From Mission to Annual Conference:
The Work of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, In China, 1848–1886
Melville O. Williams, Jr.

Background of Foreign Missions in the M.E.C.S.

John Wesley's combination of the warmed heart and the world parish gave to the churches following him a great motivation for world mission. This motivation had to survive the traumatic split in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844 over the slavery issue, the southern section becoming the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (M.E.C.S.). In the division of work and responsibility, the M.E.C.S. was left with missions to Native Americans, slaves, German-speaking Americans and to the poor. These constituted a large home mission field. There were no foreign missions. This lack greatly distressed many in the southern church. Their thoughts and concerns were best set forth by Dr. William M. Wightman, Editor of the Southern Christian Advocate, Charleston, S.C., in a ringing editorial in that paper, September 5, 1845, “A Mission to China.” He wrote of the need and the opportunity—five treaty ports had just been opened to foreigners—and he called for action, including mission volunteers. Many readers were deeply moved, but none more so than was Benjamin Jenkins, a well-educated printer who was setting the type for the editorial. He knew he was called to service in China. He offered himself and was ready to go as opportunity developed.1

The other volunteer was Charles Taylor, M.D., of New York state, a graduate of New York University, with additional medical studies in Philadelphia, where he received his medical degree. Contacts with Dr. Wightman and Dr. William Capers (both later bishops) deepened Taylor’s interest in China and led to his moving to South Carolina where he became a teacher in a church-related school and was pastor in Camden. Jenkins and Taylor were married, and the wives shared the dedication.

Beginnings of the China Mission

Overall plans for foreign missions were shaping up. The first General Conference of the M.E.C.S., Petersburg, VA., 1846 set up plans for “new work in China and in Africa.” Both Taylor and Jenkins became ordained ministers in the South Carolina Annual Conference and with their wives

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sailed for China April 24, 1848. In Shanghai, with the help of experienced missionaries of other churches they found housing and began language study. They started conversing and preaching as they were able, and soon opened day schools for street children.2

By 1852 ill-health had forced both missionary wives to leave China. Mrs. Jenkins died enroute home and was buried at sea. Dr. Taylor left in 1853. He wrote one of the earliest books on China by a Protestant missionary.3

W. G. E. Cunnyingham, M.D., and his wife arrived in October 1852. He was prepared for the preaching ministry and medicine. He preached and ran a school for street children. He wrote much, interpreting the China scene quite well. In 1854 Jenkins, with his second wife, returned to China along with James W. and Mary McClelland Lambuth (sometimes Mary I. for Mary Isabella), D. C. Kelley, M.D., James L. Belton, and their wives. The men were equipped for evangelistic work.4

The M.E.C.S.-developed Chinese church was born in January, 1852 when Mr. and Mrs. Liew Tsoh-sung were baptized and taken into the church. Liew, also written as Liew “Sien Sang,” the “Sien Sang” meaning Mister, had been Jenkins’ language teacher. Immediately after the service of baptism Liew entered the pulpit and preached.5 He had been street-preaching for some time.

Liew Tsoh Sung’s work grew rapidly. In October, 1858 he accompanied Lambuth, itinerating in a circle of 500 miles around Shanghai, with much preaching and tract distribution, including 500 New Testaments. Liew stated he was preaching 17 times a month and he gave positive indications of his maturing faith.6 In 1859 he listed the eleven members of M.E.C.S. in Shanghai, including Shu Sia-yun, J. W. Lambuth’s language teacher.7

Soochow seemed an inviting place in which to begin work, but it was closed to foreigners and hostile to Christians. It was felt that Liew Tsohsung had qualities that would make it possible for him to “open up” that city. He willingly took up residence in Soochow in 1863, but was soon attacked by a mob and thrown into prison. There he contracted a disease that caused his death.8 He might well be regarded as the first martyr.

