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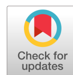

ARTICLE

Twelve days in the career of a China missionary: Timothy Richard at the Protestant Conference in Shanghai in 1890

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Abstract

This article proposes to examine an obscure episode in the long career of the well-known Welsh Baptist missionary Timothy Richard, who went to China in 1870 and spent most of the next 45 years there. Richard attended the second general Protestant Missionary Conference in Shanghai in 1890 and served on committees, spoke at meetings, and presented a paper. The information available, though scanty, confirms key components of his approach to mission at this time: his goal was to achieve Chinese 'salvation' by promoting the principles and practices of what might be broadly termed 'Christian civilisation'; his means of propagation was the written word; his preferred point of entry was contact with members of China's 'ruling' or 'governing' classes. In response to his call for action against anti-Christian, anti-Church propaganda, the conference appointed a permanent committee, with Richard as chair, to present an address on the 'missionary question' to the Qing government. It was this project that took him to Beijing in 1895, where he met with court officials and members of the educated elite, and established connections that involved him, rather haphazardly, in court politics in 1898. The sequence of events sheds light on an intriguing aspect of Sino–foreign relations during the late Qing period.

Keywords: 'Blue-books' of China; end and means of Christian mission; Protestant Conference; Timothy Richard

The biographical study of the China missionary Timothy Richard (1845–1919) is often looked upon as an open-and-shut case, though a critical assessment of his entire career, from his first arrival in 1870 to his retirement in 1915 and to his death in London in 1919, has yet to be carried out. Born in Ffaldybrenin in South Wales in 1845, Richard went to China as a member of the (English) Baptist Missionary Society (BMS)[1] and spent most of the next 45 years there. His relief work during the North China Great Famine in the second half of the 1870s and his role as general secretary of the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge among the Chinese (SDK) in Shanghai from 1891 to his retirement have aptly been celebrated as milestones of a career dedicated to the betterment of Chinese life during the last decades of the Qing

[1] The official conference source identified the BMS as 'English'. See *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China held at Shanghai, May 7–20, 1890* (Shanghai, 1890), https://ia600704.us.archive.org/20/items/recordsofgeneral00gene_1/recordsofgeneral00gene_1.pdf (accessed 25 May 2022).

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Dynasty.[2] To many, Richard exemplifies the best of Protestant efforts with the most beneficial results.

Kenneth Scott Latourette (1884–1968), a former missionary and an industrious student of mission history, capped it all by calling Richard one of the 'greatest' missionaries ever sent to China by any Christian organisation (Catholic or Protestant). Indeed, most missionaries who had ever set foot in China had remained obscure or unknown, except in the local context or when their work, perchance, intersected the lives of well-known Chinese.[3] Latourette was careful to limit his application of superlatives to only a select few, such as the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and Hudson Taylor (1832–1905), Richard's contemporary and founder of the China Inland Mission.[4] One is tempted to compare Richard to these two figures but likely to find Richard a lesser 'equal' in terms of historical significance: Ricci signalled the epochal importance of Christianity's 'second' coming to China after the earlier inroads made by the Nestorian and other Christian sects centuries before, and Taylor was exceptional in organisational and evangelical vigour. Latourette's appreciation of Richard was probably shaped, in part, by contemporary developments in China. Chinese intellectuals of the Republican period (after 1912) had clamoured to rid their country of Western domination, and Church-sponsored institutions and activities were often stigmatised as symbols of its ubiquitous reach. It was in response to the Chinese 'anti-Christian movement' that Latourette wrote in 1929:

> The missionary … has set himself primarily to the task of making the impact of the West helpful rather than harmful, of putting the Chinese in touch with whatever in the Occident has intellectual, physical, spiritual, and moral worth, and has devoted his energies unselfishly to bringing the Chinese into contact with the best elements in Western civilization.[5]

This may well be read as his tribute to Richard. However, the word 'greatest', as employed in the missiological context, does conjure up ambiguous, if not misleading, connotations.

Much of the literature on Richard sings his praises in a spirit of Christian fellowship. While this is not the place to discuss a statement such as 'Timothy Richard knew that God loved Chinese people as Chinese people',[6] personal affection could easily get in the way. E. W. Burt (1867–1951), another BMS missionary who went to China some years after Richard, is a case in point. A self-proclaimed 'admirer and friend', who by his own admission was too favourably biased to furnish 'a detached and critical estimate of the man', Burt described Richard as having 'prepared the ground for the New China of today [i.e. 1945]'[7] and compared Richard to Sir Robert Hart of the Imperial Maritime

[2] For scholarly works on aspects of Richard's experiences in China, see, for example, R. Bohr, *Famine in China and the Missionary* (Cambridge, 1972); E. Johnson, *Timothy Richard's Vision* (Eugene, 2014); A. Kaiser, *Encountering China* (Eugene, 2019). Also insightful are two shorter works: B. Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792–1992* (Edinburgh, 1992), pp. 189–196; A. Walls, 'The multiple conversions of Timothy Richard', in *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History*, (ed.) A. Walls (Edinburgh, 2004), pp. 236–258.

[3] An example is Dr. Alexander Mackay of the London Mission; see Kuang Zhaojiang 鄺兆江, 'Ma Shangde Tan Sitong shushi di Yingguo chuanjiao yishi' 馬尚德譚嗣同熟識的英國傳教醫師 [Alexander Mackay and Tan Sitong], *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 [*Historical Research*], 2 (1992), pp. 174–187.

[4] K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York, 1929), pp. 378, 380, and also pp. 98, 259, 382.

[5] K. S. Latourette, 'Christian missions in China', *The Atlantic Monthly* 143 (May 1929), pp. 687–697, at pp. 689, 696, https://cdn.theatlantic.com/media/archives/1929/05/143-5/132415685.pdf (accessed 1 May 2023), in which he referred to the beneficial influence of missionary literature on the Chinese 'reform movement' of the 1890s. He did not name Richard or the SDK but obviously had them in mind.

[6] Title of an essay by Andrew Kaiser, https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2019/april/timothy-richard-china-missions-shanxi-famine.html (accessed 25 February 2024).

[7] E. W. Burt, 'The centenary of Timothy Richard', *Baptist Quarterly*, 11.1 (1945), p. 346, https://doi.org/10.1080/0005576X.1945.11750659 (accessed 7 January 2023).

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Customs. Both, Burt opined, played a large part in bringing about the '[a]mazing changes … in China during the past half-century'.[8] Never mind what 'amazing' meant during that same 'half-century' when large-scale Chinese suffering occurred or how those national or societal 'changes' could be attributed to Richard and Hart: Burt seems to have overlooked the vastly different criteria for measuring Hart's achievements in the 'sphere of administration' and Richard's in the 'religious sphere'. While Hart may properly be recognised for creating 'one of the administrative marvels of the world',[9] Richard, even in his 'parallel' sphere, was nowhere near a comparable claim to fame.[10] Hart was arguably the most powerful foreigner in late Qing China whereas Richard, despite his eager attempts, remained an outsider to high-echelon Chinese politics. By comparing Richard to Hart, Burt catapulted Richard's historical stature to remarkable, though unwarranted, heights.

While 'in-group' portrayals, such as Burt's, have helped sustain Richard's glowing image, there has been the occasional demurral. In the mid-twentieth century, the Chinese historian Ding Zeliang 丁则良 (1915–57), after examining some of the Foreign Office files at the Public Record Office in London, England, came up with a damning appraisal of Richard. In vehement language, he denounced Richard for having urged, during the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Zhang Zhidong 张之洞 (1837–1909), then-acting Minister for the Southern Seas 署南洋大臣in Nanjing, and Li Hongzhang李鸿章(1823–1901), Minister for the Northern Seas 北洋大臣in Tianjin, to 'sell out' by turning China into a subservient protectorate to Western powers (primarily, Britain).[11] To Ding, Richard was a die-hard imperialist who was committed to subverting China's independence and sovereignty. One does not have to endorse Ding's ideological slant to recognise that, his outrage aside, his question about Richard's intent and purpose was, in fact, a valid one: Why did Richard feel it appropriate, even justified, to dabble in Chinese politics? Any satisfactory answer to this question would have to be based on a scrutiny of Richard's full career, which, as mentioned, has yet to be attempted.

