They Are Just like the Generations Past: Images of Chinese Women in the Women’s Missionary Periodical Woman’s Work in China (1884-1885)

Dušica RISTIVOJEVIC
Central European University
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Dušica RISTIVOJEVIĆ
Central European University

ABSTRACT

In this essay the author attempts to contextualize and analyze selected articles published in 1884 and 1885 in the women's missionary periodical \textit{Woman's Work in China}. \textit{Woman's Work in China} has here been found exceptionally rewarding for an analysis of the representations of Chinese women. This is not only because it included reports from various parts of the Chinese Empire, but also because the articles were written by Protestant European and American women of various denominations, and thus, most likely addressed a large audience in the foreign community in China and in the West. Since the author observes textual encounters of Western women with Chinese women under imperialism, analysis here is informed by "general" postcolonial theory, as well as by the feminist postcolonial insights on gender aspects within orientalist cultural production. The goal of this article is twofolded: attempting to identify and analyze the constructions of Chinese women that were produced in women missionaries' writings and to relate them with the images of women missionaries that emerged in the same process.

Keywords: gender, orientalism and class, representations of Chinese women, women missionaries, Late Imperial China

Westerners in Nineteenth Century-China

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Qing imperial court was faced with the consequences of its failure to adjust the governmental structure to the enormous growth of population and the development of commerce in the eighteenth century. The increase of unemployed literati, peasant migration and official corruption not only endangered the local order, but also Confucian morality. Prostitution of boys, smuggling, violence, and opium smoking became an additional threat to the political and moral authority of the Qing dynasty.\textsuperscript{2} Confronted with this vulnerability to their power and control, Qing rulers could not tolerate the unrestricted flow, influence and interference of the Western merchants and missionaries in China.\textsuperscript{3} Macao was the only European settlement permitted by the Chinese, and Canton was the only port through which the Westerners were allowed to trade.\textsuperscript{4} However, the small community of Western men, dominated numerically by the British, was barred from going inside the Canton city walls and could reside in the restricted district along the waterfront only for the part of the year known as the trading session. Western women were forbidden to join these men.\textsuperscript{5}

It was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that Protestantism as a whole became committed to foreign missions. Protestant countries had only a small
part in the early world-wide discoveries and had no significant importance as commercial and colonizing powers until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Most of the sections of America and Asia that were in contact with Europeans were controlled by Catholic nations that would not have permitted Protestant missionaries to reside in their domains. Moreover, early Protestant leaders, absorbed in defining and defending their theological positions, organizing their Churches, and participating in controversies between themselves and with Catholics, did not have the time nor energy for missionary activities outside of Europe.  

With respect to China, the problem for pre-1842 Protestants was that the Catholic Portuguese did not want to permit the residence and activities of Protestant missionaries in Macao. For this reason, Protestant Foreign Missions Boards were sending their members-men and married and a few single women—to ports and districts under the influence of Protestant imperial powers or relatively tolerant native governments where they could reach Chinese emigrants.

1 This essay is a result of my ongoing research on the relations and interactions between Chinese and Western women in pro-educational, anti-footbinding and suffrage movements in Late Imperial and Early Republican China (1844-1913). I want to thank the USF Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, San Francisco and the Central European University, Budapest for generous financial support for the research. I also want to thank the anonymous reviews, especially to the sharpest one, whose comments were more than helpful for improving the quality of my paper. Above all, I am indebted to my professors Francisca de Haan and Radosav Pušić for their thought-provoking critique and invaluable patience and encouragement.

2 Although “Westerners” is a homogenizing and therefore problematic term, I will use it whenever my secondary and primary sources do not allow further specification and differentiation in terms of nationality of the people addressed. In addition, Chinese and non-Chinese sinologists, in and out of China, in my view should not be unselectively criticized for using the term “Westerners” as if that is a matter of negligence, oversimplification, and essentialization. As Han Shaogong has explained, “Even today, the majority of Chinese people still have great difficulty... in making out cultural differences between the British, the French, the Spanish, the Norwegians, the Poles, etc...This baffles Europeans, just as if baffles the Chinese that Europeans cannot differentiate clearly between people from Shanghai, Canton, and the Northeast. Thus the Chinese prefer to use the general term ‘Western’ or even ‘old foreigner’.” Therefore, having in mind and acknowledging the generalizing Chinese perception of the foreigners, it is occasionally impossible and futile to emphasize the national differences within the foreign community present in nineteenth-century China. See Han 2005:18-19.

3 Fairbank 1986:63-68.

4 The first significant contact that China had with Western religious traditions started with the presence of Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Through the introduction of Western astronomy and mathematics the Italian Matteo Ricci, the Spaniard Diego de Pantoa and the German Joannes Adam Schall Von Bell found the way to the court of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The Chinese were not hospitable to foreigners, but they tolerated the early missionaries because they were not “aggressive”-i.e. they allowed their converts to practice the old popular rituals. However, drastic anti-Christian feelings arose after the “Rites Controversy” in 1704 when the Pope ordered the missionaries to forbid Ancestor worship by their Chinese converts. This change in the approach provoked the politics of later Chinese rulers, made Chinese people very cautious and suspicious toward Westerners, and kept China closed to the Christian influence until the middle of the nineteenth century. See LaPiere and Wang 1931: 401. For the earlier encounters of Chinese people with Christianity, and the treatment of the Nestorian, the Franciscan and the Jesuits missionaries by the Chinese rulers, see Kane c2001:14, 60-61, 189-190. About the reasons of the later engagement of Protestant missions with China's evangelization and its historical development before the Opium War, see Kane c2001:73-75; Porter 2004:135-136.

