THE EVANGELICAL UNITED BRETHREN MISSION IN ASIA:
TWO CONTRASTING ECUMENICAL SCENARIOS

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In comparison with Methodism, the mission work of the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB), and their predecessor bodies, the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (UB) and the Evangelical Church (EC) were characterized overall by distinctive patterns of structures and strategies which were emphatically ecumenical in nature. This article will explore those patterns as found in two different Asian cultures, with a view of discovering how these ecumenical experiments in overseas missions were impacted in diverse ways by political conditions in those fields. The fields to be examined are China and Japan.

Since we are concerned with an aspect of missions that developed within a non-Methodist tradition which was only later organically joined with that tradition (1968), an introduction to their distinctive missional perspectives will be included. EUB origins are traced to German-American revival leaders of the late 18th century, who were German Reformed, Mennonite, and Lutheran in affiliation. They stood in fraternal but not in organic relationship with early American Methodist leaders. Initially influenced by German Pietism, especially its Reformed and Radical Pietist expressions, William Otterbein and Martin Boehm (for the UB) became the chief catalysts for disseminating the revival movement, earlier represented by George Whitefield, into the German population of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. The Evangelicals, based in the itinerant evangelism of a Lutheran-born layman, Jacob Albright, showed greater affinities with Methodist polity and doctrine, although Methodist influences were recast in the vocabulary of Pietism. Unlike “church” and “plain” Dutch (colloquial for “Deutsch”), they became known as the “bush meeting Dutch,” due to their preference for outdoor “big meetings” (grosse Versammlungen) which sought to introduce their frontier adherents to an intense experience of new birth in Christ.

The Pietist heritage of the EUB is seen not only in the centrality of the new birth, but also in a forward-looking view of salvation history, in which traditional European churches would be superseded by new end-time configurations of Kingdom life among the reborn on earth. The manifestations of that life would herald the return of Christ as the final Lord of history. In accordance with that outlook, the UB also diverged more significantly than did the Evangelicals from Methodist missional structures. This was a reflection of their formation as an “unpartisan brotherhood” in Christ.
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(1800) among German Americans of conflicting ecclesiastical backgrounds (primarily German Reformed and Mennonite). In their bush meetings, they identified themselves as pilgrims “on the journey home” as they sang, “Wir sind auf der Reise heim.” Their kingdom goal gave definition to their deeds, and the communities they were instituting were to them precursors of a transformed humanity that God was preparing. In Otterbein’s words, their hope was “a more glorious state of the church than ever has been.” Whether at home or overseas, UB were never really at home with a self-sufficient denominational outlook. They were mandated by their founders to embark upon an ongoing search for other “sisters and brethren in Christ.” Furthermore, the visible form which that “brotherhood” would assume was not mandated by an a priori design of polity; it would be configured in accordance with the Kingdom-manifesting leadership of the Holy Spirit, and in ways that were appropriate to the cultural identity of those peoples who were being reached for Christ. Given the largely rural and ethnically provincial outlook of the mid-Atlantic and midwestern “home base” which undergirded that enterprise, EUB achievements in overseas ecumenical missions are rendered all the more significant.

How, then, did this ecumenical mission strategy play out in the Asian fields of China, and Japan? In each case, it did so in ways that caused strains in that strategy which required major adjustments of expectations for each field.

I

A plausible case can be made that an indigenous and eventually united Protestant witness was established in China in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to a considerable degree through the initiative of the UB mission in south China. Although, after three decades of service, this entity would be attacked and dismantled by the Maoist regime that gained political control after the Second World War, its legacy remains as a testimony to the UB/EUB ecumenical approach to world missions.

The UB entered China in 1889 under the auspices of their Woman’s Missionary Association (WMA) who made early initiatives in overseas mis-

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1 From the “200th Anniversary Pilgrimage, 1767–1967, Commemorating the Historic Meeting of Philip William Otterbein and Martin Boehm, the Human Founders of the former United Brethren in Christ Church” (1967).