With a more modest aim in view, this article proposes to use his attendance at the Protestant Conference in Shanghai in 1890 as a springboard into his thoughts on mission and on China during the narrow time frame, and, when pertinent, beyond. According to the conference proceedings, Richard served on committees (mostly temporary during the conference and a permanent one to continue afterwards), spoke at meetings, and presented a paper. Though a brief interlude, the occasion offers a glimpse into Richard's career, not in isolation, not as if it were a small side-step in his lone march towards some teleological greatness, but in the social context of peers. Richard's proposal in his paper led to a conference resolution to memorialise the Chinese government on the 'missionary question'. It was a project that kept him occupied, intermittently, for the next several years and led to his trip to Beijing in 1895, during which he had the opportunity to meet with court officials and members of the educated elite. The connections thus established gave him an incidental role in court politics in 1898. Richard's story, when told in missiological terms, often acquires a self-sufficiency that wears thin, however,

[8] E. W. Burt, 'Timothy Richard, his contribution to modern China', *International Review of Missions*, 34.3 (1945), pp. 293–300, at p. 293, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.1945.tb04862.x (accessed 10 January 2023). A similar attempt to compare Richard to Hart is W. Soothill, *Timothy Richard of China* (London, 1924), p. 143.

[9] S. Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs* (Belfast, 1950), p. xiii.

[10] Not to mention the hyperbole of calling him 'a maker of modern China', as in A. Garnier, *A Maker of Modern China* (London, 1945).

[11] Ding Zeliang, 'Maguan yihe qian Li Timotai cedong Li Hongzhang maiguo yinmou di faxian' 馬關議和前李提摩太策動李鴻章賣國陰謀的發現 [The discovery of Timothy Richard's conspiracy to get Li Hongzhang to sell out the country prior to the negotiation of the Shimonoseki Treaty], *Lishi jiaoxue* 歷史教學 [*History Teaching*], 2 (1951), pp. 14–17; see also Ding Zeliang, *Li Timotai* 李提摩太 [*Timothy Richard*] (Beijing: Kaiming shudian, 1951).

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in the larger historical context. Protestant missions are not only a saga unto themselves, but also, on multiple levels, an integral part of late Qing China's foreign relations. Richard's career illustrated some of the intriguing themes and possibilities in both.

A sketch of the conference

When Richard went to Shanghai to attend the Protestant Missionary Conference in May 1890, his career was at a low point. He had earlier fallen out with his BMS colleagues in Shanxi and left the mission station of his own accord in 1887. He alluded to this period of self-imposed exile as 'years of trial and suspense'.[12] Uncertainty beclouded his future. Arrangements were being made by colleagues in London and in China for him to return to work in Shandong, where he had first started his career, but ill-health, both his and his wife's, made it medically advisable for them to stay on in the healthier climate of Tianjin.[13] Richard, however, must have felt strong enough to travel to Shanghai for the conference.

The conference was the second of its kind to take place. The first was held in 1877, also in Shanghai, after the idea for a broader, multi-denominational gathering of missions from different parts of China had gained support a few years previously at the Presbyterian Synod at Yantai (Chefoo) 烟台 in Shandong.[14] Richard did not attend the first conference in 1877 because of famine relief. It was resolved then that a second conference be held in 10 years' time. Organisational complexities, however, had delayed it until May 1890.[15] Unlike the first conference, which had only 126 attendants (74 men and 52 women), the second boasted a much larger contingent, with 445 (233 men and 212 women). The preparatory committees had drafted organisational and procedural rules that were officially adopted at the conference. These pertained, for instance, to the presentation of the 59 papers submitted. Most of these papers were printed and distributed in advance to avoid lengthy presentations during the conference. Each author was allowed 10 minutes to give a summary, followed by comments by two discussants before open discussion, at the end of which the author would have an extra 10 minutes to make concluding remarks. Similar stipulations were adopted for speeches during the business sessions. Yet, all the guidelines notwithstanding, time management proved to be a problem. Consequently, the conference had to resolve midway to extend its schedule from the original 10 days to 12. Sundays were set aside for worship and rest.

Apart from the presentation of papers, committees were set up: 19 temporary ones 'to act during the Conference' and 15 'permanent or executive committees … to act after the Conference'. In addition, nine resolutions were passed, often after a lengthy discussion or debate. Much attention was given to the 'comity' and cooperation of missions, to the standardisation of translations of the Bible, and to social welfare programmes, such as care for orphans and the aged, the poor, the blind, and the 'deaf and dumb', as well as measures against foot-binding and opium abuse. In short, the conference was like a clearinghouse of missionary projects and experiences.

[12] See his memoir, T. Richard, *Forty-Five Years in China* (London, 1916), pp. 201–217.

[13] For a discussion of Richard during this period, see L. Kwong, 'Between end and means', *Monumenta Serica* 71.1 (2023), pp. 167–186, at 170–173.

[14] See *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China held at Shanghai, May 10–24, 1877* (Shanghai, 1878), https://dn790006.ca.archive.org/0/items/recordsofgeneral00gene/recordsofgeneral00gene.pdf (accessed 25 May 2022).

[15] For specific information on the conference, see *Records 1890*. For a lively daily account, see *Report of the Missionary Conference held in Shanghai May 1890*, published by the *North China Herald* (Shanghai, 1890), https://dn790002.ca.archive.org/0/items/reportofmissiona00gene/reportofmissiona00gene.pdf (accessed 25 May 2022).

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The gender issue was very much alive and seems to have gained some headway when the committee on 'Women's Work' thanked all for allowing a full-day consideration of women's work, for an extension of session time for full presentation of papers by women, and for making women full members of the conference, presumably with the right to speak and vote at meetings.[16] A 15-member, all-women committee was organised and gave a brief report on the 'advancement of the work among the women and girls [of China] in all departments'. Twenty women sent a signed appeal to 'the Christian women' of Britain, the USA, Germany, and 'all other Protestant Countries' to invite them to join their work in China.[17] The evening session of day seven (14 May) was reserved for a 'meeting for ladies only'.

The age cohorts offered a glimpse into the cumulative strength of the Protestant enterprise. Of those present, a handful arrived in China in the 1840s and about 11, over 40, and more than 70 came in the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s, respectively. Over half of the attendants (about 283) arrived in the 1880s, while 12 arrived in China just months before the conference. The generational makeup, roughly delineated here by decennial markers, made it reasonable to set aside the evening session of day six for junior colleagues to ask questions and for senior colleagues to answer them. Richard was on hand as a senior member, having been in China for 20 years.[18] Someone inquired about the proper way to deal with Catholics, Chinese and foreign. Richard's reply was terse: they should be told that 'they are wrong' and everything should be done 'to lead them into the right way'.[19] These appeared to be his only spoken words on this occasion.

Seniority implied leadership, which reflected, in turn, national prominence in the China field. Without doubt, missionaries from Britain and the United States had formed the Protestant mainstay both before and after the Second Opium War (1856–1860). Consequently, this conference selected, as the first did in 1877, two co-chairs—one from each of these two countries. The British chair was David Hill (1840–1896) of the English Wesleyan Mission; the American chair was John Nevius (1829–1893) of the American Presbyterian Mission. Both were Richard's old acquaintances—Hill from famine relief in the late 1870s and Nevius from the early 1870s, when both worked for their missions in Shandong. Of the senior members, few were as honoured as Hudson Taylor. Not only was he invited to give the sermon at the opening ceremony, but he was also deputed to send a well-wishing telegram on behalf of all to the British and Foreign Bible Society that was holding its meeting in London. Taylor's China Inland Mission also helped ease pressure on conference organisers by providing accommodation for over 80 of its own members who were attending the conference and by hosting a lawn social on day nine at its newly constructed premises.

