MISSIONARY WOMEN IN CHINA: CHANGING CHINA, 
CHANGING THEMSELVES

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A story in the *Hainan News Letter* describes a Chinese Christian woman who had been studying at a mission school. When she went to her husband’s house for the Chinese New Year, she encountered trouble.

Her husband has never supported her since she was married, nearly 15 years ago, nor their little girl. She has worked in the fields for her brothers in order to earn a living for herself and child. She has accompanied Miss Skinner on some of her trips with the older Bible-woman, and has assisted in instructing the women that came into the chapels. Some of her village people saw her on these trips and told her husband that she was following men. When she went home, he beat her, cutting a gash in her forehead and bruising her in many places. He also threatened to cut off her ears and nose, for this is permitted, when women are thought to be disloyal to their husbands. She was very much frightened and under the pretense of going out into the fields to dig sweet potatoes, ran away and came out to Kiungchow and is still here. She is an earnest Christian and is in training for a Biblewoman.

Missionary women went to China to preach the Gospel. But instead, they helped transform Chinese culture and society, especially for Chinese women. The missionaries influenced China’s education and medical services as well as initiated changes that the Chinese reformers completed. Interestingly, most women missionaries had more freedom and power in China than they did in the West. When they arrived in China, they decided to advocate for Chinese women’s rights in addition to converting them. Many women missionaries believed China needed Western culture and did not hesitate to introduce Western norms. However, the changes initiated by the missionaries often contradicted Confucian values, which were deeply embedded in Chinese culture.

While women missionaries influenced China, the Chinese affected the women missionaries too. Cross cultural exchanges are mutual processes where both groups influence each other. If one group is politically more powerful or dominant, it is easy to overlook the opportunities that the exchange offers the dominant group for personal transformation. Women missionaries initiated changes in response to the injustices and suffering they saw, especially of children and women. At times, their affinity and empathy for the Chinese caused women missionaries to assume new roles of independence and leadership. Many historians rightly identify the changes that the women missionaries initiated in China, but equal attention should be given to the changes the Chinese had on the missionaries.

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SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

While the missionaries affected Chinese culture, debate exists about how much they really changed China. Some historians believe that while the Chinese learned little about Christianity, they learned volumes about Western culture. According to some historians, Western ideas played a major role in the overthrow of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of the Chinese Republic. Kenneth Latourette, a historian, asserted that the missionaries’ successes compensated for Western merchants’ and diplomats’ mistakes. He said, “the future historian may see in missions in China one of the most important movements of the past three centuries.”

In like manner, China influenced the missionaries, especially women missionaries. Women missionaries had more freedom and independence than Western women. Furthermore, while the women missionaries fought for the rights of Chinese women, they simultaneously obtained new rights themselves. At times, gender usurped national origins as both Chinese and American women obtained new opportunities. However, some historians argue that women missionaries’ responsibilities for the mission itself limited their work in China and women missionaries who did field work also had limited access to Chinese women since the Chinese women had many restrictions. Finally, women’s work, whether for the mission or Chinese women, generally confined women missionaries to their traditional spheres – hospitals, homes, schools and not arenas for political reform.

BACKGROUND

From 1800 to the 1990s, about 50,000 missionaries lived in China, and women missionaries comprised two-thirds of this total. Missionaries had been coming to China since the early nineteenth century. But not until the ratification of the Treaty of Tientsin in 1858, which forcibly opened up China after the Opium War to the Western world, were foreigners allowed to travel into China’s interior. Furthermore, the Treaty gave missionaries the right to preach the Gospel to the Chinese and to attract converts. Thus, a surge of missionaries arrived in China and, at the height of missionary influence in the 1920s, about 6,500 missionaries lived in China.