3 In 1906, UB were cited as the most rural of all major American denominations, with over 92% of their churches in rural areas. See H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism (Hamden, Ct: Shoe String Press, 1954), 183. The EUB constituency worldwide (1947) exceeded one million (including members, friends, and children enrolled in Christian training; North American membership was 727,000.
sion fields for their denomination. This was the year following the prejudicial "Exclusion Act" of the United States Congress, which prohibited Chinese immigration to the United States, thus adversely affecting Sino-American relations. The British Premier of Hong Kong had stated that "business interests" are paramount to "religious" and merely "humanitarian sentiments" in relating to the Chinese culture.

Into this volatile atmosphere, the WMA voted to send a party of four. It was led by George and Ellen Sickafosse who had operated a UB school for Chinese immigrants in Portland, Oregon. It included a Chinese-American, Moy Ling, and a remarkable woman, Austia Patterson, who remained on the field the longest and became the first superintendent of the mission. She was soon joined by a female physician, Sarah Halverson. Together they made forays into the new areas where no Christians and no Caucasians had ever been seen. They chose to live directly in the community they served rather than in a mission compound. Soon numerous institutions were established, including medical and educational facilities. They survived the anti-Western Boxer Rebellion (1900) unscathed. This may reflect the fact that their work was among the minority of western missions which were not closely associated with political powers that were attempting to open China to world trade. A mission conference was started in 1908 shortly before the founding of the Republic of China (1910).

While these missionaries provided the early focus upon indigenous ministries, which also laid a basis for a self-governing and strongly evangelistic Chinese church, the key UB ecumenical figures on this field were Charles and Kathryn Shoop. They exerted decisive influence in the founding of the Church of Christ in China (CCC) between 1926–28. During that time, UB work was transferred to the Kwangtung Synod of the CCC in south China. It was the first response on an overseas field to the 1925 UB General Conference decision to "establish victorious native churches as quickly as possible." The Shoops served 46 years in this field, surviving two world wars, internment under Japanese occupation, and the Maoist revolution of 1949. It was the rise of nationalist sentiment in the 1920s that alerted them to the need to transfer the mission fully into Chinese hands. Its institutions included two hospitals, several secondary schools, and a theological seminary (Miller Seminary), as well as numerous local churches. Plans for a

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1The WMA was organized in 1875 with the strong encouragement of the male-led UB Missionary Society. The WMA had previously provided support for the UB mission to Sierra Leone (founded in 1853), and they worked with the freedmen in the American South, in the Reconstruction era following the Civil War.

2Report of Lydia Patterson, The Evangel (March, 1897), 41.


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united church had been discussed by Presbyterians and Congregationalists, but, according to Latourette, the initiative was taken by the UB mission which "promptly approved the plan in its entirety, and the other cooperating missions sanctioned it with reservations."

The Shoops are to be credited with facilitating this decision lauded by Latourette. Charles Shoop's "profound respect for my Chinese brothers" led him to value indigenous leadership. His goal was to recruit only missionaries who would "have faith in the Chinese." He was the personal mentor to Peter Wong, who became the foremost interpreter of Chinese work to EUB in America, and who later served as Superintendent of the Hong Kong Synod of the CCC. His non-paternal attitude reflected the UB pattern of seeking authentic unity in Christ among persons of diverse backgrounds, expecting God to do a new thing as old patterns submit to the movement of salvation history.

While the UB were toiling in south China, Evangelicals began their work in the Hunan Province of central China in 1898. The newly organized United Evangelical Church (UEC), which adopted a strong declaration on world missions in its Articles of Faith, took the lead in that mission. C. Newton Dubs, MD, who was appointed UEC Missionary Superintendent, arrived in Changsha, the capital of Hunan, in 1900. He was assisted by language training and cultural orientation provided on location by Griffith Johns, head of the London Missionary Society. Within the first 20 years, numerous mission stations, two hospitals, and a secondary school (Albright Academy) were opened. A theological school was opened in cooperation with Presbyterians, Wesleyan Methodists, and the Reformed Church (USA). Following in close succession, the EA began its work in adjacent west Hunan in 1900, carried out in consultation with J. Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission.

