

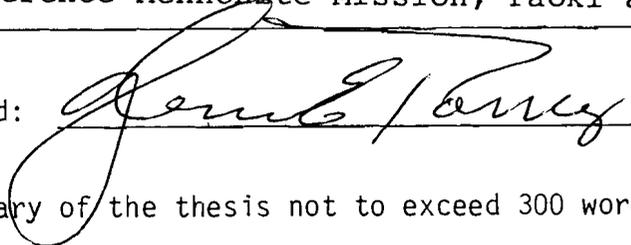
AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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General Conference Mennonite Mission, Paoki and Chengtu, 1947-1951

Abstract approved: 

(A succinct summary of the thesis not to exceed 300 words in length.)

For what seemed to be one of history's shorter interludes, the Christian mission movement to China resurrected itself after World War II. As resurrections go, it did not appear much, for just as quickly, its subject died again, this time the victim of Chinese, not Japanese, hands; and this time rebuffed not for Confucious, but for Mao.

Along with other denominations, General Conference Mennonites watched the denouement of that Western Christian effort which had actually begun thirteen centuries before, and also like the others, they wondered how well their message would survive out on its own. The West China General Conference Mennonite Mission, first to Paoki, Shensi, then to

Chengtou, Szechwan, was a Mennonite attempt to give that message a chance; in its brief tenure from 1947 to 1951, it experienced the confrontation of East and West under wartime duress.

It has been said that people only recoil in horror when Christianity is attacked or practiced, and a recent upsurge of Christian following in China has given cause for a reexamination of the mission era. Indeed, however far from China those missionaries fled, their legacy remains--for good or ill--and their story sometimes rings of tales they used to tell themselves.

AN ORACLE IN CHINA

ON THE HISTORY OF THE WEST CHINA
GENERAL CONFERENCE MENNONITE MISSION
PAOKI AND CHENGTU
1947-1951

A Thesis

Presented to

the Division of Social Sciences

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

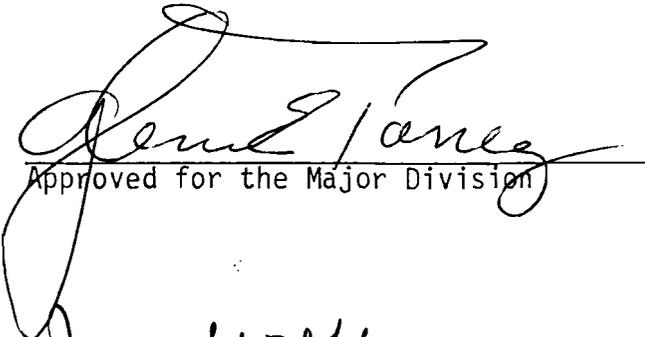
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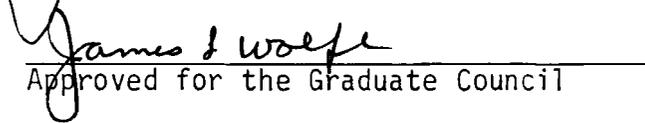
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PREFACE

Following World War II, Mennonite missionaries who had worked in China before the war returned, ostensibly to reopen their old mission fields in the east, but discouraged by Communist advances, ultimately to begin new fields in the west. One such effort, the West China General Conference Mennonite Mission in Shensi and Szechwan--a last ditch attempt to preserve Mennonite work during the Chinese Civil War--lasted from 1947 to 1951.

A prophetic Bertrand Russell once suggested that "if Europe and America kill themselves off in a war, it will not necessarily mean the destruction of the human species, nor even an end to civilization. There will still be a considerable number of Chinese left."¹ With somewhat sadder conclusions, mission historians have traditionally asked why the China missions failed, but laden with assumptions, their question was unfair; indeed, they could have just as easily asked, why did the missions not succeed more than they did? To be sure, by early 1952, only twenty out of 637 China Inland Mission (C.I.M.) workers remained, only seven of 571 Lutherans, and only three of 350

¹Bertrand Russell, Interview in New York World, May 4, 1924.

Methodists;² but despite these figures, and despite the lofty goals of missionary rhetoric, the burden these workers carried, namely Christianity, remained, and to this day, continues to expand.

Just as the missionaries' encounter with Chinese civilization often resulted in misunderstandings, or even direct animosity, so historians have often failed to understand how the missionaries' religion could succeed or fail independent of its purveyors' fate. Western scholars, acutely conscious of the dichotomy between morality and reason, must remember that the children of Confucious never knew that model, and that they contemplated more heavily on virtue--a responsibility bound, ultimately, in the individual, even if directed at a larger body. Neither absolute doctrine, as with the missionaries, nor absolute doubt, as with the scholars, were fundamental to Chinese thought, for as the Chinese saw it, and as Flannery O'Connor once phrased it, "free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man."³

Thus missionary dogma failed to the Chinese only when it forgot its own compassion, and reason's self-inflicted doubting seemed absurd. Above all, virtue, schizophrenically containing both the situationalism of reason and the

²Richard C. Bush, Jr., Religion in Communist China (Nashville, Tenn., 1970), 46.

³Flannery O'Connor, "Author's Note to the Second Edition," Wise Blood (New York, 1962).

assuredness of religion, mattered to the Chinese, and when missionaries spoke of Christ as He might have lived in China, their message hit its mark. But should that really be surprising? for surely a converted Christian's contribution, in so far as he made one, lay not in his believing what would otherwise have been unbelievable, but in his doing what would otherwise have gone undone.

Historian Paul A. Varg's comment that "missionaries who remained in China after 1948 felt useless"⁴ was therefore an overstatement, for even as the West China Mission crumbled around its instigators' feet, the hope of Christianity's continuance, and more specifically, of a local church's foundation, gave them every reason not to feel their efforts had been in vain. In the eclectic way of ancient oracles, the missionaries thrived, were snubbed and beaten back, and then proved themselves redeemed, if not on the national face of China, at least in the lives of those they touched. Indeed, if Bertrand Russell's apparently optimistic assertion was correct, a surprising number of those Chinese might be Christians.

An extensive collection of the West China Mission's correspondence, and correspondence between them and their sending board in the United States, is on file at the Mennonite Archives at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas.

⁴Paul A. Varg, Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952 (Princeton, 1958), 312.

Quite regretfully, some of those who worked in West China recorded little of their tenure there, and if their role in the narrative seems disproportionately small, that should not be construed as to comment on their importance. As the old German proverb puts it, wer schreibt, er bleibt.

Also, the thirteenth edition of the Chicago Manual of Style suggests that Chinese history pre-dating 1949 should use the older Wade-Giles system of Chinese romanization, while work covering later periods should use pinyin. As this topic spanned those boundaries, the Manual's advice did not help much, and in keeping with the project's sources, Wades-Giles was maintained, with only a single, unavoidable exception. Additionally, all Biblical references, except those lifted directly from the missionaries' letters, are from the Bible's New International Version.

Finally, to my Thesis Committee members Dr. Glenn E. Torrey, Dr. Loren E. Pennington, and Dr. Philip Kelly; to Mennonite historians Dr. James C. Juhnke and Dr. David Haury; to all the staff at Mennonite Library and Archives; and especially to Dr. Leland Lengel, whose not-so-subtle hinting led me to graduate work in the first place, I wish to make grateful acknowledgement.

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No more shall I seek in reverence
 Earth's inviolate Central Shrine;
No more go to Abai, nor Olympia;
 If before all eyes the oracle
 Fit not the event!
 Zeus, if thou art rightly named,
 King and Master over all,
 Save thine honour! Let not this escape
 Thine eternal governance!
Look to thy oracles of old concerning Laius;
 Put to nought by man,
 They fade, nor is Apollo glorified
 In worship any more. Religion dies!

--Sophocles, Oedipus
 the King

INTRODUCTION

Is there one word which may serve
as a rule of practice for all one's
life? The master said, Is not
reciprocity such a word?

--Confucious

And the word became flesh . . .

In ancient China, the flesh became Huang Shang, Son of Heaven, ruler of the Middle Kingdom, ruler of the arbiter kingdom between Heaven and Earth. The Emperor of China, it was believed, held a mandate from Heaven; he was an emperor who ruled not by force (or so the theory went) but by virtue--to him all power came from Heaven, and from him all power went, not only the bureaucratic power to keep oiled China's creaking governmental machinery, but also the cultural power to breath life into his nation's intellectual and religious souls as well. To the ancient Chinese, theirs was not simply a preeminent nation of Asia, but a central nation, the patriarchal nation of all nations, around which others could be mere satellites.

Thus their Emperor was the Son of Heaven; yet he was not the Son of God, for in China there was no God, nor was he the promised Messiah, for none had been promised. The Son of God was coming, to be sure, but his time was not yet; and when his time came, few would heed his message, for they did not

need it, they did not understand it, and they did not approve of its messengers; just as the Mennonites in West China later operated in the purlieu of their non-Mennonite predecessors, so Christian missionaries in general often preached to Chinese already swindled by Western traders or coerced by Western guns. Unlike in India and Africa, Westerners never formally occupied China, never felt the same noblesse oblige toward the Chinese people, and their motives for travel were often less those of Paul's than those of Bernal Diaz' when he sought the Indies: "To serve God and his Majesty, to give light to those who were in darkness and to grow rich as all men desire to do."¹

From their very first official contact, East and West had underscored the chasm between their cultures. When the Portuguese sent an embassy of ships to Canton in 1517, they attempted a glorious approach, but foolishly marked it with cannon salute, and with the Cantonese convinced of impending attack, housewives and diplomats together ran screaming to their homes. If any had doubted, they now felt reconvinced that this Western fellow was a barbaric brute indeed.² Small wonder, then, that early Westerners in China found their treatment shocking. For vassals of the King of Kings, a coerced protestation before the Son of Heaven held little

¹Quoted by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Missionary Enterprise and Theories of Imperialism," in John K. Fairbank (ed.), The Missionary Enterprise in China and America (Cambridge, 1974), 342.

²Stephen Neill, Colonialism and Christian Missions (New York, 1966), 118-19.

savor, and only with grieved smiles did they kneel before His Majesty, properly kowtowing to the kowtower before Heaven, and properly buying their acceptance with noses on the floor. To the Chinese, all was a question of manners, but to the ambitious Westerner so pointedly taught his place, the whole affair left a frowzy taste in his mouth not unlike the palace dirt on his nose. As late as 1839--and ironically the year of the Opium War--the Governor-General of Canton summarized Chinese thinking; after receiving a communique from the British simply urging a "maintenance of peace between the two countries," he professed bafflement and pointedly asserted: "I have no idea of the meaning of the expression 'the two countries.'" Indeed, he did not; he found the British assertion of equality as offensive as the British found his reply.³

To the Governor-General, as to most Chinese, the white man was worse than a nuisance; he was a disgusting barbarian. He carried the odor of mutton fat; his nose was disproportionately large; and his hairy body belonged to an animal, not a man. Likewise, his language and mannerisms were atavistic, and by the tone of popular horror stories, his reputation was even worse; even into the nineteenth century, rumors of cannibalism persisted, and some said that children's eyes were used by missionaries to make medicine; in many quarters, so much as a Western glance could provoke

³Ibid., 126.

peasant women to shield their babies from a foreigner's presence. As historian John K. Fairbank has described it, "the white peril in nineteenth century China was a good deal more sinister than the yellow peril of the 1900s in America."⁴

To the Western missionary, on the other hand, the Chinese lived in heathenism and only a good swallow of the Gospel would cure it. But when the heathen balked, and tried to keep their kingdom Gospel-free, the missionaries were incensed (one even questioned if they really did deserve rule over "what they choose to call their own dominions"),⁵ and once admitted, the missionaries dispelled propriety as they wished. They ignored Chinese regulations, physically resisted Chinese authorities, and even disrupted schools and court proceedings to offer salvation.⁶ So fiery was their approach that, as one historian noted, had they tried to liberalize it, they would have looked like a "combat soldier who in the thick of battle took time to rethink his position."⁷

⁴John K. Fairbank, The United States and China (Cambridge, 1971), 142.

⁵Elijah Coleman Bridgeman, quoted by Stuart Creighton Miller, "Ends and Means: Missionary Justification of Force in Nineteenth Century China" in Fairbank, Missionary Enterprise, 250.

⁶Ibid., 251.

⁷Paul A. Varg, Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952 (Princeton, 1958), 25.