Taylor's words also carried special weight. It was he who successfully 'moved to extend the time of the Conference as long as necessary',[20] hence its extension from 10 to 12 days. In his opening sermon, with 'Christ feeding the multitude' as his theme, Taylor spoke of the possibility of reaching 50 Chinese families per day with the gospel message (and all Chinese families in fewer than 1,000 days) if there would be an additional 1,000 mission recruits to China in the next five years. His suggestion led to a permanent committee that was appointed to pursue and monitor this appeal.[21] An incident on day 11 gave a clear sign of his influence. After W. A. P. Martin's paper on 'The worship of ancestors—a

[16] *Report*, pp. 52–53.

[17] *Records 1890*, pp. lv–lix.

[18] Not all seniors were the same. There was a list of 14 'seniors among the missionaries … who have been in China forty years, or longer'; *Report*, p. 75.

[19] *Records 1890*, p. 429.

[20] *Report*, p. 41.

[21] For Taylor's sermon, see *Records 1890*, pp. 1–10; for the organisation of the committee, see *ibid*., p. lxi.

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plea for toleration' was presented in absentia in the morning session, a heated debate ensued. More than a few insisted that the Chinese practice was nothing short of idolatry and that Christians, especially missionaries, must condemn it unequivocally. Timothy Richard was one of the few to speak in Martin's defence. Richard argued that Martin did not mean to suggest a blanket tolerance of everything and surely not of anything idolatrous. He cited the example of Chinese converts from his Baptist Mission, who proved capable of distinguishing between the worship of God and the worship of ancestors, and had no problem with giving up 'numerous superstitions'. Richard seemed to suggest that the practice of 'ancestor worship' would be best left for Chinese Christians to decide for themselves. He also alluded to the Chinese 'Tomb-sweeping day' (or the Qingming festival 清明), which, being so close to Easter, offered an opportune time to explain to the Chinese the Christian meaning of 'immortality and the resurrection of the dead'.[22] However, it was Hudson Taylor's words that led to a clear expression of the prevailing discontent: 'I trust that all those who wish to raise an indignant protest against the conclusion of Dr. Martin's paper will signify it by rising.' The record shows, with emphasis, that '*Almost the whole audience did so*'.[23] That was not the end of the discussion, which, for lack of time, had to resume in the evening session. The next morning, Martin's paper again came up in a motion, seconded by Taylor, to affirm that 'idolatry is an essential constituent of ancestor worship' and to repudiate Martin's conclusion that 'missionaries should refrain from any interference with the native mode of honoring ancestors'.[24] Hudson Taylor was clearly a moving force behind the dissent of those two days.

Aspects of Richard's thought on mission

In defending Martin's perspective on 'ancestor worship', Richard sided with the minority. It can only be speculated that, when Taylor called for a show of 'indignant protest', Richard did not get to his feet; nor did he vote the next morning in support of the resolution, seconded by Taylor, to reject Martin's viewpoint. Though their opinions differed, it was not a direct engagement between the two. In fact, Richard already had his opportunity on the third day to tackle Taylor's ideas when he served as one of the two discussants of Taylor's paper and of another paper by David Hill during that same morning session. Both papers dealt with an open-ended theme—'the missionary'. Taylor spoke first on the 'qualifications' and 'mode of life' expected of the ordained, while Hill focused on lay agency. Taylor explained that a missionary should be 'thoroughly consecrated to God, unselfish, considerate, patient, not apathetic, long-suffering, persevering, filled with energy, with no pride of race, etc., etc.'.[25] The first discussant found Taylor's list, though inspiring, a very tall order. When it was Richard's turn, he complimented the two papers as 'excellent' and agreed that the 'spiritual' quality of a missionary was all-important. However, he did not give the two papers an in-depth review or critique. It may have been superfluous to do so anyway, as both papers dwelt mostly on commonplaces. Taylor's, for example, was tantamount to a checklist of qualities that any mission administrator would look for in candidates who were applying for overseas assignment. Richard's interest as discussant may be said to have lain elsewhere. It gave him an opportunity to propound his own ideas on related but, to him, far more vital issues. He proposed three 'qualifications' that a missionary should possess. By 'qualifications', he probably meant something like insights, understanding, awareness, or commitment.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 658.
[23] *Ibid*., p. 659.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 699.
[25] As summed up by Rev. A. Alwin, in *Records 1890*, p. 163.

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They were as follows. First, missionaries should know that they were different from pastors and evangelists, and that their primary function was to present 'the claims of God and the blessings of Christianity [to] the prepared in China' and to assist them in church-building. Once the church was set up, Chinese Christians should take over as pastors and evangelists. Second, missionaries should seek to establish the Kingdom of God in China akin to an earthly kingdom with similar 'physical, mental, social, national and international interests'. Third, for the salvation of souls and of the world, missionaries should study God's methods as revealed in the Bible and in world history. Only through an investigation into these would they discover the most effective tools for their work. Lay agency—a topic on which Taylor touched and to which Hill devoted his paper—should be recognised as one such tool, though Richard quickly remarked that he did not like the term 'lay agency', as it implied to him, prejudicially, inadequate training and inferior ability.

Richard's dislike of the term 'lay agency' was indeed a personal one. Neither Taylor nor Hill would have said anything negative about it. Hill, especially, spoke highly of its contributions to mission work. In this sense, the two papers served not so much as the basis for Richard's comments as a chance for him to articulate his views on related topics. His three 'qualifications' captured, in fact, key elements of his own shifting approach to mission since his Shandong days.[26] The first 'qualification' concerned the local division of labour between foreign missionaries and Chinese Christians. After the missionaries had played their part as teachers of Christianity and advisers on church-building, Chinese Christians were to assume all subsequent responsibilities. The arrangement, in short, pointed to the indigenisation of the Chinese Church. It was a way to address the daunting discrepancy between China's vast territory and missions' limited resources—a method that was gaining attention among missionaries. For instance, John Nevius, the American chair of the conference, was well known for the so-called 'Nevius Plan' that incorporated native initiatives.[27] Nevius was ever mindful to acknowledge similarities of approach between missions in Shandong, including Richard's BMS, but Richard seemed to suggest that he was the first among missionaries to think of indigenisation and that Nevius merely popularised it.[28] As if to amplify Nevius's indebtedness, Richard also noted his influence in kindling Nevius's interest and research into spiritual phenomena such as 'demon possession'.[29]

Richard's second 'qualification' also reflected an important aspect of his thought. By equating the Kingdom of God with the secular kingdom in 'physical, mental, social, national and international interests', Richard broached a topic for which he had earlier been criticised in Shanxi. He was censured for trying to 'substitute something else for the Gospel of Christ'.[30] Richard's concern about China's material improvement as the foundation for the Kingdom of God explains why he gave scheduled lectures on astronomy and science in Shanxi for about three years in the early 1880s and spent close to £1,000 of

[26] For an in-depth discussion, see Kaiser, *Encountering China*.

[27] J. Nevius, *Methods of Mission Work*, 2nd edn (New York, 1895), pp. 29–31, 86; see also J. Nevius, 'Mission work in Central Shantung', *The Chinese Recorder*, September–October 1880, pp. 357–364, https://ia802307.us.archive.org/21/items/sim_chinese-recorder-and-missionary-journal_september-october-1880_11_5/sim_chinese-recorder-and-missionary-journal_september-october-1880_11_5.pdf (accessed 1 May 2022); and his 1890 Conference paper, J. Nevius, 'Historical review of missionary methods', *Records 1890*, pp. 167–177.

[28] Richard, *Forty-Five Years*, p. 107.

[29] *Ibid*., p. 68. Nevius's work on the subject is posthumously published as J. Nevius, *Demon Possession and Allied Themes* (Chicago, 1896). The connection between Richard and Nevius might make a fascinating topic in China mission history.

[30] Kwong, 'Between end and means', pp. 173–174. According to Soothill, it was denounced as a 'mixture of science, popery and heathenism for the Gospel of Christ' (*Timothy Richard*, p. 156).

