² Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, 460.

following the abolition of university religious tests in 1871.¹³ Within Oxford Legge never received the same acclaim as his fellow pioneer in the study of comparative religion and collaborator in publication of the *Sacred Books of the East*, Friedrich Max Müller.

However, while Müller as a German Lutheran shared Legge's status of marginality from the inner circles of the university, it was seemingly harder to persuade Oxford that the study of the history of Chinese thought was worthy of its investment than was the study of Indo-European religions, in view of the long-standing close connections of India with the British Empire. Even the very term 'sinologist' was still relatively rare – though not unknown – in the English language at the time of Legge's election to the Oxford chair in 1876.¹⁴ The endowment for Legge's chair was raised by private subscription, and not without considerable difficulty.¹⁵ Legge attracted very few students to his lectures – an article in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1889 estimated his average attendance as four.¹⁶ The Bodleian Library possessed few Chinese books until 1881-2, when the accession of 563 printed Chinese books and 55 manuscripts from the former library of another Scot, Alexander Wylie, the scholarly former LMS missionary and later British and Foreign Bible

¹³ David Jasper, 'Legge in Oxford', in *James Legge and Scottish Missions to China*, ed. Chow, 000-000.

¹⁴ Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, 141; the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists the first published instance of the word as being in 1816.

¹⁵ Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, 162-6.

¹⁶ Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, 200-1.

Society agent in China, more than doubled its existing holdings of Chinese items.¹⁷ It is revealing that Legge's own personal library of Chinese books ended up in the New York Public Library rather than being left to the Bodleian.¹⁸ Legge always remained something of a prophet without honour in his own, or rather his adjacent, country.

Alexander Wylie (1815-87) went out to China in 1847, having been chosen by Legge to run the LMS printing press in Shanghai. Wylie was born in London to Scottish parents, and began his education living with relatives at Drumlithie near Stonehaven. He is a figure who deserves a full scholarly treatment.¹⁹ This extraordinarily learned yet almost entirely self-taught Scottish missionary was adept, not only in Chinese, but also Latin, French, German, Russian, Manchu, and Mongolian, as well as having some competence in Greek, Uyghur, and Sanskrit. Although he never held a university post, nor even went to university, Wylie gained wide recognition in his own day as a leading sinologist and bibliographer of Chinese literature. He had particular expertise in Chinese mathematics and astronomy.²⁰ Some 1,700 volumes from his large collection of Chinese books and early European sinological works became the basis of the holdings of the Shanghai Public Library

¹⁷ David Helliwell, *A Catalogue of the Old Chinese Books in the Bodleian Library. Volume 2: Alexander Wylie's Books* (Oxford, 1985), iv; Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 77.

¹⁸ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 117.

¹⁹ A major study of Wylie is being undertaken by Professor Ian Gow of the University of Glasgow, to whom I am indebted for my knowledge of Wylie.

²⁰ 'In memoriam. Alexander Wylie', *Monthly Reporter of the British and Foreign Bible Society* 16, 4 (April 1887), 49-54.

established in 1868, while most of the remainder was sold to the Bodleian in 1881-2.²¹

Wylie's reputation in the field of Chinese mathematics and bibliography survived him. Legge was initially rather less fortunate. Although there were those such as H. A. Giles who accorded Legge immense respect in the years following his death, it is also true that his intellectual reputation fell under a shadow in the early twentieth century, above all because his central contention fell out of fashion. Legge was committed to the position first expounded by Matteo Ricci that the Chinese originally had a concept of the High God, and by the early 1850s he had concluded, significantly as a result of his close interaction with Chinese collaborators, that his name was *Shangdi*.²² If correctly translated, the Chinese classics could thus function in an analogous way to the Old Testament as described by the apostle Paul, as a schoolmaster to lead the Chinese people to Christ. The Chinese confirmed the teaching of Paul in the letter to the Romans that all humans had been granted an original knowledge of the one true God, but that over time this knowledge had been

²¹ Helliwell, *Catalogue*, iii; *Report of the Council of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, for the year 1868* (Shanghai, 1868), vii-viii; *Report of the Council of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society for the Year 1869* in *Journal of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society for 1869 and 1870* (Shanghai, 1871), ii.

