Pacific Rim Report No. 12, March 2000

China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future

The USF Center for the Pacific Rim and Its Ricci Institute are pleased to publish jointly in this issue of Pacific Rim Report two special presentations delivered during an international conference on “China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future” held in October 1999 at the University of San Francisco. This premier international conference, highlighting nearly four hundred years of contact and engagement between Chinese and Christian traditions, was convened on the eve of both the twenty-first century and the third millennium. It brought together outstanding invited scholars from around the world. The forty-seven speakers and panelists included prominent Protestants, Catholics, a Russian Orthodox Christian, and non-Christian scholars.

The conference was held in memory of Father Edward J. Malatesta, S.J., founding director of the Ricci Institute of the Center for the Pacific Rim, University of San Francisco. An internationally known biblical scholar and historian of the Church and Jesuits in China, Father Malatesta passed away suddenly in Hong Kong in 1998. The USF Center for the Pacific Rim and Its Ricci Institute presented this conference in celebration of his life and his contributions to the study of Christianity in China.

The two addresses published in this inaugural issue of Pacific Rim Report focusing on the Ricci Institute were presented by David W. Vikner on October 15 and by H. Christopher Luce on October 16, respectively.

We gratefully acknowledge the EDS-Stewart Chair for Chinese-Western Cultural History at the Ricci Institute and the Kiriyama Chair for Pacific Rim Studies at the Center for the Pacific Rim for funding this issue of Pacific Rim Report.

Chinese Higher Education and the United Board for Chinese Higher Education in Asia

by David W. Vikner

David W. Vikner is president of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia. He spent his early years in China and Japan, and worked in Asia for fourteen years, where he served in various capacities. Before assuming the presidency of the United Board in July 1989, Vikner served for two years as vice president with particular responsibilities for the United Board’s relationships in the People’s Republic of China.

The United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia traces its institutional roots back to 1922 when a small office affiliated with three Protestant universities in China was opened in New York City. However, this by no means could be considered the beginning of Christian higher education in China. The roots of Protestant higher education in China can be traced back to the first primary schools which the missionaries established in the early 1800’s on China’s rim. The Treaty of Nanking, which ended the so-called First Opium War in 1842, then permitted the missionaries to begin work in five of China’s major seaports and in the newly formed colony of Hong Kong. It was in these six cities that the Protestants were very quick to begin emphasizing basic education. And since the churches had been playing a leading role in education in the West and did have some expertise, this emphasis on education was, in many ways, a very natural development.

Nevertheless, in the early years, the primary reasons for focusing on education in China were:

1. schools were seen as an important channel through which evangelization could be carried out.
2. since there were very few established institutions to provide general education for people and to train church workers, it was felt that schools were essential.
3. with virtually no opportunities for young girls to get a formal education, the missionaries through their schools hoped to support young women in the development of their fullest potential.

However, with the passage of time, there were additional motivations which moved beyond evangelization, general education, the training of church workers and education for young women. It soon also became clear that primary school education alone would not be adequate, and secondary and tertiary levels of education would be essential. Among the additional motivations were:

1. many people in China eventually came to see modern schooling as being highly beneficial and, since traditional Confucian schooling was
still the norm in the nineteenth century, the missionaries found a significant need for a broader and more comprehensive approach.

(2) it was felt that Christianity could have an even more significant impact on China if it moved beyond general education and the training of church workers to preparing people to serve the nation as a whole. This would, of course, make universities absolutely necessary.

(3) then it was also found that as students graduated from primary school they would often have nowhere to go for the next stages of their education if middle schools and then colleges were not established.

It was within this context that the first colleges were established in China in the 1870s and 1880s.

On October 1, 1922, the Central Office of the China Union Universities was established in New York City. The headquarters was no more than a small room of approximately fifteen square feet on the fifth floor of the Methodist Building at 150 Fifth Avenue. The Boards of Trustees of the University of Nanking, Peking University and the Shantung Christian University felt it was essential to cooperate in their effort to provide counsel and financial support for their three young and struggling universities. Within a month they had been joined by the Trustees of Fukien Christian University. By 1925, the Central Office evolved into the Permanent Committee for the Coordination and Promotion of Christian Higher Education in China.