5 In the 1550's the Portuguese were expelled from the interior of China and were only allowed to occupy a peninsula near Canton. Here they built a city, Macao, which for nearly three centuries was the main point of European, and later American, intercourse with China. Canton was the main and, after 1760, the only port through which Westerners were allowed to trade with China, Latourette c1973:85-86, 208.


7 Latourette c1973:82-83.

8 At Bangkok, Malacca, Penang, Singapore, Riouw, Batavia, a part of Burma and in a section of Borneo missions were conducted for the Chinese, Latourette c1973:224-226.
After the closure of the first Opium War (1839-1842) the Chinese were forced to allow Westerners, both men and women, to settle down and preach the Gospel in the five treaty ports of Guangzhou (Canton), Xiamen (Amoy), Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai. Moreover, after the end of the Arrow War (1856-1860) Britain, France, Russia, and the United States gained the right to establish diplomatic legations in Beijing (a closed city at the time), ten more Chinese ports were “opened” for foreign trade, foreigners were allowed to travel in the internal regions of China, and British and American Protestant missionaries were granted the right to evangelize. 

China’s defeats in the Opium Wars marked the beginning of a forcible opening of China for Westerners, a profound historical change that can be interpreted and observed in different ways. On the one hand, in Chinese historiographical terminology the Western encroachment of China has been assessed as the birth of “semi-colonized and semi-feudal China,” thus (mis)used for anti-imperial resistance and provoking anti-foreign sentiments and action. On the other hand, it has been, somewhat paradoxically, recognized as the beginning of the development of a particular “port culture” which could be interpreted not only as a “hybrid” formed under the strong influence of the Western cultures and religions, but also as the cultural locus of Chinese “cosmopolitanism.” However, what has been defined and emphasized in this essay is that these historical events denoted the beginning of the generally overlooked, silenced and/or neglected initial phase of increased contacts between Western and Chinese women in mainland China.

9 Beginning with five treaty ports obtained at the closure of the Opium War, the number of China’s ocean and riverside ports opened to foreign commerce and residence came in time to number approximately one hundred. The conditions ranged from formal over-taking of territory (British Hong Kong); concessions governed by foreign consuls (French Tianjin Concession); semiautonomous settlements (the Shanghai International Settlement); to areas reserved for foreign residents but subject to Chinese administration. See Rozman 1981. Imperialistic prerogatives not secured by treaties, such as the opening of the foreign banks, the issue of foreign currencies, direct purchase of the agricultural products and the development of the farms were also in operation. See Luo Ronggu c1997. Nonetheless, Chinese sovereignty was never displaced, and, neither foreigners nor treaty port Chinese ever had “free hands” to operate in various fields as the colonial Westerners and their partners in the rest of Asia who functioned in the colonial environment. In a long run, the treaty port system created nothing similar to new national consciousness in South and Southeast Asia, but it merely refocused and sharpened traditional Chinese insistence on their self-sufficiency, self-satisfaction, resistance to the foreign models, and the Chinese sense of crisis, not cosmopolitanism. See Murphey c1970. For the definition of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century China’s status in postcolonial theoretical terms, and significant distinctions among the territories and societies which constituted parts of informal or formal Empire, see Osterhammel c1997:20, 21.

10 Nineteenth-century calamity has been perceived under twin captions of “imperialism” and “feudalism”, and these terms, as explicated by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao, have been used in the People’s Republic to describe China’s modern history. Set of institutions and practices summed up under the term “feudalism”, or, if translated from the modern Chinese historiographical lexicon-traditional culture signifies the Chinese weakness not only in military and economic spheres, but also in moral terms. Foreign invasions and the resulting special privileges for foreigners are from the period of World War I more and more called “imperialism”. See Fairbank ed. c1978.

11 Fairbank and Goldman 2002.

12 Grieder c1981.

13 With the term “Western women” I mean European and American Protestant women; whereas the term “Chinese women” refers to Chinese women of Han ethnicity. The interaction of European women who were active in China within the Catholic religious orders deserves a separate research and must remain out of the scope of this essay, as well as the broader issue of the way in which multiple hierarchies among “white” women in China in the late nineteenth century affected their actual and discursive interaction with Chinese women.
Once the military strength and political influence of the imperialist powers had ensured the flow of Christian ideology to China, British and American Protestant women began their educational work with Chinese girls and women in the Treaty Ports (Xiamen, Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai). The Englishwoman Miss Mary Ann Aldersey (1797-1868) established the first school for Chinese girls in the treaty port of Ningbo. Miss Aldersey was a member of the Church of England, but she opened her school without the resources or influence of any Missionary Society and without supporting colleagues. Her first pupils were “diseased or dull daughters,” whose parents were willing to part with them or even sell them, taught by male Chinese teachers four days a week on the Chinese subjects, one day on embroidery, while weekends were dedicated to the reading of the Bible.

