

# *Texts of Henry Martyn Lectures 2007*

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## "Three Prophetic Voices - The Challenges of Christianity from Modern China"



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- [Lecture I: Timothy Richard - Christian Attitudes towards Chinese Religions and Culture](#)
- [Lecture II: David Paton - Christianity Encounters Communism](#)
- [Lecture III: K.H. Ting - Christianity and the Three-Self Church in China](#)

# THE HENRY MARTYN LECTURES

2007



## "Timothy Richard - Christian Attitudes towards Chinese Religions and Culture"

by Prof. Peter Tze Ming Ng

**LECTURE 1: Monday 5th February 2007**

### INTRODUCTION

I am most honoured to be the Henry Martyn Lecturer of 2007 and most happy to present this lecture series on "Three Prophetic Voices- the Challenges of Christianity from Modern China", in special memory of the 200th anniversary of the arrival of Robert Morrison to China in 1807. As the theme assigned to this year's lecture is on "The Challenges of Christianity from Modern China", I

have chosen three prophetic voices which are respectively from Timothy Richard, David Paton and K.H. Ting.

Last October, when Dr. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury was paying a two-week visit to China, he made at one of his lectures in Nanjing the following remarks, saying:

"China is emerging as a senior partner in the fellowship of nations; a country whose economy is changing so fast and whose profile in the world has become so recognisable and distinctive that we can't imagine a global future without the Chinese presence... (And he said to the students there) Yours is a society which will have messages to give to the rest of the world..." <sup>[1]</sup>

About a year ago, in November 2005, Lord Wilson, the Master of Peterhouse spoke as the Lady Margaret Preacher at the Commemoration of Benefactors Sunday at our University Church, the Great St. Mary's Church of Cambridge. He has also reminded us that what was happening in China today and in the years ahead would be very significant for the rest of the world. It is indeed a very appropriate time for us to spend 3 lectures on China Mission at our Seventh Henry Martyn Lecture this year.

We may still remember Robert Morrison (1782-1843), the first Protestant missionary sent to China by the London Missionary Society. When Morrison was sent to China, he could not go directly because at that time China was still adopting the closed door policy and the British East India Company dared not take Morrison to China, fearing that would upset the Chinese government. Morrison had to go to New York and took another boat from America to China. So, in the very beginning of the Protestant Missionary to China, the missionary had already known that it was not an easy job to evangelize in the Far East.

A hundred year after Robert Morrison's arrival to China, Protestant missionaries held a Centenary conference in Shanghai in 1907. In the same year, Timothy Richard published his biographies and articles, sharing his experiences and his new vision on Christian mission. <sup>[2]</sup> Now, another hundred years have passed by and it is definitely the most proper and significant time for us to do the similar work as Timothy Richard did and review the work of Christian missionaries from our experiences in the past 200 years. Prof.

Andrew Walls once reminded us that the "the missionary movement was a great learning experience for Western Christianity". [3] It could be a great challenge to review some basic assumptions about our Western theology and about our conception of Christian mission. I shall hence bring to our attention three prophetic voices from China which are valuable for our rethinking of Christian mission today.

## What is a 'Prophet'?

Before we start, we may stop for a while to consider the question of what constitutes a prophet. In his book, *The Shaping of Prophecy: Passion, Perception and Practicality*, Adrian Hastings remarked that 'Prophecy is an old-fashioned, biblically grounded concept which is still valid today - provided it contains two essential elements. The first is a clear, rational and sophisticated understanding of the world... The second is fidelity to a tradition, a faith, a shared discourse through which one speaks; not a rigid, uncritical fidelity, but the acceptance of a language and culture of meaning and of value.' [4]

Perhaps I may cite also the words of Hubert Allen, the grandson of Roland Allen, who wrote a book on his grandfather describing him as a 20th century prophet of Christian mission. Allen defines a prophet "as a person who has the perspicacity to observe truths that are unfashionable, and the tactlessness to voice them. In this way the prophet greatly annoys whoever those people are that happen to be the contemporary 'pillars of the society': because the prophet makes them feel uncomfortable, and rather less confident of their own wisdom and their own worth." [5] Like the Old Testament prophets who were committed to what the Lord had commissioned them, and out of their personal experiences they could speak of their visions and express prophetic voices which were so distinctive of their time, yet could not be apprehended by the people of their time. And also like the Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet would be rejected by his own people. It is somehow with this kind of sentiment that we are approaching our three great characters in this series of lecture.

There are four characteristics I shall focus in this lecture. They are outstanding in the life of Timothy Richard whom we are going to study. The four characteristics are: (a) A prophet is one who is faithful to one's religious calling; (b) A prophet is one who is open and keeps an open attitude to the culture and society of one's living context; (c) A prophet is one who not only has a clear, rational and sophisticated understanding, but also responsive to the contemporary world; and (d) A prophet is one who is quick to understand the unfashionable yet greater truths, and dare to adventure new visions, in such a way that may greatly annoy those who reckon themselves as 'pillars of the society'.

The three prophetic voices chosen for this lecture series are all from China. They were either Western missionaries or Chinese Christians, it was because of the specific situations they encountered in China and their unfailing commitment to Christianity which made them prophets of their times. Their commitment to the Church required them to be open and be responsive to their situations, in such a way that they could discover deeper meanings and bigger truth of Christianity which could accommodate their experiences in China. Hence, they became prophets of their time, calling for a new understanding of Christian mission in China. The three prophetic voices under study are: Timothy Richard, David Paton and K.H. Ting. Their voices are still relevant today. I shall take one person each lecture and will start with Timothy Richard now.