That all this would haunt them they could scarcely have foreseen. From their Bibles they divined the Absolute, and to mingle it with Chinese philosophy would have paganized the perfection of their message; unwittingly, they blinded themselves to an unholy trio of perils, which not only emasculated the missionaries' image, but ultimately turned millions of Chinese faces away from the cross and toward the hammer and sickle. First, China's traditional obfuscation of supernatural and secular power had shaped religion into something of a governmental function--giving Confucianism the authority a state usually has; secondly, the missionaries' disconcerting hypocrisies led the Chinese to judge Christianity more by its adherents than its doctrines; and thirdly, the individualism of Christianity, which played so well in the West, seemed out of place in the far more synthesized society of China.⁸ In short, many of the missionaries had failed to understand their adversary, failed to practice what they preached, and failed to preach anything the Chinese could understand.

Nevertheless, forward they plunged like crusading zealots, and directly confronted the precepts of Confucian philosophy; yet in so doing, they could not have realized the magnitude of their actions. Confucianism directed far more than religion; it defined an entire social structure skeletonizing the Chinese nation. Indeed, in its essence, it

⁸Jessie G. Lutz (ed.), Christian Missions in China: Evangelists of What? (Boston, 1965), xiv.

was more a system of ethics than of metaphysical dogma; it promised no individual afterlife, professed no dawning utopia, and paid less heed to the individual than the collective. Confucianism simply implored all to accept their lot and officials especially to look after the lot of others. Confucianism was not spontaneous in the least, but quite conservative, for it valued social order as its summum bonum, and rendered authority inextricably intertwined with spirituality. It was the guardian of Chinese stability, and as such could subvert that function in other religions which dared enter its snare. Mongol rule in the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) had fallen apart when the Mongols' imported Lamnism rendered them "uncivilized,"⁹ and evangelical Buddhists had long avoided persecution only when taxed into poverty or secluded into monastic oblivion.¹⁰

Chinese society had evolved into nothing less than a power base from which Confucianism drew its strength. Although the Chinese government was too weak to resist much of anything, Chinese law--a most basic institution--blended Confucianist morality with an authoritarian method for attaining it. The law would land with crushing weight upon a child offending his parent, but would righteously defend a parent selling or even killing his child. One Chinese youth

⁹Fairbank, United States and China, 81.

¹⁰For a brief time during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Buddhism was sanctioned as a state religion, but still failed to compete with its Confucian rival. See ibid., 116-18.

who accidentally killed his father while trying to save him from an attacker, saw his sentence compassionately commuted from "dismemberment" to "immediate beheading" only after hearing deliberations on his good intentions and an appeal to the Emperor.¹¹

With the Westerner challenging such an ingrained behemoth, his own behavior seemed of the utmost import, but perhaps the missionaries' most damaging legacy--certainly the one which would haunt their successors the most--was their lackadaisical opposition to or outright support of the merchants and diplomats who also represented the West, but with much less charity. When the British opium trade sparked the Opium War of 1839, for example, missionaries first sided with the Chinese, but many changed their mind. Opium to all was a damnable evil--and even when the Chinese seized twenty thousand pounds of it, the missionaries cheered--but when British guns rolled into place, some reconsidered, and wondered if a broken China would be a China more easily disposed to the Gospel. God could smite opium in His own time, they reasoned; perhaps war could help them smite heathenism. Gradually, the controversy no longer hinged on opium, but (as one missionary put it) on "freedom and Christianity" versus "ignorance and exclusion." "He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him," another quoted, "Hence the opium trade--a direct violation of the laws of God--can serve

¹¹Ibid., 105-110.

Him." Almost in the twinkling of an eye, the Opium War transformed into a lucky (if wicked) windfall for Christ, and catalyzed a flurry apostolic doublespeak: "We doubt not that He who said He came to bring a sword upon the earth has come," puffed the Reverend Samuel Wells Williams, "He will overturn and overturn until He has established the Prince of Peace." When the fighting finally began, so overheated were their words that many missionaries chided the British for waiting so long.¹²

Likewise in 1856, when the British revenged their assaulted ship Arrow (and blazed into four more years of periodic fighting), the missionaries sided with the god of John Bull. The resulting treaties did win them tolerance for Christian work, but also legalized opium; yet to many the course was clear. Once again, the Chinese "need harsh measures to bring them out of their ignorance, conceit, and idolatry," wrote Williams to his brother; and although he admitted that war was antithetical to a message of love, he called it "methods whose inherent wrong He can punish at His own time."¹³ As for opium addiction, the missionaries renewed a campaign to nurse its suffering even as they supported the war which secured its expansion.¹⁴

¹²Miller, "Justification of Force," 252-5.

¹³Ibid., 262.

¹⁴Fairbank, United States and China, 146.

Worse yet were those instances when missionaries directly intervened with government policy. They routinely translated for government officials (obscuring the line between them and their governments), and occasionally they provoked violence for their own cause. In 1868, the fundamentalist C.I.M. founder, Hudson Taylor--who had gone far to endear himself to the Chinese, wearing their dress and observing their customs--found himself caught in a riot at Yanchow. While neither Taylor nor his family were hurt, the British took a dour view of such incidents, and when Taylor returned to the city, it was after gunboats had sailed up the Yangtze on his account.¹⁵ If the Chinese fought back, stereotypes reinforced themselves on both sides, and the upshot was a cancerous continuity of erratic attacks and sporadic killing. Missionaries often found themselves "mobbed in the fu city, mobbed in the district cities, mobbed in the large towns. We got so used to being pelted with mud and gravel and bits of broken pottery," one exclaimed, "that things seemed strange if we escaped the regular dose."¹⁶

Just as these early missionaries were not wholly to blame for the violence, however, their blundering was not wholly antidotal to Christianity. Christian schools and hospitals introduced Western science; Christian care of the

¹⁵J. C. Pollock, Hudson Taylor and Maria: Pioneers in China (New York, 1962), 180-99.

¹⁶Harlan P. Beach, quoted by Varg, Missionaries, 5-6. A "fu" was a local unit of government.

peasants helped offset that group's neglect; Christian intervention unleashed Chinese women from the medieval prurience of foot-binding; and Christian famine and flood relief saved countless thousands of lives. Yet the Gospel was often lost in all this, and in 1894, with some 1300 Protestant missionaries operating 500 missions in approximately 350 Chinese cities and towns, there remained less than 60,000 Chinese Christians.¹⁷

In large part, the missionaries had failed to grasp the fundamental differences between the individualistic West and socially-oriented East, a continuation of those cultural misunderstandings which had long plagued both sides. To the Confucianist, his participation in society--not his dichotomy with it--sketched the outline of his own personal identity, and whereas the Westerner fancied himself as a "self-made man," the Chinese fancied himself as an extension of his long line of ancestors. The concept of individual sin, then, was entirely foreign to the Chinese, and a good deal of the Christians' dilemma came with the incoherent assumptions they brought along. Even their symbolism had not been adapted to Chinese tradition, and while it usually seemed bizarre, it occasionally drifted toward perversion. Imagery of sheep and shepherds had little effect, for huge sections of China contained no sheep and in those that did, sheep were despised

¹⁷In addition, Roman Catholics had over 1200 European or native priests with over 500,000 communicants in China. From Fairbank, United States and China, 178.

and shepherds snubbed. White had been the color of mourning in China, and perhaps worst of all, the serpent symbolized intelligence, beneficence, and power.¹⁸

The intellectual failings of these early Western endeavors were hardly confined to symbols, however. In fact, only peripherally were the missionaries "teaching all nations;" more centrally they were seeking a Chinese utopia--reshaped in their own image--ostensibly to bring souls to God, but more ultimately to bring Westernism to China. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the millennial rule of Christ had taken a foremost position in the minds and strategies of Western missionaries. Reasoning that because a relatively few will be saved anyway ("Many will be called, but few will be chosen") their first imperative lay in provoking the imminent return of their Savior. What had been holding Him up, they were convinced, was not His own unwillingness, but their failure in creating the conditions He needed to come back--that is, His Gospel had not yet reached all nations. Once introduced, He would break free from the shackles of history and, gathering the faithful to His breast, would sweep from creation any of the paganism which the missionaries had unfortunately left behind. Obviously, with such a plan, these missionaries saw in China their perfect opportunity to serve, first as harbingers of happiness, and then as ring-side spectators to the parting of

¹⁸Varg, Missionaries, 23.

the clouds. They would make their own attempt, there in the Middle Kingdom, to find a connection between Heaven and Earth, and as the missionary Griffith John put it, the stakes were considerable:

China is dead--terribly dead. Our plans and organizations can do very little for this great people. They want life. Christ came to give life; and He is not the I was but the I am. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."¹⁹

The millenarians' message was both individualistic and apocryphal; they sought to save the world by saving China, and sought to save China by saving as many of the Chinese as possible. While this approach may have been dogmatically sound, it was clearly oriented toward pleasing long-faced Westerners more than open-eared Chinese. "Brethren, this is what we must be," John concluded, "if this mighty Empire is to be moved through us."²⁰

Of course once such talk collided with reality, victory slithered a few more years down the line. Confucianism's emphasis on filial piety had frequently manifested itself in quasi-religious ancestral rites (what the missionaries nicknamed "ancestor worship"), and once all of this was understood, many missionaries came to see Chinese culture as another of those impediments holding back eternal bliss. Indeed, a standard measure of faith for the newly proselytized was not an exhaustive knowledge of Christian dogma, an

¹⁹Griffin John, "Salvation from Sin, the Great Need of the Chinese," in Lutz, Christian Missions, 12. Emphasis John's.

²⁰Ibid., 12.

understanding of Christian ethics, or a demonstrated adherence to Christian creeds, but a final renunciation of Confucian philosophy.

While such Western ethnocentrism bounded rampant deep into the twentieth century, as early as the nineteenth some began to question the advantages of gunboat evangelism. True, Chinese customs had to be changed, but a hope was born for peaceful change, encouraged not by the sting of bullets, but by the sheer force of a better idea. To destroy every indigenous expression of culture would pull up the wheat with the tares, and to continue a policy of religious imperialism could only incite greater hatred of Christianity. In fact, some admitted that a few of the Chinese' heathenish ways might contain a seedling of truth, and to toss it all out would render the field even more infertile than it was already. A cruelty like footbinding was clearly too much--indeed mission theorist F. Ohlinger scarcely gave a neutral party to footbinding credence as human (he called them "driftwood"),²¹ but neither was zealotry the answer, nor a particularly viable alternative. "'Thou shalt' and 'Thou shalt not' do not come with much effectiveness from the lips of man," Ohlinger wrote, and while missionaries could be uniquely qualified to improve the Chinese' lives, they carry with them their own seeds of destruction:

[Missionaries] are the true sons of those who have ever been accused of turning the world upside down, and still

²¹F. Ohlinger, "Missions, an Agency for Christianizing Chinese Civilization," in Lutz, Christian Missions, 14.

consider it a sufficient answer to tell their accusers that the world is awfully downside up. Yet there may be a zeal without knowledge. The spirit of wholesale condemnation may get the upper hand here and there and work incalculable mischief. Our converts and heathen neighbors will not fail to discover whether it is this spirit or the spirit of Him who went about doing good, that moves us.²²

Increasingly, favorable comparisons were made between Christianity and Confucianism; the Western God was compared to the Chinese Heaven, Moses was compared to the Chinese sages, Jesus was compared to Confucious, the Bible was compared to the Chinese classics, and even the Christian doctrine of salvation allowed itself to stand beside the Chinese triumvirate of human nature, self-cultivation, and morality. Christianity, it was held, could purify Confucianism if not defeat it, and while in so doing Christianity did not give up its secrets, it did allow Confucianism to attempt to pick the lock.²³

So was born the Social Gospel in China, about the time Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward topped bestseller lists in America. Emphasizing the traditional utilitarianism of Chinese ethics, the Social Gospelists sought to make Christianity more relevant to China by rooting it in social service. Old attempts at cosmic millennialism gave way to new attempts at creating an earthbound millenium; one such thinker, A. R. Kepler of the Church of Christ in China,

²²Ibid., 13.