Writing in 1911 Margaret E. Burton documented that “The great need of the Chinese girls and women, and the necessity for trained native women to work among them as pastors’ wives, Bible women and teachers, were such strong arguments for girls school that many other missionaries soon followed Miss Aldersey’s example.” Hence, in 1847 the Presbyterian Mission started in Ningbo another school (that was united with Miss Aldersey’s school in 1867); Mrs. Bridgeman in Shanghai under the American Board in 1849; Mrs. Maclay in Fuzhou under the Methodist Mission in 1851; the Episcopal Mission in Shanghai in 1852; the American Board in Canton in 1854; the Presbyterian Board in Shanghai in 1857; the Baptist Board at Ningbo in 1858; the Wesleyan Church at Canton, and the Reformed Church at Amoy in 1860.

The curriculums of these schools not only included study books containing Christian instruction, some elementary books in science, arithmetic and geography, but also needlework and domestic economy.

Furthermore, western women’s contacts with Chinese girls and women accelerated the debates in the late 1860s on how the Christian churches should handle the issues of footbinding. The earliest anti-footbinding society Jie chanzu hui was organized in Xiamen under the auspices of John Macgowan of the London Missionary Society. Before 1842 Western women founded schools for Chinese girls in Malacca, the East Indian Islands and Singapore. The first school for Chinese girls was opened in Singapore by the Englishwoman Miss Grant. Burton c1911:34; Reason 1956:7.

In the 1860s and 1870s women missionaries’ schools for Chinese girls and women did not make any progress in winning the trust of the Chinese. However, due to the Chinese male elite’s deepening sense of China’s crisis, the inclusion of a liberal course of study next to Christianity in school curriculums in the 1880s and 1890s, and (for the missionary cause) encouraging results of women’s educational efforts on the other, in the late 1880s and 1890s both Chinese men and missionaries (men and women) were persuaded that the female education was worthwhile and necessary. After 1906, when an Imperial Commission urged the establishment of government-sponsored schools for girls, virtually all Chinese private schools at the turn of the twentieth century were modeled on the missionary school’s curriculum, teaching methodologies and administrative regulations.

In order to prepare girls for a “real Christian life”, the instructions in the school in Fuzhou included Christian morals and doctrine, geography, history, astronomy, mathematics, daily reading of the Bible, but “It was expected that all graduates be able to make, wash, and mend their own clothes, to cook and take care of the house”. Report of Methodist Board of Foreign Missions, quoted in Lewis c1919:20.

The earliest debates appeared in the 1860s in the leading “general” missionary journal Chinese Recorder, but the missionaries had no consensus opinion on footbinding since neither the Bible nor Christian morality offered simple advice on the subject.
Mission and his wife in 1874 when some sixty Chinese Christian women from the small community of Chinese converts gathered to discuss footbinding.20

Western women not only launched works aimed at “emancipating” Chinese girls and women, but also, by the virtue of their sex/gender, have been granted an “access” to Chinese women denied to Western men. As a result, Western women came to be seen as a reliable source of “knowledge” on the subject of “Chinese women” in their home countries.21

In the decades following the Treaties of Tianjin(1858) and Beijing(1860) missionaries found themselves in a paradoxical situation. These Treaties provided Western missionaries, educators, merchants and sailors not only with a license for mobility throughout China, but also for buying or leasing land and building houses or churches. From then on, Christians were scattered through the Chinese provinces, in almost every important city and in remote villages. Nonetheless, instead of spreading the Christian faith to more “heathens” than ever before, missionaries started to be objects of an unprecedented hostility from all social layers of the Chinese population. This is not to say that missionaries, or for that matter other foreigners or outsiders,22 were welcomed before the 1860s, yet the conflicts between the Chinese and newcomers before the period of the flourishing of the missionary enterprise can be interpreted as instances of only xenophobic sentiment. The open anti-Christian outbursts started when China became forcibly open to missionary work.23

Different classes had different reasons for their hostility toward missionaries. The hostility of common people was fueled by circulated rumors concerning immoral

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20 Several Chinese women addressed the assembly, denouncing the crippling effect of the custom, and one of the discussants harshly criticized the ambivalent attitude of the Christian church by pointing to “the wrong that we Christians have been doing in consenting to carry on a custom that is inflicting such sorrow upon ourselves.” Kwok 1992:110. For the outstanding study of anti-footbinding discourses, see Ko 2005. Because of the reserved attitude of the missionary bodies, the activities of this society were limited to the area of Xiamen and the Society was short lasting and not particularly effective. Nevertheless, given that many women missionaries corresponded with this prototype anti-footbinding organization, thus spreading the missionaries’ opposition to other parts of China, Jie chanzu hui marked the beginning of the extensive Westerners’ and Chinese reformers’ opposition to footbinding that would rise in the 1890s. The debates and activities evolved around the issues of female education and anti-footbinding are among the most assertive verifications of the gendered nature of missions’ discourses and practices. For the examples of scholarly works which expose the gendered dimensions of missions see Bowie, Kirkwood and Ardener 1993; Flemming 1992; Huber and Lutkehaus 1999. For the works which specifically deal with women missionaries in late-Qing and early-Republican China see Ashton 1996; Chin 2003; Frost 2002; Graham 1994, 1995; Hunter 1984; Kwok 1996; Morgan 2003.

