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CONTENTS

Nuclear Nonproliferation: A Hidden but Contentious Issue in US-Japan Relations During the Carter Administration (1977-1981)
>>..... Charles S. Costello III 1

An Interview with 2002 Kiriya Chair Rosemary Foot on Human Rights, the United States, and the Asia Pacific
>>..... Joaquin L. Gonzalez III 7

Persistence of Interlocking Institutions: Big Business Policy Under the Kim Dae Jung Government
>>..... Jiho Jang 10

Shifting Boundaries: The Double Life of Walls in Beijing, 1949-1965
>>..... Duanfang Lu 17

North Korean Realities
>>..... James McAdam 25

Asian American Mental Health Issues
>>..... Michael Menaster 31

Christian Higher Education: A Case for the Study of the History of Christianity in China
>>..... Peter Tze Ming Ng 35

Comparing Democratization in the East and the West
>>..... Doh Chull Shin and Junhan Lee 40

Zebra Crossings: Perspectives on Pedestrian Safety in China
>>..... Yu Qingling, Zhang Qiao, Wang Min, and Yan Jun 50

Asia Pacific: Perspectives is a peer-reviewed journal published once a year in May. It welcomes submissions from all fields of the social sciences and the humanities with relevance to the Asia Pacific region.* In keeping with the Jesuit traditions of the University of San Francisco, *Asia Pacific: Perspectives* commits itself to the highest standards of learning and scholarship.

Our task is to inform public opinion by a broad hospitality to divergent views and ideas that promote cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and the dissemination of knowledge unreservedly. Papers adopting a comparative, interdisciplinary approach will be especially welcome. **Graduate students are strongly encouraged to submit their work for consideration.**

* 'Asia Pacific region' as used here includes East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Oceania, and the Russian Far East.

Christian Higher Education: A Case for the Study of the History of Christianity in China

by Peter Tze Ming Ng, Ph.D.

Abstract

Christian Higher Education started in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in China. It began as part of the missionary movements in China, but gradually grown up to be an independent educational enterprise in China. There were already 13 Protestant universities registered with the Chinese government in the 1930s. In this paper, it is suggested that Christian higher education can be taken as a good case for the study of Christianity in China, especially in the analysis of the shift of paradigms in the mission history of China. Four shifts of paradigms were illustrated from the case of Christian higher education in China. Finally, it is concluded that Christian higher education in China could perhaps be another good case to study the interplay between the Western and Chinese cultures, or more precisely an interplay between the Western and Chinese understanding of Christianity and the Christian mission.

Introduction

In this paper, I would like to talk about the shift of paradigms in the study of mission history in China, using Christian higher education as a case for illustration. While studying the history of Christianity in China, one would easily locate it as part of the missionary movements in China, initiated by the Western countries, either by the Europeans or Americans in the nineteenth or earlier centuries. Hence, the 'Impact-Response' theory was put forward by John King Fairbank since the 1950s.¹ China would then become an object of the mission and the movement would end up to be what was known as 'The Occupation of China', a term used by the missionaries in 1920s.² As for resources, one would turn to the records from various mission boards as primary resources, and the correspondences and memoirs of the missionaries are significant tools for the understanding of any changes or patterns of the mission history.

However, scholars in China today are trying to move beyond the study of mission history and begin to see the history of Christianity in China as part of China's own history. Just as the study of American Christianity here. Few scholars in the country today would like to study the history of American Christianity as part of European mission history in America though it was so started since the missionaries came to America. American History can stand on its own, so is the history of American Christianity. The same is true to the history of Christianity in China. Especially when we think of higher education in China, Chinese education started long before the missionaries came. China has a much longer history of its own, more than 5000 years. Christian higher education only supplemented, or added some elements if it could, to the whole educational system of China.