²² See Joachim Gentz, “‘God has conferred even on the inferior people a moral sense’: Legge’s concept of ‘the people’ (*min*) in his translation of the *Book of Documents*”, and Alexander Chow, in ‘Finding God’s Chinese name: a comparison of the approaches of Matteo Ricci and James Legge’, in *James Legge and Scottish Missions to China*, ed. Chow, 000-000, 000-000.

obscured, in the Chinese case being corrupted by the subsequent depersonalisation of *Shangdi* by Neo-Confucianism. This distinctly ‘missionary’ reading of the history of Chinese religion came under increasing attack after the turn of the century, as historians of religion, anthropologists, and sinologists all grew sceptical about theories that posited the degeneration over time of a primitive monotheism. In his lifetime, conservative missionaries had attacked Legge for his suggestion that the Chinese might have retained even a fragmentary and residual concept of the true God. In contrast, after his death, his critics were those of a more scientific perspective, accusing him of reading Christian theistic meanings into Chinese traditions that were in reality entirely ‘other’ in nature, not to be squeezed into a Western framework of religious categories.²³

In Britain, however, the Leggian tradition of missionary sinology retained influence until well into the twentieth century, in contrast to France, Belgium, and Germany, where there was an older and richer tradition of scholarship in Oriental philology, which was less dependent on missionary expertise. In Britain, former missionaries – plus a few diplomats – were for some time almost the only people who possessed sufficient knowledge of both spoken and written Chinese to qualify for academic posts in Chinese. Thus at Oxford Legge was succeeded in the chair of Chinese in 1899 by a former consular official, Thomas Lowndes Bullock, and then, in 1920 by the former Methodist missionary W. E. Soothill.

Evangeline Dora Edwards (1881-1957)

²³ Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, 442-3.

In comparison to James Legge, Evangeline Edwards has been forgotten. She receives no mention in Elizabeth Hewat's standard history of Scottish foreign missions, nor even in Austin Fulton's history of the Scottish Presbyterian missions in Manchuria.²⁴ More surprisingly, Ian Brown's official centenary history of the School of Oriental and African Studies, published in 2016, contains only one brief reference to Edwards.²⁵ In view of her general absence from most historical sources, it has been necessary to reconstruct her life story with some care.

Evangeline Dora Edwards was born in Napier, New Zealand, on 13 August 1888. Her father, John Edwards (1857-1934), was a Methodist minister, born in Dundee and later resident in Glasgow.²⁶ After training at the United Methodist College in Manchester, he entered the probationary ministry of the United Methodist Free Church in England in 1882. In 1886 he went as a missionary to New Zealand,

²⁴ Elizabeth G. K. Hewat, *Vision and Achievement 1796-1956: A History of the Foreign Missions of the Churches United in the Church of Scotland* (London, 1960); Austin Fulton, *Through Earthquake, Wind and Fire: Church and Mission in Manchuria 1867-1950* (Edinburgh, 1967).

²⁵ Ian Brown, *The School of Oriental Studies: Imperial Expansion and the Advancement of Learning* (Cambridge, 2016), 131.

²⁶ On John Edwards see Oliver A. Beckerlegge, comp., *United Methodist Ministers and Their Circuits Being an Arrangement in Alphabetical Order of the Stations of Ministers ...* (London, 1968), 74; *The Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church and Church Yearbook* (1934), 223. The obituary in the Minutes of the Methodist Conference incorrectly gives his place of birth as Glasgow. The Scottish census records for 1857 indicate that he was born in Dundee: accessed via <https://www.archives.com/uk> (accessed 30 September 2019).