### **The Story of Timothy Richard Revisited**

Timothy Richard (1845- 1919) was a well known missionary in China, sent by the Baptist Missionary Society of England. In the book, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, Prof. K.S. Latourette described Richard as "one of the greatest missionaries whom any branch of the Church, whether Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox or Protestant, has ever sent to China" <sup>[6]</sup> He was also "a prophet... and a nation builder of modern China". <sup>[7]</sup> "Like all prophets, he (Richard) was ahead of his times and therefore misunderstood by some. But he lived and died beloved by the Chinese people who know him to be

their friend".<sup>[8]</sup> Though Richard spent forty-five years in China as a Baptist missionary, most of his work was not so much in congruence with the expectations of the Baptist Missionary Society. Richard kept asking the society to be patient to understand and to support what he was doing as it was true to his calling as a Christian missionary in China. How did Richard understand his own mission in China? We shall re-visit his story and see how it fits into the four characteristics I have just mentioned. In doing so, I am trying to recover some new insights we can learn from Richard's humble examples.

### ***(a) Being faithful to his Christian calling***

Richard received his calling to China when he was a seminarian at Haverfordwest Theological College in Pembrokeshire in 1868, at the age of twenty-three. He heard about the story of Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) who had founded the China Inland Mission in 1865.<sup>[9]</sup> With his famous motto: "if I have a thousand lives, I would give them all to China", Hudson Taylor had called many young people from England to be missionaries in China, including our 'Cambridge Sevens' in 1860s who had changed the whole world for a new era of Christian mission in those days.<sup>[10]</sup> In 1868, Richard was already moved by the example of Taylor and decided to give his life to China, hence becoming a missionary to China. People often compared the differences between Richard and Taylor for their different theologies and missionary methods, but in fact they were much closer to one another at the beginning of their missionary work in China.<sup>[11]</sup> Richard wanted to follow Taylor's vision to be a missionary to China and he asked to be sent by the China Inland Mission though it was rejected. Being a Baptist, he was recommended to apply to the Baptist Missionary Society, his own denominational mission society. He did and was accepted. He was sent to China in 1870.

In the beginning years of his work in China, Richard followed the evangelistic methods used by the China Inland Mission, namely the daily preaching and the distribution of Bibles.<sup>[12]</sup> When famines broke out, he urged people to

repent and pray to the living God, the same way as those CIM (China Inland) missionaries were doing. It was only when he encountered failures with the conventional missionary methods that he changed for new ways. Even while changing his missionary approaches, he often supported and justified his own act with the Christian Bible. So to say, he remained as an Evangelical and Biblically oriented missionary. <sup>[13]</sup> Some scholars may have given him other titles, such as "Seer, Statesmen, the most Disinterested Adviser in China" <sup>[14]</sup> "Relief Administrator and Advocate of National Reform" <sup>[15]</sup> or "Maker of Modern China" <sup>[16]</sup> but basically he was still a missionary. There had been several times he could leave his work as a missionary- Chinese people had offered him new jobs during his relief work in Shanxi (Shansi), inviting him to implement his modernization programmes for China, but he had turned them down. Li Hung Chang, a Chinese government official of high rank introduced him to be the editor of a Chinese newspaper in Tianjin (Tientsin) in 1890, though he accepted the offer yet he had not given up his original status and he still regarded himself as a missionary in China. Richard had indeed given his whole life to China as a missionary. He became a missionary to China as soon as he completed his theological training in his early twenties and did not take the first furlough until he had been fifteen years in China; it was another ten years before the second, and eight more years before the third. He spent all together forty-five years in China and he could live only five more years, two years in China and three years in his own country after his final retirement in 1914. So, indeed Richard had not departed from his missionary vocation and was faithful throughout his whole life to his Christian calling as a missionary in China.

### ***(b) Keeping an open attitude to the Chinese culture and society***

Being a missionary in China, Richard did not look down upon Chinese people and their culture. He always kept an open heart and tried to learn whatever he could from them. Upon arrival to China in 1870, Richard worked in a Baptist Church in Yantai (Chefoo), in Shandong (Shantung) Province. When he was teaching catechism to his first Chinese convert, he raised a question to him:

"Are not all men sinners in the eyes of God?" (This was a common question for any baptismal class). But the answer he got was: "I do not know about other people, but I know I am a great sinner". As Richard recalled, he said: "I was much struck by the sincerity of the answer and the foolishness of the question, and felt that the man was a true Christian in spirit. Never again did I repeat that question."<sup>[17]</sup> So, he was open enough to revise his catechetical questions.

As a missionary in China, Richard began the same way as most of missionaries did, to preach and distribute Bibles on the streets. But after two years, he wrote the following remarks:

"I did not find the preaching very productive of good results, and was consequently considerably discouraged... In my evangelistic work during the first two years in Chefoo I had tried street-chapel preaching without any success worth mentioning. I then began to follow the plan of 'seeking the worthy', as our Lord commanded, for I found that they constituted the 'good ground' in which to sow the seed."<sup>[18]</sup>

Richard's new method was confirmed by reference to the Bible as the foundation of his missionary work. It was quoted from the remarkable sermon of Edward Irving on *Missionaries after the Apostolic School* delivered at the London Missionary Society in 1824. Irving cited the instruction of Jesus to his disciples when he sent them out to preach, saying: "When you come to a town, enquire who there is worthy, and stay with them until you leave that place."<sup>[19]</sup> Richard's mind was opened while he was prepared 'to find' and looked for 'the worthy ones'. This attitude of 'seeking the worthy' had changed his life for new missionary methods. It was no longer going out to preach or make converts among the Chinese, but to find and seek those who are worthy of the Christian message. It was not so much to 'seek the lost', but to 'look for those who are worthy'. Rather than mere preaching and distributing Bibles on the street, he put up on town walls carefully chosen texts, and with statements which would stimulate thought and inquiry. Some Chinese came up to him and the results were encouraging. Later, he started even better methods, to 'find the worthy' by going into the homes of the leaders who were more worthy as they were prepared to listen. And he went to them with an open and learning heart. In affirming that they were 'worthy', Richard began to