In 1932, another transition took place, and the Permanent Committee became the Associated Boards for Christian Colleges in China. As constituted and later incorporated, the associated boards were ten in number (Central China College, Fukien Christian University, Ginling Women’s College, Hangchow Christian College, Lingnan University, the University of Nanking, Shantung Christian University, Soochow University, West China Union University, and Yenching University). In June 1934, the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York granted the Associated Board for Christian Colleges in China a Certificate of Incorporation as a nonprofit membership corporation, the purpose of which was “to advance the interests of Christian higher education in the Republic of China by counsel and financial support” and to conduct its principal operations in “the United States, the Dominion of Canada and the Republic of China.”

However, since all of the Christian colleges were themselves also incorporated, it soon became clear that there was a good deal of overlap and waste. Consequently, in June of 1945, before the end of the Second World War, the United Board for Christian Colleges in China was formed. Initially, the Boards of Trustees of six of the thirteen Protestant colleges were merged into one board (Fukien Christian University, Ginling Women’s College, Hwa Nan Women’s College, the University of Nanking, West China Union University, and Yenching University). And at the time when the United Board’s endeavors in China collapsed in mid-1950, only two of the thirteen Protestant colleges (Lingnan University and the University of Shanghai) had not been incorporated into the Board. Neverthe-less, all thirteen of the Christian colleges still coordinated their efforts through the Associated Boards until its demise in 1950.

Many remained hopeful that the Communist takeover of China in 1949 and the Korean War, which broke out in June of 1950, would not affect the work of the Christian colleges in China. After all, the colleges had managed to persevere in the past despite seemingly insurmountable difficulties - the warlord period of the 1920s, the anti-Christian period, the Nationalist period, the Anti-Japanese War period from 1937 to 1945 and the post-World War II revolutionary period.

However, by mid-1950, continuing relationships had become impossible, partly due to the anti-American sentiments in China and partly due to the anti-Chinese sentiments in the United States. Then, in the autumn of 1951, came an approach from a new “China College” in Hong Kong which had been established by a group of Christian educators and religious leaders, most of them refugees from the mainland of China. This was among the first United Board endeavors outside of China, and it marked the beginning of a new era. The forty-eight year relationship with this college, Chung Chi College, continues to this day.

In late 1951, there was also a request for assistance in starting another Chinese Christian college, this one in Taiwan. By 1954, Tunghai University in Taichung was established, with the United Board over the years providing more funding for this university than for any other Board related institution in Asia.

The former President of Yenching University, Dr. J. Leighton Stuart, later referred to Chung Chi College and Tunghai University as “the spiritual successors of the China Colleges.” And even though Chung Chi College has been incorporated into the Hong Kong government’s Chinese University of Hong Kong and Tunghai University has expanded into an institution with over 12,000 students, the flame of Chinese Christian higher education, which was first lit in China in the nineteenth century, continues to burn to this day.

The year 1951 also saw the work of the United Board for Christian Colleges in China expanding beyond the “Chinese World” into Japan and the Philippines. Yet, it is clear that the Board’s strong Chinese orientation remained. The 1951-52 budget also included a grant of US $25,000 for the agriculture program of Silliman University in the Philippines. But this too was seen as something of a continuation of the Board’s involvement in China where its agriculture program, especially at the University of Nanking, had made such an important contribution.

Then 1953 saw the United Board for Christian Colleges in China expanding into both Indonesia and South Korea. Clearly, by this time, the work of the United Board was gradually extending well beyond its early emphasis on China. Consequently, the name change which occurred in 1955 was indeed appropriate. The United Board for Christian Colleges in China became the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia and remains so to this day.