where he ministered to both indigenous Maori people and the numerous Scottish settlers in the Hawke's Bay region of North Island.²⁷ In 1896 he returned to England to minister in circuits first in Riddings in Derbyshire, and then in Bath. He is described in the 1901 census returns as a minister of the United Methodist Free Church living with his four daughters and one son in Bath. According to the census entry, Evangeline (or Eve) was the second daughter, and it would appear that her mother had died, perhaps in giving birth to one of her siblings.²⁸ Eve Edwards was educated at Redbrooke College in Camborne, a girls' boarding and day school that subsequently became Camborne Grammar School. She then trained as a teacher at the Islington Day Training College, a college founded by the London County Council in 1906 to provide a two-year training course for teachers.²⁹ Her first teaching post was a demanding one, at the Devon and Exeter Girls' Reformatory, an institution established in 1858 for the schooling of delinquent teenage girls who had been

²⁷ In the 1926 New Zealand Census Hawke's Bay recorded the highest percentage of Presbyterians of any region of the North Island; see John Rawson Elder, *The History of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand 1840-1940* (Christchurch, n.d.), map facing 224; see also 113-115.

²⁸ 1901 census records for England and Wales, accessed via <https://www.archives.com/uk> (accessed 5 September 2019). W. Simon, 'Obituary: Evangeline Dora Edwards', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 21, 1/3 (1958), 220-24, at 220, is presumably incorrect in describing her as the third daughter. John Edwards' obituary refers to his suffering 'grievous sorrows from time to time' (*Minutes of the Annual Conference*, 223).

²⁹ UCL Institute of Education Library Guide, <https://libguides.ioe.ac.uk/c.php?g=482420&p=3298563> (accessed 2 March 2020).

committed by the magistrates.³⁰

On 20 January 1912 Miriam Stevenson, the Secretary of the Women's Foreign Mission Committee of the United Free Church of Scotland, received a letter from Eve Edwards's father, who was by then ministering in the Chesterfield United Methodist circuit. The letter has not survived, but from Stevenson's reply it appears that Eve had already written a letter of inquiry to the United Free Church about missionary service, but had not received an answer. It also appears that Edwards had referred to his 'former connection with our Church', his happy recollection of it, and his work since he 'went south'.³¹ What the precise nature of that connection was, is not known: had John Edwards perhaps been brought up within either the United Presbyterian Church or the Free Church before identifying himself with Methodism? What is clear that Eve Edwards was determined to apply for missionary service in China, and that she wished to serve not with the China mission of the United Methodist Church (as it had become in 1907) but with the United Free Church of Scotland.³²

Further correspondence with Miriam Stevenson over the coming months resulted on 14 May 1912 in Eve Edwards being accepted by the Candidates Sub-Committee for missionary service, though without a field allocation at that stage. As already a qualified teacher with some experience, it was agreed that only one year of further training at the Church's Women's Missionary Training College in Edinburgh

³⁰ <http://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/ExeterGirlsRfy> (accessed 2 March 2020).

³¹ Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland [NLS], MS 7951, fol. 273, Miriam Stevenson to Rev. John Edwards, 23 January [19]12.

³² NLS, MS 7951, fol. 272, Miriam Stevenson to Evangeline Edwards, 23 January 1912.

(St Colm's) would be necessary.³³

In joining St Colm's, by then located adjacent to Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden at 23 Inverleith Terrace, Edwards became part of one of the most creative and vibrant institutions of missionary training then existent anywhere in Europe. Founded by the Free Church of Scotland in 1894 under the principalship of former India missionary, Annie Small, by the second decade of the century St Colm's was training women missionaries, not simply for the United Free Church, but also for a broad range of Scottish, English and continental mission agencies. The twenty-five students in the 1912-13 session also included those destined for service with the English Presbyterian mission, the Church Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, the Bible and Zenana Medical Mission, the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, the Evangelical Union of South America, the Salvation Army, and another who is described simply as being from the 'Bpt. Ch.' [Baptist Church].³⁴ Among them was Mabel Shaw of the London Missionary Society, who would become a pioneer of girls' education in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia); one of her pupils was Betty Kaunda,

³³ NLS, MS 7951, fol. 625, Miriam Stevenson to Evangeline Edwards, 15 March 1912; and MS 7952, fols. 305-6, 479, Stevenson to Edwards, 16 May and 26 June 1912.