The Christian colleges in China have long been taken for granted as missionary schools, being controlled by the mission boards and were preoccupied with evangelistic purposes. That was why Christian schools were often criticized as "means of cultural imperialism by Western powers in China".³ Such perceptions have been undergoing rapid changes in the past two decades. The change was started in 1989, when Prof. Zhang Kaiyuan made a formal call to the Chinese scholars for a new approach to the study of the Christian colleges. He reminded scholars that it was the right time to draw clear distinctions "between the educational role of Christian colleges and its religious role" and "between the normal educational activities in Christian colleges and the imperialistic policies of the Western powers".⁴ He suggested Chinese scholars to study Christian colleges as part of the history of Sino-Western cultural exchange in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ This may serve as a significant milestone in the development of research on the history of Christian higher education in China. Since then, there were great changes in the field and a shift of paradigms has been emerged. So, in this paper, I shall describe briefly some characteristics of the shift of paradigms and discuss its significance on the study of history of Christianity in China in the past two decades.

The Shifting of Paradigms in Christian Higher Education of China

From the Study of Christian Higher Education as part of Mission History to that of Chinese Social History

Francis C.M. Wei, one Chinese president of a Christian college had once said that in order that Christianity could take root in China, it must become part of the Chinese culture. Earlier studies have portrayed Christian higher education in China as part of Christian Missionary History in China, yet more recent studies turn to re-locate the study of Christian higher education to its contemporary Chinese social contexts. A number of scholars have made pioneering attempts such as Prof. Gao Shiliang, a retired Professor of Education at Fujian Normal University⁶, Prof. Qu Shipai, a professor of the Institute of Higher Education in Peking University China⁷, and Profs. He Xiaoxia and Shi Jinghuan, both at Beijing Normal University⁸.

I have been working with a few other young scholars in the production of a series of books on "Christian Education and Chinese Society Series", to bring the social contexts alive again. The first book was written by Mr. Huang Xinxian, the chief editor of *Jiaoyu Pinglun (Educational Review)* in Fuzhou. The book entitled: *Christian Education and Social Change in China*, is a very fine work, being on the one hand free from the traditional Marxist view and on the other hand it portrayed an objective and comprehensive picture of Christian education in China in the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁹ Huang made very positive and substantial remarks on the contributions of missionaries in introducing and promoting modern education in China.¹⁰

From the Focus On the Work of Missionaries to the Work of Chinese Christians

There has been a distinctive shift of focus from earlier studies which focused on the work of missionaries to the recent studies of the work of Chinese Christians in Christian colleges. Interesting to know, in most of the missionary archives, Chinese Christians were 'nameless' or sometimes recorded as 'Ah Wong', 'Ah Leung' etc.¹¹ To compensate that, scholars today are more interested in the study of Chinese Christians, especially on those Chinese presidents and professors who taught in Christian colleges in China.

For instance, there has been a conference held at Huazhong Normal University in 1993 in memory of Francis C.M. Wei, the first Chinese president of Central China University. At that conference, there were twenty papers presented on one single Chinese president which were for the first time ever happened in the history of Christian colleges in China. To mention a few of these papers, they included the followings: Jessie Lutz's "Dr. Francis Wei: A Christian, A Scholar and a Patriot", Ng Tze Ming Peter's "Christianity and Chinese Culture—As Francis Wei Sees It", and Zhou Hongyu's "Francis Wei's Educational Theories and Activities".¹² Besides, there were articles such as Xu Yihua's work on P.J. Pu Puharen, an alumnus of St. John's University,¹³ and Ng Tze Ming Peter's work on Chan Shiu Paak, the first student of Lingnan University, Canton.¹⁴

Since 1997, a team of scholars including Peter Ng, Edward Xu and Hongyu Zhou launched a project entitled: "Outstanding Chinese Presidents in Christian Colleges in Pre-1949 China".¹⁵ Ten Chinese presidents were chosen for intensive study,¹⁶ and the research focused on the evaluation of their efforts in the development of Christian colleges into indigenous educational institutions and their responses and adaptation to the demands and needs of Chinese society. There are good reasons for these studies:

- a. Firstly, as Chinese Christians, the educators under study were committed to the noble mission of searching the values and relevance of both their Chinese and Christian identities. Both identities had been taken so firmly that they could not be forsaken one way or the other as many outsiders have thought they could. As a matter of fact, most of these Chinese educators were found struggling hard to keep the two in good balance, so that they were not ashamed to be called 'Chinese' and 'Christian' at the same time. But, how could the two be integrated? The study of these Chinese Christians reveals a lively picture of the interplay between Christianity and Chinese culture. As Nicolas Standaert has said, "the history of Christianity in China is also... a history of defining the 'other' and the 'self'... As such the 'other' and the 'self' come into the light for both sides. This might be a new challenge for the study of Christianity in China."¹⁷
- b. Secondly, as Christian professors working in higher education, they were bound to be facing two kinds of commitments, namely their 'professional commitments' and their 'religious commitments'. They had to strive for a balance between the two commitments, hence they somewhat resembled 'the fiddler on the roof'. The study of these