In 1970, the United Board decided to organize a Commission on Christian Higher Education in Asia to evaluate its overall policy of relating directly to colleges and universities. As a result, instead of having institutional ties with only seven institutions, it began to focus instead on projects, extending short-term support for the many innovative endeavors in Christian higher education which were emerging throughout the region. Between 1971 and 1973, the United Board supported 112 different projects in thirty-five Christian colleges and universities in thirteen
different parts of Asia. This set the stage for the United Board’s current involvement with some eighty colleges and universities in twelve different parts of Asia, also included were a number of Roman Catholic institutions.

At the point when the United Board was formulating its policy document for the 1980s, yet another shift in direction took place. This emerged out of an invitation from the Communist government in Beijing for the United Board to return to support higher education in the mainland of China. With thirty years elapsing after the United Board was compelled to leave mainland China and with long periods when the Communist authorities condemned Westerners and Christians alike, many trusteess were very skeptical. Furthermore, with no Christian colleges in China and virtually no prospect of any appearing in the foreseeable future, it was difficult to see how the United Board could be faithful to its priorities.

However, after a great deal of discussion, it was finally decided that the United Board was in fact more than a board for Christian higher education in Asia. It could also be seen as a united Christian board for higher education in Asia. As a Christian board, it was broadly concerned about the need to train all forms of Asian leadership. As a Christian board, it was broadly concerned about the need to find solutions for the multitude of complex problems in Asian societies. As a Christian board, it was broadly concerned about the need to maintain a human dimension in all forms of higher education. As a Christian board, it could still express its deep Christian concerns and Christian commitments. It was within this broader understanding of the United Board, that the China Program was able to resume after a lapse of thirty years. It is this broader understanding which has also enabled the United Board to establish involvement’s in Burma, Cambodia and Vietnam and is now challenging the United Board to pursue new opportunities in other countries where there are no Christian colleges or universities—among them are North Korea and Pakistan.

Now a few words about the United Board’s involvement in China since 1980. Between 1980 and 1990, the United Board was related to 103 government universities in the People’s Republic of China, approximately one out of every ten universities in the country. In the 1990s, the United Board has attempted to have a more significant impact on a smaller group of universities, and the number has been decreased to twenty-one scattered throughout the country.

Since 1980, the United Board has supported the overseas study of over 1,500 scholars, primarily scholars who have come to the United States. And we estimate that over 97% of these scholars have returned to China and are teaching in the universities from which they came. Since 1980, the United Board has sent over 500 North American scholars, and a number of others from Asia and Europe, to teach in Chinese universities.

The Board has also related to numerous libraries and three library training schools. It has supported Women’s Studies Programs and Minority Studies Programs in Board-related universities across China. It has worked closely with the Amity Foundation in recruiting foreign language instructors to teach at struggling colleges and universities in the more remote parts of western China. Recently, greater emphasis has been placed on support for the religious studies programs emerging in a number of key universities in China.

The United Board is part of a mission which began with several Christian primary schools in China’s nineteenth century treaty ports, expanded to middle schools and later to the thirteen Protestant colleges related to the United Board. The Board then moved to Christian colleges and universities on China’s rim. Finally it returned to its roots where it became involved with the secular, government universities of today’s China. Yet, its current mission has remained valid at every stage. “The United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia works to support Christian presence in related colleges and universities in Asia.” I am convinced that while this mission will remain firm in the future, the forms which it will take in China will remain somewhat uncertain, and they are very exciting to anticipate.

**Chinese Higher The Henry Luce Foundation: A Century of Service to Christianity and Higher Education in China**

*by H. Christopher Luce*

H. Christopher Luce is an award-winning photojournalist and a director of The Henry Luce Foundation. Through the years Christopher Luce has continued to support the family’s commitment to promoting a greater understanding between China and the West. He has lectured frequently and authored numerous articles on Chinese and Japanese Art.