New missionaries continued to arrive: Young J. and Mary Holston Allen and M. L. Wood and his wife reached China in 1860. The U.S. Civil

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2 Clark, 465.
4 Warren A. Candler, Young J. Allen, the Man Who Seeded China (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1931), 49.
5 Clark, 465.
War began soon afterwards. With the South blockaded, there was no communication or transmission of funds. Allen and Lambuth remained and resorted to various forms of work for support. Lambuth returned to the U.S. in 1862. Allen secured employment with the Chinese government's Anglo-Chinese College. He also had responsibility for managing the affairs of the Mission. Because of the Civil War, no Annual Reports were published between 1862 and 1870.

There have been frequent references to towns and cities and to ill health. It seems fitting that we here examine geographic background and these health factors. Early in the history of the mission, J. W. Lambuth, Young J. Allen and others decided to concentrate and selected the thickly populated area of the Yangtze River delta where the Wu dialect was spoken. They began with Shanghai as the outlet port and then Soochow as the hub of a cluster of cities on the Yangtze Plain.

Dr. George B. Cressey, writing in 1934, stated: "The Yangtze Plain is a land of rivers and canals. . . . These canals are the very arteries of life. . . . [They] supply transportation and furnish water to irrigate the fields. . . . Factors of climate and location make this the most prosperous part of China." "The excessive humidity makes the summer months ener-vating." Dampness and temperatures of 30–40° in unheated classrooms and churches made winter months bone-chilling. Missionaries and some Chinese had heat in their homes, but the overall effect made for frequent colds, more severe than most foreigners had experienced before. Early in their work missionaries noted with concern the severe health needs of the people.

Dr. W. H. Park of Soochow Hospital gives this picture of heat and health risks at a time before the medical profession knew that malaria was transmitted by mosquitoes: "The summers in Soochow at that time (1885–1895) were almost unbearable. . . . Mosquitoes swarmed so that [at evening meal] we had to wear pillowcases coming up above our knees with double mosquito nets on our beds. . . . There was no wire screening to be had in the market."

"In this densely populated section," wrote Cressey, "all night soil was carefully collected and used on the farms as fertilizer." The practice increased fertility, but created a massive public health problem. In homes without screens, flies were a real menace, especially when the servants who prepared and served food had little knowledge of home sanitation.

Malaria was a constant threat. Other diseases of the Chinese to which these early missionaries were exposed included typhoid, cholera, typhus,

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9 Candler, 79-111.
12 Cressey, 295.
scarlet fever, and dysenteries. Measles could be very severe, and followed by pneumonia was life-threatening. There were also varieties of influenza, diphtheria, tuberculosis, trachoma, and scabies.

For the W. R. Lambuth family, health in Soochow became critical. In the report of Soochow Hospital, 1885, he wrote: “The climate of Soochow does not and never will agree with my family.”

In 1868 Allen, after consultation with mission leaders, launched the Chiao-hui Hsin-pao, “Church News,” a Christian weekly magazine in Chinese dealing with matters of church and national import and designed to appeal to the literati and to government officials. The magazine was very well received and at its height had a circulation of 2,000 throughout China and into neighboring countries. Shortly after it began, Dr. W. A. P. Martin, missionary evangelist and educator, President of Peking University, called it “the great Pastor, . . . equal to five missionaries.”

Pro-vocative articles stimulated much discussion; a century ago it was considered a journal of opinion for China.

It took the M.E.C.S. many years to recover from the war, but by 1875 they began to send able and dedicated missionaries to China. Alvin P. Parker, who developed Buffington Institute, arrived in 1875. In her report for 1889 Mrs. Parker, signed Alice S. Parker, described her full-time teaching schedule. George R. Loehr, a teacher in Anglo-Chinese College and pastor, arrived in 1881. David L. and Mary G. Anderson arrived in 1883. Mr. Anderson was later Soochow District Presiding Elder. William Hector Park, M.D., arrived in 1882 and served as head of Soochow Hospital for many years. On October 6, 1886, he and Nora Lambuth, the daughter of J. W. and Mary I. Lambuth, were married in Japan. Her father conducted the ceremony.