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his own inherited money on books and instruments for demonstration purposes. What he wanted to promote was what he understood of Western achievements over the past several centuries, or what might broadly be termed 'Christian civilisation'. It comprised a Protestant orientation with elements of the political, intellectual, religious, scientific, and technological developments in Europe since the sixteenth century and, later, in America.[31] Richard's third 'qualification' pertained to method. As he reduced his basic routine of street and chapel preaching, which he did not find 'productive of satisfactory results',[32] he favoured contact with China's ruling or governing classes and the use of literature (translated and original) as his means of propagation. This shift in approach, as noted in his memoir, was reinforced by his experiences in famine relief and again marked his divergence from his more traditionally minded, or 'purist', Shanxi critics.[33]

Richard's conference paper

Richard's comments thus revealed more his own thought than the quality of Taylor's and Hill's papers. As discussant, he spoke under time constraints but, as author, he had a little more time. On the afternoon of day six (13 May), Richard presented his paper, 'Relation of Christian missions to the Chinese government',[34] which he had drafted earlier in Tianjin.[35] It began with a long introduction before getting to his three main themes, namely: attitude of the Chinese government to missions, missions' attitude to the Chinese government, and several 'practical suggestions'. The introduction was a diffuse commentary on state–religion relations in ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, and India, followed by an account of the Christian Church in medieval Europe and its schism into Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. During those centuries, there was the rise of Mohammedanism, as well as the coming of Nestorianism, Manichaeism, and Mohammedanism to China. The arrival of Matteo Ricci, in Richard's view, signalled the 'most brilliant period' of Catholicism in China, whereas Protestants were latecomers to the China field. He concluded this section by noting two necessary conditions for Christianity to thrive in China: the 'government shall not continue to persecute' and its rulers must be directly dealt with to obtain the 'liberty to propagate'. Both conditions, as will be shown, were germane to the main goal of his paper.

Richard next turned to the treaties and regulations that had been in place since the 1840s for the protection of foreign nationals and of Christianity. Despite the treaty terms, he observed, problems had continued to plague missionary work. While hostile incidents could be settled by appealing to the treaties, anti-Christian sentiments were more elusive and harder to eradicate. Richard singled out for denunciation

> a collection of public documents on all State questions, called. [sic] 經世文 [*Jingshi wen*], published in 1826 in 120 books. These, for brevity's sake, I call the 'Blue-books' of China. It was republished by the Shanghai publishers in 1889; a

[31] For an insightful discussion of this 'legacy' as it related to British expansionism in the nineteenth century, see B. Stanley, '"Commerce and Christianity"': providence theory, the missionary movement, and the imperialism of free trade, 1842–1860', *The Historical Journal* 26.1 (1983), pp. 71–94.

[32] Richard, *Forty-Five Years*, p. 48.

[33] For the effects of famine relief on him, see also Bohr, *Famine*; K. Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron* (Berkeley, 2008).

[34] *Records 1890*, pp. 401–415.

[35] His letter to Baynes, 18 March and 7 April 1890, in 'Timothy Richards Papers', which I consulted for my dissertation many years ago at the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) in London, England. I remain grateful for the opportunity and permission to conduct research there.

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> supplement to the same, also in 120 books, bringing the subject down to date, was published in 1888. This is edited by a Shanghai man, 葛士濬 [Ge Shijun].[36]

Richard then focused on two 'books' (*juan* 卷 in Chinese) in Ge Shijun's *Supplement* that contained the most horrific scandals about the Christian Church and Chinese Christians. These two 'books' included excerpts from Xia Xie 夏燮, *Zhong Xi ji shi* 中西紀事 ('A record of events between China and the West'); documents by Shen Baozhen 沈葆楨, by Zhang Zhidong 張之洞, by the Zongli Yamen 總理衙門, and by Xu Gengbi 徐賡陛; and three short essays by unidentified authors (who were, according to Ge's original, Yang Xiangji 楊象濟, Wang Tao 王韜, and Li Dongyuan 李東沅).

What Richard found the most disturbing was a passage in *Hai guo tu zhi* 海國圖志 ('An illustrated treatise on the maritime kingdoms') by Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857), which described men and women sleeping together in church, clergy's use of money to entice converts, priests' practice to extract silver from eyeballs of the dead, clergy's use of drugs to control church members for life, clergy's incitement of church members to destroy ancestral tablets, etc. While the wording might identify the Catholic Church as the target, Richard warned, Protestants must not rest complacent, for the 'Chinese generally have not yet arrived at such nice distinction in Christianity'; in other words, to them, Christians were Christians. Richard then summed up Chinese allegations against church and missionaries under nine headings: 1. instigating unrest or 'what ends in rebellions'; 2. legal intervention to protect 'the lawless'; 3. '[a]ssuming official ranks'; 4. accepting 'the refuse of China' into the Church; 5. instilling disrespect towards ancestors; 6. allowing men and women to mingle in church and women to teach; 7. '[g]rossest immoralities'; 8. '[c]orrupt teaching'; and 9. 'doing no good'.[37] Richard ended with a lament: despite the missions' annual total spending of close to a million taels 'for the good of China', all they got in return was ingratitude, not to mention hatred.

To facilitate missionary efforts, Richard offered three practical suggestions: first, 'to adapt Christian teaching and methods to *Chinese* needs'; second, to prepare more 'textbooks for Christian instruction' and for explaining the 'true principles of the world's progress and salvation'; and third, to appoint a commission to present a memorial to the Chinese government to thank it for its 'kind protection in the past', to apprise it of the 'missionary question', and to request 'a full inquiry into the grave charges made in the Blue-books'. These proposals resonated with elements of his thought. The first to adjust to '*Chinese* needs' was, in a sense, a variation on the theme of indigenisation. The second was about 'textbooks', which, again, pertained to the use of printed materials for the dual goal of '[material] progress and [spiritual] salvation'. The third proposal of direct appeal to the Chinese government made perfect sense, given his gravitation towards China's ruling or governing classes, which ended, logically, upwards at the imperial top in Beijing.

Richard as author came across as self-assured and firm. Yet, to some in the audience, he may have overstated his complaints. As he recalled, '[m]any in the Conference considered that I took too gloomy a view of the situation'.[38] During open discussion, John Wherry (1837–1918) of the American Presbyterian Mission observed that 'it was quite possible to exaggerate the opposition of the Chinese officials to Christianity' and cited his own witness from long years of working in Beijing of 'much tolerance' towards Chinese Christians, including a 'private steward of the president' of the Zongli

[36] *Records 1890*, p. 407.

[37] *Ibid*., pp. 409–410.

[38] Richard, *Forty-Five Years*, p. 214.

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Yamen.[39] Wherry's remarks possibly underscored a wider opinion. Indeed, in emphasising the Chinese threat to mission work, Richard differed widely in tone from the first paper of the conference, which was presented by the veteran missionary Young Allen (1836–1907). Allen was certainly aware of problems beleaguering the missions but depicted Qing China more positively as open to spontaneous or voluntary change, besides the compulsory and semi-compulsory kinds. He argued that a gathering such as the conference would be an 'opportune and providential' time for missions to recognise the 'issues' and take up their 'obligations and responsibilities'.[40] Allen, Wherry, and, conceivably, others as well were willing to acknowledge conditions as they were but remained hopeful that they would improve, instead of harping on about negativities.