By 1926, the reunited Evangelical Church had a mission force of 60 with 220 Chinese pastors—a momentum that would be reversed by the waves of civil conflict that racked Hunan between 1923–28. The weak Manchu dynasty was overthrown by a heady brew of Bolshevik and anti-western nationalist sentiment. Order was restored at last with the triumph of Chiang Kai Shek and a more moderate Nationalist Party, but the number of missionaries had been reduced from 60 to 8 and mission properties were ravaged. This led the Evangelicals to launch an indigenous China

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9The original body founded by Albright, the Evangelical Association, experienced division over language, doctrinal, polity, and personality issues in 1891–4, resulting in the continuation of that body alongside the United Evangelical Church. Their reunion in 1922 produced The Evangelical Church of North America. On the UEC Mission Statement, see Harold P. Scanlon, "The Origin of the Articles of Faith of the United Evangelical Church," Methodist History (July, 1980), 235.
Conference in 1937. However, that year also brought the Japanese invasion of China, followed by the civil strife between Nationalists and Bolsheviks, which brought the China Conference to a state of prostration. After the EUB union in 1946, the Hunan work, like the earlier work of the UB in south China, was transferred completely to the CCC in 1949. It contributed 100 churches and preaching stations to the united church.\textsuperscript{10} The valiant efforts to reconstruct the war-shattered institutions of the China fields in the postwar era were only to be overcome by the Maoist victory in 1949, resulting in the arrest or flight of all EUB leaders in China and the transfer of all assets into the hands of the indigenous synods of Hunan and Kwangtung. Calvin Reber of the south China mission observed that the Chinese pastors, under pressure to denounce the missionaries, did all they could to maintain their loyalty and friendship, and maintain the time-honored UB tradition of "unpartisan spiritual fellowship in Christ."\textsuperscript{11} Only a vestige of the extensive EUB China mission would continue until 1968, based in Hong Kong.

II

While Evangelicals selected Germany as their first and primary overseas mission field (1850), the first of its numerous secondary fields was Japan. The call to establish a mission there began to be heard in 1853. As distinct from the mission to the German "Vaterland," this was called the "heathen mission" (heidnische Mission). This was before an ecumenical, indigenous approach to world missions had been manifested among Evangelicals. In this field, that approach would be introduced only under imperial governmental pressure in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

The Evangelical mission was launched in 1875, when the General Conference endorsed a resolution to send a team to Yokohama. This was an international team consisting of an American teacher, Rachel Hudson, an American physician, Frederick Krecker, and a Swiss preacher, Karl Halmhuber.\textsuperscript{12} Their work established the Evangelical mission in Japan as among the early Protestant missions operating there.

A breakthrough in their effort occurred when an aristocratic youth of the Samurai class was converted under Krecker’s ministry. Soon a Bible training school was started in Tokyo. In 1880, Krecker and Jacob Hartzler published their translation of what continued through the mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century as

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\textsuperscript{10}The CCC then represented 175,000 members in 21 synods, with the fastest-growing synod being the UB-led Kwangtung Synod. See Carl Heinmiller, “The Gospel in Asia” (unpublished report from June 7, 1950, in the United Methodist Archives, Madison, NJ), 22.

\textsuperscript{11}The testimony of Dr. Calvin H. Reber, Jr., a former UB/EUB missionary in the South China field, in his unpublished personal papers, shared with the author.

\textsuperscript{12}Paul Eller, History of Evangelical Missions (Harrisburg: Evangelical Press, 1942), 204. Halmhuber's records disclose the way in which candidates for baptism were examined. See Paul Mayer, "The Beginning of our Work in Japan," Telescope Messenger (July 1, 1950), 10.
the only complete version of the Old Testament in the Japanese language. Krecker’s ministry to typhoid victims in Tokyo led to his premature death. His legacy of sacrificial love reportedly turned numerous Japanese hearts to the foreigner’s religion, and in 1886 one of the largest Protestant church edifices was built in Tokyo, which bore the name, the “Krecker Memorial Evangelical Church.”