In 1876 Bishop Enoch Marvin was sent to China by the 1874 General Conference to ordain prepared “native assistants.” Four were ordained: two as local deacons, Sz Tsz Kia and Yung Kin San; two as local elders, Dzau Tsz Yeh and Dzung Young-chang.

In 1877 William R. Lambuth, M.D., son of J. W. and Mary I. Lambuth, returned to China with his wife, Daisy Kelley Lambuth. He had completed theological and medical studies at Vanderbilt University. He was able from the start to combine evangelistic and medical ministries in dispensary work and itineration programs through the area. With Dr. Park he founded Soochow Hospital in 1883, having major responsibility for its design and construction. He had full responsibility while Dr. Park was away in 1884–85.

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14 Annual Report, M.E.C.S., 1875, 64.  
16 For this spread of years see Annual Reports, M.E.C.S. one year later than date given.  
17 Personal letter to the writer from their granddaughter Olive Sherertz Lanham.  
18 Candler, 122.
He did much to help train "medical students" to become physicians. The Soochow climate, however, proved unsuitable for his children, and at the end of 1884 he declared he could not work in Soochow and accepted work in north China with the Methodist Episcopal Church, helping to found what later became Peking Union Medical College. That arrangement was not acceptable to the M.E.C.S. Board, so in 1885 he returned to the M.E.C.S. area, but not to Soochow.19

Most missionary wives, health permitting, took part in the on-going work of the mission, chiefly teaching in day schools or in Sunday Schools. In 1857 Mrs. Mary I. Lambuth drew together some "young women" for a school in her home and later saw it develop into Clopton School.20 From her history comes an outstanding example of compassion and courage. She heard a baby's whimper from a clump of long grass beside a grave, the baby evidently abandoned. She was deeply moved, picked up the baby to bring to her home, even though symptoms of small pox were clearly identified. Household servants and others pleaded with her not to bring the infant into the home, but she insisted, placing the baby in a small room off their bedroom, taking care of the child herself. No one in the Lambuth household caught the disease. The baby recovered and developed into a very fine child. She was trained at Clopton school and moved on into womanhood.21

A significant work was that of the Chinese Bible Women, nurtured for many years by J. W. and Mary Lambuth. Mr. Lambuth described the first two, "They go from house to house, talking and reading, and praying with the women of the households, and they bring into the chapels [those interested] to hear the preaching of God's word." 22

In 1878 on authorization of the General Conference, the Woman's Board of Missions was formed and began recruiting and sending out choice persons: the Rankin sisters, Lockie (1878) and Dora (1879) who opened work in Nansiang; five women in 1884: Laura Haygood, who with Young J. Allen planned and opened McTyeire School (1892), Virginia Atkinson, Dona Hamilton, Lou E. Phillips and Mildred Phillips, M.D., first woman physician for healing and medical education.23

Allen as Superintendent of the Mission

Through these years J. W. Lambuth had been serving as Mission Superintendent. In 1880, he and his wife had to return to the United States. Allen became Mission Superintendent with a heavy work load.

21 "Little Beginnings and Great Endings," leaflet of Woman's Department, Board of Missions, M.E.C.S. Nashville, Tenn. (no date).
22 Annual Report, M.E.C.S., 1874, 64.
The following summary draws heavily on the work of Dr. Adrian Bennett.24

In 1881 the supervising bishop, H. N. McTyeire, wrote Allen that he had been appointed to the superintendency of the China Mission, including coordination of Woman’s Missionary Society activities in China. He indicated that the church was entering “another era in its work,” one that “required larger experiences, greater breadth and power and more exact and efficient methods.” Allen had his mandate and moved vigorously ahead. He laid out plans for the administration of the area the mission was to evangelize. He proposed establishing headquarters in each of the main stations: Shanghai, Soochow, and Nansiang, with goals of compactness, convenience, mutual support and economy.