21 As early as the mid-fourteenth century there was a small Italian community living and trading in Yangzhou in central China, and among them was a young Christian woman, Katerina Vilionis. As is known from the Latin inscriptions from her gravestone, she was the daughter of an Italian trader from Genoa who died in 1342. However, no writings of hers have been found yet, Arnold 1999:138-140. The most famous nineteenth-century female authors of books on China that included observations of and impressions about Chinese women are Eliza Jane Gillet Bridgman(1853) and Adele Marion Fielde(1890).

22 Focusing on Chongqing in the period between 1870 and 1900, Judith Wyman argues that the hostile attitudes towards missionaries were the result of anti-foreignism fuelled by the context of increased imperialist activity, as well as by the longstanding Chinese tradition of suspicion of all kinds of outsiders that could include many Chinese people as well. See Wyman 1998. For a more detailed and broader overview of Chinese attitudes toward outsiders, see Dikötter 1994; 1997.

23 Otherwise, as Jerome Ch’en has noticed, it would have been impossible for the Taiping Rebellion(1851-1864), inspired by the Protestant doctrine, to gain such a big support for the start of their Revolution in 1851. See Ch’en 1979:140.
and perverse missionaries' practices. The Catholic concern to give Absolution to
dying children aroused the suspicion that priests and nuns took young virgins into
their churches and used their genitals and eyes for preparation of aphrodisiacs and
elixirs for longevity. Men and women that gathered in the same church hall and sang
behind closed doors were said to bathe naked and indulge in orgies. Moreover, in
the minds of common people, church buildings might have disturbed fengshui, and, by
disrupting the earth pulses that protected the essential and underlying cosmic
order, brought down misfortune upon all inhabitants.

At an ideological level, literati found the ideas and ideals that Christians
propagated highly problematic, since they could endanger the Confucian familial
and societal hierarchies and evoke disorder and anarchy. In fact, directly threatened
by the Christian charity and educational work that could endanger their social,
economic and cultural supremacy, the literati themselves issued broadsheets and
pamphlets attacking “the evil, immoral and heretical practices of the missionaries.”
In this kind of unreceptive social and cultural environment that identified them with
all the real, exaggerated, or invented evils that foreigners had been doing to and in
China, Western women missionaries commenced their work for Chinese women.

Although China was never formally colonized, the geographical expansion
of the imperial powers allowed Western women potential knowledge of their “heathen”
sisters, and this created the possibility of unequal and dependent relationship between
Western and Chinese women in which women from the West, as Vron Ware has put it, “helped to define and describe the conditions under which the colonized women
lived, as well as the nature of those women themselves.” Therefore, the overall
theoretical framework of my analysis of Western women’s representations of Chinese
women will be Edward Said’s Orientalism(1978) and the extension of Said’s theories
that Ziauddin Sardar presented in his Orientalism(1999). However, crucially
important for my thinking is feminist postcolonial scholarship that, criticizing Said’s
assumption of the existence of a “potentially unified, and paradigmatically male
colonial subject,” highlighted the multivocality and heterogeneity of orientalist

24 Ch’en 1979:140. For more information on the acts and features that were ascribed to the
missionaries, also see Dikotter 1994:37-57; Wyman 1998:101-102; Fairbank 1965:334-335. For a detailed
study about the Chinese antagonism towards Christianity in the second half of the nineteenth century,
see Cohen 1963.
26 Ch’en 1979:140-142.
27 See n. 9.
28 Ware 1992:163.
29 Whereas Said criticizes Western conceptions of the Near Orient, in particular the Anglo-
French-American approach towards the Arabs and Islam, Sardar argues that the realm of Islam, as the
first Other, the first signifier of “all that the West was not and some of what the West actually desired,”
created “a platform from which to assess other Orients... a comparative framework in which to look at
India and China,” Said 1978; Sardar 1999:2, 33. Said’s and Sardar’s theories have been criticized by
various authors, but I believe that the heating debates which their groundbreaking studies has been
motivating in no case make them “outdated”.
30 Lewis 1996:3.
31 For instance, Lisa Lowe redefines Orientalism as an “uneven matrix of orientalist situations
across different cultural and historical sites” in which each Orientalism is “internally complex and
Because I agree with Susan L. Blake’s approach that a woman’s point of view “does not guarantee a reciprocal relationship with an Other, but (does) open a crack in the concept of Self through which to examine the concept of Other,” and Norma Alarson’s claim that a woman’s identity may be constructed through her interaction with (and at the expense of) another woman, I will explore the following two questions: (1) Which images of Chinese women were produced in Woman’s Work in China in the years of 1884 and 1885, and (2) Which images of Western women emerged in the same process? The latter question goes to the heart of postcolonial theory and its argument that the West became “the West” by interpreting “the East” in a way that (re)affirmed Western multi-leveled superiority. Until now, this question has not been asked with respect to Western women in China in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Iconography of Women Missionaries’ Reports
Communication between women missionaries with other missionary and lay Western women in China, and with women and men in their mother countries, was carried out through missionary periodicals that included the reports written by, for and about women. The periodicals were primarily meant to maintain and increase the zeal of missionary women involved in the process of the Christianization of China, as well as that of women who had plans to go to China. However, since male members of missionary societies acknowledged the necessity of converting Chinese women as one of the most important tasks of the missionary work in China and admitted that Chinese women could be approached only by their Christian sisters, Western women’s articles gained an additional weight. Not only would Western women use these articles to encourage and guide women missionaries in and out of China, but

