

Nineteenth Century Chinese Christian Missions in Hawaii

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Among the 45,064 Chinese to immigrate to Hawaii during the 19th and early 20th Centuries were a significant number of individuals (especially Hakkas) embracing the Christian faith.¹ What transpired in China to make such a phenomenon possible? How was it that Asians, beginning in 1872, came to the Sandwich Isles with Judaeo-Christian morals and a Biblical faith? The answer to these and related enigmatic questions is stated briefly herewith.

The Background in China

After the Opium War of the early 1840s, between Britain and China, the mainland of China was opened to western missionaries. By the Peace of Nanking, the municipality of Hong Kong and the cities of Canton, Amoy, Fuchow, Ningpo, and Shanghai were population centers of special interest to European Christian missionaries.² At this time, Karl Guetzlaff, a German employee of the British Colonial Service in Hong Kong, decided to lead the advance of Gospel emissaries into these cities and the lesser populated rural areas. His goal was rapid evangelization and itinerant preaching rather than the more conventional methods of parish outreach through long-term education in literacy, morals, and Scriptural doctrine.

Guetzlaff, a Moravian, felt that the aim of foreign missions was not to found churches and congregations, but to preach the Gospel. His definition of missionary work was simply to seek "souls that were ready."³ His aim was to send out workers who were native to China,

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and to establish a mission that was indigenous in terms of outreach, staffing, and leadership.

To this end he established in 1843 the Chinese Union, financed by private individuals. His own salary in the Colonial Service enabled him to make considerable contribution and the work which he initiated immediately prospered. In 1844 there were 20 members of the Chinese Union; four years later there were 1100, including 100 preachers.⁴ In 1847, society missionaries from Europe began to arrive in China to assist Guetzlaff.⁵ Unfortunately, he died in 1851, but European missions and missionaries were established.

The earliest Protestant missionaries in the 19th Century to arrive in China were the three *Ba*'s:

- Ba-set — Basel
- Ba-men — Barmen (Rhenish)
- Ba-lin — Berlin

These three groups, following an appeal by Guetzlaff, were invited to evangelize.

The Berlin Society (Lutheran) with headquarters in Canton, set out to work primarily with the Punti-speaking Chinese, who were in the majority in south China. They did quality work in education, evangelization, and medical missions, and as time progressed, they were privileged to see many from the middle and upper classes respond to their efforts.⁶ Notable among these men was the Honorable Woo Set Am, a scholar and Mandarin, an official of the empire who, following his conversion, resigned his official position and became a Lutheran minister.⁷ In true pioneer fashion he went about his mission accompanied by his disciples who carried the conventional bamboo pole over their shoulders, slung with baskets from each end. In one basket were books and Bibles, and in the other medicines and herbs. This beloved gentleman-turned-preacher was revered and remembered even in 1963, his portrait still hanging in the Village Hall at Fat Sen where he had carried on much of his pastoral work.⁸

The Basel Mission Society (Rhenish) arrived in 1847 to work with the Hakkas. This mission placed a heavy emphasis on Christian education. Children of converts, both boys and girls, were placed in parish and boarding schools, and a seminary at Lilong trained future pastors and teachers, many of whom emigrated to Hawaii.⁹

The Barmen Mission Society (also Rhenish) emphasized education and outreach through an organized school system, but also ran hospitals and other missions of mercy. The Barmen work was principally among Punti.

The Rhenish Mission today still has its headquarters in Barmen, Germany, hence the name. It is a confessional Lutheran society.

The Lutheran Women's Association for China (headquartered in Berlin) was closely linked to the Barmen Mission. Deaconesses arrived in 1854 and began the work of caring for orphaned and abandoned children, most of whom were female infants. These "basket babies" were provided both basic education and professional training in music, medicine, education and other vocations. They were much sought after as house mothers, helpers and Christian wives for Christian physicians, missionaries and pastors.

A good example of a "basket baby" raised by missionaries was Mrs. Augusta Chun Kong (mother of Kathleen Kong and wife of the late Rev. Kong Yin-Tet of St. Peter's Episcopal). She learned to play the organ and was trained in the various domestic skills and graces useful during her adult life as a pastor's wife.¹⁰ Although she died in her 90's, she played the organ and read her German language Bible every evening even into her 80's. She was skillful at embroidery work as well as in cooking, baking and other domestic functions. She saw to it that her children read all the Chinese classics. Another "basket baby" was Mrs. K. F. Li, Dr. Kong Tai-Heong.