The mission had 18 schools, 26 teachers and 266 pupils. In Allen’s opinion they were “scattered, poorly organized, uneconomical.” There must be, he argued, fewer but stronger schools. Their basic courses were to be languages, science and math, knowledge of the world, with underlying Christian faith and conviction. He proposed closing many of the smaller schools and concentrating the pupils in larger buildings in the three cities. He hoped to attract pupils from the “best and most hopeful class” and to make the system self-supporting by charging the students a nominal fee and soliciting contributions from the Chinese. He spoke of “great harmony and unity.”

Allen proceeded with verve and vision to develop larger, stronger schools, and the mission was with him. “Trinity High School” with 195 pupils enrolled opened in March, 1882, and “Honkew High School” in April the same year with 136 enrolled. In 1884 the schools were combined and formed the new Anglo-Chinese College. The planned goal was 200 pupils, but so many applied that it had to take 212. It was described by the principal, George R. Loehr, as broad-based, self-supporting and a “prosperous and growing institution,” with nine of China’s eighteen provinces represented in its student body.

Allen had been one step ahead in the matter of church construction. While he was in the U.S. in 1878, a wealthy admirer had contributed a generous sum for a church building in Shanghai for the “young man to preach in.” On Allen’s return he supervised the construction of a substantial, architect-designed structure that would take the place of several chapels.25 It was strategically placed in the French Concession, in the Pa Sien Chaio vicinity. Opened in January, 1879, it had 51 members by August. It soon had 71 members and 25 probationers. The report for October, 1893 shows this church had 200 members, while the total conference

25 Candler, 140.
membership was 437. At that time G. H. Loehr and Sz Tze Chia provided the pastoral leadership needed.

In the discussion of Allen's work as superintendent he was quoted as speaking of "great harmony and unity." When Dr. and Mrs. J. W. Lambuth returned to China in January, 1882 they soon felt that Allen was dominating the mission to carry out his own plans. This footnote from Bennett is his summary of the letters Allen wrote to Mrs. D. H. McGavock, Secretary in Nashville of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, Sept. 16, 1881 and May 10, 1882:

With the return of J. W. Lambuth from a year's absence to the United States in January 1882, however, this spirit of harmony was disrupted because Lambuth raised objections to Allen's plans. This dispute, which reflected a personality clash between Allen and Lambuth, took the form of Lambuth's disapproval of Allen's appointment as superintendent. . . . Mrs. Lambuth was especially upset over the housing accommodations for her family in Shanghai and the location of the school she was to administer. The dispute was not resolved until 1886, when the Lambuths were transferred to missionary work in Japan.

The Lambuths must have felt hurt by the Bishop's letter of appointment to Allen with its implied criticism of Lambuth's superintendency of the mission and by the mission's agreement with Allen's proposals.

In 1882 the Woman's Missionary Society, with Allen as its Superintendent, built Clopton School to accommodate fifty, headed by Mrs. J. W. Lambuth. All the while Allen had been devoting himself assiduously to his magazine, re-named in 1874 the Wan-kuo Kung-pao, translated "Globe Magazine" or "Review of the Times," at that time a weekly. Yet so great was his devotion to the work of the mission that in 1883 he suspended publication. It was renewed in 1889 as a monthly with Allen as editor and with the Society for the Propagation of Religious Knowledge responsible for publication and circulation. It was continued until Allen's death in 1907.

The resignation of the Lambuths was presented at a called meeting of the Mission in Soochow where all the members were, following the meeting of the Mission. It read:


Dear Dr. Allen: We hereby tender to the Board of Missions our resignation from the China Mission, to take effect on the 1st of August 1886. We also respectfully request the Board to make provision for our return to the U.S. of America at this time.

Yours truly,

(Signed) J. W. Lambuth, W. R. Lambuth
Soochow, November 9, 1885

On motion, adjourned sine die, and closed with doxology and benediction.

26 Bennett, End note #110, p. 255.
27 Bennett, 88.
28 Bennett, 92.
29 Bennett, 236-237.
Here it was: simple, brief, direct. These two great men of the China Mission had resigned! No reasons were given. None was sought. No statement of appreciation was made. They were undoubtedly looking towards Japan. The following factors were involved.