Today, in the spirit of this international conference on China and Christianity, I would like to briefly describe the role my family and the Henry Luce Foundation have played on behalf of both. I would like to talk, in particular, about my great-grandfather, Henry Winters Luce, a Presbyterian missionary, leader of Christian higher education, ecumenical visionary, and Sinophile. It was he who instilled the values of faith and hard work in my grandfather, Henry Robinson Luce, a combination which must have contributed to the financial success of Time Incorporated. It was that very success which allowed my grandfather to create the Foundation. Founded in honor of his father, Henry R. Luce focused the Foundation’s grant-making in the areas of religion, higher education, and China. My father, Henry Luce III, has carried on this tradition as Chairman of the Foundation.

*A Love for China*

I would like you to imagine what it would be like to have been in my great-grandfather’s footsteps, when he arrived in China in 1897.
Tengchow in Shantung was destined for an important role in the new era then beginning because of the presence of remarkable missionary leaders who had arrived in the 1860s. Calvin Mateer, among them, was a pioneer in educating Chinese for leadership along modern and Christian lines. In a run-down temple dedicated to Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, they had started a boarding school which after some years had grown into Tengchow College. Harry Luce was destined to join him.

My great-grandparents liked to walk atop the wall surrounding the town of Tengchow, one complete revolution each day just before dusk, a time when it would have been interesting to watch the cobbler and other craftsmen at their trades, hear merchants and their customers haggle over prices, see people in the noodle shops, and watch the children dart to and fro, all the while reviewing the day in their minds. In a single glance, they could see much of the town, from the north gate...to the pavilion overlooking the sea...to the “water city” with its fishing boats returning as evening light fell. He came to know the town not only as Tengchow, City of the Heights, but also by the name it bears today, Penglai, which is synonymous, in Chinese lore, with “Heaven.”

Having been there myself in 1992, it comes as no surprise to me that my great-grandfather fell in love with China. As time passed and he made more and more contacts with the Chinese people, he gained an affection and admiration for China that would remain with him until the end of his days. Contrary to the negative stereotypes about them, he found the Chinese people to be courteous, patient, generous, tolerant, all very “Christian” values. Only for a short while did he think of them as a vast, undifferentiated sea. Soon they became individuals, and as his knowledge of the language grew, so did the number of his Chinese friends.

A Missionary

As a missionary, Harry Luce not only taught at the school, but also traveled to spread the Gospel. In 1898 he set out one Friday morning for a two-day donkey ride dressed in the gown of the Chinese scholar to go to a village fifty miles south of Tengchow in response to a request from a family that desired church membership. Upon reaching the market town of Zhaoyuan, and surrounded by a group of curious townspeople, Harry Luce preached his first sermon in Chinese. What with his accent, unusual tale, and pale skin, they must have thought he was a wonderfully strange story-teller, unlike any they had ever heard!

A Chinese peasant introduced himself as the one Luce had come to see. Telling him that his son was a victim of religious persecution, my great-grandfather accompanied the man to the yamen, government office, witnessed the son being beaten, secured his release, and accompanied them back to their mud hut in the village of Wei Du Qing Jia, where he spent the night with them. “There we were” he wrote, “a little group of Christians, brought together in common worship and fellowship.” Looking through old files in Zhaoyuan, ninety-six years later, and despite all that has gone on since then, I was able to locate not only the hamlet of Wei Du Qing Jia, but the very same hut! I was shown where my great-grandfather had slept and even where the donkeys were quartered.

Itraveled to numerous towns in which my great-grandfather had lived and taught. Although I looked far and wide, however, I found only one Presbyterian, the eighty-eight-year-old daughter of the couple who had given him shelter in that mud hut. At the entrance to her dwelling, taped to the doorframes, were not only passages from the Bible in Chinese, but also the sayings of Confucius, Mencius, several Kitchen Gods, and even Chairman Mao! So, I guess you could say that she was truly ecumenical.

Bridging East and West

Shortly after my great-grandfather’s arrival in Asia, he wrote that “our hearts were weighed down with the burden of heathenism.” But before long, Harry’s letters would begin to reveal that he found much to admire in non-Christian forms of worship. When, nearly four decades later, Harry Luce visited shrines in Asia once again, the scope of his understanding of other peoples and their faiths had widened considerably. As Luce looked back, he realized what a transformation had taken place in him. He had departed for China in 1897 with the conventional Western attitude of disparagement of the Chinese and approbation of all things American. The history of Sino-American relations contains many similar beliefs, ranging from xenophobia to paternalism to naivete. Images of China largely came from Americans’ incomprehension and fear and not from the reality of what the Chinese were like.