Soon a plethora of other projects was launched, including a boat ministry among urban dwellers living on canal boats, an English school, a deaf–oral school, and the founding of a theological school in Tokyo. One of the seminary students was Gumpei Yamamuro, the first leader of the Salvation Army in Japan. In its early years, these institutions of the mission were fervent champions of the Evangelicals’ prized emphasis on entire sanctification, which then served as their raison d’etre for maintaining their identity in overseas missions.

Hudson’s appeal for support led to the first denomination-wide organization of the Woman’s Missionary Society (1884). Although the novelty of women in mission leadership was not initially accepted by the patriarchal leadership of the Mission Board, the women’s success in raising awareness and funding for missions throughout the brotherhood soon won them the respect of the Board. With their decisive assistance, a Japan Conference was organized in 1891, the same year as the traumatic division that occurred in the North American church. By 1918, 47 kindergartens had been established by the conference, and an Evangelical, Lois Kramer, was serving as president of the Japanese Kindergarten Union. By 1927, all district superintendents in the conference were Japanese. Superintendent Paul S. Mayer served as President of the Japan Christian Council in 1929, which then represented all Protestant missions in Japan.

By comparison, the UB work in Japan manifested a concern for indigenous church that would be led by Japanese pastors from its beginnings. That mission began in 1895 by sending Japanese nationals who had trained in America to the Osaka area. Their first encounter with the Japanese culture indicates how that enlightened strategy was not flawlessly executed. Japan

\[\text{Eller, 204.}\]

\[\text{Founded in 1893 as the Missionary Seminary of the Evangelical Association in Tokyo, it was united with a Methodist seminary, Aoyama Gakuin, in 1914. See Eller, History, 206.}\]

\[\text{See David Rightmire, Salvationist Sumurai; Gumpei Yamamuro and the Rise of the Salvation Army in Japan (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow, 1997), 6, and Eller, History of Evangelical Missions, 217.}\]

\[\text{See note 9 above.}\]

\[\text{Dr. Javan Corl, a former UB missionary to Japan reported the case of a Japanese-American who professed conversion in Japan and came to America to be educated at UB Lebanon Valley College. He was then recruited by the Mission Society and ordained to “return and preach to [his] fellow countrymen” in 1895. He reportedly committed an undisclosed cultural “indiscretion,” described only as a “moral failure,” that so alienated his Japanese hosts that he was forced to withdraw from Japan. See The Religious Telescope (July 3, 1895), and interview with Dr. Javan Corl, July 27, 2000 (author’s enclosure).}\]
Superintendent Arthur T. Howard, later the Asian missionary bishop for the UB, developed a long-term strategy for this mission, which resulted in the formation of a Japan UB conference in 1902, composed exclusively of indigenous ministers. This, in turn, led to UB cooperation with Congregationalists in operating Doshisha University, where a UB missionary, A. B. Shively, served in the chair of religious education. One of his colleagues, missionary J. Edgar Knipp, pioneered union mission work among Buddhists in the Kyoto area. The outstanding indigenous Japanese UB preacher was Takejira Ishigura, pastor of First UB Church, Kyoto. The growth of the Evangelical and UB missions would continue until the political disruptions of 1940.

The Evangelicals and the UB participated in every pan-Japanese Christian movement from those sponsored by the Evangelical Alliance in 1901 to Kagawa's extended "Kingdom of God movement" in the 1930s. However, all of these efforts were overshadowed by the events of April 1910, when the Japanese Diet passed the so-called "Religious Organization Control Act." By this decree, Christianity gained status as one of three recognized religions, alongside Buddhism and Shintoism. It further resulted in the formation of the Church of Christ in Japan (the Kyodan) in August, 1940, with a single executive head and a common creed. This comprehensive Protestant church represented 20 denominations then operating in Japan. It represented a self-governing and self-supporting entity that grew by 1941 to include 42 denominations. Moreover, the Kyodan was not solely the creation of government policy. It can also be characterized, at least in part, as the inspired action of Protestant leaders who were responding to new pressures from Japanese society. Although Christianity was now on a par with the traditional religions in Japan, this Act was also a signal that the prevailing American denominational consciousness could not long endure.