32 I hope that the use of subjective “I”, or the words and expressions that clearly reveal my position as a researcher throughout this paper will not make a reader doubt in the professional value of my analysis. I just do not want to hide behind the mask of “objectivity”. On the problems of “objectivity” see, for instance, edited volumes of Fox Keller and Longino 1999 and Kourany 2002.
33 Blake 1992:30, 32.
34 Alarcon 1990:360.
36 The articles that I will look at include representative examples of women missionaries’ reports from Woman’s Work in China vol.7(2)-9(1). The reason for focusing on precisely the years of 1884 and 1885 from the period of women missionaries’ writings preceding 1900 is my access to the sources. I do not want to imply neither that the women/missionaries’ discourses were stable over a span of several decades of their “civilizing project” in China, nor that the texts of women missionaries were not influenced by the multiple intersections of the author’s subject positions which become significant in a particular context of “ripe for the Christian harvest”–China, i.e. nationality, class, denomination, age, marital status, personal experiences, temperament and so on. Sara Mills offers a very concise treatment of the nature of discourses as such in her book Discourse (c1997). Nonetheless, I accepted this limitation in terms of presently available material because I firmly believe that even the analysis of extensively rich material in this journal, even though it had been publicized within two years, may be taken as representing much wider array of published reports written by Western missionary women in the second half of the nineteenth century.
37 Some of the journals and periodicals that regularly informed Western readers about the activities pointed at the “improvement of the condition of Chinese woman” were India’s Women & China’s Daughters, Woman’s Work in the Far East and Ladies’ Papers. See Semple 2003.
to authoritatively inform both male and female Western audiences on the subject of the “Chinese woman.”

One of these missionary periodicals was *Woman’s Work in China*. Bringing reports from different parts of the Chinese Empire, *Woman’s Work in China* gave the impression of offering complete insights about Chinese women. Published every six months by the Woman’s Missionary Association in China, the periodical was launched in November 1877, published in Shanghai but distributed in China, England and the United States. As listed in May 1884, the membership of the Association comprised more than 400 Western women involved in the work of 30 Protestant missions located in more than 50 cities, towns and villages in China. The articles published in 1884 and 1885 incorporated Western women’s observations of indigenous women, their attitudes towards footbinding and their experiences in educational, evangelical and social work with Chinese girls and women. Additionally, a special set of articles addressed deceased missionary women’s characters, efforts and actions.

The most judgmental articles described Chinese women who were not interested at all in Christianity. A sharp distinction was drawn here between “civilized Western women” and their pagan Chinese counterparts. Whereas the latter were represented either as women who were likely to remain in the permanent “darkness” of their culture and in the depth of the “sins” that a non-Christian moral upbringing necessarily entailed, or as a contrast to those Chinese women and girls who were rising or had risen from the degrading indigenous traditions.

The demarcating of Western from Chinese women took place by emphasizing, from the Protestant women’s point of view, Chinese women’s clearly inferior physical, mental and spiritual levels. “Heathen” women’s faces were dirty, their hair was unkempt and their dress neglected; their hearts were incomprehensively dark and cold; their minds “clogged and stunted by years of ignorance, superstition and idolatry,” their souls “dead in trespasses, and in sins.”

Despite this, reports often presented women missionaries’ optimistic view on the potential they detected in Chinese women. As an echo of the general missionaries’ view that China, her culture and people were “disposed” and “ripe” for a gradual but thorough remodeling by the uncontested greatness of Christianity, women missionaries informed the Western reader that even though Chinese women were “just like generations past... the inference must not be drawn that there is no good material on which to work and no opportunities presented.” Hence, in the affectionate accounts about Chinese women “who are so eager to learn (that it is) a pleasure to teach them,” it was noted that “their advancement in spiritual knowledge has been

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38 Out of 401 Western women that were active in the work of the Association in China, 293 were married and 108 were single missionaries.

39 For the “List of Missionary Ladies in China, Corrected to May, 1884” with the names of female members of the Association, the date of their arrival in China, their place of residence and the date when each Protestant Society commenced its work in China, see *WWIC* 7(2):182-185.

40 Mrs. Macgowan 1885:135-136; Miss E. Inveen 1885:11.

41 Mrs. Mason 1885:37.

42 Mrs. Julia Lloyd 1884:131.

43 Mrs. A. P. Peck 1884:28.
gratifying and encouraging.”

When describing their experiences, women missionaries positioned themselves less as the agents of their Lord than as the (re)creators of a “good material” in Chinese women. There are numerous accounts in which missionary women concentrated on their own agency, emerging (or formed) through their encounters with indigenous women. S. A. Norwood for instance clarified that:

(We, Western missionary women) invite the women ourselves, after care has been taken in each case to learn whether or not she be worthy... If, at the end of that time, it is not deemed advisable to keep her longer, we dismiss her kindly to her own home, impressing upon her the duty of telling what she has learned to those about her...45

Moreover, what may be grasped from the published texts is that Western women represented themselves not only as having absolute power of judgment and decision owing to their alleged control over Chinese women, but also as possessing an almost divine power of developing the minds of indigenous women. As Miss C. M. Ricketts self-celebratorily recorded, after three years of difficult work with Chinese women, “their memories now being more cultivated and minds somewhat enlarged, they can remember far better what I teach them daily.”46