Apart from Wherry's caveat, no other comment of dissent was heard during the session, which, due to the lack of time, had to be adjourned until the next morning. A rebuttal, however, was quietly forming. In a paper presented two days later, entitled 'Current Chinese literature: how far is it antagonistic to Christianity?', Joseph Edkins, formerly of the London Missionary Society and now translator for the Inspectorate-General of the Imperial Maritime Customs, furnished a polite yet subtle critique.[41] Edkins mentioned Richard by name only once and that was in a footnote about Yang Guangxian 楊光先 (1597–1669), a key figure in the Calendar Case (*Li yu* 曆獄) against the Jesuits during the Kangxi 康熙 reign (1661–1722). Richard had mentioned Yang in his paper but, possibly due to a misprint, Yang's book, *Bu de yi* 不得已 (*Cannot Help It*), was given as *Bu sao ji de* 不掃己得. Edkins also referred to Yang's work, still imperfectly, as *Bu de ji* 不得己 and noted: 'For … [Yang Guangxian's] most hurtful slanders, see the paper by Rev. T. Richard in this volume.'[42] Edkins pleaded, in not so many words, that it was possible, even necessary, to trace the sources of anti-Christian propaganda much further back than Richard's culprits, Wei Yuan and the 'Blue-books'. Edkins covered some of Richard's ground, particularly Ge Shijun's *Supplement*, to which he referred twice—once as *Hwang-ch'au-ching-shï-wen-sü-pien* and once in Chinese characters, but never as 'Blue-books'. His treatment of Ge's compilation was clearly more in-depth and sympathetic.

For instance, by noting Shen Baozhen as representing the 'best types of the governing class', he refuted Richard's characterisation of Shen as inimical. One of the three short essays that Richard cited without the author's name was 'The conflict between science and Christianity'. Edkins identified the author as 'Yang Siang-chi [Yang Xiangji], residing in Shanghai' and translated Yang's title as 'Discrepancies between science and the Christian religion'. Edkins took pains to discuss Yang's short piece and explained that Yang refused to accept the biblical accounts of 'incarnation and the miraculous conception' or anything 'that cannot be detected by the senses'. He therefore called Yang a 'full blown materialist'.[43] Edkins thus differed from Richard in that he focused on issues that were central to the Christian faith rather than on sensational, tabloid-like rumours that Richard related. He demonstrated that he was more familiar with Ge Shijun's *Supplement* and knew how to read it for a better grasp of Chinese sentiments. He went beyond the two 'books' that Richard condemned to other selections in *Supplement*. Remarkably, for instance, he took notice of the many essays by Feng Guifen 馮桂芬 (1809–1874) and explained that, when Feng was a member of the Imperial Academy (Hanlin翰林), he submitted 40 recommendations to the government to urge 'the adoption

[39] *Records 1890*, p. 439.
[40] See his article, Y. Allen, 'The changed aspect of China', *Records 1890*, pp. 11–22.
[41] For his paper, see *ibid*., pp. 559–581.
[42] *Ibid*., p. 577. Edkins's footnote suggests that at least some of his views were inserted into his own paper after he had read Richard's.
[43] *Ibid*., p. 563.

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of a progressive policy'.[44] Ge's *Supplement* was not, therefore, a bastion of anti-Christian propaganda, as Richard had described. Another author whom Edkins referenced was Zhang Zimu 張自牧, whose *Ying hai lun* 瀛海論 (*On the Extensive Oceans*) was extensively excerpted in *Supplement*. Zhang recorded many of his observations on Sino–foreign relations, which Edkins debunked as false. Edkins nevertheless cited Zhang's remark on the 'three forms of Christianity in Europe', thereby refuting, unobtrusively, Richard's claim that the Chinese could not generally distinguish between the different branches of Christianity. Edkins also endorsed Zhang's view that the Chinese hatred of Christianity stemmed from 'ignorance and want of familiarity with the motives, aims and character of the persons hated'. The remedy for the 'unreasoning hatred', therefore, flowed naturally from this to call for '[m]ore science, more newspapers, more books' for the Chinese. Richard would have heartily agreed, as he also would, in his heart of hearts, that the 'attitude of the literary class … is less hostile than it was'.[45]

After the two-day extension, the conference came to an end. As its proceedings were being edited for publication later that year, the unexpected death of Alexander Williamson (1829–1890)—a pivotal organiser of the conference, a key Protestant leader in China, and the founder of the SDK—set events in motion that gave Richard a new lease on his career. After an acting appointment and an interim search, the SDK named Richard as its secretary in 1891.

Richard's conference paper: a critique

Richard's conference paper was not a literary tour de force, nor was it a compelling exercise in persuasion. Other than Wherry's terse remarks and Edkins's indirect critique, more can be said about its weaknesses. The most glaring was his use of 'Blue-books' to translate the Chinese titles. His explanation that he did so 'for brevity's sake' was trivial at best when accuracy was at stake. In contemporary usage, 'Blue-books' often referred to the British *Parliamentary Papers*, officially authoritative and binding, whereas *Huang chao jing shi wen bian* (1826) and its *Supplement* (1888), despite their foci on state affairs and matters relating to government, were strictly private compilations by Wei Yuan and Ge Shijun, respectively. This showed that Richard did not have a clear understanding of either the English or Chinese work, but simply, and somewhat casually, equated them as comparable. He thus conveyed the impression that the Qing government was behind the Chinese hatred of Christianity. There is no indication that he had consulted the 1826 compilation. He derived his harsh judgment only from Ge's 1888 *Supplement* or, more precisely, from the two 'books' out of 120 in Ge's compilation. After taking the two 'books' to task, he remarked 'Thus end the Blue-books', thereby inflating a miniscule portion to be the whole.

He decried Wei Yuan's *Hai guo tu zhi* as the fount of outrageous lies about the Church and Christians. Likewise, however, he had not consulted Wei's original work; nor did he have an inkling that Wei Yuan was actually the compiler of the 1826 'Blue-books', or his rebuke of Wei would have been twice as severe. His knowledge of *Hai guo tu zhi* was limited to a chapter from Xia Xie's *Zhong xi ji shi* that was included in one of the two 'books' and was therefore doubly circuitous. In Xia Xie's excerpt from *Hai guo tu zhi*, there was a description of the 'Catholic religion' (*Tian zhu jiao*) that Richard found the most appalling. Xia Xie, a keen compiler of Chinese sources on Sino–foreign contact, acknowledged that he was fond of using Wei Yuan's *Hai guo tu zhi* because of its rich sources, including

[44] *Ibid*., p. 572. Edkins may have had in mind an edition of Feng's *Jiaobinlu kangyi* 校邠廬抗議 (*Straightforward Proposals from the Jiaobin Studio*), which contained 40 'chapters' (*juan*).

[45] For Edkins's remark, see *Records 1890*, p. 571; for Richard's earlier view, see note 50 below.

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documents from the 'Guangdong archives' (*Yue zhong dang an* 粵中檔案).[46] The long passage on 'Catholic religion' was likely in an archival source that was recycled first by Wei Yuan in *Hai guo tu zhi* and then by Xia Xie in *Zhong xi ji shi*, and eventually made its way into Ge's *Supplement*. It is obvious that Richard had not investigated his materials before using or critiquing them; nor did he, writing in 1890, know anything about Wei Yuan's influence on Chinese reform discourse since the mid-century before hastily branding him, along with Shen Baozhen, Zhang Zhidong, and Wang Tao, an obstructionist. Compared with Edkins, Richard was more a polemicist than a scholar—more eager to make claims than mindful of the proof.

As misleading as the label 'Blue-books' was, no one questioned its application during open discussion, and some simply repeated it as a token of, a shorthand allusion to, Chinese recalcitrance.[47] Richard appeared particularly fond of the term. In his memoir more than two decades later, he still invoked it. It was already the early republic.[48] By then, more than 20 Chinese compilations with *jingshi* (statecraft) in their titles had been published.[49] As an advocate for change in China, he seemed totally oblivious to the significance of the 'statecraft' discourse during the last Qing decades. Possibly to his chagrin, its recent 'vogue' had begun with Wei Yuan's 1826 'Blue-books' compilation. The irony, however, runs deeper. When some of his own Chinese essays were included in the 1898 *Huang chao jing shi wen xin bian* 皇朝經世文新編 [*A New Collection of Documents on Statecraft*] compiled by Mai Zhonghua 麥仲華 (1876–1956), he was evidently delighted. In an anonymous contribution to *The Chinese Recorder*, he identified Mai's work as a 'supplement' to the 1826 and 1888 compilations that were published by the 'reform party' and noted that the Rev. Timothy Richard ranked third as the author with the most selections—31 in total.[50] If truth be told, of course, no other foreigner, missionary or not, had earned this distinction. Mai's *Supplement*, now simply called *New King Shih Wen* rather than 'Blue-books', was decidedly different from its two predecessors that contained, as Richard pointed out, 'the vilest calumnies against Christians'.

