

**E. W. WALLACE AND THE CANADIAN METHODIST RESPONSE
TO CHINESE EDUCATIONAL REFORM
1906-1926**

BRUCE R. LAWRIE

In 1891 the first party of Canadian Methodist missionaries left Canada for Sichuan, West China. Between this beginning and the end of the West China Mission under Methodist auspices in 1925, numerous missionaries saw service in Sichuan. In fact, by 1925, the Canadian Methodist Mission (CMM) represented the largest group of missionaries from one church in one field in the world.¹

No doubt the social gospel spirit evident within the CMM explained, in part, their almost universal belief, in the early days at least, that the "Kingdom of God" was about to be established in China. A potentially positive application of the social gospel to Chinese society remained, however, somewhat fettered by an equally paternalistic attitude. This outlook colored the world view of many of the early missionaries. V. C. Hart, for example, the pioneer of the West China Mission, viewed the foreign missionary as engaged in a pitched battle with the alleged iniquities of the Chinese social structure.² In retrospect, however, such paternalism should be seen in light of the times rather than as an indictment of the individuals involved.

While missionaries of Hart's era were not immune to the social and racial prejudices of their time, younger ones, such as E. W. Wallace, would be different. They began to manifest more sophisticated insights into the Chinese environment and character. Wallace, for instance, did not express dismay at the fact that the Chinese often reacted with hostility toward the foreigner. In his opinion they had a number of reasons for feeling this way:

That they had good reason to hate and fear the foreigner cannot be denied. . . . On slight pretexts often for no reason at all, European powers have appropriated sections

¹In 1925, a merger of the Methodist, Congregationalist and some members of the Presbyterian church led to the creation of the United Church of Canada. Methodist control of the West China Mission shifted to this newly created United Church although Methodist philosophy was always the dominant feature of the West China Mission until the Communist takeover forced the Mission out of China by 1951.

²West China Mission Papers, Methodist Church, Canada, Newfoundland, Bermuda (MCCNB), Missionary Society (MSFD), Box 1, File 1, Victoria College Archives (VCA)

of the Empire, and have openly discussed the advisability of partitioning the whole country among themselves.³

E. W. Wallace and the Founding of the West China Christian Educational Union 1906

From their earliest days in Sichuan the Canadian Methodists stressed a threefold enterprise of evangelism, medical work and education. The latter became an integral part of their overall design. In the realm of education, at least, the CMM had more people under instruction than either the British or the Americans. They had five times more pupils than any other group except the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁴

In response to the Chinese government's educational reform policies sweeping the country in 1904–1905, the CMM initiated an educational union in West China in order to maximize the efforts of all Protestant educators in Sichuan. Initial talks regarding the proposed union were launched in 1904 and in October, 1906, the West China Christian Educational Union was officially born and comprised the following seven missions: American Baptist Missionary Union; Church Missionary Society; Friends Foreign Mission Association; London Missionary Society; China Inland Mission; Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Canadian Methodist Mission. The leading educator and secretary of the Union was Dr. E. W. Wallace of the CMM. The stated purpose of the Union was to "educate a generation of Christian young men and women . . . trained in modern methods of work and fitted to exemplify Christian character, and to promote the teaching of truth."⁵ In the words of one Union official, "this does not mean that the Government schools do not teach the truth, but it does mean that the atmosphere in which it is taught is not essentially Christian."⁶

The educational philosophy of the Union was, to a large extent, that of Dr. Wallace the secretary. In an effort to raise the standards of Christian education in West China, Wallace advocated standardized curricula, examinations and textbooks in Union schools. He also espoused a policy of cooperation between government and mission schools and, as far as possible, parallel curricula:

In all but a few minor details the curriculum of the government schools is followed in the schools of the Educational Union. While these schools as a whole have not

³E. W. Wallace, *The Heart of Sz-Chuan* (Toronto: The Methodist Young People's Forward Movement for Missions, 1903), 76.

⁴*West China Missionary News* 22 (October 1920): 42.

⁵E. W. Wallace, "Report of Work 1915," *Missionary Bulletin* II (1914–1915): 705.