First, as pointed out earlier Dr. W. R. Lambuth was certain that family health factors did not permit the family living in Soochow, location of the M.E.C.S. hospital. Mary I. Lambuth, writing in 1876, had viewed Japan as a place "where the people are willing and ready to learn." Furthermore, the time was right. Pinson writes of J. W. Lambuth's conviction that "the hour has come for us to enter that Empire." 31

Second, differences in the way Allen and Lambuth saw education and evangelism in the Mission program. Dr. W. R. Lambuth made this statement to the Second Ecumenical Methodist Conference in 1891: "Evangelistic work should be emphasized—far above medical or educational work are the claims of direct evangelist work—hand-to-hand work for souls." The Report of the Committee on Education, to come later, clearly set forth Allen's position. The issue was described by Pinson as "a controversy on mission policy, a sharp division of sentiment between leaders"; 32 evangelistic itineration as opposed to institutional forms of work: schools, hospitals, community centers. It continued to be a perennial issue, yet more than this one issue was involved. Careful study of why the Lambuths left China has been made by Mrs. Frances H. Bray. She and her husband, Dr. William Bray, are retired missionaries from Japan with much contact with Kwansei Gakuin, an institution that traces its beginnings to the work of Dr. W. R. Lambuth. In a paper, "More about the Lambuths," 33 she has researched this subject and gives much helpful information.

Third, Confucian Classics and Christian faith was a factor. J. W. Lambuth had been critical of Anglo-Chinese College from the beginning: "Unless the Bible was made more prominent in the school than it was... There is too much Confucianism and not enough of the Christian Bible." 34

According to Bennett there was much emphasis on the Bible in Anglo-Chinese College and in Allen's writings. Bennett states that "religious instruction occupied a central place in the curriculum and was never hidden." Allen quoted John Nevius of the American Presbyterian mission, developer of the "Nevius Plan" for church development, on the new school in Shanghai, "I am surprised... that it could be so imbued with the religious sentiment and instruction; and with such boys for pupils, I had never conceived." 35

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31 Pinson, 73.
32 Pinson, 70.
35 Bennett, 91.
Lambuth’s comment on Confucianism showed that he had not grasped its importance in the education of Chinese youth. Allen saw that for education to be genuinely Chinese it should not “denationalize.” It should include the Confucian classics. Allen saw good in Confucianism, but considered it responsible for the rigid conservatism in China and for the low position of Chinese women. 36

Fourth, there were other serious differences. In the letter of explanation of November 20, 1885 that went with the resignation letter, the Lambuths referred to “evils among us which are growing apace, and which if unchecked will threaten the very existence of the Mission.” 37 Mrs. Bray continued, “The first evil mentioned was the denial of free speech in their meetings. The second was that they could not agree with the Superintendent and his plans when they were not consulted, and yet these plans were published as though all the members had endorsed them.” 38

Consider the hurt feelings in the situations described below: Mrs. J. W. Lambuth resigned her connection with the Woman’s Board in 1883 and the superintendent stated in his report to the China Mission that the arrangement for her and Dr. Lambuth to occupy premises belonging to the Woman’s Board “could not be effected.” They should continue to occupy rented quarters. It seemed unfortunate in Allen’s opinion that her resignation should come just as provision had been made to provide J. W. Lambuth a “comfortable home for life” and Mrs. Lambuth with “great facilities for conducting Clopton School and women’s work generally.” 39

In the next year’s report, 40 Dr. Allen explained, somewhat apologetically in regard to the resignation that he had lost sight of the fact that he had “previously intimated that such an arrangement might be necessary to the harmonious adjustment of the work of the Board.”

Possibly the most painful experience was that related to the work assignment for J. W. Lambuth, veteran and senior in years in China to any in the Mission. Mrs. Lambuth in her letter 41 of February 11, 1886 wrote: “Mr. Lambuth wanted some time ago to transfer to Soochow—where he could work as chaplain in the Hospital and go out into the country on tours of mission work—the Mission Leader (Superintendent) told him he was not wanted, nor was there anything for him to do, so he meekly gave up the idea.” Lambuth’s idea had merit, but it just did not fit into overall mission plans, calling for another type of grouping for missionaries.