appreciate the good side of the Chinese people and their culture and even of the Chinese religions, including Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. During the early years in Yantai (Chefoo), Richard was blessed with the acquaintance of some enlightened missionaries such as Dr. Alexander Williamson 1829-1890, of the National Bible Society of Scotland (also the founder-secretary of the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge among the Chinese), John Livingstone Nevius 1829-1893, Hunter Corbett 1835-1920 and Calvin Mateer 1836-1908 (the three giant missionaries from the American Presbyterian Mission. John Nevius was well known for his development of three-self churches in China & Korea; Hunter Corbett and Calvin Mateer were known for their educational work at Shantung Christian University). The missionary partners had introduced him to the scriptures of Chinese religions and the fields of comparative religion and the science of missions which he found so important for his work in China. In 1875, Richard had to move to Qing Zhou (Ching Chou Fu) where he later found himself in the neighbourhood of various religious sects. For instance, there was an important Islamic centre, with two big mosques and a theological college for the training of mullahs (Muslim theologians) for the country. Richard was invited to attend lectures at the Islamic college and discuss issues with the *mullahs*. Hence, he began to reach out for 'the worthy' and began dialogues with people of other religious traditions. In 1876, he reported of an incident he had of meeting a Muslim priest with six of his students <sup>[20]</sup> It was an open, religious dialogue and they had serious discussions comparing the lives of Jesus and Mohammed and the uniqueness of the two religions. Though he was confirmed of the Christian superiority over the Muslim faith, he still discovered the richness of the Koran and that there were much in common between the two religions. <sup>[21]</sup>

In Qing Zhou, Richard met some Taoists too. And he kept an open attitude to all the people he came across. With his usual courtesy, he won the good-will of the Taoist priest and obtained permission to attend one of their midnight ceremonies. And he reported, saying: "having found the devout always ready to welcome and hear me, and give me every hospitality, thus proving the soundness of the principles laid down by our Lord in the 10th chapter of St.

Matthew (i.e. to find those who are worthy)." [22] So, even before being involved in social services work, Timothy Richard had already opened himself for new missionary methods.

Richard also had much contact with Buddhism in China. He has had discussions with some Buddhist friends, especially with Yang Wenhui and found that they were well-versed in Buddhist scriptures (*sutras*), so he attempted to study and translate some of their Buddhist scriptures. In his famous book, *The New Testament of Higher Buddhism*, he says,

"There was a time when every religion (including Christianity) considered itself true and every other false, but that time has long since been superseded by a more just classification of all the great religions into good, better and best." [23]

Modern scholars may wonder whether Timothy Richard had understood Buddhism properly. [24] They may have doubts about his scholarship and his literal accuracy, knowing that he had no mastery of Sanskrit or Pali. But that was not the point of his translation and his work on Buddhism. Richard was rather one of the pioneers who advocated a new mode of interpretation as he was translating the Buddhist scriptures- he was doing it wholly from a Christian point of view. As I have said, Richard had a deep conviction of 'seeking the worthy' in approaching Chinese culture and Chinese religions. In adopting such a positive approach to find 'what are worthy' of Buddhism, he read into it much parallel Christian elements and he even discovered the concept of Trinitarian theism in Chinese Buddhism (*Mahayana* Buddhism) such as a loving father (*Buddha*), a compassionate saviour (*Guan Yin*) and a life-giving spirit (for the work of enlightenment in human mind) [25] Richard also believed that the study of other religions was crucial for the self understanding of Christianity and 'true Christianity' would welcome all the good found in other religions. As he said,

"True Christianity does not destroy any good that is found in other religions. Like its founder, it comes not to destroy but to fulfil, (he was citing the words of Jesus again who says: 'Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them' - Mt.5:17), and supplementing what is lacking in other religions, aiming to make its followers perfect as their Father in Heaven is perfect." [26]

Later, he added:

"All religions have some true ideas concerning the true God... all have much good, some are better than others, and finally it will tend to make all to seek the highest and the best in order to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect." [27]

As Prof. Soothill, the author of *Timothy Richard of China*, has remarked: "To reveal a new point of view is the work of a prophet" [28] For Richard, he had done it precisely so.

### ***(c) Being responsive to the living context***

Richard's first hand experience of the catastrophic famine which hit Shandong (Shantung) province in the year, 1876-1877 and in the following years in Shanxi (Shansi) province, which was recorded the worst in history. Both had convinced him that salvation for the Chinese people was not confined to the soul, but also for the physical body. China needed the gospel of love and forgiveness, but she also needed the gospel of material progress and scientific advance. As Brian Stanley reminds us: "Whereas in the West it was the problems of urban life which gave rise to the social gospel movement, in China the social gospel was a response to the predicament of the rural peasantry." [29] Anyway, Richard really cared for the Chinese people, saving their souls as well as their bodies. After several years of working in the two provinces, he even believed that China could find national salvation only through a massive program of Westernization and economic modernization. And his Christian concern was not limited to individuals and society, but the whole nation of China.