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3 Neils, United States Attitudes and Policies toward China, 4.
9 Foster Stockwell, Westerners in China, 98.
10 Lodwick, Educating the Women of Hainan, 2.
Before the influence of the missionaries, Confucian thought directed Chinese women’s lives. According to Confucianism, a woman had three devotions; first, she devoted herself to her father before marriage. Then, she devoted herself to her husband after marriage, and lastly, she devoted herself to her son during widowhood. Women lived in a patriarchal society and depended on men their entire lives. In addition, Confucianism taught that women should have little contact with men except for relatives and husbands. This meant that Chinese women remained isolated most of their lives, especially in upper-class society. Even male missionaries and doctors could not contact Chinese women.\(^\text{11}\)

Not only were women secluded from public life, but the painful tradition of footbinding eliminated their ability to work. While the Chinese saw small feet as a sign of beauty, missionaries viewed this tradition as an act of oppression toward women.\(^\text{12}\) Cited in an article titled “Chinese Character,” published in 1843, in the Protestant Missionary Journal, the author states, “Confucian philosophy has done its best to unfit a Chinese for the possession of such a heritage, by assigning to woman nothing but the privilege of drudging for her lord.”\(^\text{13}\) Chinese women lived isolated from society and dominated by men.

Overall, most missionaries had little success in converting the Chinese. Christianity felt foreign and unfamiliar to the Chinese and contradicted several values of Confucianism. Thus, accepting Christianity meant relinquishing their identity for most Chinese.\(^\text{14}\) However, the missionaries had some success converting lower class Chinese people for several reasons. First, missionaries fed the poor; converting gave a poor Chinese access to food. The Chinese called these converts “Rice Christians.”\(^\text{15}\) Second, some converts were convicts, and mission houses offered protection and safety from authorities.\(^\text{16}\) Lastly, the lower class, less educated Chinese sometimes felt attracted to Christianity’s miraculous powers.\(^\text{17}\) In other words, disadvantaged people more often converted to Christianity compared to other groups. Thus, it makes sense that Chinese women would be attracted to Christianity since they had few rights within Chinese society.

**IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN MISSIONARIES**

Overall, missionaries were in the best positions of any foreigners to understand the feelings and behaviors of the Chinese. Since their work required them to move into the interior of China from the treaty ports, they had unique knowledge of Chinese culture. Moreover, missionaries made China their home, while other foreigners did not stay for long periods of time.\(^\text{18}\) But without women missionaries, male missionaries would not have reached half of the Chinese population since men were forbidden to talk to Chinese

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\(^\text{13}\) Lay, “Remarks on Chinese Character and Customs.”
\(^\text{15}\) Stockwell, *Westerners in China*, 98.
\(^\text{16}\) Stockwell, *Westerners in China*, 98.
\(^\text{18}\) Neils, *United States Attitudes and Policies toward China*, 82.
women. Thus, the job of converting Chinese women belonged exclusively to missionary women; as one missionary put it, “The peculiar barriers of the East point to what is distinctively women’s work.” Furthermore, missionary women played a crucial role in extending missionary work into the whole of Chinese society. Many missionary women believed that the home was the most important institution of society, and thus, by reaching Chinese women, the women missionaries could influence Chinese families as well. Reaching entire families made women missionaries indispensable for achieving the missionaries’ goals. A male missionary in China once said, “We men have failed. Now the Lord is showing us what He can do through women.”

Not only were women missionaries important for their work in China, they also inspired Western women to donate money, thus aiding the missionaries financially. Cited in a journal article in 1869 titled “Laborers Wanted,” the author said, “Let every lady who feels that she would be a missionary, go to work at home, and she may, by every dollar raised, teach her heathen sisters.” Western women felt inspired by missionary women and supported them by raising money for “mission schools, hospitals, orphanages, and asylums, and the like,” illustrating how all divisions of missions were influenced by women missionaries. Cited at a conference in 1988, with the theme of “Mission History from the Women’s Point of View,” Reverend Pang Ken Phin, the first woman ordained by the Basel Mission’s Chinese Partner Church said,

Our women missionaries were the pioneers in the church’s ministry among our Chinese women. This means that their dedication in work, faith in God, and their sacrifice deeply impressed our women, and helped them to have the right attitude towards their identity as women. On the other hand, through the contribution of our women missionaries our Church recognised the importance of women’s participation in the ministry of the Church.