Nevertheless, the perspective implied in the debate about the introduction of the English language into the curriculum of Chinese girls’ schools47 was that the students, who were in the process of being converted were intellectually and morally too immature to be led “into the broad field of intellectual culture which knowledge of the English language spreads.”48 As the previously mentioned Miss C. M. Ricketts further elaborated:

...their characters need for several generations to be submitted to all holy influences, that flowed about our English ancestors... it will be well that our Chinese sisters should drink deeply at the well of inspiration before we shower upon them the floods of western literature... Many of them would acquire great facility in repeating foreign words, but they would have small glimmer of the meaning...I do not believe that we could ever train Chinese women, as a whole, in such a manner as to enable them really to grasp the meaning of our western literature...49

In Ricketts’ view, the danger could be twofold. On the one hand, the students “might wish to enter foreign hongs and gain, by knowledge of the English language a better

44 Mrs. E. U. Yates 1885:99.
45 Miss S. A. Norwood 1884:162.
46 Miss C. M. Ricketts 1884:37.
47 Interestingly, the debate had brought together the opinions of Western women in China and their more experienced missionary sister from India, with referring to examples from “wide-awake, progressive Japan.” See Miss Safford 1884:176-179.
48 Miss C. M. Ricketts 1884:163.
49 Miss C. M. Ricketts 1884:164-165.
commercial position and higher salaries.”50 On the other hand, as she concluded, “once (you) teach (them) western languages... (you) render it possible for Chinese women to pollute their minds, and enervate their mental constitution, as well as to strengthen and refresh their spiritual being.”51 Miss Norwood, who was against teaching English to Chinese girls, added that “we need no anxious thought regarding infidelity and liberalism which are waiting to come in like a flood with the advent of English.”52 Thus, although Chinese students were represented as the “raw” material suitable for Western women’s skillful modeling, an unbridgeable difference between Western and Chinese women stemmed from Chinese women’s innate lack of mental capacities that would enable them to remain free from the contaminating non-Christian Western influences.

Similarly, Chinese girls and women, who had been lifted up to the heights of Christian morality and spirituality, were not perceived as being able to remain there and stabilize their subject positions. Therefore, “they[Bible women] are never sent to labor in their own villages lest the temptation to neglect the work to which they have been set apart, to attend to local personal matters, should prove too great.”54 However, and to some extent contradicting the previously discussed images of Chinese women, the reports repeatedly described examples of successful change in Chinese women’s characters as a result of Western women’s interventions. Whether the process of learning had been finished or abruptly stopped, the Chinese woman was depicted as “a woman (who was) of a sorrowful spirit, one who had drunk deep draughts of affliction... (who) seemed from our first interview like Lydia whose heart the Lord opened... (and who had ultimately became) an able and efficient woman, and in her family it was always said she could do any thing she ever tried to do.”55 Moreover, it had been recorded (and obviously exaggerated) that twelve-year-old girls said that they were “going to teach her new relations about Christianity and the wickedness of worshipping idols,”56 or were “delighted to carry away with her

50 Miss C. M. Ricketts 1884:163. Though not explicated in the published texts, the extent of the fear that Chinese students might be motivated to accept Christian teaching out of greed and possible material gains may also be grasped from the frequency of vindicating women’s reports that ensured the reader that Chinese women did not get any material compensation for their acceptance of the divine truth. See, for instance, Mrs. E. U. Yates 1885:99; Miss S. A. Norwood 1884:137.

51 Miss C. M. Ricketts:165.

52 Miss S. A. Norwood 1884:169. In opposing the teaching of English language to Chinese girls Miss S. A. Norwood did not only allude to the deficiency of their intelligence and morals, but also to the futility of such an effort for both missionaries and students. While elaborating the “need” of Chinese students, she made an utterly racist comparison: “... they[Chinese girls] would have about as much need of English in their homes as a means of communication as colored people in the Southern States would have need of German or Italian.” Miss S. A. Norwood 1884:167.

53 When women missionaries of the Methodist Episcopal Church’s Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society arrived in China, and discovered that they were not able to reach most women because they did not know the language, they searched for Chinese women who were willing to learn to read, and then taught them to read the Bible and sing hymns. After obtaining Western women’s approval, Chinese women went into areas where male missionaries could not go and were expected to spread the word of Christ.

54 Miss S. A. Norwood 1884:161.

55 Mrs. Graves 1884:27.

56 Mrs. A. Foster 1885:121.
the hymns... (that she) valued as her greatest treasure.”

In addition, when missionary women were assured that they had accomplished their Christian goal, Chinese women were represented in an utterly positive light. According to the descriptions, Christian Chinese women completely resembled Western women. Hence, Chinese women who formed “a little Missionary Band” were represented as capable, admirably willing to accept self-denial in the name of the Savior, and sharing Western women’s missionary zeal since, “their hearts have been warmed by hearing of the work in other places.”

Furthermore, as Mrs. Julia Lloyd reported, “many have become more intelligent Christian wives and mothers, capable of reading and explaining the Bible and other Christian books to their families and neighbors,” while Mrs. M. C. N. Corbett documented that earnest indigenous Christian women, “with tears and entreaties... plead with their friends and neighbors to accept Jesus as their Savior.” Moreover, “reliable” and “mastered” indigenous Christian women were not only depicted as the mirror images of Western women, but also as those whose “knowledge of their experience can better select and illustrate the truths suited to their comprehension than a foreigner can do.”