Finally, the tone of Richard's paper gives pause. Where China or Chinese were mentioned, the language tended to be stern, harsh, legalistic rather than warm or sympathetic, as might be expected of a veteran missionary who was dedicated to the 'salvation' of the land and its people. He did cite instances of friendly encounters but concluded with a cynical caveat: 'I wish I had many examples of generous support from the Chinese government, mandarins and literati to put before you; but hitherto they have so few and feeble that the best that can be said of most is, that they do not oppose

[46] Xia Xie 夏燮, *Zhong Xi ji shi* 中西紀事 [*A Record of Events between China and the West*] (Taibei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1962), p. 12; see also pp. 6–7.

[47] See *Records 1890*, pp. 437, 438.

[48] Richard, *Forty-Five Years*, pp. 214, 247. Meanwhile, he had employed it in his first report as general secretary of the SDK in *Fourth Annual Report of the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge Among the Chinese for the Year ending October 31st, 1891*, p. 10, https://archive.org/details/ldpd_13891474_004 (accessed 27 May 2023); 'Autobiography of the author', in T. Richard, *Conversion by the Million*, two vols (Shanghai, 1907), vol. 1, p. 101.

[49] See, for example, the discussion in Shen Yan 沈艷, 'Wan Qing jing shi wen bian di wen hua te se yu wen hua ben zhi' 晚清經世文編的文化特色與文化本質 [The cultural phenomenon and nature of the late Qing collections of statecraft essays], *Qing shi yan jiu* 清史研究 [*Research on Qing History*], 1 (2000), pp. 69–74, 125; Li Pengcheng 李鵬程, 'Wan Qing "Jing shi wen bian" xian xiang yan jiu' 晚清經世文編現象研究 [A study of the 'statecraft essay collections' trend], *Zhongzhou xue kan* 中州學刊 [*Academic Journal of Zhongzhou*], 1 (2006), pp. 182–185.

[50] 'New China and its leaders', *The Chinese Recorder*, September 1898, pp. 415–417, https://dn790000.ca.archive.org/0/items/thechineserecorderv291898/The%20Chinese%20Recorder%20v29%201898.pdf (accessed 30 May 2023). His wife edited his draft before it was submitted. See M. Richard, 'Diary', 2 August 1898, in 'Timothy Richard Papers'. The number 31 may have been an error and was repeated in his *Forty-Five Years* (p. 261). I glanced through a Taiwan reprint of this work and found 41.

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Christianity.'[51] It was a far cry from his own positive assessment only two years before when he wrote to the BMS secretary in London about a '*very great change*' (his emphasis) for the better in the attitude of Chinese officials towards Christianity.[52] As noted, in his paper, he enumerated Chinese allegations against the Christian Church under nine headings, some of which were quite bland, devoid of substance (e.g. 7 to 9), as if contrived just to make the list longer. In the extra time that he was allowed as author at the end, he likened the threat to missionaries to 'such dynamite as these Blue-books contain'[53] and reported that 'a fresh series of risings against Christian missions [has started] … just such as we would expect to follow from the circulation of such literature as we find in these Blue-books'. In his memoir, in which the conference was only given a very sketchy account, he twice emphasised his foresight in 1890 with words such as 'prophesised' and 'prophecy'.[54]

If Richard sounded alarmist in his paper, it was all in order to garner support for his plea to petition the Chinese government, and the outbreak of anti-foreign, anti-Christian incidents along the Yangzi Valley supplied a timely coincidence. His fear-mongering effort, however, might have been gratuitous anyway, for no one at the conference would have been under the illusion that working so far away from home in a strange land such as China was free from risks and dangers. There were indeed local problems to hinder their work or threaten their safety, and an appeal to the Chinese government would hopefully help or, in any case, do no harm, so long as it was not couched in language that could be interpreted as hostile or provocative. It was in this dual spirit of support and caution that the conference resolved on the last day that a permanent, seven-member committee be appointed and Richard, its chair, to 'prepare an address to the government'.[55] Richard's complaints in his paper about Chinese threats were now compressed into the 'late republication and the wide distribution of grave charges against Christian missions'. No mention was made of 'Blue-books'. All the committee members were seasoned colleagues and the committee's terms of reference were mild enough. The memorial was to begin by thanking the Chinese government for its 'protection' in the past, then to point out the danger and serious consequences of the false charges made against Christian missions, to ask that the government 'take immediate and effective measures to check their circulation', and, finally, to explain that missionaries were there to 'inculcate loyalty, peace and charity' and 'seek nothing but the best interests of China and the Chinese'.[56]

[51] *Records 1890*, pp. 410–411.

[52] Richard to Baynes, 30 March 1888, in 'Timothy Richard Papers'.

[53] *Records 1890*, p. 440.

[54] Richard, *Forty-Five Years*, p. 214.

[55] *Records 1890*, p. lxi. Details are murky, but it is possible that Richard and some of his close associates had tried to engineer an appeal to the Beijing government but encountered some opposition. There was initially a committee of seven (Richard included) established, as proposed by William Soothill, Richard's future biographer, to prepare a memorial to the Chinese emperor, comprising a congratulatory note on the emperor's coming of age and assuming full power the year before (1889), a brief explanation of Christian beliefs, and an avowal 'to inculcate the principles of loyalty' to all Chinese, Christians or not. The committee was supposed to draft the memorial before the conference ended so that every member could sign it. The day after Richard presented his paper, the committee was ready to present its report but a motion was put forward to recommit it to the committee so that it could take Richard's paper into account. This 'resolution was proposed and lost'. Then the committee report was 'taken up and debated with great animation for an hour', at the end of which 'it was understood that the substance of these debates should not be reported'. The concern was clearly to prevent critical or harsh comments during the debate from reaching Chinese ears. This committee was soon consolidated with the committee on the relation of Christian missions to the Chinese government, which was replaced by the committee to prepare the memorial to the Chinese government on the last day of the conference; see *Report*, pp. 7, 10, 34, 51, 52, 61.

[56] *Report*, p. 67.

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The memorial project

The memorial project kept Richard busy intermittently for a few years. Getting the other six members to agree on the contents and wording of the 'address' to the Chinese government proved no easy task, as the great distances that separated their respective missions made contact by mail not only time-consuming, but also liable to mishaps. For instance, Richard's early draft of a portion of the memorial got lost in transmission.[57] Finally, in 1895, five years after the conference, Richard went to Beijing and, together with another committee member, John Wherry, made plans to submit the missionary memorial. As per established practice since the early 1860s, foreign communications had to go through the Zongli Yamen. Even at that late stage, there was still so 'much to consult about daily' that Richard found it sensible to move his temporary lodging close to Wherry.[58] Revisions were still necessary in order 'to meet the views of the various [committee] signers'.[59] According to Richard's letter to his wife, the memorial had been copied at least 20 times, presumably in ink and brush, before it was deemed suitable for sending to the Yamen ministers.[60] The submitted package contained three items: an 'apologia' (drafted by another committee member, Henry Blodget of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Beijing), the missionary memorial, and a letter to the Yamen requesting that Richard and Wherry be permitted to present the first two documents in person to the emperor and, if not possible, that the ministers would 'kindly do it for' them.[61] A publication relating to this occasion was issued by the SDK in 1898 under the title *Yong xi jiaoan ce* 永息教案策 ('A treatise to end anti-missionary cases once and for all'), which showed adherence to proper format and language of court documents. It began with the names of the two missionary delegates, both preceded by a subordinate's lowly self-address in smaller print as 'your servant' (*chen* 臣). As expected, the memorial was conciliatory in tone and basically rehashed familiar themes. Probably few at the 1890 Conference had expected that another Qing declaration of tolerance could dispel deep-seated prejudices against mission work and clear their path of obstacles. In historical hindsight, the Boxers came as proof soon enough.