In actuality, Christian activity in Japan would experience severe restrictions during the Second World War. Japanese pastors were often enlisted for manual labor while their wives continued to lead services. While there was official recognition of the Kyodan, there was a sharp rise of nativist sentiment during the war, with many Japanese viewing Christianity as a "foreign faith" from "enemy nations." Under those conditions, the number of Protestant missionaries in Japan was reduced from about 100 to 39, half of whom were German or Finnish. The 15 American missionaries who remained were interned. The American denomination with the largest number of interned missionaries (three) was the Evangelical Church. One of those interned, Laura Mauk, had a considerable following in Japanese soci-

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18 Eller, 225.
19 One was a Methodist. Paul S. Mayer, "Short History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church in Japan" (1951?, unpublished manuscript in the United Methodist Archives, Madison, NJ), n.p.
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In a volume chronicling her service, there appears a lengthy list of prominent Japanese pastors, scientists, journalists, businessmen, and educational leaders, all of whom were alumni of her Bible classes and who called themselves her "spiritual sons." After the War, Mauk became an honored figure in EUB mission circles in North America.

Rising like a phoenix from the war's devastation, this governmentally-imposed ecclesiastical structure, the Kyodan, would continue to function with renewed energy in the postwar years. It would remain the vehicle through which the newly-formed EUB Church would continue to work, through 1968.

The first postwar report from this field surveyed an occupied, devastated land, filled with human tragedy and despair. In late 1945, the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, which represented the American denominations participating in the Kyodan, received an urgent request from Japan for missionaries to return. One of the two named by General MacArthur to lead the way in launching rehabilitation of the Protestant churches was Superintendent Paul S. Mayer of the Evangelical (soon to be EUB) mission. Although MacArthur rescinded the Japanese legislation that had created the Kyodan, some 85% of Japanese Protestants remained within it. Eight American denominations, including the EUB, joined in an Interboard Committee, based in New York, to direct efforts in church development. By 1949, the Committee oversaw the reconstruction of 200 churches and four theological seminaries, two of which had EUB roots.

As the decade of the 1960s approached, membership in the Kyodan increased to 172,000, with 130,000 students enrolled in its schools. However, the Christian community was still less than one percent of the total Japanese population. In all, this field remained a prime instance of the EUB effort to immerse its own mission aims and strategies into the needs of indigenous and eventually ecumenical expression of the church, with all the difficulties involved in such a venture. For this reason, it represented an advance in the vision that they were called to be a "homeward journeying folk," now beckoning even former enemies to join in their procession.

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20 In 1945, Mauk wrote from her cell, "my love for Japan was so great that I chose to die if necessary with the Japanese people rather than to flee safely." When the camp officers received word that Japan had surrendered, it was reported that all Americans would be shot. Mauk records a vision of Jesus in her cell, beckoning her to maintain confidence in Him and her fear disappeared. Laura J. Mauk, Bridge Over Eden (published by the Koishakawa-Hakusan Church and Miss Mauk's Monday Meeting, 1986), 11f.