At an earlier conference in the fourth Catholic Students Mission Crusade, Mother Mary Joseph Rogers stressed the need to convert Chinese women because she believed women would be the foundation for converting Chinese families. She responded to the question, “Is it true that the majority of women in the non-Christian world can be reached only by women?” In reply, the Mother said, “The influence of women in the Orient is great, and our missionaries will not receive a family until the mother has been baptized….It is the women who teach [their families] how to live a Christian life.”

WOMEN MISSIONARIES IMPACT ON EDUCATION

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21 Robert, Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers, 83.
22 Neils, United States Attitudes and Policies toward China, 87.
23 Neils, United States Attitudes and Policies toward China, 87.
Before missionary influence, Chinese women had little or no education. For missionaries, the education of Chinese women became an important goal for several reasons. First, education could increase women’s social status and standard of living. Cited at a 1988 conference on “Mission History from the Women’s Point of View,” Reverend Pang Ken Phin said, “Education is one of the strongest tools to raise up the status of women and improve women’s life style. An old Chinese saying states ‘It is a virtue for a woman to remain ignorant.’ This traditional teaching hindered the education of our Chinese women. It caused a great loss to the family, to church and to society.”

By elevating the status of women, the cornerstone of family and domestic life, missionaries could influence the women’s families to convert to Christianity. Cited in an 1842, a missionary journal, The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal, printed an article called “Woman’s Work for Woman,” which highlighted the importance of educating Chinese women. This article states, “there can be no doubt that our most effective and hopeful work is among the girls who shall become the future wives and mothers of China,” thus suggesting that women’s positions had a major impact on society. Moreover, this article promotes the importance of women missionaries’ work educating Chinese women. Furthermore, the women missionaries had to be educated themselves in order to educate the Chinese women. They had to be competent administrators, educators, and financial managers to advance the missionary cause.

There had been earlier worries that mission schools would deplete resources and energy from missionaries’ evangelical work, but this fear abated when missionaries began viewing schools as a way to reach the impressionable youth of China. In turn, these children could influence their parents’ views of Christianity and ultimately influence Chinese culture when they became adults. In the article, “Woman’s Work for Woman” the author states that educating “their children commands their respect and I think in many cases their gratitude…. Much of the lesson taught during the day is taken home and talked of, so that there is no such utter ignorance of our doctrine as among those who have had no contact with us.” Furthermore, education became a part of the “social gospel” approach to converting the Chinese. By the twentieth century, missionaries believed that they could best change Chinese society by providing institutions that served society such as schools and hospitals. As a result of these initiatives, missionaries hoped that the Chinese would feel gratitude, and thus, they would consequently support other initiatives of the missionaries.

Women missionaries contributed to educating the Chinese, especially the women in several ways. The Jiangyin Mission represents a good example of the impact of women missionaries on Chinese women overall, but specifically on education too. In 1906, Ella Little, a woman missionary, started holding classes in her home. About thirty women attended each class. In 1907, Ella Little rented a building and started a women’s Bible boarding school. Chinese women were offered a four year program that focused on theology and prepared them to attend another theological school in Nanjing. In addition,

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26 Haas and Pang, Text and Documents, 44.
28 Farnham, “Woman’s Work for Woman.”
evidence suggests that in afternoon classes, seventeen women boarders and seventy-five irregular students had attended courses in mathematics, geography, and writing. Furthermore, girls and boys took the same classes in missionary schools, with the exception that boys learned industrial skills while girls learned household skills. The Jiangyin missionaries treated the male and female youth as equals in terms of learning but simultaneously maintained their respective roles in society.