Missionaries to Hawaii

The first Chinese clergyman of the Episcopal Church in Hawaii was the Honorable Woo Set Am's son, the Rev. Woo Yee Bew. Among the latter's children and grandchildren are physicians, educators and professional people serving Hawaii and the mainland U.S. Another relative, Dr. K. F. Li, and his wife, Kong Tai-Heong, became the first Chinese medical doctors (husband and wife team) to serve in Hawaii. They arrived in 1890 bringing with them one of the Berlin Mission Society's specialties, medical training and practice. When examined upon arrival in Hawaii, it was found that Dr. and Mrs. Li were considerably advanced both in theory and practice over the American mainland doctors serving the islands.¹¹ They had received their training in China through the auspices of the various mission societies which brought from Europe some of the latest and most advanced medical practices and skills.

Basel-trained Chinese in Hawaii included at least 12 professional clergy, catechists and Bible women.¹²

Kong Tet Yin (Kong Sue Yin), left China for Australia where he joined the Anglican Church and served many years as an evangelist. In 1872 he arrived in Hawaii with a letter of recommendation from his Australian Bishop. He was assigned to work in Kohala for the Congrega-

tional Church under the direction of the Rev. Elias Bond. He served as pastor in Kohala until his passing early in the 20th Century. Mr. Kong thus was active, at separate times, in three major Christian denominations. (Kong Tet Yin is not to be confused with the Rev. Kong Yin Tet mentioned below.)

Tshi Syah En, Basel trained at Lilong, was employed as an evangelist by the Hawaii Evangelical Association among the Chinese, working out of Paia and touching Wailuku and Lahaina, Maui from 1883-1884. He is also known as Tsi Sak En.

Mark Wan To, Basel trained at Lilong, became pastor of the First Chinese Church of Christ in Honolulu in 1885. He spoke both the Punti and Hakka dialects. He returned to China in late 1885.

Kong Shui Kee, Basel trained, became the Honolulu pastor of the First Chinese Church of Christ in 1888. He had previously worked for the Hawaii Evangelical Association on Maui as Evangelist from 1886-1888. By 1890 he had returned to China.

Leng Shen Chong, Basel trained, was employed as Hakka-speaking pastor at First Chinese Church of Christ from 1897-1900.

Chong How Fo (Cheung Hou Fo), Basel trained at Lilong, began his pastoral work at Kula, Maui for the Hawaii Evangelical Association in 1901. A biography is forthcoming from his widow and other family members. His widow and her parents were also of Basel background.

Shim Yin Chin, Basel trained at Lilong, was ordained a Lutheran minister in Hong Kong in 1892 and served congregations there and in Canton until his arrival at Kula, Maui in 1899 where he established St. John's Episcopal Church and served as its pastor until his death in 1918. He was born in 1868. His wife was also of Basel training and carried on his work at St. John's after his passing. The Rev. Canon Wai On Shim, D.D. survives as a son of this venerable couple.

Fung Tet Yin, Basel trained at Lilong, served as pastor of the First Chinese Church in Honolulu.

Kong Hyuk Tung, Basel trained at Lilong, served as a teacher in the mission school of the Congregational Church in Kohala. He is the father of Albert K. C. Kong and Dr. Raymond Kong of Honolulu.

Kong Yin Tet, Basel trained at Lilong, served as pastor of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Honolulu from 1896-1927. A more complete biography is forthcoming from St. Peter's.

Luke Ah Seu (Luke Aseu), Basel trained, founded St. Paul's Episcopal in Kohala as layreader in 1882. He moved to Honolulu in 1898, having previously founded in 1897 the First Chinese Christian Church in Honolulu. (Aseu's sister's son, the Rev. Kong Yin Tet, came from China in 1889.) Luke Aseu is another example of an individual who served

three denominations with equal enthusiasm at different times. (Chang Young Siu) Luke was his Christian name; Young Siu, his given name; and Chang, his family or surname.

Mrs. Fock-Tshin Young, Basel trained, came to Hawaii in 1892 with some 80 women who were to join their husbands or to be married to men who had preceded them. She brought with her, her eldest son, Edward, who later became well known as a medical doctor in the Hawaiian Islands. Five other sons were born in Honolulu. The study of English was her first concern. From 1908 on, she taught Bible and Prayer Book to the Chinese women in the different missions until she finally associated herself with St. Elizabeth's where she worked with Deaconess Sands and others. She left to return to China in October of 1930 with her son, Dr. Edward Young, who was on his way through Honolulu from a year's study in some of the great medical centers in Europe. Mrs. Young was one of the best known and most loved Christian workers among the Orientals in Honolulu within the Episcopal Church.¹³

The Rev. Sat Fan is the only known Rhenish in English trained Lutheran to serve as an evangelist in Hawaii. He was employed by the Hawaii Evangelical Association at Makawao, Maui in 1880, and after serving a brief time there, he apparently returned to his homeland on the mainland of China.