⁶Joseph Taylor, "Scope and Policy of the West China Christian Educational Union," West China Mission Papers, MCCNB, MSFD, Box 18, File 78, VUA.

received government recognition, there are individual cases where recognition has been given; and in a few cases the Christian schools diplomas receive the official stamp of the local authorities.⁷

Whenever possible the courses of study offered by the Union attempted to encourage the teaching of, and respect for, Chinese traditions, language and culture. In the five-year course of study for the Junior Primary Schools the curriculum included religious instruction, Chinese Classics, Chinese literature, Chinese history, natural science and English. The curriculum at both the four-year Senior Primary level and the four-year secondary level mirrored that of the Junior course of study. Obviously the schools in the Union were Christian based. However, they offered an extensive menu of courses in Chinese literature, history and geography. Nowadays the politically correct historical interpretation of Christian missionaries in China and elsewhere portrays their efforts as exercises in cultural and religious imperialism. Clearly this oversimplified point of view is incorrect when discussing the work of the Union. Courses in the Union were not only cognizant of Chinese traditions, but also contributed to increased literacy in Sichuan province. For example, at the end of their primary course students should have manifested:

. . . the ability to understand a popular lecture and to give a speech in simple but clear language. . . . The ability to write an exposition of a subject in common language. . . . To recognize 3500 characters. . . . To be able to read the daily paper and writings with ten per cent of new words.⁸

Anyone familiar with the tortuous regimen of learning Chinese can appreciate the Herculean task involved in learning 3500 characters. In addition, the staggering social, political and economic implications of masses of ordinary Chinese youth becoming literate are only comprehensible when one recognizes the "elitist" overtones of traditional Chinese education. Therefore, the overall value of the intensive language programs offered at these mission schools is undeniable. Also, the mere fact that many graduates of these schools became functionally literate doubtless enabled some of them to serve as future leaders, doctors, scholars, teachers and administrators in the new China and the world at large.⁹

While the CMM and most of the other missions in the Union maintained a reasonably good relationship with Chinese government educational

⁷E. W. Wallace, "Report of the Secretary of the Educational Union to the Board of Governors of the West China Union University, 1916," Wallace Papers, Box 20, File 213, VUA.

⁸H. G. Brown, "Course of Study for Primary Schools, 1924-25," *West China Missionary News* 26 (1924): 7-8.

⁹One example of such a student is Dr. Jerome Chen who became one of the most noteworthy historians of modern China and especially Mao. Professor Chen, who was educated by the Methodists in West China, enjoyed an illustrious teaching career in both North America and Britain.

officials the antagonism of Chinese nationalists toward the Christian educators intensified over time. In 1908, the terminally ill Qing dynasty issued an edict invalidating the diplomas issued by missionary schools and colleges. In response to this edict many students withdrew from missionary institutions. Subsequent to the Republican revolution of 1911–12 the proscription was rescinded and mission schools flourished again until the reimposition of a similar interdiction during the rebirth of nationalist fervor in the years immediately following the May 4th Incident of 1919. The death of the Union in 1926 followed in the wake of an avalanche of student withdrawals. Joseph Beech, an American educator in West China, wrote a brief obituary. The demise of the West China Educational Union, Beech declared, was lamentable.¹⁰

Chinese Educational Reform in the Late Qing and Early Republican Eras

Between 1901 (late Qing Dynasty) and throughout the 1920s (early Republican Period) Chinese education underwent far reaching reforms. Paradoxically, the reform movement embodied both western philosophical concepts and heavy doses of Chinese nationalism.

Reform in the late Qing was led by Chang Chih-tung and Liang Qichao. Beginning in 1901, Chang advocated “general education” and castigated those conservative Confucian diehards who spoke out against “too much Westernism.” With more powerful nations in the world Chang argued, rather pragmatically, “China would perish if it remained isolated, if it were in harmony with others it would survive.”¹¹ After vainly trying to integrate various reform ideas into a realigned Confucian network Chang realized the obvious. Following a lengthy period of procrastination the throne abolished the Confucian examination system with an edict on September 2, 1905. This “revolutionary” development closed the door to the old Confucian-based education system forever.¹²

Liang Qichao whose reformist writings dominated student circles prior to the 1911 Revolution built on the educational reforms of Chang by articulating the concept of the “new Citizen.” Liang saw the need to develop strong, self-reliant, citizens as a precursor to the formation of a strong modern nation. He viewed the development of nationalism as necessary to the survival of China in a world dominated by western economic and military might. Unlike most Social Darwinists of his day, from whom he

¹⁰Joseph Beech, “University Beginnings,” *Journal of the West China Border Research Society* 6 (1934): 230.