The Great famine of 1876-1879 had indeed given very good chance for the missionaries to be involved in relief work and social services, as an expression of Christian concern. Andrew Walls was right in saying that "such things were far from the minds of those who established the missionary movement, and by no means part of normal conception of missionary duty at the time when Timothy Richard first volunteered for service overseas". [30] It was not the job normally assigned to a missionary, but was only voluntary

response to the immediate situation where he was. Hence, Richard began to realize that the Christian gospel was not confined to preaching in the church, but to be lived out in the society by direct caring and concern for the Chinese people. In Shandong, famine broke out in places where Richard had been working, so it would be easier for him to be involved in relief work. When famine came, he was asked to help finding food and funding for relief work alongside with his preaching work in Shandong. But in the case of Shanxi, it was another, distant province. There had not been any Protestant missionary work in Shanxi and Richard was invited just to help with famine relief work there. "What have it to do with the work of a Christian missionary? Would a missionary be called to leave his own mission field and help others with things which was not normally assigned to a missionary?". This was a really great challenge for Richard, whether it could be justified to leave his own mission field in Shandong and go to Shanxi as a relief worker. Of course, Richard had to seek permission from his church and he asked his colleagues to pray for God's guidance. Eventually they all agreed that it was his Christian duty to go to Shanxi. So it was a great learning experience for Richard and his missionary colleagues, learning to be open and responsive to the call of God, to realize and extend the Christian duty by helping the needy even though they were not the immediate target group of their mission.

Richard wrote in 1906, "When China suffered famines, we advised the Chinese officials to open railways, mines and manufactures which would avert and ameliorate future famines. When China suffered from defeat from foreign nations, we advised China to educate the people... to introduce the best methods of the West for the material, social, intellectual and religious benefit of China; thus proving ourselves to be far better friends of China than their own statesmen." Richard was always responsive and was caring for the well-beings of China. That was why he was honoured and remembered by millions of Chinese people even for almost a century after his death.

***(d) Daring to adventure new visions***

After working in China for fifteen years, Richard had his first furlough (sabbatical year) in 1885. He went back to England and attended the annual meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society held at the Old Exeter Hall in London. He reported to the society his work in the provinces of Shandong and Shanxi. Then he put forth his grand plan for "the national conversion of China", the proposal of establishing a comprehensive educational institution (a small scale Christian college) in each provincial capital to train Chinese leaders. <sup>[31]</sup> Richard dared to adventure new visions and while 'seeking the worthy' as what he had been trying to do, he discovered that it was necessary to target on the training of leaders for the whole nation of China. "I am after the leaders", he said. "If you get the leaders, you'll get all the rest". <sup>[32]</sup> It was at the time when the other missionaries were still struggling to resolve the tensions between evangelistic and the educational/ social services priorities, seeking justification for educational concern besides missionary work in China <sup>[33]</sup> yet for Richard, he had already come up with his grand project of advancing national, educational programmes in China. He was a great prophet indeed. Yet, of course, Richard was bitterly disappointed because it annoyed the missionary board members at home as they were not yet ready to support his grand plan. He returned home in great anguish, but he still comforted himself by saying "(perhaps) God would have me bear my cross alone, and that I must fit myself more fully for influencing the leaders of China." <sup>[34]</sup> By 1890, Richard was invited by his Chinese friend, Li Hung Chang, a government official of high rank, to become the editor of a Chinese daily newspaper, the "Tianjin (Tientsin) Times" (Shih Pao) which would provide him much chance to reach the Chinese intellectuals. And he accepted the offer immediately. Since by the work in Shandong and Shanxi, he could influence only the Chinese of the two provinces, but now by his writings in the newspaper, he could reach a much wider audience - readers and Chinese intellectuals from all over the country. As he recalled, "This was the beginning of the systematic and daily publication of the leading ideas of Christendom among the Chinese... a powerful organ of enlightened opinion and a pulpit from which goodwill and reform are preached". This experience had helped him opened up a new vision, namely: "The Conversion by the Million" <sup>[35]</sup> In

1891, several months after the death of Dr. Alexander Williamson, the founder-secretary of the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge among the Chinese, Richard was approached to be his successor. <sup>[36]</sup> Having experienced of the power of literary work in China, Richard was convinced that this would be the best means to realize his vision of "Conversion by the Million". It was so surprising that the Baptist Missionary Society, despite of seeing his work as irrelevant and his missionary methods as misguided, resolved to second Richard and continued to support him financially for a provisional period of three years. When Richard became the General Secretary, he broadened the scope of work and served an immediate group of non-Christian truth seekers. <sup>[37]</sup> Later, in response to the Boxer's Uprisings, Richard pointed out that the chief sources of China's anti-foreign feelings were to be found in her prejudice or ignorance of Western civilization. He then set the society's aim as that of removing prejudice and ignorance among the Chinese young people so that the Christian gospel might have a free course. Among their publications, they introduced especially Ernst Faber's *Civilization, Chinese and Christian*, Timothy Richard's *The Historical Evidences of the Benefits of Christianity*, and the translation of Mackenzie's *History of Christian Civilization in the Nineteenth Century*. These books were targeted to a wider audience with the intention to propagate the values of Western civilization, and to bring about awakening of non-Christian Chinese. Richard had indeed many great ideas and had done much to promote Western and Christian knowledge through literary work in China, including the followings:

- a. A free distribution of books to thousands of examination students in Beijing (Peking). As he believed, these were the leaders and "the conversion of one leader is often potentially the conversion of a thousand followers as well". One thousand multiplies by one thousand will become a million. That's how Richard came up with his vision of 'conversion by the million!'; <sup>[38]</sup>
- b. Translation of Mackenzie's *History of Christian Civilization in the Nineteenth Century*, a book which had a considerable impact upon the Chinese Reform Movement;

c. The presentation of his writings, esp. *The Historical Evidences of the Benefits of Christianity*, to the highest authorities in most of the provinces; and through their work in the society, both he and Mrs. Richard had given much support to the Anti-Footbinding Society, to enhance the movement against foot-binding in China;

d. The presentation to the Empress-Dowager for her 60th birthday in November 1894, a beautifully bound copy of the New Testament was made in the name of the Protestant women of China. (There was an exhibition of the Empress-Dowager's Bible in England two years ago - in 2005.) The Bible was printed on the best foreign paper of that time, with an introductory address prepared by Mrs. Richard and was enclosed in a silver casket. <sup>[39]</sup>