²³M. Searle Bates, "The Theology of American Missionaries in China, 1900-1950," in Fairbank, Missionary Enterprise, 157.

explained that sin was "a cancerous growth to be removed," and that society was not, as the millenarians thought, "one big camp with infectious diseases to be avoided."²⁴ "We want to make Christ King of the world, but we want the world to be a worthy kingdom for such a sovereign."²⁵ No longer could voice alone bring Christ to the earth, now hands were needed also. "[Christ] realized," wrote Kepler, "what it has taken His Church almost nineteen hundred years to realize-- the intimate relationship that exists between a man's physical, intellectual, and spiritual functions."²⁶ Certainly Elijah's Chariot had ended its journey flitting between the clouds, and had now landed full force on hard dirt; but if it sat ready for boarding, its destination was still utopia.

Of course, with the Revolution of 1911, something of a utopia seemed in the making, but from a religious point of view, it remained a shapeless one. At first, the new government tried to end religion's tax-free status, and even to confiscate some religious property, but such an ecumenical cry went up that they desisted. The once-ingrained behemoth Confucianism was feeling its deathpains, and when a group of Confucianists promoted theirs as China's official religion, their coup was foiled, and the cracks in their armor became

²⁴A. R. Kepler, "Christianity as a Social Gospel," in Lutz, Christian Missions, 17.

²⁵Ibid., 18.

²⁶Ibid.

apparent.²⁷ Christians, Buddhists, and even an assortment of cultists rushed to fill the void, and at least one cult--the Tao Yuan--featured a dabbling from nearly all religions. Its members divined their instruction from a planchette, a three-foot pole with a pencil tied in the center, and which was held over a tray of sand some two-feet square. Combined with the necessary ambiance--including the burning of incense--"automatic" writing occurred, and the words written were said to be dictated by spirits, often those of Buddha, Confucious, Lao-tsze, or even Jesus.

Seizing a perceived opportunity, Christian missionaries--except for fundamentalists--cheered humanism and modernism as an "open door," and not a kowtow to paganism. Hospitals were constructed, schools were opened, and democratic ideals were toyed with, for as one young reformer put it: "Ignorance without organization is bad, but ignorance with organization is horrifying."²⁸ Westernism, especially Western science, no longer symbolized extraterritorial ports or unequal treaties, but the hope for imperialism's defeat through economic and social competitiveness. The Son of Heaven was deposed; Sun Yat-Sen--a Christian--was ascended; a new China of patriots and reformers, and of Western-educated intellectuals, took control. Mission work expanded as well,

²⁷Y. Y. Tsu, "Our Native Religions," in Milton Stauffer (ed.), China Her Own Interpreter (New York, 1927), 37-9.

²⁸L. T. Chen, "Our Changing Life and Thought," in Stauffer, China, 91.

and missionaries old or novice put themselves at the vanguard of Nationalist revolution. Whereas during the sixty years prior to 1911, only 4,160,972 Bibles reached China, from 1911 to 1915, some 8,386,280 did.²⁹ Similarly, from 1914 to 1924, Protestants were estimated to have grown from 257,431 to 402,539, but likely grew several times that number,³⁰ and for about a decade after the last emperor's fall, the vision of a Christian China emerged from its ethereal mist.

But the vision did not last long, and the vision had never existed for most Chinese reformers. Christianity to them could not be excised from the imperialism and Western nationalism it once supported. Beginning in the early twenties, and reaching its apex in the late twenties, an anti-Christian mood of distrust swept the country. Missionaries were pressured into leaving; government controls on Christian activity were increased; and even within the missions, native Christians challenged foreigners for dominance in church affairs. Chinese Christians still charged the West with over-emphasizing the theological, and some charged the West with racism.³¹

²⁹William Hung, "The Contributin of the Western Church," in Stauffer, China, 91.

³⁰Kenneth Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York, 1953), 1446.

³¹Ibid., 1446-7; Paul A. Varg, "The Missionary Response to the Nationalist Revolution," in Fairbank, Missionary Enterprise, 312-15.

A few missionaries reasoned their persecution to be a positive good--a test of faith--but such optimism did not conceal the uncomfortable truth of many of the Chinese allegations. The missionaries' futile denominational feuds were incomprehensible to the Chinese, particularly with missionaries telling them that Christ's is a universal truth. As one Chinese protested: "We are not yet interested in the fundamentalist or modernist approach to God, for we are trying to find Jesus' approach to God."³² And the racial element very definitely existed; even in the 1940s, at least one missionary refused to let rural Chinese in her living room.³³ In more remote areas, anti-modernists and fundamentalists screamed out services of zero intellectual content; bellowing scripture at the top of their lungs, they often dragooned unsuspecting peasants into doing the same, and as historian Paul A. Varg put it, "reduced Christianity to a soporific."³⁴ Yet these were a minority; for most, the old mistakes had been recognized; their recognition simply came too late. The Nationalist regime they had supported began to collapse of its own corrupted weight, and though the anger and the apathy of that period were but a palimpsest of things to come, the missionaries' legacy of irrelevance and bigotry had already debunked them from their role as

³²T. Z. Koo, "The Future of Christianity in China," in Stauffer, China, 149.

³³Varg, Missionaries, 278.

³⁴Ibid., 282.

"apostles of China's transformation" to their status as what John K. Fairbank called "worried bystanders."³⁵

Still a strain of fragile hope persisted. One Chinese Christian, Hsu Pao-Ch'ien, writing as late as 1939, remarked that "in spite of [Christianity's] small numerical strength in China, it has been exerting an influence on the life of the nation way out of proportion to its number." To Hsu, Christianity was neither a cry for eternity nor a social mandate; it was a combination of the two; it was the meaning, even the teaching, behind the utility of Christian ethics. "The religion of love is being demonstrated," Hsu continued, "and in face of this concrete demonstration, how can the Chinese help taking Christianity more seriously than before?"³⁶

Even on the brink of World War II, Hsu spoke for those whose belief was either indestructible or foolish: "The open door toward the Christian gospel, prayed and worked for by the early missionaries, is actually here. And this time it was not forced open; it opened of its own accord."³⁷ In the eyes of people like Hsu, China could still hear the Gospel, for Christianity could make itself heard, and Confucianism already spoke with a faltering voice. Yet the China they

³⁵John K. Fairbank, "Introduction: The Many Faces of Protestant Missions in China and the United States," in Fairbank, Missionary Enterprise, 3.

³⁶Hsu Pao-Ch'ien, "Christianity, a Religion of Love Spread by Force," in Lutz, Christian Missions, 65.

³⁷Ibid., 66.

longed for was never too clearly defined, and with the mandate of Heaven demolished, and the mandate of Christ all but squandered, the word became flesh for a third time, this time with the mandate of revenge, first against all that was old and decaying, then against all that was foreign.

Already by 1947, when the West China General Conference Mission began operations in Paoki, Shensi, some had estimated that sixty percent of the Chinese peasants were pro-Communist.³⁸

³⁸Lionel Max Chassin, The Communist Conquest of China: A History of the Civil War, 1945-1949, trans. Timothy Osato and Louis Gelas (Cambridge, 1965), 162.

CHAPTER ONE

(May 1947 -- April 1948)

All difficult things have their
origin in that which is easy, and
great things in that which is small.
--Lao-Tsze

If he was anything, P. J. Boehr¹ was an optimist. Searching in 1947 for a site in Shensi on which to start his new mission, Boehr saw a post-war China not of bayonets and Communists, but of blooming potato plants, of cherry and walnut orchards, of reconstructed railroads, and of promise for evangelization. Pioneer missionary H. J. Brown, who traveled with Boehr, noted "valleys and hills and sides of mountains . . . covered by terraces of fields," and both found the climate invigorating. They described China's people as cautiously friendly, and concluded that their mission opportunities were excellent--far greater than those in the east. "My heart is beating with great hope," wrote Boehr, "that we may be able to come here soon."²

¹German pronunciation retained; more like "bear" than "bore."

²P. J. Boehr to Howard Nyce, Tienshui, Kansu, May 28, 1947, General Conference Board of Missions/Commission on Overseas Missions Collection, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kans.; Mrs. Wm. C. Voth, What Happened in China (Newton, Kans., n.d.), 13.

His hope was not unique. Immediately following World War II, missionaries of all denominations returned to China, and in the United States, contributions for these missions poured in as well.³ The Chinese predicament seemed ripe for mission assistance with over ninety percent of the country's railroads demolished, enough food gone to cause famine, and parts of most major cities burned to the ground. Missionaries had been hard to find in the war years, for most that stayed, did so in Japanese concentration camps, and in 1944 only 850 were known to have stayed at all.⁴ But with the war having drawn to a close, they returned en masse to continue their interrupted work.

Yet the same Chinese who were impatient with the missionaries had grown even more impatient with their own Kuomintang. Chinese students, especially, were furious with the Nationalists' broken promises, and even the peasants were piqued, ready for change. The Nationalists had offered a new life but had not delivered, and had now grown conservative, lethargic, and corrupt. Conjoined with China's banking elite, they sacrificed a stable economy for high-level

³Paul A. Varg, Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952 (Princeton, 1958), 274.

⁴Ibid., 275, 291; for Mennonite internment, see H. J. Brown, In Japanese Hands (North Newton, Kans., 1943).

currency exchange payoffs,⁵ and their leader, Chiang Kai-Shek, turned to military solutions for political problems, an ignorance which radicalized his people further and only compounded the military problems which he did have. When an entourage of fifteen Chinese and two foreign Christian (but not Mennonite) leaders met with Madame Chiang in July, 1947, she told them to lay the blame where it belonged--on the Communists, not the government. China's problems, in her logic (and in her husband's) lay not in its need for reform, but in its insurrections. Yet when they asked her what propels the insurrections, she answered, simply: "Satan."⁶

Her answer was out of step with the Chinese people, and (unfortunately for Christian missions) for many of the same reasons that Christianity was out of step. Those Chinese who still tried to believe--many of them intellectuals--often concentrated on the person of Christ rather than the doctrines of Christianity, but they were few in number, and the "old sins" of Christian missionaries had not yet faded. Allegorical of these--although somewhat predating them--was Ch'en Tu-Hsiu, Professor of Literature at National Peking University, editor of New Youth magazine, and a patriarch of Chinese nationalism in the early 1920s. Ch'en saw little value in the dogmas and doctrines of Western Christendom, but he saw a great deal in the life of Christ the man. While

⁵F. Olin Stockwell, With God in Red China: The Story of Two Years in Chinese Communist Prisons (New York, 1953), 29.

⁶Varg, Missionaries, 301.

"the doctrines of Creation, the Holy Trinity, and miracles . . . [have] been nullified by the historical and physical sciences," he wrote, there are "new beliefs" already "embodied in the wonderful personality of Jesus."⁷ Christianity must strike out on its own; it must be practiced in its essence; for "if we continue to think that it can only serve to purify Confucianism, then we shall continue to reap confusion,"⁸ but if "we . . . try to cultivate the lofty and majestic character of Jesus and imbue our very blood with his warm sympathetic spirit," the human race--not to mention the Chinese people--could yet live with themselves in a semblance of decency.⁹

But in the end, even Ch'en became disillusioned--overjoyed perhaps with the model Christian man--but utterly baffled with the model Christian community. Ch'en still looked for utopia; he wanted more than individual salvation; he wanted Christ to offer collective salvation, and he had to believe that Christ would. He saw China's problems as collective problems, and while a nationalized salvation would be nonsensical--for what self-respecting Savior could favor this nation over that?¹⁰--he decided that "Jesus came not to

⁷Ch'en Tu-Hsiu, "Jesus, the Incarnation of Universal Love," in Jessie G. Lutz, Christian Missions: Evangelists of What? (Boston, 1965), 49.

⁸Ibid., 47.

⁹Ibid., 49.

¹⁰"In every country there are many professed Christians," Ch'en continued (in a vein that would make any Mennonite proud), "Why do they not oppose the unchristian acts of the

save a country but to save the entire race." With an almost apologetic vision, then, Ch'en lashed out at those who had betrayed the Christian ideal, yet of his own hope, faith, and love, hope was crumbling, and the orphans love and faith had begun their search for finer quarters. Even in the most virulent of his attacks on Christian corrupters, his future had begun to show itself if read between the lines:

They have forgotten that Jesus teaches us to love our neighbor as ourselves. They have forgotten Jesus' command to love our enemies and to pray for our persecutors. They attack communism as "the greatest evil of the future" and "the doctrine of chaos." They have forgotten that Christianity is the Good News of the poor and Jesus is the friend of the poor.¹¹

If Ch'en could still believe in Jesus, he could not believe in Christianity; much as he longed to keep his faith, it slowly came to resemble Santayana's ("I do believe her though I know she lies"),¹² and shortly after penning his final phillipics, Ch'en Tu-Hsiu became a principle founder of the Chinese Communist Party.