Chinese presidents reveal a true picture of how Christian faith was working in the Chinese context.¹⁸

- c. Lastly, these Chinese presidents were found facing even greater challenges in setting goals and objectives for their colleges. What should a Christian college be? Should it merely serve to provide pastors or clergymen for the missionary boards or churches as they had in the early twentieth century? Or should they also train good citizens and good leaders for the nation and society? Again, it would definitely not be a matter of either/or – either serving God or serving the Chinese community. It had to be a matter of both/ and how. The issue was vividly understood by Chinese presidents who were found pushing in many ways to keep a fair balance. The study of their work should be much illuminating.

Indeed, as 'melting pots' for the two cultures, Christian colleges can definitely be valuable resources for the study of the process of encounters, dialogues and exchanges between Christianity and Chinese cultures. The rediscovery of the activities of these Chinese presidents was a valuable effort. The research has certainly added more Chinese ingredients and brought the study of Christian colleges in China to a new horizon.¹⁹

From the Application of Missionary Archives to the wider application of Multi-Archival Materials

As Chinese scholars are now more accessible to the archival materials in China which have not been used before, there was a growing desire to employ these materials in the re-discovery of the history of Christian colleges, alongside with the use of the missionary archives available in the West. For instance, Prof. Tao Feiya and Ng Tze Ming Peter have attempted a joint research into the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia archives in the United States as well as the Christian colleges archives recently recovered in China. We worked together on the study of Chinese studies programs in Christian colleges. Seldom do people relate Chinese studies programs with Christian colleges, because Christian colleges were meant to be promoting Christianity and western sciences and technology. The teaching of Chinese studies could be in contrary to the cause of Christianity in China. However, it was found that Chinese studies programs had become a core program in Christian colleges, even as a missionary's tool to beat the other, national universities in China. Hence, we published a book on *Chinese Studies Programs at the Christian Colleges*.²⁰ Chinese scholars are now beginning to give more emphasis on comparative studies and multi-archival research in their effort to re-tell the story of Christian colleges in China. Besides, Prof. Leung Yuen Sang has written an article on Young J. Allen, the founder-teacher and Yun Chi-ho, a student-alumnus of the Anglo-Chinese College in Shanghai, setting an excellent example of how cross-cultural and multi-archival research could be done.²¹

From the Exposition of Missionary Perspectives to the Exploration of Alternative Perspectives

I have recently finished a book, working together with three other scholars on *Changing Paradigms of Christian Higher Education in China*.²² We also attempted some ways for alternate perspectives. I may recall a couple of attempts as illustrations in the following paragraphs.

Attempt 1: The Impact-Response Theory Re-visited

John K. Fairbank has once introduced the 'Impact-Response' paradigm for the study of modern Chinese history, in which China was seen as one facing great impact from Western civilization, including Christianity, and she had responded to the Western impact rather slowly.²³ In my recent work, I attempted to revise this paradigm in the belief that cultural exchanges worked in both directions and changes took place on both sides. Since much work has already been done on China as the receiving end of the Western impact and on Christianity as the giving end, I turned to look at the history of Christian colleges from the other way round. Instead of seeing Christian higher education as a driving force and looking for her contribution to the process of modernization in China as many scholars did,²⁴ I studied Christian colleges as a receiving end and see the changes in Christian colleges as the Western response to the Chinese impact. It was found that Christian colleges in China have been under great pressure to adjust themselves to the Chinese context and consequently their curriculum had undergone drastic changes, including the followings:

- a. Religious courses were no longer evangelistic by purpose, but rather seeking to be more academic and educational in nature; hence, the study of religion/ religions was offered as part of general education curriculum or as elective courses in universities in China;
- b. The scope of religious studies was no longer confined to the study of the Bible or Christian theology, and due attention was given to non-Christian religions, esp. to the religious and cultural traditions found in the Chinese context, such as Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism.
- c. Interdisciplinary approaches were introduced to the study of religion with courses such as 'Comparative Religions', 'Philosophy of Religion', 'Sociology of Religion', 'Psychology of Religion', 'Science and Religion'.