e. During the 25 years he was serving at the society, Timothy Richard had written or translated over a hundred books or booklets, and had some shares (a chapter or so) in the production of at least 300 books;

f. Most significantly was his influence to the Reform Movement in 1890s, known as the 'Self-Strengthening Movement' led by Kang Yu Wei and other reformers. His message to the Chinese scholar-officials was clear: the road to 'self-strengthening' which Chinese scholars were promoting was to follow the path of Westernization. He was later told that Kang Yu Wei, being influenced by his work, shared his beliefs in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of nations and Kang hoped to co-operate with him in the work of China's regeneration. The Reform Society had published a paper of its own to propagate Western knowledge and ideas. In one of the society's most influential publication, *Tracts for the Times*, 31 of the one hundred and thirteen articles were written by Richard. Indeed, the name 'Li Ti Mo Tai' was very popularly known in China. <sup>[40]</sup>

As a result, there were great changes in China in the beginning of the twentieth century, such as: (1) the abolition of the traditional examination system and the reform of examination alongside Western lines; (2) the changing of educational system, with the emergence of schools of Western learning, with a University in each provincial capital; and (3) the creation of opportunities for able young people to go abroad for overseas study. And in 1902, Empress-Dowager issued an edict to abolish the custom of foot-

binding. Hence, we can see the impact and influence of the work of Timothy Richard and his dream of 'Conversion by the Million' became at least partially realized.

Throughout his missionary career, Richard emphasized greatly the need for education. He was so convinced of the necessity of sound education along modern lines that he suggested to the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society again in 1888 the establishment of a Christian College under his charge in Jinan (Tsinanfu), the capital of Shandong Province. His ideal did not prove feasible at that time. However, the great opportunity came after the Boxer Uprisings in the year 1900. The events in 1900 were catastrophic for Protestant missionary work in China, as more than 200 foreign missionaries and 30,000 Chinese Christians were killed. After the incidents, China had to pay great indemnities as the foreign powers all claimed China's compensation for their lives lost and property damaged. While most of Western missionaries were restoring their lost properties, rebuilding church buildings and their schools, <sup>[41]</sup> Richard made his proposal which was accepted by the Chinese government, i.e. to use the Boxers indemnity funds to develop modern education in China, by setting up a Western-style university in Shanxi. Richard was then asked to take care of all the appointments of the professors, the arrangement of curriculum and the administration of the university funds for a period of ten years.

While negotiating for the establishment of the Shanxi Imperial University, difficulties arose over the type of university needed for the Chinese people. Timothy Richard did not favour any use of Shanxi University as direct tool for evangelization, which upset many missionaries of his time. Their justification was that it was both right and logical to use Boxer indemnity to realize the ends for which the martyred missionaries had come to China. <sup>[42]</sup> Yet, Richard insisted that though Christian education could be taught in the university, it could by no means right to impose Christianity upon the students, neither could it be proper to advance evangelization work in the new university. <sup>[43]</sup> Instead of setting up another Christian university in China, Richard proposed to set up a 'Chinese university with Christian characteristics', i.e. with the provision and promotion of Christian studies in the Chinese university. It was



quite a revolutionary idea at that time, for it would upset people from both sides. Richard also faced oppositions from the Chinese official and gentry who were anti-Christian, over the issue of religious teaching in the new university. The Chinese officials demanded to forbid the teaching of Christianity in any form in the new institution. Richard of course refused to accept this. He insisted that the religious liberty which had already been granted by international treaties should operate in the new university. For he said: "To agree to such a course, would have meant that what the missionaries and Chinese Christians who had lost their lives for their faith had done, was not worthy of the University". What the Chinese feared was that the teaching of Christianity would become a tool for evangelization in the university. Finally, the viceroy stated: "If you do not force our people to become Christians, we would not prevent them from becoming Christians if they wish to." The matter was then settled and it was for the first time in Chinese history that Christianity would be taught in a government university, (this remains a very good example even for the Communist China today, as it advocates the academic study of Christianity in State-run universities in China) and Richard had done a really great thing for China (a hundred years ago!). [44]

Richard had indeed demonstrated his missionary zeal to promote the "real" modern education for the Chinese. In his study of Modern Education in China in 1922, Prof. Roxby of Liverpool University remarked that, educationally, "Shanxi was the furthest advanced province and that, at that time, it was known as "the model province (in China)". [45] Shanxi University is still running in China, of course in quite different model now. However, in 2002 when Shanxi University was celebrating its 100th anniversary, the name Timothy Richard was still remembered and honoured as its great founder and as a great pioneer of modern education in the province, and the Chinese people still respected him despite the fact that he was a Western missionary.

**Concluding Remarks- "Converted before bringing about Conversion"**

Ten years ago, I came across a book, entitled: "The Conversion of Missionaries".<sup>[46]</sup> I was so attracted by the title of the book that I read through the whole book right away. It was a doctoral thesis written by a Chinese who studied in the United States.<sup>[47]</sup> His work was on three different missionaries in China who came from America. They were, so to speak, converted by the Chinese people and culture after staying there for some years. They were Edward Hume, President of Yale-in-China, Frank J. Rawlinson, editor of *Chinese Recorder*, and a novelist, Pearl Buck.<sup>[48]</sup> Perhaps, we have been focused so much on how missionaries had worked to change the lives of many in their mission fields that we seldom studied how their lives were changed by where they had gone. In this lecture, I have attempted to look at the life and work (or, if I may say the 'conversion')<sup>[49]</sup> of Timothy Richard in several areas, including: (a) the breakthrough of the conventional ideas by adopting a more open attitude towards Christian mission, i.e. instead of 'finding the lost', he worked for 'seeking out the worthy'; (b) to expand and broaden the concept of Christian mission by actively involved in relief work and social services in China; and (c) by launching nation building programmes such as literary and educational ones for the realization of his daring vision of the "Conversion by the Million". It is interesting to note that 'prophets' are precisely those who could be changed by where they were, or by what they had seen, so that they would start prophesize and became prophets. And Richard prophetic in the sense that he had enlightened us with a broader understanding of Christian mission- "he preached with a learning heart". Rather than seeking for the lost, he went out to seek for the worthy. And in approaching Chinese culture and Chinese religions, he did not condemn them as pagan or false religions, but affirming that "all are good". The Chinese people believed that all religions were good because they taught us to be morally good- this was precisely what Richard had learnt from China. Hence, in order to bring about any 'changes' in China, Richard had first of all to be changed by China.<sup>[50]</sup>