In 1919, one of the women missionary teachers was asked to teach English at a primary school in Jiangyin. This non-missionary school had already been influenced by the missionaries. For example, this school had a Western-style curriculum which did not focus on classical Chinese and the teachings of Confucianism. Furthermore, the school held a celebration of a Chinese holiday in 1919. Ten of the Jiangyin missionaries attended, and the missionary women and Chinese men sat at the same table. Before missionary influence, this would have been inconceivable in China. Thus, women missionaries influenced Chinese culture while educating the Chinese.

**WOMEN MISSIONARIES ON MEDICINE**

Medical work was the smallest of all the contributions made by women missionaries in China. Only three percent of American female missionaries were doctors, but this small group still had a significant impact on China. For example, before missionary influence, sixty-five percent of the Chinese hospitals did not have an isolation block, which meant that highly contagious patients stayed with the regular patients of the hospital. Not only did missionaries improve medical services in China, they made medical services more available to poor Chinese too. Cited in the 1988 conference on “Mission History from the Women’s Point of View,” Reverend Pang Ken Phin said, “According to Chinese custom male doctors were not regarded as appropriate when women needed treatment. So the missionaries’ wives helped at the beginning, and gradually more and more doctors and nurses were sent to help.” Moreover, the missionaries provided medical services to groups traditionally shunned such as the rural population, opium addicts, lepers, mentally ill, and the blind. Missionaries improved public health by providing antiseptics, anesthetics, vaccines, and promoting personal hygiene. While providing medical services to the Chinese, the missionaries taught and converted the sick and poor.

Again, the Jiangyin missionaries serve as good examples to illustrate women missionaries’ contributions to Chinese medical services. In 1915, the missionaries in Jiangyin opened a women’s ward. Bible women, Chinese women who had taken classes provided by the missionaries on Christianity, regularly came to the women’s ward and spoke to the patients. In addition, Missionaries visited and preached to the patients every Sunday afternoon. By creating a women’s ward, missionaries raised the status of women and made it easier for the women missionaries to preach to the sick women.

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34 Haas and Pang, *Text and Documents*, 46.
Furthermore, at the Jiangyin women’s ward, a school opened to train women to become nurses. Ida Albaugh, the chief nurse of the hospital, started the program which became registered with the Nurses Association of China. In 1915, the first year of the program, Albaugh trained three young women. Slowly, the program expanded, and eventually, the hospital trained over 231 certified Chinese nurses.36

SOCIAL REFORM AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN MISSIONARIES

Most initiatives for social reform, especially for Chinese girls and women, positively influenced Chinese culture but were also problematic. In addition, women missionaries personally responded and changed because of the social struggles they saw. Female missionaries felt troubled by Chinese women’s roles. Missionaries believed that Chinese women were oppressed; when Mari Gratia Luking, a women missionary in China, visited hospices for only boys, she wrote, “We asked what had become of the girls. The sisters said the women and girls are among the greatest sufferers…but I am too full of the suffering of our people to write more.”37 Clearly, the perceived suffering of Chinese women made the missionary women sympathetic to them which in turn, made the women missionaries push for reform.

The female missionaries fought to abolish child marriage, foot-binding, and infanticide because they believed that these changes would be “for the benefit of Chinese society as a whole.”38 They realized that “when poor parents were unable to bring up their children, they usually sold the girls to rich families, so that their own family and the girl could survive….The girls were usually badly treated, they had to do a lot of housework, and sometimes they did not have enough to eat.”39 The suffering of these children sometimes affected the women missionaries so much that they no longer had a purely professional relationship with them. Some missionary women, influenced by the suffering of the Chinese children, crossed a professional boundary and took the children into their own homes. Often missionary women adopted deserted children before an official ban was put into place by the missionary board, and professional boundaries were reestablished. But, even after the ban, many missionaries would still save children by placing them with a Bible woman. This ensured that the child was safe and could still live among the Chinese, while also encouraging Chinese workers to be devoted to the mission.40 For example, in 1923 in the Hainan News Letter, edited by Margaret Moninger, Luella Tapppan, a missionary, wrote an article about a seven year old Chinese girl who had been found dying near the mission. The girl had been sold for sixty dollars by her starving and desperate family. After some convincing, the girl’s owner gave her to the missionaries. The article ended in a plea for help saying, “We have no plans for her yet, no money, no clothes, no name even! But who knows what she may turn out to be? Three of our finest graduates, now teaching, were no more promising ten years ago when the bugs had to be picked out of their dirty little heads for days. Now to see the beautiful