Religious education which was the core of Christian colleges, even in the United States in the early years of the last century, had to be shifted to the periphery of the university curriculum in China, just as what we find in most of the universities today. In the West, this process was called 'Secularization of Christian Academy', but in China we call it 'Modernization of Christian Higher Education in China'.²⁵ It is interesting to note that the study of religion, including the study of non-Christian religions as an academic discipline in universities was developed in the United States since 1960s, but such attempts have already been started in China in the 1920s, forty years earlier.

Attempt 2: The Cultural Knot of Christian Colleges in China

The missionaries had long been enforcing a challenge for Chinese Christians to choose between the Christian faith and Chinese culture as a choice between God and Mammon. This has become a cultural knot for many Chinese Christians. Must Christianity and Chinese culture be mutually exclusive? Why must a Chinese forsake his own culture in order to become a Christian? However, the very existence of Chinese Christians already suggested that the two needed not be mutually exclusive. For the Chinese Christians who were committed both to Christianity as their personal faith and to China as their beloved nation, it was by no means a matter of choosing one and forsaking the other. It is but a profound issue of how to embrace both and to work out a possible amalgamation of Christian faith and Chinese culture in real life.²⁶

There was indeed many Chinese professors who were engaged in this task of keeping both their Chinese and Christian identities, such as Lei-chuan Wu, T.C. Chao, N.Z. Zia and Francis Wei. They were typical Chinese scholars who remained steadfast in their commitments to both Christianity and Chinese culture and they attempted various ways to integrate Christianity to Chinese culture. Wu and Chao wanted to show how Christianity could help enrich or transform Chinese culture, and how it could contribute to the re-building of the Chinese nation.²⁷ Zia worked at reinterpreting Christianity in Chinese terms such as 'searching for Truth, Good and Beauty in life'.²⁸ Wei claimed that Christianity and Chinese culture could be mutually transformed through interactions. All these were good examples of how Chinese intellectuals could work out possible ways to harmonize Christianity and Chinese culture. Although Samuel Huntington's thesis has been widely taken for granted that different cultures, like Chinese and Western cultures would clash with one another, we still can argue that the cultural knot could become driving forces for encounters and dialogues which would lead to mutual transformation of both cultures. That is precisely the case we find in Christian higher education in China. The cultural knot had become an impetus for Chinese Christians to attempt creative imaginations and the Christian colleges become excellent arenas for the cultivation of educational dialogues and discussions on this important issue of bridging between Christianity and Chinese culture.

Concluding Remarks

Some twenty years ago, Paul Cohen called for the awareness of the danger of studying Chinese history with a Western agenda. His new historiography, the well-known 'China-Centred Approaches' has been widely established in the field of the study of modern Chinese history. However, we still need to go beyond it if we want to see the interplay between the Western and Chinese perspectives. Prof. Daniel Bays has been a leading figure in the launch for the study of indigenous Christianity from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries.²⁹ Jessie Lutz has reminded us that "the

Chinese Christians themselves had played a crucial role in propagating and interpreting Christianity".³⁰ Indeed, she called for new attempts to re-write the history of Protestant Christianity in China from a new perspective, "with greater attention to the Chinese side of the story".³¹

Scholars today are more aware of the local materials and the rediscovery of Chinese materials. One of my students, Tao Feiya has done an excellent thesis on Jesus Family Movement in Shandong Province in China. It was founded by Jing Dianying in a small village called Mazhuang in 1920s in China. It was one of the most indigenous Christianity in the rural area of China and the movement was so successful that it spread rapidly over northeast, northwest, east and south of China. It was reported to have 10,000 followers who gave away their properties and joined into the community of Jesus Family. Especially in view of the shift of paradigms evolved in the past two decades, we are looking ahead for more new approaches and new discoveries in the future years, not only in the study of Christian higher education in China, but also in the broader study of the history of Christianity in China. More interactive, more cross-cultural, cross-archival studies are anticipated.³² This would be really good news to especially young scholars of Asian studies, as there will be more rooms for new challenges and new discoveries in the years to come.