³⁴ NLS, Acc 13301/67, Women's Missionary College, House Guild Letter, February 1913. The students are listed by name in separate lists for the first two terms in NLS, Acc 13301/118, 'Schemes of work in Miss Small's time', 1912-1913 session, Curriculum papers relating to students' work, 1909-1965. Edwards is listed as Dora Edwards.

wife of Kenneth, the first president of Zambia.³⁵

The weekly house journal recording life at St Colm's was kept by each of the students acting in turn as secretary. Edwards's first stint as secretary, for the week ending 11 October 1912, implies that the student community was remarkably free of denominational or theological argument:

We understand that a proposition is afloat – that, as we all live together too quietly & peacably [*sic*], a Committee be appointed, consisting of seven or eight students, Volunteers, to try the tempers, & thus build up more efficiently the characters of their fellows. We shall be interested to watch the working out of this idea.³⁶

Nothing more is said about that intriguing idea. A later entry by Edwards records with equal amusement the visit of an expert in linguistics:

On Tuesday a brilliant star was seen to rise upon the horizon of our knowledge – phonetician became the new word in our language, and the great questions of the day are now 'Do you say "be-lieve" or "bu-lieve"? "India" or "Inja"?' If two lectures with Mr Graham Bailey have roused the College to such enthusiasm, we may hope to be 'bet'er' [*sic*] linguists by the time we go

³⁵ Norman Goodall, *A History of the London Missionary Society 1895-1945* (London, 1954), 279-80; Bernard Thorogood, ed., *Gales of Change: Responding to a Shifting Missionary Context. The Story of the London Missionary Society 1945-1977* (Geneva, 1994), 53.

³⁶ NLS, Acc 13301/46, House Journal of the Women's Missionary College, volume 4, 1910-1914, fol. 143.

down. It's sad however we are to learn that already some are beginning to doubt how many l's there are in 'woollen'.³⁷

This was a learning community that combined intellectual stimulus with fun and fellowship.

On 23 September 1913 Edwards sailed for Shanghai.³⁸ Her destination was the Girls' Middle and Preparatory School, at Kaiyuan in Manchuria. She arrived in north China at a momentous time. In the winter of 1910-11 Manchuria had witnessed a horrific epidemic of pneumonic plague; as Liza Christie, wife of Dr Dugald Christie of Moukden hospital, starkly observed, there were 43,942 cases and 43,942 deaths.³⁹ Hard on the heels of that disaster came the overthrow of Manchu rule in Peking in 1911 and the establishment of the Chinese republic in 1912. No contemporary evidence survives of Edwards' reaction to the Nationalist victory, though it is fair to assume that she shared the general enthusiasm of Protestant missionaries for the promise of a new dawn in China; some of her later writings reflect on the major innovations and also challenges that the Revolution brought to public education in China.⁴⁰ Few letters from Edwards' time in Manchuria survive, but we do know that

³⁷ NLS, Acc 13301/46, House Journal of the Women's Missionary College, volume 4, 1910-1914, fol. 202.

³⁸ NLS, MS. 7955, fols. 278 and 600, C. W. Crawford to Miss E. Dora Edwards, 6 June and 12 August 1913.

³⁹ Hewat, *Vision and Achievement*, 261.