Paul Cohen once attempted to compare Richard's work with that of Hudson Taylor, giving much doubt to the daring attempts of Richard.<sup>[51]</sup> Taylor's approach was typical of the conservative, evangelical missionaries who had a

narrower conception of "Christian Mission"; whereas Richard represented those who had changed for a broader, more liberal understanding of the concept of mission. Taylor wanted to save the souls of the Chinese, in such a way that it echoed with the saying: "One more Christian, on less Chinese"; whereas Richard worked to Christianize the whole country, not only with the Christian gospel but also by Western civilization. Despite the fact that they had attempted different approaches to reach the Chinese people, they both failed in their missions to Christianize China. Taylor failed because his attitude toward Chinese culture, traditional religions and customs, particularly ancestor worship, was rigid and uncompromising; whereas Richard, though showing more tolerance and sympathy toward Chinese religions and culture, had tried to conquer China with Western civilization. <sup>[52]</sup> I shall come back to this issue about Western civilization in the coming lecture tomorrow. Here, Richard was convicted that the Chinese people would accept Christianity if they accepted Western civilization, however, it turned out that even though Chinese people were willing to accept Western civilization, it did not imply that they would take Christianity accordingly. Worse still, Chinese intellectuals even turned against Christianity with their Western weapons such as Science and Communism. I shall come to an alternate view of Christian mission offered by Chinese Christians in my second and third lectures. But to conclude this first lecture, I may affirm that Timothy Richard can still be reckoned as a prophet of his time. <sup>[53]</sup> He was indeed a man of vision and also a practical man, as he had successfully broken through the conventional missionary methods and worked out new ways, and broadened new visions, in approaching Chinese people and cultures. Richard was indeed successful as it turned out to be that he was respected and is still remembered by Chinese people even in today's China.

<sup>[54]</sup>

Scholars today are more aware of the fact that the study of missionary movement should go beyond any mere evaluation of missionary methods, or the debate between conservative and liberal conception of Christian mission or Christian theologies. Prof. Andrew Walls has rightly reminded us, saying:

"The missionary movement was a great learning experience for Western Christianity. For those engaged in it, it was a process of

discovery... It is no accident that one outcome of the process was a challenge to many of the assumptions that had originally under-girded the movement... assumptions about the values of Western society, and, eventually, about the adequacy of Western theology. Part of the story of the missionary movement as learning experience is the creation of an instrument for Western self-criticism." [55]

We have already seen the story of Timothy Richard which had indeed challenged us with a broader conception of Christian mission and a new way to understand Western theology. At the missionary conference held in Jerusalem in 1928, An American missionary, John Leighton Stuart, who then was the President of Yenching University, had already argued that missionary efforts to reconcile Christianity and Chinese culture ought to "(bring) to ourselves the corrective influences it can exert upon the defects of our civilization and a broader, better-balanced understanding of our own religious faith". [56]

Hence, the conversion of Timothy Richard does not mean that he had to forsake his Christian faith altogether, certainly he was not. It was rather a challenge for him to review his own missionary methods, to revise his conception of Christian mission and even to see how far he could go in searching for a broadened understanding of his Christian faith for the new world. [57] Indeed, among the many important things Richard had drawn our attention to, he called for the study of 'The Science of Missions' (i.e. the study of Missiology) for a new conception of Christian mission in modern time. [58]

This reminds me also of the remarks of another American missionary, Earl H. Cressy who has been an educational missionary in China from 1910-1946 and working mostly for the Council of Higher Education of the China Christian Education Association, saying:

"The conversion of the missionary by the Far East results in his being not only a missionary but an internationalist, an intermediary between the two great civilizations that inherit the earth... bringing to them something of his new breadth of vision, and helping them to a larger appreciation of the greatness and worth of the civilization of the Far East." [59]

I shall stop at here. In case you have any further comments or reflections on what I have said. Your sharing are most welcome.

## Footnotes:

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[1] For reference, see

[http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons\\_speeches/061010.htm](http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons_speeches/061010.htm)

[2] See Richard, Timothy. *Conversion By the Million in China*, in two volumes. Shanghai: Christian Literature Society, 1907.

[3] See Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*. Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2002, p.258.

[4] See Hastings, Adrian. *The Shaping of Prophecy: Passion, Perception and Practicality*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995.

[5] See Hubert Allen: *Roland Allen-Pioneer, Priest and Prophet Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.*, 1995, pp.1-2.

[6] See K.S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*. New York: Macmillan, 1929

[7] See also Albert J. Garner. *A Maker of Modern China* London: The Carey Press, 1945, p.7.

[8] *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

[9] For a comprehensive story of Hudson Taylor, see A. J. Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century*, 7 volumes. London, 1981-1989.

[10] See e.g. E.W. Price Evans. *Timothy Richard: A Narrative of Christian Enterprise and Statesmanship in China*. London: The Carey Press, 1945, pp.18f.