ENDNOTES

1. See, e.g. Fairbank, John and Teng. *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839-1923*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954.
2. See, e.g. Staffer, Milton T.'s famous book, *The Christian Occupation of China*, Shanghai: 1922.
3. See e.g. Li Chucai (ed.) *Diguo zhuyi qinhua jiaoyu shi ziliao - Jiaohui Jiaoyu (Materials on the Educational History of Invasion of the Imperialism in China - Church Education)* Beijing: Science of Education Press, 1987
4. See "The Preface" in Zhang Kaiyuan & Arthur Waldron (eds.) *Zhongxi Wenhua yu Jiaohui Daxue, (Christian Universities and Chinese-Western Cultures)* Hubei: Hubei Educational Publishing House, 1991, p.3.
5. *ibid.*, p.4.
6. See e.g. Gao Shiliang, *Zhongguo Jiaohui Xuexiao shi (The History of Church Schools in China)* Hunan: Hunan Educational Publishing House, 1994 and Chu Youxian & Gao Shiliang (eds.), *Zhongguo Jindai Xuezhi Shiliao (The Historical Resources for Modern Educational System in China)* vol.4. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1993.
7. See Qu Shipai, *Zhongguo Daxue Jiaoyu Fazhan shi (The Historical Development of University Education in China)* Shanxi: Shanxi Educational Press, 1993.
8. See He Xiaoxia & Shi Jinghuan, *Jiaohui Xuexiao yu Zhongguo Jiaoxue Jindaihua (Church Schools and the Modernization of Education in China)* Guangdong: Guangdong Educational Press, 1996.
9. See Huang Xinxian, *Jidujiao Jiaoyu yu Zhongguo Shehui Bianqian (Christian Education and the Social Change in China)* Series No.3 of *Jidujiao Jiaoyu yu Zhongguo Shehui Congshu (Christian Education and the Chinese Society Series)* Fuzhou: Fujian Educational Press, 1996.
10. Besides, there are five other books published in the same series. They are:
Tao, Fei Ya & Ng, Peter Tze Ming. *Jidujiao Daxue yu Guoxue Yanjiu (Chinese Studies Research in Christian Colleges in China)* Fujian: Fujian Educational Press, 1998.
Shi, Jinghuan et al. *Jidujiao Jiaoyu yu Zhongguo Zhishi Fenzi (Christian Education and Chinese Intellectuals)*. Fuzhou: Fujian Educational Press, 1998.
11. See the discussion in Philip Leung, "Mission History versus Church History - The Case of China Historiography" in *Ching Feng* Vol.40, No.3-4, September-December, 1997, pp.177-213.
12. See the collection of papers in Ma Min et al (eds.) *Kuayue Zhongxi Wenhua de juren (A Giant Bridging Over the Gap Between the Chinese and Western Cultures - A Collection of Theses at the International Symposium on Dr. Francis C.M. Wei)* Wuhan: Central China Normal University Press, 1995.
13. See Edward Xu, "Puhua ren yu Zhongguo jiaohui (P. J. Pu and the Chinese Church)" in Zhu Wei-zheng (ed.) *Jidujiao yu Jindai Wenhua (Christianity and Modern Culture)* Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1994.
14. See Ng Tze Ming, "Chenshaobai - Lingnan daxue diyiguo xuesheng (Chan Shiu Paak - The First Student of Lingnan University, Canton)" in *Journal of The Chinese Historical Society Taiwan: the Chinese Historical Society*, Vol.23, pp.139-148.
15. The project was funded by the Direct Grants for Research 1997-98, the Arts and Languages Panel of University Grants Committee, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.
16. The Chinese presidents under study include the followings:
a. Dr. Herman C.E. Liu, president of University of Shanghai;
b. Dr. Francis Wei, president of Huazhong University;
c. Xiang Bo Ma, president of Aurora University;
d. Yuan Chen, president of Fu Jen Catholic University;
e. Y.G. Chen, president of the University of Nanking;
f. Dr. Lincoln Dsang, president of West China Union University;
g. Dr. Yi-fang Wu, president of Ginling College;
h. Dr. Lucy C.Wang, president of Hua Nan Women's College;
i. Lei-chuan Wu, president of Yenching University;
j. Dr. Zhi-wei Lu, president of Yenching University.
17. See Nicolas Standaert. "New Trends in the Historiography of Christianity in China", *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol.83, No.4, October 1997, pp.612-613.
18. See e.g. Chang Shing Wu, "Tingfang Lew Zongjiao jiaoyu linian zhi shijian yu Zhongguo shehui bianqian, 1891-1947" (*Timothy Lew's Idea and Practice of Religious Education and Social Changes in China, 1891-1947*). Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2001.
19. The 10 chapters were finally compiled into a book just cited, see Peter Tze Ming Ng (ed.), 2001.
20. See Tao Fei-ya & Peter, Tze-ming Ng. *Jidujiao daxue yu guoxue yanjiu (Chinese Studies Programs at the Christian Colleges)*, Fuzhou: Fujian Educational Publishing House, 1998.
21. See Leung Yuen-sang, "Zhongxi shuyuan lishide zhuixun: yige kuawenhua kuadangan de jingyan (In Search of the Anglo-Chinese College: A Cross-cultural and Multi-archival Endeavor)", in Peter, Tze-ming Ng (ed.) *Zhongguo jiaohui daxue lishi wenxian yantaohui lunwenji (Essays on Historical Archives of Christian Higher Education in China)*, pp.555-570.
22. Ng, Peter Tze Ming et al. *Changing Paradigms of Christian Higher Education in China, 1888-1950*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002.