37 Dries, The Missionary Movement, 135.
38 Haas and Pang, Text and Documents, 47.
39 Haas and Pang, Text and Documents, 46.
accomplished girls they have become is almost unbelievable."  

Another example of child advocacy work is the Jiangyin mission. In 1917, two missionary women began an orphanage there for abandoned girls, and it stayed open until 1927. At the Jiangyin mission, the mission schools’ students became involved in charitable work. Usually, the students raised money to support the Qingming festival in Jiangyin, a festival created to honor ancestors. But in 1911, the students decided instead to contribute the money to famine sufferers in Jiangyin. This decision shows the influence of the missionaries as well as illustrates why other Chinese did not always welcome the missionaries. In Confucianism, ancestors were highly revered and withdrawing donated money from the festival would have been criticized by most Chinese. Many social reforms done by the missionaries conflicted with Confucian values, especially in terms of Chinese women’s roles and responsibilities.  

Throughout the twentieth century, many political changes took place that supported the missionaries’ advancement of social reforms. For example, in 1902, the Empress Dowager issued a decree outlawing foot-binding. Furthermore, schools for girls were created by the government. Interestingly, Chinese reformers often attributed the increasing political power of China to the corresponding increases in women’s rights and liberties.  

While women missionaries helped Chinese women, especially in terms of social reform, other skeptics argued that the missionaries were not that helpful. In fact, letters and newspapers sent back to the West described the oppression of Chinese women. Some historians assert that the missionaries exaggerated how much Chinese women depended on protection and help from the missionaries. Instead of only focusing on how the missionaries helped China, the writings of the women missionaries also demonstrate their own personal evolution. In response to the suffering they saw, some women missionaries challenged long standing social norms, crossed professional boundaries, became leaders, and at times, even changed their personal lives and responsibilities by adopting children. The women missionaries’ presence in China might not have initiated significant religious or political transformation. But, the individual lives of some of the missionaries changed because of their relationships with the Chinese.

ARROGANCE OF MISSIONARIES

While many missionaries demonstrated empathy and concern for the Chinese, other missionaries held arrogant attitudes about the Chinese and perhaps this rigidity kept them from evolving. Anna Pruitt, a missionary in China, exemplifies a typical missionary woman. While in China, along with setting up a boys’ school and a medical center, she did domestic work with Chinese women. She assumed that “Western scientific education, the English language, and Christian ideals” would transform an ethically

41 Neils, United States Attitudes and Policies toward China, 107.
42 Kessler, The Jiangyin Mission Statement, 156.
44 Stockwell, Westerners in China, 97.
dissolute people into an advanced, “Western-oriented” nation. Her attitudes, which typify some missionaries’ attitudes, can be partially blamed on the fact that most missionaries had no political or cultural training about China. Naïve Westerners believed that China needed to become westernized. They believed that Westerners were morally superior and technologically advanced. These arrogant missionaries believed that Chinese women were oppressed, and they thought that converting them would be the best way to westernize them and free them from oppression.