21 Statistics from former Evangelical and UB missions reported 24 of 84 congregations destroyed and seven of 72 pastors killed. There remained 75 kindergarten and Bible teachers still serving. EUB Mission Yearbook (1948), 85, and EUB Mission Yearbook (1949), 65

22 Vernon L. Farnham and W. O. Williams, "The Kyodan" (unpublished report from 1958), n.p
The China and Japan missions of the UB/EC/EUB developed into indigenous churches at later stages of their development—the former by the initiative of the cooperating missions and the latter by the impetus of government decree. This policy, based on the 1925 UB General Conference declaration, came to its full expression in the thinking of the World Missions Division of the Board of Missions during the EUB era. Evidence of this outlook is found in (1) the freedom to structure overseas relationships that was given to the Board; (2) its authority to consecrate and assign missionaries overseas independent of episcopal appointment; and (3) the mandate to transfer titles to overseas properties and funds to indigenous churches on those fields. This freedom was to enable the Board to discern where consensus was building on a given field. It could then move to establish structures which would address the needs of that field in ways that did not replicate annual conference patterns prescribed for North America.

The end result of these structural aspects was not the development of a "world EUBism," but rather a more comprehensive realization of a unified Christian witness, whose intent was to "uplift Christ and His coming Kingdom" as the Lord of the nations. The retired head of World Missions stated in 1987 that the EUB Church has "through the years voluntarily surrendered its denominational sovereignty . . . for the sake of united church programs in every overseas area of its missionary operations where a united church organization has been formed."

In the Asian field, only in Japan did both EUB and Methodists share a commitment to united churches, thanks to the Kyodan. Here is where the patterns diverge. In Schaefer's words, "the majority of the Methodist overseas' conferences are part of Central Conferences organically related to the Methodist Church in the United States," while most overseas fields related to the EUB were "autonomous, united churches."

However, caution should be exercised in referring to these as autonomous church bodies. They also received missionaries, regular budget subsidies, and much capital fund assistance from the home mission board. Each was also entitled to send a fraternal representative to the EUB General Conference. However, they also related to a variety of other mission boards

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23 By comparison the UB/EUB mission to the Philippines, launched by the WMA, was ecumenical from the beginning and resulted in the formation of a strongly indigenous United Church of Christ in the Philippines (1948) that was parallel to the formation of the republic of the Philippines (1947). A fuller account would include this field as well.

24 The Board of Bishops would supervise mission work abroad only where overseas annual conferences existed, which was only in Europe and Sierra Leone, West Africa.

25 Unpublished letter from former Executive Secretary of the Division of World Mission, Dr. Carl Heimmler, September 28, 1987, provided by Dr. Calvin Reber from his personal papers.

which cooperated through an interboard committee. The result is what Schaefer called a “network of connections with other sending boards.”

When EUB were called to be missionaries overseas, they were called to “win converts to Christ, baptize believers and establish Christ’s church.” However, given the very different cultural environment being faced, that church did not prove to be the EUB Church. The Asian fields offer us different scenarios whereby EUB went about the task of “exalting Christ and leaving their denominational loyalties on the North American shores.” This policy did not proceed without lapses. However, where it succeeded, it was marked by the following commitments: (1) to develop a fully indigenous church in each place of service as rapidly as possible; (2) to guarantee its complete independence from jurisdictions of the denomination over its affairs; (3) to encourage it to seek union with other Christian bodies within its national boundaries under a common allegiance to Jesus Christ; (4) to encourage it to develop its own confessional and liturgical expressions and evangelistic strategies appropriate to its needs in its environment and with faithfulness to the “Church Universal through the ages,” that will best serve the interests of the Kingdom in that place.

With these policies, the EUB sought ways to continue their “journey homeward” pilgrimage by seeking new manifestations of Kingdom life that they believed were emerging within the cultures of the younger churches of Asia. EUB sought to demonstrate that they had a higher commitment to “unpartisan” unity in Christ than to replicating an American denominational pattern on a global scale. The political and cultural challenges encountered on those fields ultimately served to deepen and mature rather discourage their commitment to Kingdom-oriented, ecumenical missions. It was possibly their finest contribution to United Methodism.

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This paragraph paraphrases information provided in Schaefer, 18.

Schaefer, 20.

"Actions of the Board of Missions of the Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist Churches" (in joint deliberation), 1968 (unpublished text from personal papers of Dr. Calvin Reber, used with permission), 2.