23. See for reference, John Fairbank and Teng, *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839-1923*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954.
24. See, for instance, Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, 3 volumes. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958-65 and Peter Chi-ping Lin (ed.) *Zhongguo Jidujiao Daxue Lunwenji* (Papers of the Influence and Contribution of Christian Colleges/Universities in Modernization of China International Conference). Taiwan: Cosmic Light Media Center, 1992.
25. See for instance, George Marsden et al (eds.) *The Secularization of the Academy* New York: Oxford University Press, 1992; and my discussion in, "Secularization or Modernization: Teaching Christianity in China Since the 1920s" in *Studies in World Christianity*. Vol.5, Part1, pp.1-17.
26. There were, for instance, cases like Timothy Ting-fang Lew who was born into a Christian family, hence was born with both the Christian and Chinese identities.
27. Wu had indeed made significant contribution to the development of Chinese theology by interpreting Christianity as a vital force for the realization of Confucian virtues. Chao had a strong conviction that Christianity would contribute to China's national salvation by creating a new morality and he argued that Christianity would become the basis for social reconstruction of China. However, when he was kept in prison during the Japanese invasion, he became more aware of the sinfulness of human nature and his own inability. In his later writings, he began to expound this unique Christian message of the sinfulness of man and the saving grace of God. See, e.g. discussions in Chu Sin Jan. *Wu Leichuan: A Confucian Christian in Republican China*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1995 and Lam Wing Hung. *The Theology of T.C. Chao* Hong Kong: Tiandao Shulou, 1988.
28. Zia had a deep conviction that the search for 'Truth, Good and Beauty' could be the common ground for the Eastern and Western philosophies and that Christianity could be interpreted in terms of the Chinese culture. Zia attempted his new curricula of 'philosophy of religion' and 'philosophy of life' by harmonizing the Christian ideals into the Chinese philosophy of life. See the discussion in Ng Tze Ming Peter, "*Jidujiao yu Zhongguo Wenhua zhi Ronghe* (The Harmony of Christianity and Chinese Culture - the Insights from N.Z. Zia)" in Zhang Kai-yuan and Ma Min (eds.) *Jidujiao yu Zhongguo Wenhua Congkan* (Christianity and Chinese Culture Series) Wuhan: Hubei Educational Press, 1996. pp.132-146.
29. Bays, Daniel (ed.) *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
30. See Lutz, Jessie. "China and Protestantism: Historical Perspectives, 1807-1949", in Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu (eds.) *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001, p.180.
31. *Ibid.*
32. For further discussion, see Ng, Peter Tze Ming. *Jidu Zongjiao yu Zhongguo Daxue Jiaoyu* (Christianity and Higher Education in China). Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2003.

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