To him, as to many Chinese after World War II (just as before it) China's civil war was no interstellar clash of the titans, but another antiquarian clash of the warlords, and when Chiang Kai-shek implored his people to fight--but refused them reform--he was lucky if they laughed; unlucky if they sewed red stars to their caps. The luscious valleys and

militarists and the moneyed?" See ibid., 50.

¹¹Ibid., 50.

¹²Quoted by Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy (New York, 1929), 540.

hills and mountainsides which Boehr and Brown so happily beheld became luscious outposts, hiding the frustrated men who would ultimately march not only Chiang to Taiwan, but Boehr and Brown, too, right out the open door through which they came. That the Mennonite Church had not worked in China during imperialism's heyday, and that (for obvious reasons) Mennonites had not cooperated with imperialism's violence, was of no matter. Mennonites were Christians and Occidentals, and the Communists were fed up with both.

Yet P. J. Boehr was an optimist. Perhaps especially traveling with H. J. Brown, he could remember with pride the "glory years" of their China field, for Brown had been the first General Conference Mennonite in China, and the field he began, along the Hopei-Honan border, still showed progress, despite having first been occupied by Japanese and then by Communists. Indeed, the Mennonites' story in China often paralleled the Christian missions' larger story, except that the Mennonites, having arrived much later, often faced animosity originally directed at their non-Mennonite predecessors. A few Mennonites entered China in the 1890s unaffiliated with their own churches, but in 1900 some began working directly under Mennonite sending boards, and in 1908, Brown and his wife, Maria, attempted to begin the first General Conference mission. Unfortunately for the Browns, their Mission Board refused them, and for reasons which remain unclear. Some gossipers cited insufficient funding, others noted that a crucial document was lost in the mail,

and still others, more conspiratorially minded, suggested that the Board discriminated against Brown's Baptist seminary experience.¹³

Whatever the case, Brown resolved to begin a mission with or without Board approval, and the following year traveled to China to look for a location. In 1911, Kaifeng, Hopei, was selected, and a mission was begun, although only in 1914 did the Mission Board finally agree to take over. By then a chapel, dispensary, and guest accommodations had been built, but workers were in short supply, and the greatest benefit of Mission Board control was in sending more, beginning in 1915, and totaling fourteen by 1920. Both evangelization and social work were stressed, in tune with the traditional Mennonite conviction that faith and action are intertwined and inseparable, and from 1915 to 1927, twenty-one new missionaries were sent from Kaifeng to canvass the border region between Hopei and Honan. At Kaifeng, a hospital was constructed which was ultimately expanded into an eighty-bed facility, and a boarding school for boys (the Hua Mei School) opened just before a similar girls school did. When war interrupted operations in 1940, the Hopei-Honan field claimed 2,273 communicants in twenty-four churches and forty preaching places. Truly those who went to West China

¹³James C. Juhnke, A People of Mission: A History of General Conference Mennonite Overseas Missions (Newton, 1979), 45-6; The Mennonite Encyclopedia (Hillsboro, Kans., 1955), s.v. "China Missions."

in 1947 could look back with satisfaction upon their record of success.¹⁴

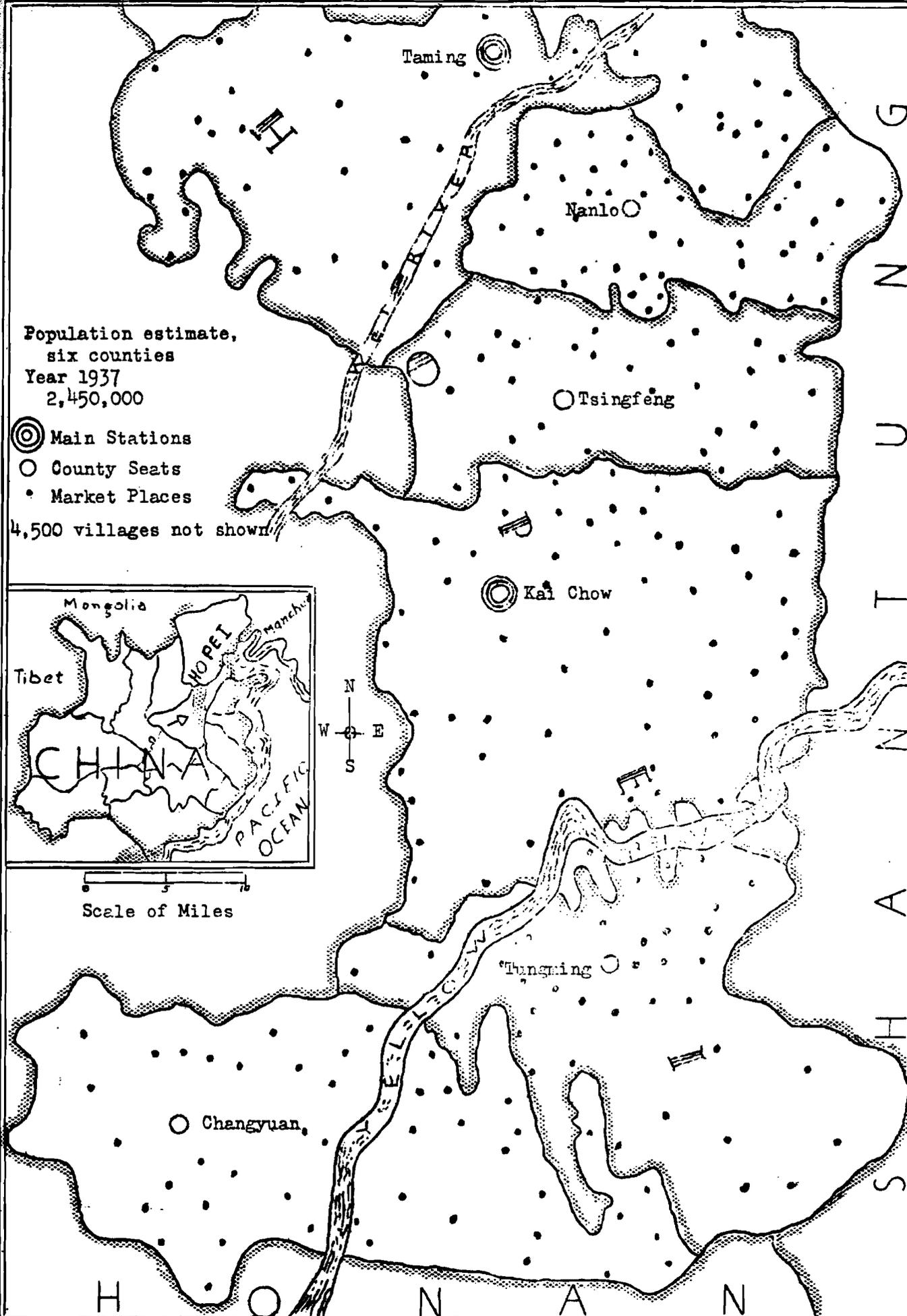
To be sure, these first Mennonites had had their own grief as well (a perennial problem being the degree to which native converts were given control over the mission), and in turbulent 1926--at the height of the anti-Christian reaction--the entire student body of the Hua Mei School went on strike and walked out.¹⁵ But better days returned, and from 1936 to 1940 an especially high number were baptized, raising the Mennonites' church population from 1450 to 2273 in just those four years, and lifting the number of "serious inquirers" from 758 to 1474 in only one year, from 1939 to 1940.¹⁶

The war which had crept into the mission's field first disrupted operations in 1940; Japanese troops occupied a number of nearby cities, and guerrillas roamed the countryside at night with relative impunity. As early as 1937, nearby Taming fell to the Japanese, and the following year in Changyuan, just south of Kaifeng, two thousand people were lined up and machine-gunned. In January, 1941, Kaifeng itself was bombed, and when the city's church was nearly hit, one native Mennonite, Li Hong Liang, was killed. Although the General Conference missionaries held their last official

¹⁴Ibid.; Robert and Alice Pannabecker Ramseyer, Mennonites in China (Winnepeg, 1988), 27-30.

¹⁵Ibid., 33.

¹⁶Ibid., 34.



Population estimate,
 six counties
 Year 1937
 2,450,000

- ◎ Main Stations
- County Seats
- Market Places

4,500 villages not shown



Scale of Miles

meeting in July of that year, the mission's doors remained open, and only when the United States declared war after Pearl Harbor did the Japanese finally shut down the Hua Mei School.¹⁷ Obviously for the Mennonites to have favored one side over another would have been suicidal, but neutrality was no easy course either, particularly with the Japanese demanding that those boys in the school go to work for their guerrillas. By 1942, all missionaries had either left or been thrown in Japanese prisons--a native, James Liu, ran the school again without the missionaries--and a Field Conference of Chinese, created for just that purpose, ran the mission as best they could. To their great credit, at no point were all parts of the mission's work impeded.¹⁸

Perhaps, then, to Boehr, no conceivable evil could befall China which had not befallen it already. In 1947, three months after his trip through Shensi, when the General Conference Mission Board approved Paoki as a mission site, Boehr expressed from Kaifeng a "feeling of relief"--despite the two bridges between him and Paoki blown up the previous day. Boehr had worked the Hopei-Honan field with Brown--he arrived in China in 1915--and he knew well his peril: he simply prioritized his mission far higher than his "communist

¹⁷Ibid., 40-41, 77; The Mennonite Encyclopedia, s.v. "China Missions."

¹⁸Ibid.

troubles."¹⁹ Nonetheless, with railroads "broken, bridges destroyed, and even tunnels blown up," Paoki lay in a region accessible only by air, and when fighting approached its gates, and--as Boehr put it--Paoki "had a 'scare'," even he admitted that "the communist scourge has been spreading."²⁰

Aircraft were scarce, of course, but a Chennault flight from Kaifeng to Chengchow had been promised for October 4, and Boehr and his company loaded their trucks to meet the plane. Yet just minutes after loading, they learned that the flight was cancelled, so rather than unpack, they resolved to drive the trucks to Chengchow, hoping then to find a flight to Sian. Rain drenched the road most of the way, and for a long stretch, they travelled along the Yellow River, at one point passing a dike repair project which Boehr recognized as the spot broken by Chinese troops during the war. Typical of wartime monstrocities, the Chinese plan had gone somewhat awry, when in addition to drowning thousands of advancing Japanese troops, they also drowned thousands of Chinese peasants, not to mention flooding thousands of acres of Chinese farmland. The Mennonites probably passed this sight reaffirming their pacifism (such events should at least be sobering to anyone), yet shortly after their trucks slogged

¹⁹Boehr to Mission Board, Kaifeng, Sept. 3, 1947, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

²⁰Boehr to Mission Board, Kaifeng, Sept. 30, 1947, ibid.

past the project, they finally got stuck, and several of the men had to walk back to it for a caterpillar.²¹

Once in Chengchow, another Chennault plane was hired for the last fifty miles to Sian, but the missionaries waited most of that month to be picked up. Boehr used the time to plan his new mission, complain to the Mission Board about his lack of funds, and enquire about a new Dodge truck which had been purchased in Shanghai for use in West China, and which they would be needing directly.²² On November 20, the first of three planes finally arrived, and took Boehr's wife Frieda and daughter Mary Ellen, along with the two Chinese ladies and several children which traveled with them, to Sian. The next day, a second plane picked up their cargo, and four days after that Boehr himself flew to Sian, traveled by rail to Paoki, and there rejoined his family just before midnight Thanksgiving.²³

Paoki's population was estimated at the time to be around 300,000, but so many were refugees from Honan or soldiers from the Nationalist army that a local woman was heard to predict "if all the Honan people would leave, there would be no Paoki."²⁴ Often living in makeshift straw

²¹Boehr to Nyce, Chengchow, Oct. 8, 1947, ibid.

²²Boehr to Mission Board, Chengchow, Nov. 1, 1947, ibid.

²³Boehr to Mission Board, Paoki, Nov. 28, 1947, ibid.