⁴⁰ See, for example, London, School of Oriental and African Studies [SOAS], Special Collections, MS 145609, Evangeline Edwards Papers, Box 4, Typescript of lecture on education for international understanding in relation to China. n.d. [1945-6?], fols. 8-9.

in 1915 she was appointed principal of the Women's Normal College in Moukden (Mukden), training women teachers for the Presbyterian schools in the province.⁴¹

In 1920 Edwards returned to Britain on furlough. Whatever St Colm's had given her, it had not provided any tuition in Chinese: the language teaching offered during the 1912-1913 session was limited to introductions to Hindustani and, less predictably, Esperanto.⁴² Presumably she had received some instruction in Chinese while teaching in Kaiyuan and Moukden, but she evidently now felt the need to acquire a more adequate grounding in the Chinese language. She accordingly informed the Women's Foreign Mission Committee of her intention to study for a Diploma in Chinese at the School of Oriental Studies in London (opened in 1916), and requested some months of release from deputation duties in consequence.⁴³ The Foreign Mission Committee staff at 121 George Street evidently knew next to nothing about the newly founded School in London, as Edwards was requested to provide more information about the course of study, and 'the status of the institution'.⁴⁴

In the course of the autumn of 1920, the tone of the letters from 121 George Street became progressively more frosty as it became apparent that Edwards was

⁴¹ NLS, Acc 13301/236, Women's Foreign Mission of the United Free Church of Scotland, *Report for the Year 1915* (Edinburgh, 1916), pp. 39, 42.

⁴² NLS, Acc 13301/118, 'Schemes of work in Miss Small's time', 1912-1913 session, curriculum papers relating to students' work, 1909-1965. In 1910-11 some elementary tuition had also been offered in Persian and Marathi.

⁴³ NLS, MS 7970, fol. 317, Anon.[Ella Lee] to Evangeline Dora Edwards, 3 August 1920.

⁴⁴ NLS, MS 7970, fol. 475, Anon. [Ella Lee] to Evangeline Dora Edwards, 15 September [19]20.

looking to delay her return to China in order to further her Chinese studies.⁴⁵ The Mission Council in Manchuria began to press for a clear indication of her date of return.⁴⁶ On 25 October Edwards offered her ‘temporary resignation’. The Women’s Foreign Mission Committee considered her offer on 11 November. Edwards was then bluntly informed that no offers of *temporary* resignation were ever accepted, and that her full resignation had been accepted as of 25 October, with the payment of six months’ furlough salary. The Committee expressed the hope that she might perhaps return to Manchuria at a later date ‘when family circumstances permit’, which suggests that her language studies were not the only factor.⁴⁷ Her promising missionary career had come to an abrupt termination.

Eve Edwards’ Diploma studies in London turned into a degree. In 1924 she was awarded the first-ever degree in Chinese awarded by the School of Oriental Studies: she gained a First. In 1921 she began part-time lecturing at the School – no mean achievement for a woman at that time – while continuing her own studies in Chinese as an external student of the University of London. This was despite the fact that the University on three occasions in 1924-5 refused to grant her the official status of a Recognised Teacher of the University, until finally doing so in 1929.⁴⁸ She went on to obtain an MA with Distinction in 1925, and in 1931 a DLit for a thesis on prose

⁴⁵ NLS, MS 7970, fol. 537, E. Lee to Miss E. J. [sic] Edwards, 28 September 1920; and fol. 725, E. Lee to Evangeline Dora Edwards, 21 October 1920.

⁴⁶ NLS, MS 7970, fol. 782, E. Lee to Evangeline Dora Edwards, 26 October 1920.

⁴⁷ NLS, MS 7970, fol. 931, E. Lee to Evangeline Dora Edwards, 22 November 1920.

⁴⁸ Robert A. Bickers, “‘Coolie work’: Sir Reginald Johnston at the School of Oriental and African Studies, 1931-1937”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, series 3, 5, 3 (1995), 396.

literature in the T'ang period. She was appointed reader in Chinese in 1931 and then professor in 1939, a post that she retained until her retirement in 1955.⁴⁹