To Richard, the real gain of the trip lay elsewhere. It afforded him an opportunity to renew his earlier efforts during the Sino-Japanese War to offer advice to policymakers. During the war, apart from visiting the then-acting governor-general for the southern ports Zhang Zhidong in Nanjing, he also telegraphed Li Hongzhang in Tianjin, claiming to have a 'marvellous plan (*miao fa* 妙法) to safeguard China's present and future'. He requested the guarantee of 1,000,000 (one million) taels as a reward if his plan should work.[62] For a time, unsure of Richard's influence in diplomatic circles but desperate for a chance for peace, Zhang and Li probably took Richard seriously and humoured his initiatives, so as not to overlook any possibility.

While getting the memorial presentation ready, Richard became acquainted with some of the court officials.[63] He took evident delight in reporting that he had dined with some court censors and 'first with 4 then with 10 Hanlin members of the Imperial Academy …. They said there were 50 of them who had pledged themselves to carry on work similar to

[57] Mary Richard (wife) to Baynes, 5 September 1895, in 'Timothy Richard Papers'.
[58] *Ibid*., Richard to wife, 26 September 1895.
[59] *Ibid*., Richard to Baynes, 3 October 1895.
[60] *Ibid*., Richard to wife, 8 November 1895.
[61] *Ibid*., Richard to wife, 14 November 1895.
[62] See Li's paraphrase of Richard's words in his telegram to the Zongli Yamen (Guangxu reign (hereafter, GX), 21/1/15) in Li Hongzhang, *Li Hongzhang quanji* 李鴻章全集 [*The Complete Works of Li Hongzhang*] (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008), vol. 26, p. 143.
[63] For this experience, see Richard, *Forty-Five Years*, pp. 242–260.

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that of our Society [SDK]'.[64] He complained, good-naturedly, that 'there is so much dining that I am tired of the dinners' but quickly qualified his remark by stating that he was willing to 'take up the cross' if these would help attain better days for China.[65] Apart from relatively low-ranking court officials of the Imperial Academy and the Censorate, Richard also reached out to those in high places. As 'a purely private matter of my own', he prepared a 'document on general reform' for Li Hongzhang and for Robert Hart.[66] Of the court dignitaries, the powerful minister Weng Tonghe 翁同龢 (1830–1904), whom he had befriended but mistook for China's prime minister, stood out. Weng had earlier paraphrased in his Grand Council journal (*Junji riji* 軍機日記) Li Hongzhang's telegram regarding the million-tael reward guarantee for Richard's 'marvelous plan'.[67] He now interacted socially with Richard and found him eager and well-meaning. He identified Richard by his formal status as missionary (*jiaosh* 教士) but concluded by calling him, interestingly, 'a *haojie* 豪傑 bold, valiant character, a *shuike* 說客 persuader-lobbyist'[68]—familiar types in Chinese history, especially during disjointed times, and in the romance genre (*yanyi* 演義) of Chinese fiction.

It was also during this visit to Beijing that Richard made the acquaintances of Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) and Liang Qichao 梁啓超 (1873–1929), who had stayed on in the capital after taking part in the Metropolitan examination (*huishi* 會試). Kang told Richard that he 'believed in the Fatherhood of God and in the brotherhood of nations as we [SDK] had taught in our publications, and he hoped to cooperate with us in the work of regenerating China'.[69] Whether worded specifically for the occasion or not, Kang's professed affinity was music to Richard's ears. With all the clerical chores involved in getting the memorial ready, Richard had had an offer of help from 'one of the ablest writers—a Cantonese. He is an M.A. and an Editor of the Chinese Paper in Peking'.[70] There is no question that he was referring to Liang Qichao, Kang's student. Richard thus bore witness to some of Kang's and Liang's activities in Beijing, such as the founding of the Qiangxue hui 強學會 (Self-Strengthening Study Society) and the publication of its organ, *Zhong wai ji wen* 中外紀聞 (*Sino-Foreign News*). He reported some of this to the *North China Herald* in Shanghai and probably had a hand in shaping a Kang-centred perspective on Chinese reform and court affairs in Western sources.[71] Meanwhile, his interactions with Kang and Liang set him up for an incidental involvement in Beijing politics in 1898.

Though an indirect outcome of the conference, once or twice removed, Richard's tie to the Hundred Days Reform of 1898 via his Beijing sojourn in 1895 merits a mention. A critical key to understanding the 1898 episode was that Kang Youwei, despite his activism and the favours bestowed on him by the Guangxu emperor 光緒皇帝 (r. 1875–1908), never attained a high-court position or a direct role in imperial decision-making, much less one dictating policies.[72] As for Guangxu, instead of relying on a sole adviser during this period, he followed mainly the established administrative routine, while negotiating a steady path forward through the multiplicity of political forces at court. Consequently, Kang had to find some other way to make inroads, such as 'ghost-writing' for censors

[64] Richard to Baynes, 3 October 1895, in 'Timothy Richard Papers'.
[65] *Ibid*., Richard to wife, 9 October 1895.
[66] *Ibid*., Richard to wife, 14 November 1895.
[67] Weng Tonghe, *Weng Tonghe riji* 翁同龢日記 [*The Diary of Weng Tonghe*], (ed.) Chen Yijie 陳義傑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), GX21/1/16, p. 3806.
[68] Weng Tonghe, *Weng Tonghe riji* 翁同龢日記 [*The Diary of Weng Tonghe*], (ed.) Weng Wange 翁萬戈 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2012), GX21/9/9, p. 2888.
[69] For his encounters with Kang and Liang in Beijing, see Richard, *Forty-Five Years*, pp. 253–255.
[70] Richard to Ella, 30 October 1895, in 'Mr. and Mrs. T. Richard to Ella' file, in 'Timothy Richard Papers'.
[71] For these developments relating to the 1898 episode, I follow the account in L. Kwong, *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days* (Cambridge, 1984).
[72] A central argument in *ibid*.

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such as Yang Shenxiu 楊深秀 (1849–98) and Song Bolu 宋伯魯 (1854–1932), who were allowed by their official duties to memorialise the throne and who would forward, as if wholly passively,[73] Kang's drafts to the throne under their own names. Such a 'partnership', however, was irregular and, as such, took on subversive and conspiratorial overtones. Rumours and tall tales about Kang were rampant. When, late in the 'hundred days', Yang and Song proposed in separate memorials, with Kang allegedly behind them, to engage Richard as an imperial envoy to seek an alliance with Britain, Japan, and the United States, it was a last-ditch effort on their part to establish a sympathetic force at court, especially a foreign one, that might enhance Kang's prospects.[74] Both Yang and Song described Richard as having come to Beijing on his own and therefore readily available, whereas, according to Richard's wife's diary and his later recollections, it was by Kang Youwei's 'invitation' that Richard had decided at extremely short notice to hurry from Shanghai to Beijing.[75] In any case, rumours of possible foreign intervention in court affairs proved to be the last straw that galvanised a suspicious empress-dowager into action. Cixi 慈禧 decided to put an end to Guangxu's follies by terminating most of the policies that he had made over the past several months. Thus, misled by Kang's so-called 'invitation', which Kang was in no position to issue, Richard showed his gullibility and a basic lack of understanding of court affairs. Though highly motivated, at no time was he truly an insider, in any meaningful sense of the word, of any of China's ruling or governing circles.