One way he manifested this transformation was in his insistence on retaining as much as possible of the magnificent old architecture of China in the design of the three universities he led: Shantung Christian University in Weixian, Cheeloo University in Jinan, and Yenching University in Beijing. They were a blend of Chinese outward form with Western modern improvements. By the time his last one, Yenching University (of which he was Vice-President), was being planned, he wished to eliminate all residual “foreignness.” Luce was appalled, for example, at the thought of the stark profile of a water tower spoiling the aesthetic harmony of the Yenching campus, and he suggested that the tank be placed within a pagoda-like structure. “Poor Harry,” people murmured, “This time he’s really crazy!” His critics called them his “castles in the air.” But when it was finally built, they saw how well it blended into the Chinese landscape.

A further way in which my great-grandfather tried to facilitate East-West dialogue was by writing Chinese reference books, to make the gospel more accessible to the Chinese. Starting in 1901 when he published the first Harmony of the Gospels in Chinese, he continued writing Chinese language works such as Aids to the Study of the Life of Christ. One of his greatest assets was that he was a teacher who radiated an infectious brand of enthusiasm. To his chagrin, however, his teaching roles grew more limited as the need to raise money for each successive project grew greater. He saw little of his family, and the stress of having to search for funds caused his health to fail.

Harry Luce had so acclimated to living in China that each time he returned to the United States, he was struck by the feeling of being a stranger in a strange land. He realized that the America he had described to his Chinese friends was not as perfect as the one he had
remembered. He had begun to think of men everywhere as brothers, with many traits in common. This may seem obvious to us today, but a century ago, it was quite radical to think in those terms if one was a missionary from a Western power to a far off, heathen land. He no longer based his judgments on what he thought in 1897 were superstitious practices. He was now looking for points of similarity, not difference. My great-grandfather realized he had become a missionary from China to his own native land!

Righteousness

When he had to choose a Chinese name for himself, he followed the standard practice of making the surname sound somewhat like his English name while inventing a given name with an auspicious meaning. The name he selected was Lu Si-yi. Lu, meaning “the way,” Si meaning “thought,” and Yi meaning “righteousness,” so that the full name becomes “The way of righteousness and thought.” In the center of the campus of Yenching University is a lake upon which stands a pavilion. Built in honor of the man who conceived the design of the university and raised the money for its construction, the Chinese words etched above the entrance read: “Si-yi Ting, the Pavilion of Righteousness and Thought.” How fitting, both for the manner in which he led his life and for the Chinese name he chose.

Christianity

His deep belief that God had imparted a purpose to human life was handed down to my grandfather and father. My grandfather once said, “Meaning was built into life, in the beginning, by the Creator, and that meaning will endure until the end of time.” As a result, the Luce Foundation has from its very beginning supported Christianity, higher education, and China. During the past fifteen years, it has played a prominent role in promoting new scholarship on Christianity in China, a subject which has experienced a recent renaissance.

The Luce Foundation, for example, provided major support to the University of Kansas for research on Christianity in China which produced a path-breaking volume edited by Daniel Bays in 1996. Based largely on Chinese language sources, this volume was significant because it made Chinese Christianity a legitimate topic for American and Chinese academics. Other research has ranged from the study of Ming dynasty “Confucian Christians” to support for a delegation of American religious leaders to China in 1998. For the past several years, the Luce Foundation has also supported a center for the study of China’s Christian colleges at Huazhong Normal University in the city of Wuhan. No one was more deeply committed to a belief in the value of intellectual exchange on the subject of Christianity in China than Father Edward J. Malatesta, who, with great energy and conviction over the past decade, pioneered research on the history of Christianity in China. He realized that materials chronicling the Christian experience in China were profuse, but that accessing them was difficult. He therefore embarked on a bold initiative: a comprehensive computer database on the Internet called the Ricci 21st Century Roundtable Database Project. I am pleased to say that the Luce Foundation has supported this project.