In addition, some missionaries tried to influence the Chinese by personally rejecting Chinese culture and maintaining a Western lifestyle in China. A Western lifestyle maintained boundaries between the Chinese and the missionaries. Missionary women did this by making their home life similar to what it would have been in the West. Missionary homes, outwardly and inwardly, replicated late Victorian American homes. Chinese objects were rarely used in mission homes, and missionary women remained dependent on goods from the West. In terms of food, missionary women ordered provisions six months in advance so they could preserve their Western diets. Furthermore, they usually taught their Chinese cooks how to make western food. Missionaries believed that Western food would be one of the best defenses against “the threats of an alien environment.” Lastly, clothing choices were another way missionaries maintained their ties to the West. Missionaries rarely adopted Chinese dress. For example, at a dinner party in Hainan, a missionary named Margaret Moninger wrote that “Mr. Campbell had on a dress suit, if you please, and Miss Chapin, Mrs. Campbell, and I all had on our evening gowns.”

IDA PRUITT: IN A LEAGUE OF HER OWN

While many missionaries maintained superior attitudes toward the Chinese, one woman missionary typifies opposite responses of empathy and understanding. Ida Pruitt was born in 1888 in China where her parents worked as missionaries. While most mission children went to the China Inland boarding school, Pruitt grew up on her parents’ mission. Thus, she had an early identification with the Chinese and their culture. Because Ida grew up with the Chinese, she probably had fewer emotional boundaries. In other words, Ida did not identify herself as a Westerner helping the Chinese. Rather, she probably presumed that she and the Chinese were aligned and naturally connected. In turn, Ida felt deeply affected by the Chinese culture, perhaps more so than other women missionaries who had grown up in the United States. For Ida, China felt familiar; the United States seemed like a foreign land. Furthermore, she had a deeper understanding than most missionaries of the Chinese peoples’ hostility towards Western missionaries.

47 Neils, United States Attitudes and Policies toward China, 134.
48 Stockwell, Westerners in China, 102.
49 Neils, United States Attitudes and Policies toward China, 134.
50 Lodwick, Educating the Women of Hainan, 39.
54 Hunter, The Gospel of Gentility, 137.
55 Lodwick, Educating the Women of Hainan, 39.
56 Neils, United States Attitudes and Policies toward China, 138.
who were trying to impose a new religion and culture.\textsuperscript{57} Another reason for Ida Pruitt’s early identification with the Chinese might be because of her distant relationship with her mother, Anna Pruitt. Anna Pruitt’s attitude exemplified Western arrogance towards the Chinese culture. In contrast, Ida’s father, C.W., had been influenced by Lottie Moon, a woman missionary of the 1870s who concluded that Western missionaries were not superior in any way to the Chinese.\textsuperscript{58} Ida identified with her father’s views.

After attending college in the United States, Ida Pruitt returned to her parents’ mission in 1912 where she taught at the mission school and then became its principal in 1917. But in 1919, Ida wanted to do something different and became a social worker at the new Peking Union Medical College (PUMC) where she met several non-missionary Westerners and Chinese from all social classes.\textsuperscript{59} The PUMC’s goal included helping China by increasing medical standards and promoting medical research. However, PUMC tried to make these changes according to Western ideals. Ida Pruitt became dismayed by the arrogant, narrow attitudes of the Western doctors and Western-trained Chinese doctors. Furthermore, they pressured Ida to proselytize patients even though she did not want to change Chinese culture according to Western standards.\textsuperscript{60} The arrogant Western attitudes of her contemporaries did not change Ida Pruitt’s empathic understanding of the Chinese. She remained their advocate.

While Ida worked at the PUMC until 1938, she wrote a book, \textit{A Daughter of Han: The Autobiography of a Chinese Working Woman}, which illustrates Ida’s views on Western reform and Chinese tradition.\textsuperscript{61} This book tells a fictitious story of a Chinese girl, Ning Lao T’ai-t’ai, who marries an Opium addict, works for missionaries, and struggles to keep her family together. Pruitt portrays Ning as a woman whose “gift of humor and of seeing things as they are” helps her through life’s hardships. Ning shaped her life by following Chinese tradition. Ning’s strength and determination, which came from her inner strength and her traditions, contradicts the traditional view of Chinese women held by most Western missionaries.\textsuperscript{62} Pruitt saw Chinese women as strong, competent individuals and not as meek victims of oppression.