[11] For instance, Paul Cohen had placed their missionary strategies in relative opposition, whereas Lauren Pfister added a remark that Taylor and Richard were both "committed, Non-conformist Evangelicals". See the discussions by Paul Cohen in "Missionary Approaches: Hudson Taylor and Timothy Richard", *Paper On China*, vol.11. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957, pp.29-62; and Lauren Pfister in "Rethinking Mission in China: James Hudson Taylor and Timothy Richard" in Andrew Porter (ed.) *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Mission, 1880-1914*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2003, pp. 183-212.

[12] See E.W. Price Evans, *op.cit.*, pp.20-23.

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[13] Prof. Andrew Walls is suggesting that "it is truer to say that Richard expanded his vision than that he altered his theology. The expansion of vision came through the inexorable pressure of Chinese conditions. The original missionary aim was never abandoned; but in the process of fulfilling that aim new dimensions of the task were recognized, dimensions not visible at the beginning." See Andrew Walls, *op.cit.*, p.242.

[14] See e.g. Willaim E. Soothill, *Timothy Richard of China: Seer, Statesman, Missionary & the Most Disinterested Advisor the Chinese Ever Had*. London: Seeley, Service & Co. Ltd., 1926.

[15] See e.g. Paul Richard Bohr. *Famine in China and the Missionary: Timothy Richard as Relief Administrator and Advocate of National Reform, 1876-1884*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.

[16] See also Albert J. Garner. *Op.cit.*

[17] See E.W. Price Evans. *Op.cit.*, p.23.

[18] See *ibid.*, pp.25f.

[19] See *The Gospel According to Matthew ch.10, verse 11*.

[20] See Timothy Richard, "Mohammedan and Christian Evidences" in *The Chinese Recorder*, vol.7 no.2, 1876, pp.129-131.

[21] See also Timothy Richard. *Forty-five Years in China*. London: 1916, pp.88f.

[22] See E.W. Price Evans. *Op.cit.*, pp.51f.

[23] See Timothy Richard, *The New Testament of Higher Buddhism*. Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1910, p.29.

[24] Richard did not have a comprehensive understanding of Buddhism. His interpretation of Mayahana Buddhism was just one among the many sects in Buddhism. There had been criticisms from both sides- Christians and Buddhists, on the way he understood Buddhism in China. See, e.g. G.E. Moule, "The Awakening of Faith" in *The Chinese Recorder*, vol.42, 1911, p.347.

[25] Richard could see that Chinese Buddhism had developed from a non-theistic religion (Hinayana Buddhism) to one which accepted the doctrine of grace and a merciful saviour (Mahayana Buddhism). He also claimed that the

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concept of a trinitarian theism can be found in the Chinese Buddhist texts, e.g. a loving father, a compassionate saviour and a life-giving spirit. See *ibid.*

[26] See Timothy Richard, "The Historical Evidences of Christianity: Present Benefits" in *The Chinese Recorder*, vol.22, no.11, November 1891, p.492.

[27] See Timothy Richard, "The Future of the Church in China" in *The Chinese Recorder*, vol.43, no.11, November 1912, p.647.

[28] See William Soothill, *op.cit.*, p.319.

[29] See Stanley, Brian. *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Leicester: 1990, p.138.

[30] See Walls, Andrew. *Op.cit.*, p.248.

[31] See e.g. E.W. Price Evans. *Op.cit.*, pp.96f.

[32] See *ibid.*, p.97.

[33] See e.g. Calvin Mateer, "The Relation of Protestant Missions to Education" in *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China Held on May 10-24, 1877*. Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1878, pp.171-180. Mateer represented a tiny minority of missionaries who emphasized the importance of education and his paper aroused much discussions at the First Conference of Protestant Missionaries in China held in 1877.

[34] See E.W. Price Evans. *Op.cit.*, p.98.

[35] Later, he had the vision of circulating Christian literature to the Chinese intellectuals, esp. at the examination centres, "the leading men in the whole empire would be easily reached". See Timothy Richard, "How One Man Can Preach to a Million", in *The Chinese Recorder*, vol.20, no.11, November 1889, pp.487-498. Richard had also written a book with the same title, see Timothy Richard. *Conversion by the Million*, in two volumes. Shanghai: Christian Literature Society, 1907.

[36] Ever since the First Protestant Missionary Conference held in China in 1877, a Standing Committee on Literature was set up primarily for the publication of suitable text-books for mission schools. Later when Dr. Alexander Williamson took up the committee in 1887, he re-organized it and

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formed the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge among the Chinese. After four years, Williamson died suddenly and Timothy Richard was asked to take his place.

<sup>[37]</sup> Richard believed in the power of books. In the first place, he knew that Chinese people loved reading and writing, and they were fond of books. Secondly, he found that it was by means of books that he could enlighten the minds of officials and scholars, and he considered it an important part of a missionary's work at the time. Furthermore, he discovered that there may be some places in China where missionaries could not go, where churches and schools could not be established, yet there books might still find their way. The Society was later changed to be known as the Christian Literature Society of China in 1905. It was in 1943 that the society joined with the Canadian Mission Press, the Associated Press and the Christian Farmer to become the United Christian Publishers in China. After 1949, the society was moved to Hong Kong and became what is now known as the Hong Kong Christian Literature Council.

<sup>[38]</sup> As Richard reported in 1903, there were some 150,000 students attending M.A. examination in China. And he believed that "the conversion of one leader is often potentially the conversion of a thousand followers as well". That's why he had chosen them as his target group. See Timothy Richard, "Of More Than a Thousand Missionaries" in *The Chinese Recorder*, vol.34, no.1, January 1903, pp.2-8.

<sup>[39]</sup> There was a report of the event by Rev. Timothy Richard in *The Chinese Recorder*. See Timothy Richard, "Presentation Testament to Empress-Dowager of China" in *The Chinese Recorder*, vol.26, no.4, April 1895, pp. 151-161.