The University of London chair of Chinese, as has already been mentioned, dates from 1837, with the appointment of Samuel Dyer. Dyer was not the only former missionary to occupy the chair. From 1908 to 1913 the professor of Chinese was George S. Owen (1847-1914), formerly an LMS missionary in Peking. His appointment appears to have been due entirely to his linguistic expertise developed through his work since 1890 on the Union Version of the Mandarin New Testament for the British and Foreign Bible Society, as he had no publications.⁵⁰ After Owen's death the professorship in Chinese remained vacant until 1925, though another LMS missionary and Bible translator, William Hopkyn Rees, held a Readership in Chinese from 1921 to 1925. W. E. Soothill was one of the electors to the London chair, and he may well have been responsible for the appointment to the chair in 1925 of Joseph Percy Bruce (1861-1934), who had served with the Baptist Missionary Society in Shandong province, latterly on the staff of Shandong Christian University, of which he became president.⁵¹ Bruce had published two substantial books on Zhu

⁴⁹ Simon, 'Obituary', 220.

⁵⁰ On Owen see James Sibree, comp., *A Register of Missionaries, Deputations. Etc., from 1796 to 1923*, 4th edn (London, 1923), 86, no. 633; Jost Oliver Zetzsche, *The Bible in China: The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China* (Sankt Augustin, Germany, 1999), 216, 255-9, 268-9.

⁵¹ Robert A. Bickers, 'New light on Lao She, London, and the London Missionary Society, 1921-1929', *Modern Chinese Literature*, 8,1/2 (1994), 31.

Xi (1130-1200), the influential Neo-Confucian philosopher in the Sung dynasty.⁵²

Apart from that, however, Bruce was not particularly distinguished intellectually. It is noteworthy that Bruce had without success applied twice – in 1920 and 1924 – for the Readership in Chinese, and that his eventual appointment to the chair in 1925 was for one year only, being annually renewed until 1931, when he was 70 years old, five years beyond retirement age. He continued to teach in the School thereafter as a part-time instructor in Chinese.⁵³

Eve Edwards thus entered a Chinese studies department whose primary function had been to teach the Chinese language to the diplomats, imperial administrators and missionaries who were the original constituency for whom the School had been founded. Academic sinology took second place to language instruction. Her own scholarly contribution, building on her DLit thesis, was in the field of Chinese prose literature of the T'ang dynasty: she contributed two volumes on the subject to the Oriental Series published by the London Orientalist bookseller, Arthur Probsthain, one on miscellaneous literature and one on fiction.⁵⁴ A third Chinese anthology of Chinese parables, sayings, and poems in translations, *The Dragon Book*, was of a more popular kind. The copy in Edinburgh University Library

⁵² Chu Hsi, *The Philosophy of Human Nature*, translated from the Chinese, with notes by Joseph Percy Bruce (London, 1922), Joseph Percy Bruce, *Chu Hsi and his Masters: an Introduction to Chu Hsi and the Sung School of Chinese Philosophy* (London, 1923).

⁵³ Robert A. Bickers, “Coolie work”, 393-4.

⁵⁴ E. D. Edwards, *Chinese Prose Literature of the T'ang Period A.D. 618-906. Vol. I. Miscellaneous Literature*. Probsthain's Oriental Series vol. XXIII (London, 1937); *Vol. II. Fiction*. Probsthain's Oriental Series vol. XXIV (London, 1938).

bears her signature, dated 8 July 1947, and was presumably donated by her to the library.⁵⁵ A further volume of semi-popular anthology published in 1948, *Bamboo, Lotus and Palm*, extended her literary horizons beyond China to Asian Buddhism (the lotus) and the Pacific (the palm).⁵⁶ It was inspired by a tour of the Far East, South-East Asia, and the Pacific she took on behalf of the School between July 1946 and February 1947, charged with reporting on the success of the School's training of candidates for the armed services who had served in these regions during the war.⁵⁷ The tour took Edwards to Australia, but apparently not to the land of her birth, New Zealand.⁵⁸

Although due note should be taken of Edwards' publications in the field of Chinese literature, the China historian Robert Bickers fairly describes her academic reputation as 'now negligible'.⁵⁹ Among her former colleagues at SOAS, the predominant memory was of someone who was an academic administrator of ferocious efficiency and no mean opponent in academic politics. The projected St Colm's training exercise in 'trying the tempers' – if it ever happened – paid off in the

⁵⁵ E. D. Edwards, comp. and ed., *The Dragon Book* (London, Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1938).