Additional projects sponsored by the Foundation concerning Christianity in China have been through such organizations as the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, the Union Theological Seminary, and the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Ecumenicism

The first three decades of Harry Luce’s missionary service were spent in working to strengthen Christian higher education in China. The last decade of his life was devoted to the movement toward the ecumenical ideal of a world church. “If I had a whole lifetime before me,” he said, “I could spend all of it tracing out the meaning that lies behind the words used for the concept of God.” He knew, for example, that the Chinese name for the Christian God, Shangdi, had a long history prior to the introduction of Christianity. Studying its etymology, he thought, might be useful in understanding not only the Chinese better, but also the concept of faith among all humans.

In his later years, after returning to the U.S., he taught seminars at the Kennedy School of Missions in Hartford. One, Development of Chinese Culture, surveyed China’s five thousand year heritage, its religious and philosophical concepts, its rich artistic and cultural traditions. He sought to familiarize his students with the great sages of China, and to find in them many of the same ideals espoused by Western teachers. There were even echoes of the New Testament. In passages like “The way of mutual love is to regard the state of others as one’s own,” he saw resemblances to “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to look through his library. I was astonished to find so many books on Eastern religions, and to find that, in the margins of many of the books on Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, he had scribbled remarks which would not only comment on the book’s contents, but were often accompanied by comparisons to Christianity, such as, “That’s just as in the Bible!” or “Christ said the same thing!” So the thought occurred to me that, as irony would have it, it was my great-grandfather who was converted by China, and not the other way around! Under my father’s leadership, the Foundation has supported ecumenical programs such as a fellowship at the Hartford Seminary on Protestant Christianity and the Conundrum of Islam, an initiative on comparative religions called The Many Faces of God at the New Hampshire Humanities Council, and many others.

A Visionary

A question one might raise is: Was Luce too much of a visionary to be a missionary? After all, his forthright approach and unconventional suggestions had often aroused the opposition and resentment of his colleagues. His radical ecumenical ideas also annoyed many of his elders, who distrusted his “visionary schemes” and who said he “interfered with their missionary work.”

But it was hard to say no to him. Obstacles and opposition only stimulated him to greater effort. Furthermore, he was often right. Speaking of
the situation in 1898 when he had suggested moving Tengchow College to a more central town, Luce said, “There was no money in sight. But, I learned a principle which seemed to me to be valid, that the way to tackle a problem is first to decide whether it ought to be done, and then to make plans, regardless of whether or not the money is in sight. The consequent result is that, in the process of planning, conviction grows as to the soundness and wisdom of the enterprise, which in due course is caught by others able to make the dream a reality.” Doesn’t this sound like Father Malatesta!

Among his many visionary dreams, Luce for a long time had wanted to set up a central office in New York to serve all the Christian colleges in China, to assist in raising money, and to coordinate the efforts of missionaries abroad. Finally, in 1922, with his fervent support, the China Union Universities Central Office was organized. This developed into the Associated Boards for Christian Colleges in China which later became the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia. He had succeeded in helping to create the first interdenominational board in America on behalf of a Christian college in Asia.

So the answer to my question is, no, he was a missionary first. But he felt his mission was often to shake up the status quo for the furtherance of what he thought was best for the Kingdom of God....

On December seventh, 1941, Harry Luce was so disturbed by news of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, an event so contrary to everything he had tried to achieve during his lifetime, that, before retiring, he wrote down these words: “Seeker after the Kingdom of God, Dreamer who made his dream a reality, Friend and Servant of China, Interpreter of the West to the East, And of the East to the West.”

He never woke up...even to the last, his thoughts were close to God and to China. “Let whatever I have done,” he said, “be a sort of offering to China, land of my abiding affection and allegiance.”