While Ida wanted to improve China, she also wanted Westerners to develop an understanding of traditional Chinese culture and society. She recognized that Chinese culture had much to offer Westerners because it had influenced her development so profoundly. She did not believe that Westerners were morally superior to the Chinese, but she did think that Westerners should help China. For her, helping China meant not imposing Western standards and values on the Chinese.

\textbf{AUTONOMY OF MISSIONARY WOMEN}

While missionary women influenced Chinese women and Chinese social norms, the missionaries had new roles and opportunities in China which demonstrates how China simultaneously influenced missionary women. Missionary women varied in their

\textsuperscript{57} Neils, \textit{United States Attitudes and Policies toward China}, 135.
\textsuperscript{58} Neils, \textit{United States Attitudes and Policies toward China}, 134.
\textsuperscript{59} Neils, \textit{United States Attitudes and Policies toward China}, 135.
\textsuperscript{60} Neils, \textit{United States Attitudes and Policies toward China}, 136.
\textsuperscript{61} Neils, \textit{United States Attitudes and Policies toward China}, 136.
\textsuperscript{62} Neils, \textit{United States Attitudes and Policies toward China}, 141.
responses to this new autonomy. While a missionary woman’s primary role remained in the domestic sphere, similar to her role in the West, she could sometimes expand and assume community leadership roles, especially in churches. Missionary women had more power and freedom in China than they had in the West. Again, this demonstrates the impact China had on missionary women by giving them new, unique opportunities.

As mentioned before, Western women already had more rights than Chinese women. But Western women, working as missionaries, had even more freedom than women living in the West. The respect Western women received from their male coworkers gave the missionaries new opportunities for leadership. Unlike Chinese women, missionary women in China traveled long distances and took jobs requiring significant autonomy. This freedom allowed missionary women to obtain labor-intensive skills, but more significantly they acquired managerial skills. For example, many women managed or worked in hospitals, schools, or even households and held jobs that required them to utilize business and managerial skills. Some women even started their own businesses, employing poor Chinese women to make goods which would be sold in the West. In 1927, an International Missionary Council report titled The Place of Women in the Church on the Mission Field, illustrated the advantages of Christianity as a religion for women saying, “women find in it a religion that compliments them by ignoring them as women. Christ laid down no rules for women as separate from men.” The Report suggested that missions provided women with important educational and leadership skills. In other words, women missionaries obtained the necessary professional skills to do their jobs since their work settings demanded independence, authority, and creativity. In this way, women missionaries’ lives changed because of moving to China.

MARGARET MONINGER: ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF A CHANGED WOMAN MISSIONARY

Similar to Ida Pruitt, Margaret Moninger represents another missionary woman who exemplifies the opportunities given to missionary women and their personal evolution. She graduated from a church-affiliated college in the United States. There, she became part of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVMFM) and pledged to become a missionary in her junior year of college. In 1915, she was sent to China by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. She spent twenty-three years in Hainan where she worked on educational and evangelical initiatives. Within Moninger’s first five years at Hainan, she acquired a leadership role by becoming the principal of the girls’ boarding school. If Moninger had been in the United States, it

63 Neils, United States Attitudes and Policies toward China, 87.
67 Robert, Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers, 11.
68 Robert, Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers, 11.
70 Lodwick, Educating the Women of Hainan, 1.
71 Lodwick, Educating the Women of Hainan, 11.
72 Lodwick, Educating the Women of Hainan, 5.
would have taken much longer to obtain a leadership role, or she would have never even had this type of opportunity.\textsuperscript{73}