⁵⁶ E. D. Edwards, comp. and ed., *Bamboo, Lotus and Palm: An Anthology of the Far East, South-East Asia and the Pacific* (London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, 1948).

⁵⁷ Simon, 'Obituary', 222; see also the entry for Edwards' papers in the SOAS archives catalogue:

<http://archives.soas.ac.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=MS+145609&pos=1> (accessed 2 March 2020).

⁵⁸ Edwards, *Bamboo, Lotus and Palm*, dedicatory page.

⁵⁹ Bickers, "'Coolie work'", 396.

long run. From 1937 to 1953 she served first as Acting Head, and then Head of the Far East Department at what in 1938 became the School of Oriental *and African* Studies. Her academic relationship with Bruce's successor as Professor of Chinese, the former Scottish diplomat Sir Reginald Johnston, one-time tutor to Pu Yi, the last emperor of China, was a fractious one. It reflected the fact that in 1931 Johnston had been given the chair instead of her, by a majority vote, even though she was almost certainly a better scholar than he was; he also demonstrated a chronic inability to treat women as equals. The dysfunctional nature of their working partnership may have been the reason that in 1936 the School made overtures to another former missionary, H. R. Williamson of the Baptist Missionary Society, informally offering him the post of professor of Chinese. Williamson turned the post down.⁶⁰ Bickers' analysis of the intra-Scottish conflict between Edwards and Johnston points unmistakably to the fact that, in this instance at least, the former missionary was much closer to the ideal of a modern academic than was Johnston as a former British diplomat in China.⁶¹

During and after the Second World War Edwards became rather more widely known beyond the ranks of academia through public lectures on China and a series of radio broadcasts on Chinese topics for the BBC Eastern Service. The surviving scripts of these broadcasts reveal her to have held Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) in high – and largely uncritical – esteem. A BBC talk she gave on 'China's Everyday Heroes' in February 1943 had no hesitation in comparing the Nationalist leader and his

⁶⁰ Oxford, Regents Park College, Baptist Missionary Society archives, CH/67, C. E. Wilson to H. R. Williamson, 10 December 1936, and J. B. Middlebrook, *Memoir of H. R. Williamson: In Journeyings Oft* (London, 1969), cited in Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792-1992* (Edinburgh, 1992), 317.

⁶¹ Bickers, "Coolie Work", 385-401; see also Simon, 'Obituary', 220-4.

devoutly Methodist wife, Soong Mei-ling, to heroic figures from China's history who had been elevated to quasi-divine status. Her reverence for the 'Generalissimo' as a Christian man of valour leading the national resistance to Japanese imperialism was typical of attitudes in the British Protestant missionary establishment at the time, but lacked critical discernment.⁶² More discriminating was her May 1942 broadcast on 'Confucius Helps China to Face Japan', which insisted that if Confucius were alive today, he would be regarded as a political economist or social reformer rather than a religious leader. Confucianism, she contended, should be regarded, not as a religion, but as an independent philosophy that could be combined with a variety of religious allegiances, including Christian. Although tending towards undue conservatism, its emphasis on the sanctity of the family needed only a wider commitment to social service to propel China forward. The presumable implication was that this was what Christianity alone could provide.⁶³

What is striking, however, about Edwards's surviving papers from her academic career is that her original missionary vocation is never mentioned. Even when giving a public lecture in 1945 or 1946 on the history of education in China, which included favourable mention of the leading contribution of missionary institutions, she protested her lack of qualifications to speak on the subject, and never

⁶² SOAS, Special Collections, MS 145609, Evangeline Edwards Papers, Box 2, E. D. Edwards, 'China's everyday heroes', n.d. [broadcast February 1943]. For the widespread missionary endorsement of Jiang Jieshi see Simon D. Forbes, 'Constraints, compromise and conflict: UK missions in China 1931-1945' (PhD thesis, SOAS, 2019), 95, 113-14, 124, 138-9, 157-9, 163-9.