36 For more about Allen on Christianity and Confucianism see Williams, 197.
37 J. W. Lambuth to Bishop McTyeire (Allen Collection, Woodruff Library, Emory University, GA).
38 Bray, 172.
40 Annual Report, M.E.C.S., 1885, 92.
41 Mary I. Lambuth to Bishop McTyeire (Allen Collection, Woodruff Library, Emory University, GA).
in Shanghai. If Allen was quoted correctly, he did reveal a lack of sensitivity in so addressing Lambuth.

On May 6, 1885 the Board had adopted a resolution that a Mission to Japan be established with appropriation of $3,000. The Lambuths were chosen and appointed to open the work. For age and health reasons, W. R. Lambuth, rather than J. W. Lambuth, was designated by Bishop McTyeire as Superintendent of Mission.42

The General Conference of 1886 Regarding
“Trouble in the China Mission”

The 1886 General Conference report shows that there were problems and missionaries involved well beyond the Allen-Lambuth controversy. Questions raised about the superintendency and the superintendent had been expressed in China and in the U.S.A. in letters to church papers and to private individuals that “have filled the air with rumors of trouble in the China mission.”

The responsible General Conference committee, including Bishop McTyeire and others familiar with the China situation, had reviewed available information and could not discover the slightest evidence that the superintendent had transcended his instructions, or that “instructions to him were out of line with fundamental principles of our church in regard to the general superintendency of our bishops . . . or evidence that this conflict of opinion regarding superintendency or superintendent has hindered the missionaries in their individual work.” The committee voted noncompliance with the memorial proposed by missionaries which recommended a new organization and declared “the remedy for the troubles in China is to be sought in the judicious and firm administration of our present law as contained in the Book of Discipline.”

They closed with a paragraph strongly commending the “work there” for “the wisdom of its education plans, the splendid work of medical and hospital departments, the well arranged evangelistic department, set to carry the gospel to city or country, the woman’s department well coordinated to work of the Parent Board; each department so organized as to permit indefinite expansion, and all effectively connected to all the rest.”43

China Mission Annual Conference M.E.C.S.

For the China Mission, the most significant action of the General Conference was the decision to change its status from a mission to an Annual Conference.

Bishop A. W. Wilson had been designated by the College of Bishops to visit the China Mission Meeting and carry out the action of the General

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42 Pinson, 73-74.
43 Journal of General Conference, 1886, 204-205.
Conferences of 1882 and 1886, "authorizing the erection of the China Mission into an Annual Conference." He did so in Shanghai on November 17, the first day of the China Mission Annual Conference held November 17–24, 1886. The following proceedings and reports are from the minutes of this Conference and are also found in the Annual Report M.E.C.S., May, 1887. The 6th question was called: "Who are received by transfer from other conferences? Messers Y. J. Allen, D. L. Anderson, W. B. Bonnell from the N. Georgia Conference; D. F. Reid from the Kentucky Conference, A. P. Parker from the Missouri Conference and C. J. Soong a member of the class of the first year in the North Carolina Conference . . . ."

Dr. W. H. Park, M.D., a layman in the conference, was present, as were nine of the Chinese local preachers. These last were to occupy the position of local preachers and supplies until they could be regularly admitted into the conference.

The necessary committees and boards were set up with the missionaries and four Chinese spread among them.

A number of visitors attended. Rev. Collins Denny, traveling companion of Bishop Wilson, and later Bishop himself, was present for all of the sessions of the conference. Dr. W. R. Lambuth, Superintendent of the Japan Mission, was present at the first two sessions. Several representatives of the Woman's Board of Mission, and wives of the missionaries were also present from time to time.