It is interesting at this point to compare the construction of “untouchable” upper-class Chinese women with those of their “reachable” (both “disciplined” and “undisciplined”) compatriots. Mrs. Cockburn noted that “it is wonderful the great amount of freedom allowed to women here (in Ichang). All classes, except the very highest, walk about the streets quite freely, and rarely do we see them running on the approach of foreigners.” This account differs from the more common images of middle and lower-class Chinese women as morally, intellectually and physically degraded due to their indigenous traditions. Nonetheless, whereas the “freedom” of the majority of Chinese women came to be equated with their friendliness, approachability and openness to foreigners (which in turn corresponded to the extent of their “liberation”), upper-class Chinese women remained the absent Others who were represented as markedly different, not only from the Western women, but also from their “accessible” Christian or “heathen” sisters.

Even though the upper-class Chinese women were the most desired subjects of missionary interventions since it was reckoned that “if we (women missionaries) can only get some of these (upper-class) women to feel their deep spiritual need, other difficulties will be easily surmounted.” The dominant image of “the Chinese lady” that Western readers obtained from the narratives of women missionaries was

57 Miss A. Lancaster 1884:114.
58 Mrs. Stott 1884:117.
59 Mrs. Julia Lloyd 1884:132.
60 Mrs. M. C. N. Corbett 1885:139.
61 Mrs. A. P. Peck 1884:29.
62 Isolated accounts that acknowledged and lamented over the fact that upper-class Chinese girls and women of that period remained alarmingly out of Christian influence are Miss S. A. Norwood 1884:166; Mrs. E. U. Yates 1885:100, and Mrs. J. J. Turner 1885:101-102. There are no instances of demarcation of diverse ethnical backgrounds of Chinese women addressed in missionaries’ texts.
63 Mrs. Cockburn 1884:142.
64 Mrs. J. J. Turner 1885:102.
that of an opium addict. Hence, a reader was acquainted only with a mandarin's wife who was willing to receive the help of her Christian sister in quitting this "devils device,"\(^{65}\) and the rude hostess of the visibly disturbed and irritated Mrs. Stimson, who found herself at a dinner party with a wealthy family, but was able to talk "a little about Jesus" because the Chinese lady indulged in her opium.\(^{66}\)

With respect to the constructed Western women's self-image, the reports in Woman's Work in China frequently reminded the reader of the tedious efforts made by the missionaries and the pain they felt when Chinese women and girls rejected or ignored their care. Despite the difficulties, though, they remained involved in the process of lifting up China "from her present state of degradation, to the high plane of an enlightened Christian nation."\(^{67}\) In this way, the journal emphasized how much endurance, strength and faith were needed for this kind of work, thus helping to promote, include and advance Western women in the public life of that period.\(^{68}\)

Although the reader was warned that "if one is seeking a career, -looking for a place and a way in which to make a name for herself, -perhaps this (being a women missionary in China) is not the best way to gain that end."\(^{69}\) The role of Chinese women as a means for advancing Western women's public position in their mother countries can also be inferred from the articles that discussed the pros and cons of the employment of single and married missionary women.\(^{70}\)

Miss J. E. Chapin's article is a good example of the construction of intertwined and contrasting images of missionary women who were able to lead their Chinese students "one by one, out of the darkness and bondage of ignorance and superstition, into the light and liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free,"\(^{71}\) and Chinese schoolgirls who yielded for the complete erasure of their cultural and historical backgrounds. Responding to an article by Miss Adele Marion Fielde\(^{72}\) about the question of whether unmarried ladies should work in China, Miss J. E. Chapin wrote:

> In order to have these schools (in China) efficient in training the girls into useful Christian women, it is not only necessary to give them such mental training as their Chinese teachers are utterly incapable of giving, but their morals and manners must receive the most constant and careful attention; their superstitions must be eradicated; their habits of thought and action must be...\(^{73}\)

\(^{65}\) WWIC 8(1):65.  
\(^{66}\) WWIC 8(1):19.  
\(^{67}\) Miss J. E. Chapin 1884:121.  
\(^{68}\) Another possible means for the advancement of missionary women's position in the public sphere was their admirable competence in Chinese geography, economy, agriculture, society and culture presented in numerous articles. See, for instance, Mrs. Julia Lloyd 1884:128-131; Mrs. Cockburn 1884:141.  
\(^{69}\) Miss J. E. Chapin 1884:123.  
\(^{70}\) The debate was launched as the response to the conclusions of, as Mrs. Arthur H. Smith sarcastically wrote, "...a Bishop... a 'wise Bishop,' who traveled 'extensively' and made 'large inquiry and observation'". A nameless Bishop commented on the single ladies as if they were a "class (that) seems to add nothing to the working force of the mission," Mrs. Arthur H. Smith 1884:172.  
\(^{71}\) Miss J. E. Chapin 1884:123.
changed; their whole characters must be formed anew... The ladies who have charge of the schools must not only act as teachers, but as mothers to the girls who come under their care. And in order to do this, what constant watchfulness is needed by day and by night... How can mothers, with little families of their own, have the time or the opportunity thus to give these Chinese girls that home and heart training? Or even if they could find the time would they dare to expose their own children to the danger of contamination from familiar intercourse with a score or more of such Chinese girls as come into our schools...  