²⁴"Miss Wang," quoted by Aganetha Fast, unaddressed letter (probably to the American churches), Paoki, Mar. 5, 1948, ibid., Folder 38.

shacks with few alleys and no yards, the refugees huddled together in camps of thousands each, and with the city's streets filled with donkeys and trucks and scores of pedestrians, long caravans of wandering or war-weary peasants could frequently be watched passing by; at one point, seventy-six camels were counted in a ten-minute stretch.²⁵ Most of the residents were "hardworking folks . . . seemingly find[ing] work everywhere as carpenters, truckers, brick and dirt workers," and often the women could be seen spinning goats hair or camel wool into threads. Behind everyone stood the Tsin Ling Mountains, Paoki lying within a ring of their peaks, which often stretched beyond the clouds, the mountains' broad shoulders often hiding in the mist, and their sides usually riddled with patches of snow.²⁶

For a man of Boehr's temperament, such scenery--and such opportunities for Gospelization--could not help but create a renaissance of optimism. Despite the war, "we must 'keep on keeping on'" he wrote, "sending forth the Gospel, and 'sowing in all weather.'" Paoki's "scare," which he had described in Kaifeng, he now scoffed away as a "practice battle," and even hypothesizing "more normal" times in the East,²⁷ concentrated on housing for his workers in Paoki; not only did they

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Boehr to Mission Board, Paoki, Jan. 13, 1948, ibid., Folder 11.

need an ultimate site for the mission, but immediate arrangements before the mission was built. At first they stayed in a hospital--in a poorly heated room with a brick floor and adobe walls--but after Christmas, when the winter grew milder, on some days they barely needed heat, and their rooms seemed much improved. "How we praise the Lord also for good reception on our short-wave G-E wet-battery Radio," Boehr declared; they could pick up stations in Honolulu, Manila, San Fransisco, and occasionally New York. Indeed, they learned of New York's "record-breaking" snowstorm, and the Henry Wallace and Douglas McArthur presidential campaigns long before usual correspondence arrived; and on Sunday afternoons, they often enjoyed the Baltimore Tabernacle before listening to Dr. Walter Maier's "Lutheran Hour" on Sunday evenings.²⁸

Preaching, meanwhile, was difficult in the west; the people of Shensi had had less exposure to Westerners than those of the old Hopei-Honan field and were more apt to stereotype those Westerners they saw; at first, Boehr hyperbolically suspected he might have to stake a tent and preach "in the 'open'" before anyone would take him seriously. Yet in early February, when he picked up, in Sian, the veteran missionaries Lester and Agnes Wuthrich and Aganetha Fast, all of whom had been now transferred to West China, welcome assistance had arrived; the Wuthrichs had been

²⁸Ibid.

in China since December 31, and had been studying Chinese in Shanghai, at least, that is, until Brown--who was now stationed in Shanghai--told them to learn it in the field and suggested they travel directly to Paoki. When they did, with Fast riding along, Lester Wuthrich drove the Dodge truck, and they all crossed in a convoy.²⁹

About two weeks before, in mid-January, an acre-and-a-half lot had been purchased, which was bordered on three sides by mud walls, and on the west by a bluff with three caves.³⁰ Although the caves were convenient for storage, they were soon deemed "rather damp for residence,"³¹ and with the adjoining shacks and building in serious need of repair, the Mennonites saw they had no time to lose. In fact, their welcome at the hospital was beginning to thin, so with these new reinforcements now in Paoki, they finally moved from the hospital to the Pentecostal Bible School, where they planned to stay through February and March while the mission was being constructed. Accomodations were none too lavish, but no one seemed to mind; Aganetha Fast, for example, described her walls as mud, her floors as "ashes and

²⁹Wuthrich to Nyce, Shanghai, Jan. 17, 1948, ibid., Folder 149.

³⁰Boehr to Mission Board, Paoki, Jan. 23, 1948, ibid., Folder 11.

³¹Boehr to Mission Board, Paoki, Apr. 6, 1948, ibid., Series 1b-1, Circular Letters, Folder 9.

dirt pounded hard," and her windows as paper with which "the outlook as well as the inlook was prevented."³²

Nationalist losses were reported periodically, but Boehr's enthusiasm hardly waned. "We still cannot say anything 'exciting' about the China situation," he wrote the Board, "but feel that we need to 'work while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work.'" Even with a cloud of uncertainty beginning to descend over Paoki, Boehr spoke of starting a second mission in Tianshui,³³ and by March, the war had moved nearer, the nearby death by hand grenade of missionary Mary De Garmo (at Henry Bartel's (Old) Mennonite Mission) bringing it an immediacy hitherto unexpected.³⁴

Also in March, a major Communist victory just west of Ichuan compounded their fears. Having concentrated Communist forces from southern Shansi and northern Shensi, the Red Army had moved on Ichuan, Shensi, back in February; they outnumbered the Nationalists there 80,000 to 30,000 and when the city fell on March 3, fewer than one in ten of the Nationalists escaped with their lives. The loss of Ichuan opened the way to Yen-an, and while a similar Nationalist loss of Yen-an would be militarily unimportant, it could open a Communist

³²Aganetha Fast, "To My Friends," mass-produced letter, n.d., 6.

³³Boehr to Mission Board, Sian, Feb. 6, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

³⁴Boehr to Mission Board, Paoki, Jan. 23, 1948, ibid.

path first to Sian and then to Paoki.³⁵ Alarmed, Paoki's bankers prepared to leave, as did a local munitions plant, and when rumors spread that the city was in danger of being cut off, it was also learned that the Nationalists had no intention of defending it.³⁶ Writing the Board, Boehr was apprehensive, but not ready to admit defeat: "we've had a conference among foreigners here," he reported, "to consider our plan of action should there be need of leaving here because of possible communist troubles." Hoping not to worry Mennonite congregations at home, he denoted his letter "not for publication," and if worst came to worst, planned to flee to Tianshui and begin a new mission there.³⁷

On the morning of March 15, it snowed. Heavy rains had fallen for several days, and two new concerns arose--for thousands of drying mudbricks to be used on the mission, and for the well which was down to eighty feet but still dry. News came over the short-wave of Nationalist reverses in Manchuria, northern Shensi, and western Honan,³⁸ and despite

³⁵Lionel Max Chassin, The Communist Conquest of China: A History of the Civil War, 1945-1949, trans. Timothy Osato and Louis Gelas (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 168-169; "China Communists Claim Major Gain," New York Times, Mar. 8, 1948; "China Reports Big Loss in Shensi Defeat; Casualties in Red Ambush Given at 20,000," ibid., Mar. 11, 1948. The Communists claimed they killed 30,000.

³⁶Boehr to Nyce, Paoki, Mar. 10, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11; Boehr to Mission Board, Paoki, Mar. 15, 1948, ibid.

³⁷Boehr to Nyce, Paoki, Mar. 10, 1948, ibid. Emphasis Boehr's.

³⁸Boehr to Mission Board, Paoki, Mar. 15, 1948, ibid.

a Nationalist victory at Loyang, Hunan on March 17,³⁹ Aganetha Fast received a letter from the American Consulate advising her and her coworkers to evacuate.⁴⁰ Stubbornly, Boehr insisted that "the situation here for the present is good"--even though the Scandanavian Alliance Mission (in Sian) had decided to move their vehicles out. To be sure, ambiguity ruled over terror; the missionary F. Olin Stockwell later recalled from his Communist prison cell that shortly after he had received a similar letter, he met a U.S. embassy official planning to rent himself a house--hardly the arrangements of a man in flight.⁴¹ So Boehr concentrated on construction (they were about to complete two four-room houses), and on his anticipation for Easter.⁴² Indeed, his Easter letter to the home churches was an epistle of optimism at best, a masterwork of obfuscation at worst: "We eat, sleep, cook, study, and receive guests," he blandly reported--denoting their former status in the hospital as "guests"--and with absolutely no elaboration, explained their decision "to erect only one [building] for the present." As for the war, he wrote honestly, but in velvet terms: "We

³⁹"Loyang is Retaken by Nanking Forces," New York Times, Mar. 19, 1948.

⁴⁰American Consulate to Fast, Mar. 26, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject File, Folder 11.

⁴¹Stockwell, With God, 47-48. Stockwell was a Methodist, but he lived in Chengtu when the Mennonites did.

⁴²Boehr to Mission Board, Paoki, Mar. 27, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject File, Folder 11.

are a considerable distance removed from the troubles for the present, but the overall picture is not encouraging."⁴³

Easter service that year was held at sunrise, as the missionaries watched the sun lift itself over the bluffs on a spot in the hills "from which we can see far out toward the east and southeast, with the terraced wheat-patches in their green spring-dress from the foot to the top of the hills toward the east of this city." With hardly containable enthusiasm, Boehr beheld "about 50 in attendance" and "five decisions for Christ . . . thank God!" So enthusiastic was he that he professed "China's only hope . . . in the revival of the church in this land."⁴⁴ And as if responding to his faith, the rains stopped short of destroying their mudbricks, boosted the peasants' winter wheat, and brightened the Easter landscape, even in defiance of war clouds quickly gathering around.

For the next three weeks the missionaries lived amid persistent rumors, and almost daily would hear of other missionaries packing up and leaving. They often met terrified refugees, and listened intently for any news from the front. Disappointing as it was, they halted construction of their receiving house at its foundation, began instead on

⁴³Boehr to Home Churches, Paoki, Mar. 17, 1948, ibid.

⁴⁴Boehr to Mennonite Weekly Review, Paoki, Mar. 31, 1948, ibid.

a second chapel,⁴⁵ and when their welcome at the Bible School ran out as well, the Wuthriches moved to another home's basement, Aganetha Fast moved back to the hospital, and the Boehrs found yet a third house to live in. Even these were no permanent arrangements, and quickly changed again.

By mid-April, China's Red Army attempted to cut the Paoki-Sian railroad, and as Boehr put it, "this time there seems to be quite a battle."⁴⁶ On April 19, a military officer approached the Mennonites to warn them of the Communists' advance, and by that time streams of loaded trucks and infantry troops were leaving the city in preparation of war.⁴⁷ A meeting was held on April 20, and "due to the disturbed and restless conditions," all agreed to "give liberty for each . . . to follow the leading of the Lord whether to stay or go."⁴⁸ Boehr had alluded to their moving to Szechuan earlier in March,⁴⁹ but now felt determined to stay (with, of course, his wife and daughter), while Fast and the Wuthrichs felt "led" to move to Chengtu. Three

⁴⁵Minutes of Missionary Meetings, Paoki, Mar. 22, Apr. 13, Apr. 19, 1948, ibid.

⁴⁶Boehr to Mission Board, Paoki, Apr. 21, 1948, ibid.

⁴⁷Aganetha Fast to Mission Board, Nungkinug, Shensi, Apr. 26, 1948, ibid., Series 1b-1, Circular Letters, Folder 9.

⁴⁸Minutes of Missionary Meeting, Paoki, Apr. 20, 1948, ibid., Series 1-4, Subject File, Folder 11.

⁴⁹Boehr to Mission Board, Paoki, Mar. 27, 1948, ibid.

days later, the railroad was cut, and fighting came within twenty-five miles of the city. Fast and the Wuthriches left the twenty-second; Yen-an finally fell the same day.⁵⁰ The Boehrs--now with little choice--left the day after that. "We were of the last to leave," Boehr remarked, and on the way out, he watched panic overtake the city.⁵¹

Even as he left, Boehr planned to return; in part he felt responsible for the mission property left behind--the unfinished receiving house, the newly finished chapels; yet his chief concern was not the loss of Conference investment (although money was becoming a bone of contention between him and the board), but rather his nagging sense of unfinished business: he had left the mission with its short run secure, but without the leadership he felt it needed to operate as a going concern. Rather shamelessly, he asked the Board for another \$2000, one thousand to send Mary Ellen back to the States and another thousand to cover wartime "living expenses."⁵² Cryptically asserting that "in the rush of evacuating, we got out of money," he informed Mission Board Treasurer Walter Dyck that at one point, his people had to borrow from the C.I.M. just to finish their trip to Chengtu. The next day, another letter to Dyck, this one either

⁵⁰"Reds Imperil Sian After Yen-an Fall," New York Times, Apr. 23, 1948.