¹¹William Ayers, *Chang Chih-tung and Educational Reform in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 177.

¹²Michael Gaaster, *Chinese Intellectuals and the Revolution of 1911* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), 16–17.

derived certain of his ideas, he saw this purely as a defensive measure and did not advocate the expansion of Chinese nationalism into national imperialism. Indeed Liang's use of the term "nation" and "nationalism," implying equal status of other nations with China, initiated a break with traditional Chinese philosophy which commonly saw China as the lone island of civilization in a sea of barbarians. Much of his philosophy influenced the most prominent reformers of the early Republican era, the leaders of the so-called "New Thought Movement."

The foundation of the "New Thought Movement" was the language reform initiated by Dr. Hu Shih. His attack on the classical language aimed to erode some of the elitism of Chinese education. Along with his promotion of the use of the vernacular Hu, a student under John Dewey at Columbia University, encouraged the Chinese to abandon their parochial attitude toward the "foreign Western barbarian." Thus, the pragmatic Hu, manifesting Deweyian philosophy, saw the "Chinese Renaissance" as necessarily incorporating a variety of western philosophies and concepts.¹³

Just as the classical Chinese language and the Confucian social structure became the twin targets of the reformers so Sinicized western education became their panacea. Leading the educational crusade was Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei. Ts'ai, like Hu Shih, a disciple of John Dewey became the first Minister of Education in the Republican government in 1912 and in 1917 assumed the Chancellorship of the prestigious Beijing University (Beida). As Minister of Education he promoted utilitarian education aimed at improving the people's livelihood and at creating a global concept in Chinese intellectual circles designed to combat generations of Confucian ethnocentrism. As Chancellor of Beida he felt that "no longer would the university act as a haven for aspirants to government careers; in the future it would be primarily an institution devoted to study and research, and its second effort would be the improvement of the moral tone of the nation."¹⁴

While the Chinese reformers held divergent views on a variety of subjects ranging from economics to politics, they were universally critical of Christian education in China. In the words of two analysts of the anti-Christian movement in China, "in spite of the leaders' diversity of opinion, their common attitude concerning religion was always critical, and most of them regarded religion as useless."¹⁵ Christian schools were urged to become more practically suited to the Chinese environment and the "conversion of students into Christians should not be the dominant goal in

¹³Hu Shih, *The Chinese Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 47.

¹⁴Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei, "Chiu-jen Pei-ching Ta-hsueh hsiao-chang chih yen-shuo-ts'e," (A Speech on Assuming the Chancellorship of Peking University) in *Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei hsien sheng ch'uan-chi* (The Complete Works of Mr. Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei) (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1968), 721-723.

¹⁵Tatsuro and Sumiko Yamamoto, "The Anti-Christian Movement in China 1922-1928," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 12 (1954): 137.

the Christian educational program.”¹⁶ As we have seen the West China Christian Educational Union under the direction of E. W. Wallace recognized the concerns of the Chinese educators and responded accordingly. Wallace stridently called for cooperation with Chinese educators and government administrators.

The Response of E. W. Wallace to the Chinese Call of Nationalism and Educational Reform

In a series of lectures delivered at the Chengdu Y.M.C.A. in 1914 and 1915, Wallace addressed the value of Chinese philosophy:

At present I have no sympathy with the “You poor (ignorant heathen) method.” These men do know something. Confucius was their Moses and their Classics are built on him as our Old Testament and Law, and from my present scanty knowledge there are some splendid things in them.¹⁷

Wallace used terminology strikingly similar to the Chinese intellectuals, no doubt due, in part, to the fact that he too had studied under John Dewey at Columbia. Wallace stressed that China needed a more practical educational system:

The old education was admirably adapted to the needs of China under the early Manchu Emperors. But in changing to the so-called western administration there is a danger that China will adopt the type of education that is suited to America or Germany and not consider whether or not it is suited to Chinese needs. China is a land of farmers and workmen and merchants, 98% of the people are of this type. Yet formerly education was only for 2% who were to become scholars and officials. . . . But if you compel all children to go to school you must give them an education that will be of practical use to them. If a boy is to be a farmer there is no need to give him the education that prepares a man to become an official.¹⁸