<sup>[40]</sup> The name, Li Ti Mo Tai holds a secure place in the hearts of many Chinese people, from the mud hut of the Shanxi and Shantung peasants to the Imperial Palace in the Forbidden City of Peking. I still remember I have read his biography in Chinese when I was a small boy and I already knew that he was a great hero in China. As a Chinese poet has written in the time of Richard's death, saying:



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"Richard, the modern sage, I love: That worthy man, to end all wars  
Wrote many books, his views to prove. Past is the war, gone are our  
fears, The Altar of great Peace is built, Our friend, alas! His life is  
done! Lamenting all the blood that's spilt, I sign for him and mourn  
alone. My land! My land! Alas!" (Quoted from Garnet, *op.cit.*, p. 83.)

<sup>[41]</sup> Except those of the China Inland Mission which adopted the policy of not making any corporate claim for compensation, to exemplify to the Chinese 'the meekness and gentleness of Christ'. For reference, see Broomhall, M. *The Jubilee Story of the China Inland Mission Philadelphia, 1915*, p. 257.

<sup>[42]</sup> See e.g. Willaim E. Soothill, *Timothy Richard of China: Seer, Statesman, Missionary & the Most Disinterested Advisor the Chinese Ever Had*. London: Seeley, Service & Co. Ltd., 1926. pp.256f.

<sup>[43]</sup> Soothill added, "... to compel an entire body of non-Christian students to submit to Christian propaganda in a university established by non-Christian provincial funds would have been immoral, and have defeated its own ends.", see *ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>[44]</sup> See *ibid.* pp.257f. Also the discussions in Peter Tze Ming Ng, "Some Scenarios of the Impact of Boxer Movement on the Work of Christian Education in China" in Angelo S. Lazzarotto et al. *The Boxer Movement and Christianity in China*. Taiwan: Fu Jen Catholic University, 2004, pp.202-224.

<sup>[45]</sup> See Garner, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>[46]</sup> See Lian Xi. *The Conversion of the Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907-1932*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.

<sup>[47]</sup> Lian Xi was an Assistant Professor of History at Hanover College, Indiana. He had taught at Fujian Normal University.

<sup>[48]</sup> Most studies have sought to explore how missionaries attempted to impose their own thoughts upon the Chinese, but the book tells stories of how Chinese culture and her growing nationalism had changed the lives of these three missionaries and shaped the formation of early 20th century liberal Protestantism. See *ibid.*

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<sup>[49]</sup> Interesting to note, that Prof. Andrew Walls has used the word 'conversion' in describing the change of Richard's life in China. See Andrew Walls, "The Multiple Conversions of Timothy Richard" in Walls. *Op.cit.*, pp. 236-258.

<sup>[50]</sup> The conversion of Timothy Richard does not mean that he had forsaken his Christian faith, but it rather means the change in his missionary methods and in the ways to live out his Christian faith in China.

<sup>[51]</sup> Cohen's remark was: "Richard advocated a much more comprehensive Christianity... However, the history of modern China has ample proven that certain vital elements of Western civilization can be adopted and assimilated while Christianity is rejected. From the standpoint of the spread of Christianity, Richard's approach thus seems to have been enfeebled ultimately by the very same characteristic which made it potentially appealing to the Chinese- its broadness." See e.g. the discussion by Paul Cohen in "Missionary Approaches: Hudson Taylor and Timothy Richard", *Paper On China*, vol.11 (1957), pp.55f.

<sup>[52]</sup> Though Lauren Pfister had attempted a more lenient view on Richard by claiming that "Taylor's minimalist missionary strategy probably promoted more confrontation between missionaries and Chinese officials because of the missionaries' inadequate sensitivity to Chinese everyday culture and elitist political values, while Richard's more aggressive approach to China's elites earned him the right to explain his view of 'true Christian civilization' and predisposed some Qing officials toward a selective acceptance of Christian claims", yet at the end, he still had to admit that Richard's strategy could not be as easily acceptable to the Chinese officials. See his discussion in Andrew Porter (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.212.

<sup>[53]</sup> Timothy Richard was not a theologian, nor was he a systematic scholar. He remained as one who was faithful to his Christian call, he was responsive to the needs of others, he dared to break through boundaries, dared to dream visions and attempt new adventures. He was indeed a prophet of his time.

<sup>[54]</sup> Even last year, the Global Times of Taiwan reported of the 50 foreigners who had great impact on China, of whom four were missionaries and Richard was one of them. See Report from Global Times, 20060925 posted at

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[http://tw.gospelherald.com/news/wor\\_981.htm](http://tw.gospelherald.com/news/wor_981.htm) The four missionaries named were: John Cadbury ???1824-1901, a medical missionary in Canton; W.A.P. Martin ???1827-1916, the English Chancellor of Jingshi Daxuetang; Arthur H. Smith??? 1845-1932, urged US government to return half of the Boxer indemnity for the promotion of Students Study Abroad programme, he was also one of the founders of Peking Medical Union College; and Timothy Richard?????)

[55] See Andrew Walls, *op.cit.*, p.258.

[56] See *The Christian Life and Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems of Thought and Life* vol.1 of *The Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council*, March 24-April 8, 1928. New York: International Missionary Council, 1928, p. 45.

[57] Of course, we should not blame Timothy Richard for his arrogance in upholding the Christian and Western superiority over all civilizations and religions of the world. It was the exact mentality underlying the knowledge of comparative religion in the nineteenth century.

[58] See e.g. Timothy Richard, "Some of the Greatest Needs of Christian Missions" in *The Chinese Recorder*, vol.38, no.2, April 1907, pp. 211-212.

[59] See Earl H. Cressy, "Converting the Missionary", *Asia*, June 1919, as quoted by Lian Xi in his, *op.cit.*, p. 207.