Concluding remarks

The Protestant Conference of 1890 provided a unique angle from which to view aspects of Richard's China career. During the conference, Richard made comments and presented a paper, all of which attested to the tenacity of his thought. As a biographical episode, his participation took place near the midpoint of his 45-year career but reflected little of the lustre with which his historical image is now often seen. As mentioned, his career was at a low point at this juncture. To the BMS, his reassignment remained a conundrum, and his troubles with some of his London and Shanxi colleagues were not exactly a well-kept secret when he had to write to *The Chinese Recorder* in 1888 to dispel the rumour that he had 'left' the mission.[76] His earlier reputation as a missionary leader of famine relief in North China had apparently waned somewhat and did not make him a prominent figure among peers in 1890. Richard, who later in life tended to project a proud image of himself,[77] did not find his experience at the Shanghai Conference particularly memorable. There is not even a full-page coverage of the occasion in his 376-page memoir.[78]

In a sense, Richard belonged to a minority at the conference. His defence of Martin's view on 'ancestor worship' and Hudson Taylor's obvious prestige was a sign that cast the roughly defined but still meaningful 'liberal–conservative' polarity in the Protestant mission into sharp relief.[79] Shared precepts of faith, of course, rendered the divide less rigid

[73] See, for instance, the editorial approach in Kong Xiangji 孔祥吉, *Kang Youwei bianfa zouzhang ji kao* 康有為變法奏章輯考 [*A Critical Compilation of Kang Youwei's Memorials on Reform*] (Beijing: Beijing tushu chubanshe, 2008).

[74] For their memorials, see *ibid*., pp. 399–400, 404–405.

[75] Kwong, *Mosaic*, p. 209.

[76] 'Correspondence', *The Chinese Recorder*, April 1888, p. 180, https://dn720006.ca.archive.org/0/items/sim_chinese-recorder-and-missionary-journal_1888-04_19_4/sim_chinese-recorder-and-missionary-journal_1888-04_19_4.pdf (accessed 30 July 2023).

[77] See Kwong, 'Between end and means', p. 167, n. 3168.

[78] Richard, *Forty-Five Years*, p. 214.

[79] A 'regrettable severance' had occurred some years before, in 1881, and may be seen as foreboding. Hudson Taylor did not consider Richard 'orthodox' and instructed Inland Mission workers in the area to stay away from him and have 'a separate place of worship'; *ibid*., p. 152.

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or clear-cut but did not fundamentally obliterate it. There is little question that 'conservative' leanings held sway at the conference. Apart from formally rejecting Martin's viewpoint and affirming 'ancestor worship' as idolatrous, the conference also passed a resolution to recognise that the 'educational and literary branches of our work [are] indispensable and likely to yield large fruits in the future' but aver, in no uncertain terms, that 'paramount importance' be assigned to 'evangelistic' work, which should 'be pushed forward with increased vigour and earnestness, in order, if possible, to save the present generation'.[80] Aside from the ambitious goal about 'the present generation', the emphasis on the primacy of evangelical effort was hardly surprising, as it was, after all, the *raison d'être* of the mission in the first place. But its reiteration at this time seemed to underscore a genuine concern about the priorities of mission. With more attention and resources diverted to the 'educational and literary branches', there was inevitably a relative shift from the evangelistic focus. While schools, hospitals, orphanages, and other social programmes were widely recognised in local communities and among Chinese as symbols of the Christian faith, proselytisation and church membership did not register proportionate gains. It might be observed that, against the missionary goal of China's 'salvation', however interpreted, the Chinese response, barring an individual's special circumstances, ran a gamut of expressions, including the tendency to distinguish between primary benefits (such as social, educational, medical, and occupational opportunities) and peripheral benefits (such as conversion and church membership).[81] The discrepancy between native reactions and missionary objectives was hardly unique but behove some of the Protestant agents in China to adjust their goals and methods to match perceived Chinese needs. Richard's witness of hunger and suffering, of death and dying, during famine relief was what convinced him of Western-inspired reforms as the solution to China's problems.

If the conference resolution betrayed worries that the *means* of the mission would overshadow the *end*, then the trend had been set for the future, if not also the present, to favour the educational, literary, and social-service approaches. Add-on messages, such as universal love, compassion, life's material and spiritual improvements, disarmament, world peace, and international unity, could render the Christian message more appealing to a Chinese population that had long suffered all kinds of human misery. Yet, without the unique Christ-centred 'good news' and original meaning of redemption for the individual, how was Christianity different from, say, Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, or other religions that promoted similar human values and undertook similar charitable projects? Ultimately, why must it be Christ or the Christian Church?

As early as during his Shandong days in the 1870s, Richard had found that street-chapel preaching to the masses was not yielding satisfactory results and began, especially after famine relief, 'seeking the worthy'—that is, leaders of community and society, such as members of the 'ruling' or 'governing' classes.[82] Once these leaders had embraced Christianity, according to his vision, the multitude below would follow suit. It was a mechanistic view of the process and of Chinese society. Richard championed the use of publications (pamphlets, periodicals, and books, both translated and original) and his work as SDK secretary has been celebrated, and rightly so, as the crowning achievement of his career. It allowed him to pursue vocational interests in a more genial environment with salary support from the BMS.[83] Yet, the efficacy of the written word was inevitably

[80] *Records 1890*, p. lxiii.

[81] This observation is based, in part, on my recollections of having grown up in British Hong Kong, become a serious Christian and active church member for several years in my teens, and studied from kindergarten through to university at some of the best-known church-related local institutions with regular and, in one instance, daily assembly for worship.

[82] See, for instance, Richard, *Forty-Five Years*, p. 48.

[83] Kwong, 'Between end and means', pp. 171–172.

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hampered by widespread illiteracy. Richard never abandoned the use of religious language and spoke often of Chinese 'salvation'—a protean term that is subject to interpretation. He boldly entitled the two-volume collection of his English writings *Conversion by the Million*,[84] but the massive transformation or, for that matter, China's Christianisation never occurred. It is also unclear how many of his 'worthies' accepted the Christian faith or joined the Church because of him. To educated Chinese people who were concerned about their country's struggle for 'wealth and power' (*fuqiang* 富強), Richard's writings were useful primarily as a source of information on Western countries. To some in high places, such as Weng Tonghe, Richard was not so much a spiritual teacher as a 'bold, valiant character, a persuader-lobbyist' or simply a venturesome foreigner of goodwill.

Richard's conference paper targeted Chinese anti-Christian prejudices in cold, critical, even harsh language. What was China to him? The question may seem frivolous, but not so much when his proposals to Zhang Zhidong and Li Hongzhang during the Sino-Japanese War are taken into consideration. He objectified China then as a vast land of possibilities that could be refashioned into a better world under Western tutelage, where Christian civilisation would prevail, and where questions about national sovereignty, ethnic pride, and cultural heritage would not intrude. During the Shanxi controversy, the BMS in London had materials from both Richard and his detractors reviewed by James Legge (1815–1897), formerly of the London Mission and, at this time, Oxford professor. Legge did not find Richard theologically at fault but considered his hopes for China to be 'utter dreams and foolish fancies'.[85]

The aim of this article is not to belittle Richard's accomplishments. His famine relief work was no doubt a 'godsend' to the many lives that he helped and saved. His essays and translations both before and during his SDK tenure also contributed to Chinese reform discourse, though his 'influence', an amorphous effect, would have to be reassessed anew, outside the familiar Kang–Liang framework, beyond his own claims, and relative to similar kinds of work carried out by other foreigners, such as John Fryer (1839–1928).[86] This article has approached Richard primarily as a historical figure—a Westerner who embarked on a remarkable journey in late Qing China. The 1890 Conference in Shanghai shone a light, albeit briefly and narrowly, on some of his tracks along the way.

Conflicts of interest. None.

[84] Richard, *Conversion by the Million*.

[85] Quoted in Stanley, *History of the Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 193.

[86] Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865–1898), one of the six 'martyrs' at the end of the Hundred Days Reform of 1898, did quote Richard in his writings but was far more impressed by Fryer's work. See Kuang Zhaojiang 鄺兆江, 'Tan Sitong he Fu Lanya di yichi huijian' 譚嗣同和傅蘭雅的一次會見 [The one meeting between Tan Sitong and John Fryer], *Jindaishi yanjiu* 近代史研究 [*Research on Modern History*], 6 (1994), pp. 194–199.

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