⁵¹Boehr to Nyce, Paoch'eng, Apr. 26, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

⁵²Boehr to Nyce, Paoch'eng, Apr. 26, 1948, ibid.

clarifying the first or salving a guilty conscience, defined the "got out of money" as losing his checkbook, but considering his situation, that was hardly inexplicable.⁵³

On reaching the wayside town of Paoch'eng, Frieda and Mary Ellen hitched a ride in a Chinese Army Jeep, finishing their trip at what Boehr called "Jeep-speed" to Chengtu. The trucks were loaded beyond any reasonable capacity--at times as many as fifty-five people would ride a single truck--and periodically, they would encounter bands of soldiers stretched across the road, themselves demanding to be taxied one place or another.⁵⁴ The trip came with "considerable nerve-shocking experiences up and down steep grades and around sharp hairpin curves,"⁵⁵ and Aganetha Fast's account particularly explicated the curves, the "gapping gorges," and the "treacherous swirling mountain streams." Her ambitious descriptions not only revealed what was seen, but the philisophical context in which it was seen:

The most gorgeous, majestic sights. but O the danger!! The danger of the brake, the steering wheel going wrong, as it happened with one of the trucks. Then the hairpin curves and I repeat hairpin turns. . . . O how we pray forgrace to be un-afraid and O how we surround the driver, the steering wheel, the brakes, yes the entire truck with our prayers. How we pray that none of the

⁵³Boehr to Dyck, Paoch'eng, Apr. 27, 1948, ibid., Series 1c-4, Missionary Correspondence, Folder 15; Boehr to Dyck, Paoch'eng, Apr. 28, 1948, ibid.

⁵⁴Voth, What Happened, 18.

⁵⁵Boehr to Mission Board, Kwangyuan, May 7, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

people would fall off. O so marvelously we had been protected.⁵⁶

Boehr himself stayed at Paoch'eng until their luggage arrived, then rendezvoused with his family at Kwangyuan. The only immediate problem was money--a continual problem for these missionaries--and they were delayed in Kwangyuan because of it. The local bank had not received confirmation of their mission account in Shanghai, and the drafts Dyck sent had been delayed. Without money, they could not have continued, for the "Catholic trucks" they rode in were rented only so far as Kwangyuan, and even the mule cart they brought was not paid for.⁵⁷

Within days of their departure from Paoki, the city was sacked by Communists. After the fall of Yen-an, Communists had swept southward, west of Sian, through the villages of the upper Chin and Wei river valleys. They did not cross the Wei river, but destroyed bridges, burned factories, tore up railroads, looted grain stocks, and kidnapped local officials along the way. A particularly large bridge was destroyed near Paoki, and once Communists were in the city, public offices were looted, and a textile mill was destroyed. Nationalist forces west and south of Paoki combined, and with the help of their air force, pinched 50,000 Communists within

⁵⁶Fast to Mission Board, Nungkinug, Apr. 26, 1948, ibid., Series 1b-1, Circular Letters, Folder 9. Emphasis Fast's.

⁵⁷Boehr to Mission Board, Kwangyuan, May 7, 1948, ibid., Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11. The "Catholic trucks" were simply those owned by Catholics.

Paoki's gates and inflicted heavy casualties. Communists outside the city retreated to the Kansu-Shensi border, and those within the city escaped later on. But their guerilla operations were maintained within one hundred miles of Sian, and in Sian--as in Paoki--terror ruled; bales of cotton--Shensi's cash crop--were rushed out by air, the city's wealthy fled to Shanghai, and refugees by the thousands entered the city walls. Even Sian's ancient moat was cleaned out and filled with water! Yet with Sian cut off from Paoki, and Paoki cut off from Szechuan, the missionaries heard no word about their mission.⁵⁸

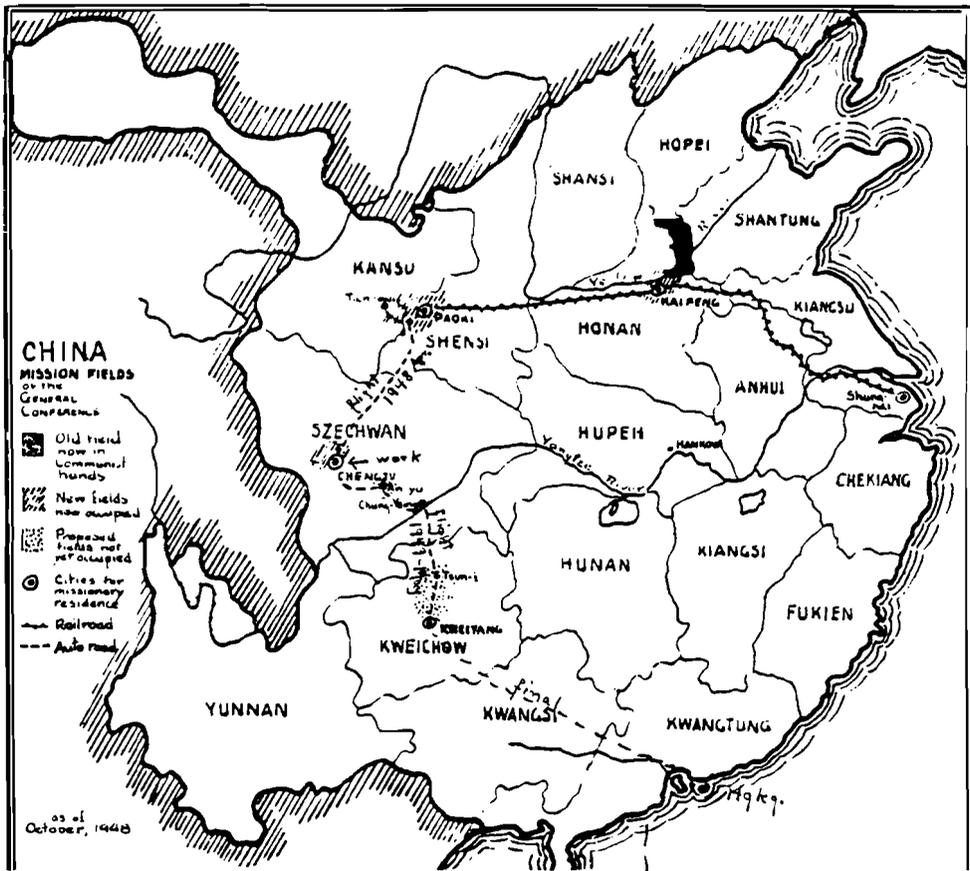
Likewise, H. J. Brown in Shanghai heard no word about the missionaries. On April 28--five days after Boehr left Paoki, and while he was still en route to Chengtu--Brown had heard from other missionaries that all foreigners in Paoki had moved out. He had no idea where had gone. Boehr talked about Tienshui, and that seemed to Brown most probable, especially considering that in the other choice--Szechuan--"the Old Mennonites who had planned a field . . . now think that doubtful."⁵⁹ "The different missions are constantly moving West and South," he wrote Mission Board Secretary Howard G. Nyce, "but . . . are confronted with difficulties everywhere." Brown spoke to dozens of missionaries from all

⁵⁸Ibid.; "Nationalists Squeeze Red Forces in Shensi," New York Times, May 1, 1948; "Southern Shensi Still Fears Reds," ibid., May 9, 1948.

⁵⁹Brown to Nyce, Shanghai, Apr. 29, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1b-1, Circular Letters, Folder 9.

**OUR MOVE OF WORK FROM EAST CHINA TO THE WEST IN 1949,
AND FLIGHT IN 1948 FROM POAKI, SHENSI to CHENGTU,
SZECHWAN**

FLIGHT IN 1949-1952 DOWN SOUTH



provinces, but none had reported "really peaceful regions."⁶⁰

Still, Boehr took his optimism along to Chengtu, and the optimism of his compatriots traveled with him. While the failure of Paoki's mission might have discouraged even the most courageous of men, it did not discourage P. J. Boehr. In fact, Boehr planned to return there at the earliest possible moment, and even if he could not, he did not consider leaving China--his mission was bound to no city or province, but to the Chinese people, and he would not leave them until they heard his message as clearly (and as loudly) as he could let them. When Boehr did revisit Paoki briefly in June, he was surprised and ecstatic to see Hopei-Honan veteran Li Kuang Ming at work at the mission which had now survived a Communist assault. Thoughtful, kindly, and unafraid to assert discipline when necessary, Li had filled in for his foreign mentors in the east during World War II, and was unquestionably capable of running the Paoki mission now.⁶¹

Continuing under Chinese control, then--which had been its ultimate objective--the Paoki mission did not perish, but only lost its American leadership. While it served as something of a preamble to the Mennonites' greater work in Chengtu, Paoki rather forebodingly gave the Mennonites their first inkling of West China's future; to them, a future not

⁶⁰H. J. Brown to Nyce, Shanghai, Apr. 28, 1948, ibid.

⁶¹Ramseyer, Mennonites in China, 42; Voth, What Happened in China, 17.

of doom, but of possibility: "The time is too short to bother with baggage," concluded Aganetha Fast, "We are here to bring Christ to the people and unless we go as missionaries are willing and to come without a suitcase--each hand and a sleeping bag we have no business here in China."⁶²

Thus, in the late spring of 1948, the West China Mennonites took their sleeping bags to Chengtu.

⁶²Fast to Mission Board, Nungkinug, Apr. 26, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1b-1, Circular Letters, Folder 9.

CHAPTER TWO

(May -- September 1948)

Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming that I am a man.

--Chuang-tzu

Undaunted as these mission workers journeyed forth, their Mission Board at home was not so fervent, and by the time the mission's Dodge truck rolled through the gates of Chengtu, the Board had wondered why it rolled at all. Even when Boehr was working in Paoki, that enthusiasm felt for post-war China and the anticipation felt by Board President A. E. Kreider and Board Member S. F. Pannabecker when they visited Shensi in the summer of 1947 had begun to dissipate, to dwindle even as Chiang Kai-Shek's armies dwindled in their own, more corporeal struggle.

To be sure, Kreider and Pannabecker remained loyal supporters of the China mission, but their support was increasingly challenged. Pannabecker himself had served in China from 1923 to 1941, and he would have liked to return had he not bound himself instead to the Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Chicago. As Kreider did to a lesser extent, Pannabecker brought to the Board a voice of support for the West China mission; he became its patron saint, so to speak, and with

much the same fire as Boehr's. Two other board members, Sam J. Goering (another China veteran), and the Board's Vice-President, Daniel Unruh, were more moderate in approach, while the last two, Phillip A. Wedel and J. J. Thiessen, usually drew conservative limits around their support. As Executive Secretary and Treasurer, respectively, Howard Nyce and Walter H. Dyck could not vote, but they also sat on the Board and they did advise the voting members when asked to, or when they deemed that their advise should be known.

China, of course, was hardly the Board's only concern; missions also operated in India, Zaire, Columbia, Mexico, and among the American Indians in Arizona, Colorado, Oklahoma, and Montana. Communists did not threaten all those places, and the frustration Communism caused finally took its toll. Once in a personal note to the President, Howard Nyce gave his own assessment: Kreider, Pannabecker, and "perhaps" Goering were interested in China, "but the other men of the Board don't care much."¹

Thus pro and con sentiments were fairly evenly divided, not on the importance of the China mission--no one questioned its importance--but on the practical wisdom of it. No voting member suggested pulling out, but when new workers were called for, or when the costs of wartime missionwork rose to

¹Howard G. Nyce to A. E. Kreider, Allentown, Penn., Sept. 16, 1947, General Conference Board of Missions/Commission on Overseas Missions Collection, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 75, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kans.

exorbitant heights, the optimism of P. J. Boehr was not often felt in the states. As early as September, 1947, Kreider suggested reimbursing the missionaries on a pay-as-you-go basis "in view of . . . uncertainties regarding exchange,"² and when attempting to secure passports for Aganetha Fast and mission architect William C. Voth, their requests were rejected due to "disturbed conditions"--a premonitory image, and a disappointing revelation which could not have helped but cast doubts on the utility of forging ahead.³

Nonetheless, to stop would have required justification (and they had no justification--that was precisely their problem; they did not know what to do), so they forged ahead. In October--just as the Boehrs headed west--Kreider still believed that because the Board replenished its workforce in India, "we should aim to do the same for the China field,"⁴ and he suggested that Fast and Voth go to Chungking (Panna-becker suggested Kaifeng) with the hope that passports would be obtainable there, even if they were not available to Shensi. He admitted that China's future was "uncertain," but reminded all that "the urgency of evangelistic work is unchanged."⁵

²Kreider to Nyce, Goshen, Ind., Sept. 9, 1947, ibid.