Women missionaries had greater opportunities in China and could assume different roles than the roles available to them in the United States since in the United States, women’s primary roles was in the domestic sphere and few women held jobs outside of their households. In contrast, Moninger became the mission agent and, for a few years, served as the mission treasurer. Working as treasurer, Moninger became accountable for managing thousands of dollars, which were in various currencies. Moreover, she served as the mission secretary, which charged her with maintaining communication between the American diplomats, the Presbyterian China Council, and the Board of Foreign Mission in New York.\textsuperscript{74} In addition, Moninger’s leadership skills expanded beyond the mission. In 1919, the May Fourth Movement swept across China. One goal of this movement included the emancipation of Chinese women. At one of the mass meetings, Moninger spoke. She wrote about it saying, “I thought just standing up in my seat and saying a few words might be sufficient, but the chairman came down with a very low bow to escort me up to the platform so I couldn’t help myself. I only said a few words of congratulations and thanks and urged the establishment of the girls’ school, if China were ever to be a real true republic.”\textsuperscript{75} Thus, Moninger became involved in the politics and future of China, an opportunity would not have in the United States. By becoming involved in the politics of China, Moninger moved beyond the traditional sphere for both Chinese and American women, and her comments reflect her recognition of this unique opportunity and her own personal evolution.

Besides Moninger’s leadership accomplishments, she wrote and published while in Hainan. She wrote a two-volume Hainese-English dictionary.\textsuperscript{76} Although never published, the dictionary illustrates Moninger’s proficiency in Chinese. In addition, Moninger published articles in several journals such as “the Lingnan Science Journal, the Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, and Woman’s Work, a church magazine. In addition, she wrote for other church publications including her hometown newspapers, a Hong Kong newspaper, and college alumni publications.”\textsuperscript{77} Furthermore, she served as the editor of the mission’s Hainan News Letter, and published one book, Isle of Palms: Sketches of Hainan. Interestingly, Moninger did not always receive credit for her accomplishments. For example, she wrote as an anonymous editor of the Hainan News Letter, in her book, she is only listed as “M.M.M. editor.”\textsuperscript{78} By becoming a missionary, Moninger defied the limits of American norms for women and experienced unique educational and cultural opportunities. Undoubtedly, China made a significant impact on Moninger’s life.

FINAL THOUGHTS

\textsuperscript{73} Lodwick, Educating the Women of Hainan, 5.
\textsuperscript{74} Lodwick, Educating the Women of Hainan 5.
\textsuperscript{75} Lodwick, Educating the Women of Hainan, 53.
\textsuperscript{76} Lodwick, Educating the Women of Hainan, 5.
\textsuperscript{77} Lodwick, Educating the Women of Hainan, 9.
\textsuperscript{78} Lodwick, Educating the Women of Hainan, 9.
The Christian religion never made more than a tenuous impact on the Chinese population. By 1920, the combined Protestant churches only had about 800,000 Chinese in their Christian constituency, which included a few hundred thousand who were registered as students in mission schools. When considered as a proportion of a population of nearly 500 million, the Christian converts were a minority of China.

But, the missionaries, whether positively or negatively, made an impact on Chinese culture. Through the missionary schools, hospitals, and other social agencies, missionaries became sources of alternate, more “modern” models of development. They exposed the Chinese to a wide range of Western cultural values that often conflicted with indigenous values such as Confucianism. At times, when the transmission of new ideas and institutions were supported by the Chinese government, the missionaries initiated significant changes in China that Chinese reformers completed. However, the arrogance of some missionaries offended the Chinese elite and kept them from becoming Christians or accepting Western values. In their arrogance, many missionaries failed to recognize the bidirectional influence the Chinese and Westerners had on each other, especially the women. However, some missionaries such as Ida Pruitt and Margaret Moninger recognized their shared humanity with the Chinese. As a result, their own lives were enriched by the Chinese that they served.