This portrayal of Chinese students as needing “constant foreign superintendence (because of) the gross immorality of the heathen... (that) render necessary the most sleepless vigilance”73 was thus employed as a justification for professional affirmation of “a loving, womanly single lady.”75 Future research must explore whether framing married women missionaries as mothers responsible for guarding their children from the influence of deviant and contaminating Chinese girls influenced the involvement and the recognition of married women missionary's accomplishments in the missionary project.

Findings and Further Questions
My analysis of the articles published in the missionary periodical Woman's Work in China in 1884 and 1885 shows that Western women's judgment of Chinese women was based upon the extent to which Chinese women accepted or rejected Western women's Christian teachings. I have identified the following four constructions of Chinese women: (1) despicable Chinese women who had not shown any interest in complying with the Christian religion; (2) Chinese schoolgirls and women-students going through a process of conversion who are portrayed as having been risen from the depths of spiritual, mental and moral darkness, but are seen as constantly in danger of regressing to their degrading non-Christian tradition; (3) Chinese Christian women who are represented as a highly positive mirror image of Western women; and (4) upper-class Chinese women beyond the reach of women missionaries' but occupying a specific place, in the created imaginary, where the liberty of their converted/convertible lower-class sisters is deprived of and indulging in opium consumption.

As may be concluded from the articles analyzed in this essay, the processes of depiction of Chinese women and construction of Western women's images operated simultaneously. Three ways utilized by Western women in their creation of these implicit self-images may be detected. Firstly, Western women, as the authors of texts on Chinese women, constructed an image of themselves as persistent,
devoted, knowledgeable and able creators (“we know and do” images). Secondly, by differentiating and distancing themselves from negatively depicted Chinese women, women missionaries employed representations of Chinese women to create their own positive images (“they are what we are not” images). Finally, significantly or utterly positive images of Chinese women beget positive images of Western women, as they emphasize the success of their evangelizing efforts, thus the power of their agency (“they are what we made of them” images). The description of Chinese girls as needing and demanding constant care, supervision and influence of Western women, served as an explicit discursive means for advocating the advancement of single Western women’s public position in their home countries.

In these textual encounters of Western women with Chinese women, “race” was not an issue. Similarly, ethnic differences among Chinese women and girls were annulled while the sexual orientation of Chinese girls and women was not addressed at any point, thus neither celebrated nor condemned. In contrast, religious beliefs and class were crucial in the creation of Chinese women’s images.

What my findings suggest, therefore, is that the relationship between orientalism and class needs to be explored further. British missionary women not only tried to educate non-Western women. Similar humanitarian projects went on in Britain, where middle-class British women tried to reform lower-class women. In this regard, Francisca de Haan and Annemieke van Drenth introduced the notion of caring power, i.e. “a mode of power whose agents are committed to the physical and spiritual well-being of others.”76 As the authors argue, caring power, generated from the combined discourses of humanitarian sensibility and evangelical Protestantism, reshaped the identities of both caregivers and those who received the care.77 If one looks at the discourses of British women about Chinese women, they are sometimes strikingly similar to the discourses used by British women about lower-class women in Britain. This raises the question of what was “orientalist” in Western women’s attitudes towards and their constructions of Chinese women and Chinese femininity.

Furthermore, it is important to note the inherent bias in Western women’s narratives on Chinese women. While the paucity of sources written by Chinese women on their encounters with Western women necessitates a reliance on Western sources to reconstruct these encounters, one must constantly keep in mind the authors of these pieces and their intended audiences. The perspective of Chinese women is only indirectly present, as told or translated by Western women, and, as I argued, articulated in such a way as to explicitly support the Christian cause and to implicitly advance the public position of Western women.

Since Chinese girls and women from the lower classes that were “the focus-group” of early women missionaries were completely illiterate before being educated in the missionary schools, it is not likely that we will hear the voices that differ from those of Western women due to at least two main reasons. On the one hand, in order to have had their views published in the missionary periodicals and journals, Chinese women would certainly have to “attune” to the Western censure of topics...
and attitudes. On the other hand, the socio-cultural milieu of nineteenth-century China would not allow girls with non-orthodox education to be heard in Chinese means of communication. Therefore, the potential sources of different and diverse Chinese women's views on their interaction with Western women in the nineteenth century China, that is, the observations of educated Chinese women, those of middle-class merchant and artisan families, and upper-class daughters and wives of Chinese literati, must be further sought.

However, this does not imply that there would be an uncontested, “true” story from the Chinese perspective that should replace that of Western women missionaries in China. In order to grasp the nature and the dynamics of Chinese and Western women's encounters, one must interweave their narratives, and, in this sense, the interpretation of Christian women's monologues should not be discarded, but to understood as the first and more accessible step.

ABBREVIATIONS

WWIC Woman's Work In China

GLOSSARY

| Beijing | Ming |
| Chongqing | Ningbo |
| fengshui | Shanghai |
| Fuzhou | Taiping |
| Guangzhou | Tianjin |
| Han Shaogong | Qing |
| Jie chanzu hui | Xiamen |
| Maqiao | Yangzhou |

ABBREVIATIONS

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