³Nyce to Kreider, Allentown, Sept. 19, 1947, ibid.

⁴Kreider to Nyce, Goshen, Oct. 1, 1947, ibid.

⁵Ibid.

Happily, the same day Krieder wrote Nyce of this urgency, Nyce wrote Krieder of the passports' approval, not so much from Uncle Sam's magnanimity as from Nyce's bureaucratic ruse. When he had called the passport office, he first suggested that Fast go to Tienshui, but was basically told to forget it. So after changing his suggestion to Chungking, he learned from the secretary on the line that "only nurses can enter at present," and as Nyce reported it: "I told her that [Fast] had taken a special course in a hospital recently." Amazingly, the secretary thought it might work. How the hospital course turned Fast into a nurse was not revealed, but when reflecting on his success Nyce added, "It seems strange, but at no time did they refer to the Wuthriches' passport. Naturally, I didn't say anything."⁶ Neither did he say anything about Voth's passport, and it, too, was received later in October.⁷

When Kreider heard of Nyce's success, he thanked God, then added: "I fear our missionaries in China have become a little impatient with us, feeling that we have not done our utmost in getting helpers onto the field,"⁸ but while the mission's staunchest defender, Pannabecker, concurred, he wanted to send even more than Fast and Voth--not just because the Lord needed them, but because the Mennonites did, too.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Nyce to Kreider, Allentown, Sept. 23, 1947, ibid.

⁸Kreider to "Brethren," Goshen, Sept. 28, 1947, ibid.

If Communists took Kaifeng, Pannabecker reasoned, passports might become tighter still, and with so many other missionaries trekking to the West, "we may not be able to hold our 'option' too long unless we get workers on the field."⁹ His pleading must have worked; that December, Kreider, Goering, and Unruh agreed that Elizabeth Goertz, R.N., should accompany Voth to West China.¹⁰ They quickly informed the other members, and naturally, Pannabecker was delighted--he believed should they move at once--(which they did) and within the year, the Board approved both Goertz's and Voth's departure.¹¹

More troubling were the mounting bills and incessant cash requests sent in by those on the field. With the future of China and the future of the West China Mission so unforetold, each bill asked for new commitment, and each commitment came harder than the last. Equally exasperating was the Board's lack of fiscal policy; indeed little had been decided since Unruh's cry of concern back in September, when he declared to Nyce that "we should ease [the missionaries] mind" about cash, and "they should not assume any financial

⁹S. F. Pannabecker to Nyce, Chicago, Jan. 26, 1948, ibid., Folder 98.

¹⁰Nyce to Kreider, Allentown, Dec. 18, 1947, ibid., Folder 75; Sam Goering to Nyce, North Newton, Kans., Jan. 1, 1948, ibid., Folder 48; Pannabecker to Nyce, Chicago, Jan. 26, 1948, ibid., Folder 98.

¹¹ibid.; Oddly, concern was raised by Kreider, who remembered that Voth was recuperating from two operations and questioned if he should go. See Nyce to J. J. Thiessen, Allentown, Dec. 18, 1947, ibid., Folder 129.

obligations other than those which rightly belong to them."¹²

By March of 1948, Kreider was agitated over the China field's \$45,000 budget for that year; he found it "high" and declared he "would like" to see it reduced.¹³ The Hopei-Honan field had been downscaled, and the West China project was only beginning; such numbers did not bode well. More critical, the Board's Treasurer, Dyck, went so far as to question the whole mission's propriety:

I realize that each of the missionaries have the Chinese people at their heart, and [I] wish that this work continue. But, at what odds should it be undertaken? Does the Lord possibly wish for us to concentrate our efforts on other areas?¹⁴

And when Dyck sent the second \$1000 to Boehr (for Boehr's hurried rush to Chengtu), the jubilant mission chief received his own cheerfully stern lecture:

It would be well for you to know that we have been receiving some criticism from our constituency, which we feel, however, has been beyond our control, concerning the large amount of travel which has been necessary in China. . . . Please do not understand this to be a criticism that comes from us personally. . . . But since it has been necessary to move back and forth a lot some will gather that our planning has not been carefully done.¹⁵

¹²Daniel J. Unruh to Nyce, Newton, Kans., Sept. 23, 1947, ibid., Folder 133.

¹³Kreider to Nyce, Goshen, Mar. 15, 1948, ibid., Folder 76.

¹⁴Walter H. Dyck to H. J. Brown, Newton, May 11, 1948, ibid., Folder 160.

¹⁵Dyck to P. J. Boehr, Newton, May 20, 1948, ibid., Folder 11. Actually, Dyck sent nearly \$5000; \$1518.¹⁶ had been requested for Lester Wuthrich's travel, and nearly \$2500 had accumulated in other previous requests.

Dyck further protested how the Board had already spent \$52,873.75 on China since the first of 1947;¹⁶ and because the \$1000 he sent had been ushered en route through Brown, the old pioneer in Shanghai also felt some heat; in fact, Dyck wrote him with even less reserve: "This constant moving about is becoming tremendously expensive," the Treasurer charged, ". . . we are facing critical days."¹⁷

Had that fiscal medicine cured with only a spoonful, financing might have faded on the agenda, but much to the Board's chagrin, the missionaries did not accept their discipline so passively, and they did take it as personally as the Board hoped they would not. Within days of receiving Dyck's letter, the mission's own designated treasurer, Lester Wuthrich, pronounced it "strange" that "after waiting for a full five months of this year before we get any money at all that along with the cheque we also get the warning that we are spending too much."¹⁸ A first shot had been fired between the mission and the Board.

About this time another issue surfaced--one which eventually created greater schism than the budget. Two more missionaries, Albert Jantzen and Wilhelmina Kuyf, were being considered for assignment in West China. Unlike Kuyf,

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Dyck to Brown, Newton, May 17, 1948, ibid., Series 1c-4, Folder 15.

¹⁸Lester Wuthrich to Nyce, Chengtu, May 31, 1948, ibid., Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 149.

Jantzen was married and had a family which he originally wanted to accompany him, but which, given the war, he decided perhaps should not. From the outset, the Board was in flux; each member had his own opinion, and each looked at the problem with a different light. When Kreider, Pannabecker, and Nyce met in April, they decided they should send Jantzen with Kuyf--even if his family did not go¹⁹--but while Unruh agreed to send the two missionaries, he felt Jantzen alone should judge the location of his own family's future home.²⁰

Predictably, Phillip Wedel opposed everything, complaining that "our funds are so low, and [the] dangers of Communism so great."²¹ He saw no wisdom in sending a whole family "when our missionary work in China is only peacemeal [sic], or perhaps better stated a hit-and-miss type of work,"²² and in mid-May, Sam Goering voiced his own opposition, pointedly asserting that "before we send more missionaries to China we want to make sure just what we will do with those we already have there."²³ Although the issue was hardly settled, Nyce then changed positions, and now claimed that Jantzen's departure made no sense at all with a war so threatening to

¹⁹Nyce to Unruh, Phillip Wedel, Sam J. Goering, and Thiessen, Allentown, Apr. 22, 1948, ibid., Folder 93.

²⁰Unruh to Nyce, Newton, Apr. 29, 1948, ibid., Folder 133.

²¹Wedel to Nyce, May 20, 1948, Goessel, Kans., ibid., Folder 142.

²²Wedel to Nyce, Goessel, July 3, 1948, ibid.

²³Goering to Nyce, North Newton, May 14, 1948, ibid., Folder 48.

Boehr that he asked to send Mary Ellen back. Nyce could not vote, of course, but he advised Kreider of these new sentiments,²⁴ and by the end of May, even Wilhelmina Kuyf urged them not to send "the mother and children . . . at this time."²⁵

Meanwhile in Chengtu the missionaries settled into their new field, and layed the groundwork for a new mission. At first, they lived with the United Church of Canada, teaching English and Gospel classes for their Canadian hosts in exchange for hospitality.²⁶ Other groups, including Baptists and Methodists also solicited the Mennonites' talents, and both Boehr and Fast soon held a number of classes while Frieda Boehr tutored a Chinese youth in English (for which he tutored her in Chinese), and the Wuthriches continued their own language study. Boehr still hoped to return permanently to Paoki, and when he temporarily revisited the city in June (the time he learned of Li Kuang Ming's arrival there), he took with him a number of Bibles, referring to them (somewhat oddly for a Mennonite) as "gospel bombs."²⁷ Perhaps he felt they offered the secret weapon which Chiang so desperately needed, but whether he did or not, he found that Shensi's

²⁴Nyce to Kreider, Allentown, May 27, 1948, ibid., Folder 76.

²⁵Nyce to Brown, Allentown, May 4, 1948, ibid., Series 1b-1, Folder 9.

²⁶Aganetha Fast to Mission Board, Chengtu, Feb. 2, 1949, ibid., Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 38.

²⁷Boehr to Nyce, Sian, June 10, 1948, ibid., Folder 11.

situation had not improved, and with the war tightening around Sian--and especially with the capable Li in Paoki--Boehr eventually realized his move to Chengtu would be permanent.²⁸

Certainly he found no shortage of opportunities in Chengtu, an urban center of normally 600,000, but with evacuations in the East (and now the North), a wartime city of many more. Even without its beleaguered surplus, Chengtu lay in the most populated region of the most populated province of the most populated country in the world, and unlike Paoki, Chengtu had no railroad; nearly everyone arrived by foot, by truck, or by mule cart. Also unlike Paoki, Chengtu lay on the plains, which were diced into thousands of individual rice paddies, and while the weather was usually cloudy and damp, the region's semi-tropical climate produced an abundance of grass, flowers, trees, and shrubs. The surrounding countryside was by no means drab, and Mennonites preaching in the streets found themselves surrounded not only by teeming pedestrians, but also by colorful streetside booths of pummelos, oranges, and tangerines, and of merchants chanting the attributes of their produce as if such quality had never been seen.

Even palm trees and bamboo stalks were scattered around the city (which Boehr dubbed the "California of China"),²⁹

²⁸Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, June 4, 1948, ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

and though bamboo was not indigenous to the Hopei-Honan field, it had thousands of uses in Chengtu. The city was a long-time favorite of foreigners, especially missionaries, and one of the (Old) Mennonites decided that foreigners could live there quite well without even learning Chinese.³⁰

Chengtu also numbered the West China Union University, or Hwa Shi Ba Campus, among its educational sites, and the university served as a major facility for foreign missionaries of all denominations. Although it was run jointly by American Methodists, American Baptists, the United Church of Canada, the English Society of Friends, and the Church Missionary Society of England, Mennonites were periodically offered a chance to teach there.

In fact, the variegation of missions and denominations in Chengtu threatened as much as consoled, for if working near other Westerners provided a sense of community, especially in wartime, it also sharpened the pangs of competition. "It should . . . be understood," warned Boehr, "that as yet most sections of Szechwan Province . . . appears to us as a vast unoccupied area" and with "the necessary shifting of missionary personnel because of adverse political conditions" there is "considerable change going on as regards the former 'mission comity', or distribution of missionary areas among the various different mission agencies." A pressure of

³⁰Dorothy S. McCammon, We Tried To Stay (Scottsdale, Penn., 1953), 10-11.

competition was apparent by June, when the missionaries planned to supplement their two-story house by renting another street chapel, and Boehr lamented his lack of electric amplification.³¹ Not that he or his missionaries had enjoyed such amenities in Paoki--they had not--but when he saw Paoki that month, his trip followed on the heels of a Sian revival and he heard all about the new technology. So fascinated was Boehr with its possibilities, and perhaps so ingrained was he with the General Conference tradition of a traveling Reise-prädiger, that he imagined microphones and trucks (or what he called "motorized evangelism") in Chengtu, primarily to carry the Word, but possibly also to overshadow the Word's other carriers.³²

Still this great abundance of mission opportunities hinged on political developments, and while Szechwan seemed safer than Shensi, it was by no means completely safe; a feeling of borrowed time was inescapable. Earlier, on May 9, Government sources had acknowledged that Communists took Sichwan, Hunan--a city eighty miles east of Szechwan--and also that Communists attempted to ford the Han River, forty miles southwest. While a Nationalist victory at Laohokow frustrated similar Red machinations on the Yangtze at Shashih, no one knew how long Szechwan could hold out. In

³¹Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, June 4, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11. Boehr identified their landlord as a Chinese "air-instructor" but did not explain what that meant.