⁶³ SOAS, Special Collections, MS 145609, Evangeline Edwards Papers, Box 2, E. D. Edwards, 'Confucius helps China to face Japan', fols. 2-4, broadcast 7 May 1942.

referred to her own previous role as a teacher in Manchuria.⁶⁴ Is this evidence that she had never forgiven the United Free Church for its refusal to give her adequate encouragement to pursue serious Chinese language studies? Or does it suggest that over the years her own Christian commitment waned? The sources do not permit a definitive judgment.

The end of a tradition

By the Second World War the missionary tradition of British sinology that James Legge had pioneered was drawing to its close. Eve Edwards was the last of the missionary line in British Chinese studies. In some other fields of non-Western scholarship, former missionaries continued to wield influence in the university world for rather longer. At SOAS, for example, another missionary of Scottish parentage, the former Baptist missionary to the Belgian Congo, Malcolm Guthrie, served as professor of Bantu Languages from 1951 to 1970.⁶⁵ Also at SOAS as a distinguished professor of Oriental Laws from 1953 to 1976 was J. N. D. Anderson (who was English), one-time missionary with the Egypt General Mission.⁶⁶ By and large,

⁶⁴ SOAS, Special Collections, MS 145609, Evangeline Edwards Papers, Box 4, E. D. Edwards, Typescript of lecture on education for international understanding in relation to China. n.d. [1945-6?], pp. 8-9.

⁶⁵ Hazel Carter, 'Malcolm Guthrie 1903-1972', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 59 (1973): 473-98.

⁶⁶ See Todd M. Thompson, *Norman Anderson and the Christian Mission to Modernise Islam* (London, 2017).

however, by the post-war period academia had ceased to be dependent on missionary experience and learning for specialist knowledge of the non-European world.

The modern discipline of sinology would be much the poorer without the relatively brief interlude of the Western Protestant missionary era in China. The Scottish figures of James Legge and Alexander Wylie tower over the field. The undoubted quality of Scottish education in the wake of the Scottish Enlightenment may help to explain the particular characteristics of their intellectual contribution to the discipline, which combined breadth of humanitarian vision with painstaking attention to historical texts. Nonetheless, former English or Welsh missionaries also figure prominently in the wider story of sinology in Britain – W. E. Soothill at Oxford, the Anglican Arthur Charles Moule, professor of Chinese at Cambridge from 1933 to 1938, and George Owen and W. H. Rees at London. Evangeline Edwards is the only woman on the cast list, and that is reason in itself for the attention given her in this article. But she is more than a token female in a male-dominated field: although not in the same academic league as James Legge, she was without doubt a vigorous intellect as well as a robust personality. The imprint of Christianity or her missionary experience on her published writings is not explicit. Nevertheless, it may be appropriate to conclude this article by citing a passage from her preface to *Bamboo, Lotus and Palm*, in which she reflects on the experience that servicemen during the Second World War gained of the peoples of East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific:

I hope it [the anthology] may interest some of the many thousands of men and women whose duties took them there during the war years, as well as others to whom the peoples of the East are no longer dwellers in a separate world. How different they are from ourselves and yet how like they are may at least be

guessed from the glimpses into their lives and their minds allowed by the limitations of a small anthology.⁶⁷

There, it may be suggested, speaks the former missionary, and, more particularly, the former student of St Colm's. The missionary movement had at its heart the audacious, but now deeply politically incorrect vision of transforming the religious allegiance of non-Western peoples, those who were manifestly 'different from us'. Yet at the same time its underlying premise was that at heart they were 'like us', part of one family of humanity for whom Christ died and whom the Spirit could renew in the image, not of the West, but of Christ. Evangeline Dora Edwards embodied that spirit of liberal but evangelical Christian humanism.

⁶⁷ Edwards, *Bamboo, Lotus, and Palm*, ix.