In order to enhance the overall effectiveness of their educational work Wallace strongly urged the Canadian Methodists and all Union educators to cooperate with Chinese educational officials:

It is hoped that in the future we may have increasing intercourse with teachers in government schools, and let them understand that our aims, course of study and methods are similar to theirs. . . . show that we are not trying to make our scholars disloyal to their country, but that we aim to make them good, moral, law-abiding citizens of the Empire.¹⁹

¹⁶Tung Chen-lang, “Christian Education in China,” *China Students’ Monthly* 18 (1923): 24.

¹⁷E. W. Wallace, “The Education that China Needs,” in “Lectures in Education given to the Y.M.C.A. Chengtu 1914–1915,” Wallace Papers, Box 21, File 221, VUA.

¹⁸E. W. Wallace, “The Curriculum of the Government Schools and our relation to it,” Wallace Papers, Box 18, File 180, VUA.

¹⁹E. W. Wallace, “The Curriculum of the Government Schools and our relation to it,” Wallace Papers, Box 18, File 180, VUA.

He viewed cooperation as beneficial to both sides and saw eventual Chinese control of education as both an inevitable and positive development. In a realistic appraisal of future Chinese government actions toward mission schools Wallace stated that rumored reports of mandatory government inspections of mission schools should not be cause for alarm. As he explained, such inspections were bound to come and would blunt the accusations that "Christian schools are foreign schools, educating children away from Chinese ideals of life."²⁰ He felt that Christian education had to be de-foreignized if it hoped to survive. Chinese should not only conduct educational planning but have the leading voice in the formulation of mission education policies. In other words, even the rather responsive approach of the West China Educational Union could no longer stand unaltered as a viable educational alternative in the face of increasing Chinese nationalism. As Wallace so pointedly remarked, "as long as the policies of Christian education must be initiated by foreigners that education is not efficiently Chinese. The Chinese must be professionally trained, they must train their own leaders."²¹ In 1922, as a gesture of good faith, Wallace directed the Union voluntarily to register all their schools with the Chinese government.

Conclusion

Regardless of the relative "progressiveness" of both Wallace and the West China Christian Educational Union they were, by virtue of their mere Christianity, unavoidably caught up in the tension which characterized Chinese society between 1906-1926. This often expressed itself in the form of anti-Christian demonstrations and was due primarily to the conflict within Chinese reform circles between faith in the advantage of western learning and a fear of "denationalization." Chinese commitment to western technology and education is understandable in light of their humiliating military defeats at the hands of the westerners and the Japanese (who used western methods) between 1842-1900. However, the issue of "denationalization" or "deculturalization" is somewhat more complex.

It is difficult to tell what the Chinese reformers meant by "denationalization." In one respect they felt that by controlling the educational system in China "denationalization" could be minimized. Certainly the edict of 1925, which called for the registration of all foreign (missionary) schools, attempted to bring these schools under the auspices of the Chinese government, thereby exercising a kind of national power. Officials explained that these inspections were necessary to combat the creation of

²⁰E. W. Wallace, "Government Inspection of Mission Schools," *West China Missionary News* 19 (1917): 25.

²¹E. W. Wallace, "Efficient Christian Education in West China," West China Papers, MCCNB, MFSD, Box 18, File 187, VUA.

“yellow Anglo-Saxons” in mission schools. Such fears may have been justified in some circumstances but were simply unfounded when considering the schools of the West China Christian Educational Union. In fact, we have shown that the Union, led by the likes of Dr. Wallace, emphasized the teaching of Chinese history and language precisely to counter such charges. Besides, Wallace had already ordered Union schools to voluntarily register with the government three years prior to the official edict.

Armed with an obsession for western learning, Chinese intellectuals in the reform camp, who were most often students returned from the west or Japan, promoted a government system of education which was at least as denationalizing, in the pedagogical sense, as some mission systems. Therefore, it is problematic whether mission schools denationalized students more than government schools. Certainly Wallace and the Union generally supported the aims and aspirations of the Chinese reformers thereby contributing, at least in the long run, to international understanding and the development of a new China.