The following report on "the State of the Church" and the first few paragraphs of "The Committee on Education" are presented with few omissions because they convey much of the philosophy and spirit of the times:

A. Report on the State of the Church

We find that the various departments of church work have been carried on without break during the year and that perceptible advance has been made all along the line. From the reports we find that there are at this time 146 members and 55 probationers. It is with great pleasure that we note a real improvement in the character of our native Christians. . . . They have an evident interest in Church affairs, are faithful in attendance on the preached word, are found at the prayer and social meetings of the church, and out of their deep poverty manifest a cheerful willingness to support its institutions. We have in the bounds of the work, 13 weekly prayer meetings and two class meetings all of which are fairly well attended.

The reports show that we have an aggregate of 67 weekly appointments for preaching and that the average attendance is something over fifty.

Encouraging progress has been made in our Sunday School work. There are now nine schools, with an aggregate of 61 teachers and 576 pupils—an increase over last year of about 50 per cent.

Our great and crying need is a force of American missionaries to properly man the field embraced within our present bounds.

44Journal of General Conference, 1882, 142.
46Minutes of the China Mission Annual Conference of the M.E. Church, South (Shanghai: Chinese Book and Tract Society, 1886), 3, 5.
B. Report of the Committee on Education

The Gospel is God's method of restoring in man the image of his maker, and repossessing him of that supremacy in the earth conferred on him when fresh from the hands of his Creator. It is hence endowed with both spiritual and intellectual functions and addresses itself to man under a two-fold aspect and by means of a duplicate agency; to wit, the preacher and the teacher.

It is, therefore, with eminent pleasure and satisfaction that your Committee, to whom was referred the subject of education, can report our missionary plans and operations so justly in harmony with God's plans for the regeneration and salvation of this people. The Church and the school, the preacher and the teacher, are Gospel companions, and among us as among all Methodists, have ever been esteemed and honored as the instruments ordained by God for the achievement of the grand results contemplated in the last command of our risen Savior.

—Young J. Allen (Chair), A. P. Parker, C. F. Reid, Committee.

The Reverend Collins Denny, who accompanied Bishop Wilson, came to China with many questions about the work. His report, printed as Correspondence of The Episcopal Methodist, stated that he attended every session and listened attentively, then met with "each of the brethren" to "ask if they knew any reason why they could not work in harmony." Their replies, plus what he had observed and heard in the sessions, provided a highly reassuring answer: No reason! They could work in harmony. The life and work of the China Conference over the years since 1886 confirms the truth of this observation.

What Difference did it Make that the Mission Became an Annual Conference?

1. The mission was the organization of missionaries, set up before there was a Chinese church. Chinese preachers and laypersons could attend the mission meeting as invited guests, but there was no way for them to become voting members. In the Annual Conference there were ways set forth in the Discipline by which the aspiring preacher could be admitted on trial, then ordained deacon, later elder and admitted into full connection with vote, just like the missionaries. In ten years the number of voting Chinese ministers equalled the number of missionaries. Also, Chinese laypersons, one from each organized church, could be elected to the annual conference.

2. The Annual Conference was the basic unit of the Methodist Church, a part of the General Conference with right to elect and send delegates, clergy and lay, to General Conference, just as conferences in the U.S. could. The district is the major administrative subdivision of the Annual Conference, with its presiding elder, now district superintendent, who supervises all the pastoral charges in the given district. There was no longer a mission superintendent, but a bishop and presiding elders, thus no way for one person to have as much power and authority as did Allen the period 1881-1886.
Summary

1. The foundations of the Church had been well developed. Those involved in China and in the US had moved towards the biblically inspired goal of establishing a Chinese church in China. The China Committee of the 1886 General Conference, after careful review, strongly commended the “work there.”

2. The lives of the Chinese Christians helped to demonstrate that the gospel is for all people by showing that the new life in Christ and the koinonia which guides and unites us is a reality for all people even those of an utterly different ethnic and cultural background.

3. The Annual Conference gave the Chinese the first sense that the church was, or could become, their church. As confirmation of this achievement we close with a listing from the Appendix of the Golden Jubilee Volume of the names of the first fourteen Chinese preachers with dates admitted on trial and into full connection.

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