The Hawaii Story

The early Christian converts in China, with their different moral and social behavior, became a cohesive and familial group with a social life all their own. Many of them met on a daily basis for prayer and worship. This practice continued even upon immigration to Hawaii. In Pahala, on the Big Island, for example, a group of 70-100 Basel Christians settled to do plantation service. For many years they met during weekday evenings to sing hymns, meditate upon the Scriptures and pray. They had a close and reliable fellowship, part of which was because a number earlier had spent time within the disciplined and structured setting of a foundling home, boarding school, or missionary compound in China. In such a setting they experienced the warmth of Christian togetherness which came to mean more to them than any previous societal bonds they had known.

Of course, the sense of "Christian" community which particularly the Hakka Christians experienced, did not supplant the importance of the nuclear home and the primary family. In many homes there was a strong bond between parents and children based upon oneness in Christ. The How Kong Chong family of Kohala (parents of the Rev. Kim On Chong), gathered daily for both morning and evening prayer.¹⁴

With the coming of Protestant missionaries in the 19th Century, a number of Christian holidays were added to the social calendar. Since these celebrations were without precedent, most of the customs and practices connected with them were of European origin. The Christian rather than pagan vestiges were inculcated. Thus these holidays were observed in a more reverent and spiritual manner than in many parts of the Western world. Of course, there was socializing and eating, there were exchanges of gifts and other of the more tangible manifestations of the holidays. Indeed, the first lighted Christmas tree in a church of Hawaii was in the Fort Street Chinese Christian Church in 1881. The lighting of the tree and the singing of Christmas carols and chorales were practices the Chinese Christians learned from the Wurttemberg missionaries in the homeland. The carols had German and Swiss tunes.

In Kohala the Chinese gathered for midnight Christmas services and did much special cooking in anticipation of this event. All of the Chinese pastries using yeast were from recipes which the missionary wives had taught them. The Chinese did not know of yeast before the coming of the Europeans, and since the German ladies were accustomed to potato yeast in Europe, this was the yeast used in Kohala in the 1880's and 90's.¹⁵ Also, many recipes from Europe were adapted to utilize available Chinese ingredients. Thus Chinese steamed buns with beans or pork made a Chinese pudding with arrow-root (a delicacy), almond cookies, etc. were additions to the diet at that time. These items became culturally acceptable quite readily despite the millennia of habits and traditions which prevailed in Kwangtung. That they did might indicate the "credibility" which the populace vested in these missionary men and women, and it perhaps also points out the importance of making something as local and indigenous as possible. Though the recipes were foreign, the ingredients were not, and with adaptations many possibly felt the creations to be uniquely their own. Hence, today, few would think of these items as anything but part and parcel of the ancient Chinese heritage.

Of course, to un-Westernize the setting in which the Christian Gospel came to China was a supreme task! From the evidence at hand, it appears that the missionaries of the three *Ba*'s did a significant amount of such adapting not only in China but in Hawaii. They did not foist their clothing, furniture, diet, etc. upon others, but offered it for their studied consideration. As a result, there were new creations which were strictly neither from the East nor the West. It was not so much a compromise as an improvement, oft times for both sides, over the conditions which had prevailed. The result was a unique, flexible, familiar background for these early Chinese Christians to Hawaii.

NOTES

- ¹ Hawaii Sugar Planters Association, n.d., composite listing of immigrants to Hawaii.
- ² Herman Schlyter, *Karl Guetzlaff* (Lung: Hakan Ohlssons Boytryckeri, 1946), p. 296.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 297. Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), founder of the Moravian denomination, was an ardent evangelist who traveled to various countries, including Russia and America (which he visited twice) as an itinerant missionary.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 297.
- ⁵ Wilhelm Kempgen, *Glaubenskampf am Tigertor* (Barmen: Verlag der Rhein-ischen Missionsgesellschaft, 1948), pp. 17-18.
- ⁶ Julius Richter, *Geschichte der Berlinger Missionsgesellschaft 1824-1924* (Berlin: Verlag der Buchhandlung der Berliner ev. Missionsgesellschaft, 1924), 729 pp.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 536-542.
- ⁸ T. David Woo, "The Reverend Woo Yee Bew," *Hawaiian Church Chronicle* (September 1963) pp. 6ff.
- ⁹ Georg Ziegler, "Der Basler Mission in China," *Der evangelische Heidenbote* (February 1906), p. 12.
- ¹⁰ Conversation with Kathleen Kong in 1972.
- ¹¹ Conversation with Mrs. Eleanor Kau, a grand-daughter, in 1972.
- ¹² These names are essentially gleaned from various issues of *The Friend*, 1868-1920.
- ¹³ C. Fletcher Howe, *The First 50 Years of St. Elizabeth's Church, Honolulu, Hawaii 1902-1952* (Honolulu: Advertiser Publishing Co., Ltd., 1952), p. 37.
- ¹⁴ Conversation with Ruth Lyman Rath on January 20, 1972.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*