³²Boehr to Nyce, Sian, June 10, 1948, ibid.

June, about when Boehr was in Paoki, another attempt was made and thwarted--the so-called "Battle of the Plains," northwest of Hangkow--and late in June, Chiang met with his top brass in Sian, ordering troops in northwestern China to defend central China as well, even though the northwestern Nationalist position was so hopeless that Chiang's move was more retreat than heroism. Certainly the Battle of the Plains victory encouraged the Szechwanese, and Chiang's assurances were also duly noted, but news in Chengtu remained sketchy, and when it was available its accuracy was questioned. Both sides propagandized freely, and when the Reds moved into Shensi, they sweetened their drive by confessing past brutalities and by promising moderation in the future. Not only were Mennonites unconvinced; wall murals painted in Sian depicted plundering Communist troops, hammer and sickle blazing, slashing their swords through the necks of women and children.³³

The Mission Board, meanwhile, struggled to slash through its own confusion, and hopefully to find a coherent picture of the Chinese predicament. Caution was their catchword (as opposed to "motorized evangelism"), but they agreed to cultivate their China field as long as possible. Finally, the six premises of S. F. Pannabecker's well-quoted

³³"Chinese Reds Try to Dissipate Fear," New York Times, May 10, 1948; "Laohokow is Lost By Chinese Reds," ibid., May 23, 1948; "Reds Said to Fear Attack at Mukden," ibid., June 6, 1948; "Kaifeng is Rewon from Chinese Reds," ibid., June 26, 1948.

"Regarding our China work" dictum were circulated among the members, and were sent in their essence to Boehr:

- (1) Work should be continued w²th the Kaifeng group as much as possible, and with greater emphasis on independence.
- (2) Some missionaries and a number of Chinese workers should be kept at Paoki as much as conditions warrant. The work there should be continued and unfinished buildings completed. . . .
- (3) Investigation for other possibilities for a field should be carried on. This can be done with proper study and without undue haste.
- (4) Evacuated missionaries should be loaned to other missions, churches, or Christian agencies to assist in their program without regard to a Mennonite field. . . .
- (5) A couple should be retained in Shanghai or Hankow or some suitable center for head quarters and for centralization of the work.
- (6) . . . Brother and Sister Brown . . . should be permitted to return if they wish.³⁴

With these guidelines (or "general principles" as Unruh called them),³⁵ the Board finally formulated a policy for the chaos of China, or at least they defined the parameters within which a more elaborate policy could be reached. The sixth point referred to Brown's impending retirement, but the extent to which the Kaifeng and Paoki missions would be continued, the basis on which non-Mennonite missions would be interrelated with, and even the need for a mission-to-Board correspondent were all addressed. Nyce insisted that the policies be voted on before sending them to Boehr,³⁶ and

³⁴Pannabecker to Nyce, Chicago, June 22, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 98. Emphasis Pannabecker's.

³⁵Unruh to Nyce, Newton, July 10, 1948, ibid., Folder 133.

³⁶Nyce to all Board members, Allentown, July 1, 1948, ibid., Folder 93.

they were, thus reaffirming the China field's importance--at least for a while. Yet while point three alluded to expansion, the Board's decision was made with cautionary dispatch.

For one thing, when the Board voted on Pannabecker's proposals, they also voted on Albert Jantzen's proposed departure, and the outcome was no surprise: Kreider and Pannabecker--yea; Unruh, Goering, Wedel, and Thiessen--nay.³⁷ Secondly, when Nyce sent the missionaries a copy of Pannabecker's proposals, he insisted that they scrutinize any new field thoroughly before rushing out to expand their operations.³⁸ Despite the green light implicit in Pannabecker's outline, Nyce did not arbitrarily flash the yellow; he knew Boehr's enthusiasm, and he knew the pressure war put on Boehr to act, perhaps not always in a prudent way. And indeed, when Boehr responded, he was still enamoured with "great urgency to go forward while we may," and declared their hearts to be "stirred with the open door everywhere, and the urgency of the task of making Christ known, 'while it is day'!"³⁹

Somehow Nyce's yellow light tarnished in crossing the Pacific, and by the time it reached China, it looked phosphorescent green. Boehr exploited every nuance of the

³⁷Nyce to Pannabecker, Allentown, July 1, 1948, ibid., Folder 98.

³⁸Nyce to Boehr, Allentown, July 31, 1948, ibid., Folder 11.

³⁹Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Aug. 23, 1948, ibid.

Board's renewed commitment, and he first turned his attention toward housing. Since the missionaries' move to Chengtu, they had first rented a tea house and then a chapel to part-time preach and full-time preach in respectively. Although it was none too spacious, they lived in the chapel, and on April 16, rather noisily opened another with over three hundred attending and "hundreds more" outside. Additionally, a medical dispensary opened with Elizabeth Goertz and one of the Chinese, Wang Jui Ting, in charge, and with a local Christian physician, Dr. Li, assisting when she could.⁴⁰

All of this nearly overworked the people they had, but just as it called for more help, it offered nowhere for the new help to live, and with Chengtu as crowded as it was, Boehr predicted a "serious housing shortage" for the future. "We have been trying to rent," he complained, "and are still trying, but that may be futile trying, for nearly everybody wishes to sell"; nearly every property owner of significance feared for his property, and with the city so overrun with refugees, nearly every prospective tenant had to compete for the rapidly dwindling number of properties up for rent. War inched its way in, and its icy spectre chilled the hearts of those who saw it coming.

On July 15, the Szechwan Provincial Council urged Chiang to send reinforcements; a westward thrust by the Reds into Szechwan was imminent, and Szechwan's governor, Wang

⁴⁰William C. Voth to Mission Board, Report of the Property Cmte., Chengtu, June 6, 1948, ibid., Folder 137.

ing-chi, permitted Nationalist troops conscripted there to stay rather than join forces nearer the fighting. With a provincial population of nearly 50,000,000 and some of the best rice fields in all of China, what the Reds saw in Szechwan was obvious, but with the twin Han River cities of Panchenck and Siangyang now surrounded by Communists, how long they could be forestalled was not.⁴¹ Evacuation scarcely tempted Boehr, and he requested another \$5000 from the Board; property was needed; he meant to get it; he felt he had to get it or the mission's work would be endangered; and perhaps he reasoned that a property purchase would pin down the Board's commitment to Chengtu, a commitment they had made so far in circumlocutory terms.⁴²

Yet while property commanded much of the missionaries' attention, and while battlelines crept ever nearer, the lure of expansion captured their imagination; if the Board was serious in its commitment, reasoned Boehr, how better could they show it by approving a new field. Plans to cast righteousness over the globe's four corners were perennial with missionaries--especially with Boehr--and despite their needs both for property and new workers, the notion of branching out dominated the missionaries' summer. For six weeks through July and August, a makeshift embassy of Voth,

⁴¹"Szechuan Fears China Reds Reentry," New York Times, July 19, 1948.

⁴²Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Sept. 10, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1c-4, Folder 15.

Wuthrich, and Boehr covered over two thousand miles with the Dodge truck, searching from Chengtu to Chungking and into Kweichow and Hunan for that perfect community longing for a Mennonite mission.⁴³

Of particular interest was Kweiyang, the provincial capital of Kweichow, but while few missions ever opened there, the difficulty of working it was well known. A C.I.M. worker warned of "spiritual and moral lethargy" among the city's populus, something he blamed on "extensive opium smoking" in earlier periods,⁴⁴ and Kweichow was China's poorest province--perhaps increasing its need for social relief, but to a small denomination like the Mennonites, sharply restricting the resources relief workers found available. Because peasants there were more widely dispersed than in Szechwan, the Mennonites' ability to reach them was dampened, and owing to the rugged mountain terraces which ran throughout Kweichow, missionaries would have to evangelize by foot when they could reach the Szechwanese by truck.⁴⁵

"From a spiritual point of view," Voth called Kweiyang "a very needy field," and mentioned only a few missions then working the city--among them the C.I.M., the Swedish Covenant

⁴³Voth, Boehr, Wuthrich, "Report of the Survey of New Missionfield Areas," ibid., Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 137, p. 1.

⁴⁴Ibid., 1; Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Aug. 23, 1948, ibid., Folder 11.

⁴⁵Voth, Boehr, Wuthrich, "Report of the Survey," ibid., Folder 137, pp. 1-2.

mission, and the Anglican Church. The city had no Christian hospital "for which there is a great need" and medical services were left to a handful of private doctors--inadequate to say the least for a city of 300,000. So great were the social problems that other missions not only welcomed, but urged, the Mennonites to set up shop there, but while Kweichow's climate was favorable, and its communication with the outside was excellent, its political prospects appealed only in contrast to Chengtu's, and the surveyors promised merely that Kweichow "might be one of the last to be disturbed"⁴⁶--not that it would escape disruption.

Similarly, the isolated city of Kin Ping in central Yunan offered poor prospects for escape should war ever reach a mission there. Nevertheless, when the Mennonites sent word to the German Leibenzeller Mission, at Kin Ping, the mission's leader, Otto Hollenweger, enthusiastically welcomed their interest. The Kin Ping field was small, but housing was not expected to be a problem, and a number of public markets offered excellent sites for preaching. Especially attractive was Kin Ping's proximity with the Tung Chia tribal groups--tribes traditionally receptive to Christians, and when the surveyors noted this advantage, they were perhaps unintentionally sarcastic when they recorded that the tribes "are open to the Gospel and are glad for the opportunity to

⁴⁶Ibid., 3. Emphasis theirs.

ear it, but pride themselves in not accepting other peoples financial help."⁴⁷

Wu Kang in central Hunan, another area suggested by Hollenweger, offered electric lights, good roads, and an eight-room "missionary home" to serve as an operations base in the four-county region surrounding it, a region of nearly one million inhabitants. Before the war, a missionary home had stood in nearby Sin Ning, but was destroyed by the Japanese; now only a building site remained, although the fifty members of a local Christian church offered to help fund the Mennonites' construction if they chose that community. The Mennonites considered both towns seriously, and not surprisingly, were especially impressed with the property offered--not surprisingly, that is, given their anarchical housing in Chengtu.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, however, they had begun to question Hollenweger's sincerity--despite the warm welcome he had bestowed. As the surveyors saw it, these Germans had never decided if they were really willing "to turn over a part of their missionfield for a permanent work of other missions," and indeed, in the interorganizational discussions that followed, "it was revealed that brother Hollenweger was thinking only of temporary aid by us in their work." Short-handed himself, Hollenweger now insinuated that once his

⁴⁷Ibid., 4.

⁴⁸Ibid.

...ing workers returned from furlough, the Mennonites' assistance would no longer be required.⁴⁹

Their tiff was illuminating, for it underscored how the same implicit competition which Boehr had noted when he moved to Chengtu, and which Pannabecker had mentioned when he urged the strategic placement of new workers, ran throughout the surveyor's contemplations. While relatively little was written between the mission and the Board concerning other missions (they did not meticulously watch the competition), the surveyors were especially preoccupied with prospective relations between transferring Mennonites and missionaries whose fields were being transferred to.⁵⁰

When the surveyors finally returned to Chengtu in August, a Worker's Conference was held from the seventeenth to the twenty-fifth, and the missionaries decided both to expand their Chengtu operations and to begin another field. Diagnosing their city's "very populous" northwest section as having "a challenging need" for Grade and High School evangelism, and for a medical clinic, they decided to make it "a center of work for our mission." They also considered Chengtu a strategic home base from which further expansion could originate, and fancied themselves a potentially underground railroad for missionaries fleeing south from

⁴⁹Ibid., 5.

⁵⁰Ibid., 6.

Shensi and Kansu.⁵¹ As for expansion, they favored Kweiyang, despite its obvious drawbacks, and called it a "very needy, almost virgin soil." The C.I.M. people in both Kweiyang and Tsun Yi had strongly encouraged a move there, and because of its low economic status, Kweichow did not seem important militarily; even if Shensi and Kansu were lost, Chengtu would not be alone, for "the Kwei Yang field will provide an added area of work." Finally, in closing their meeting's report, the missionaries inserted a typical inculcation (probably aimed at the Board) the likes of which could make the dedicated swoon and the nervous bristle: "We consider it expedient to open work there now, lest the opportunity be lost to us later."⁵²

Yet, if the Board's reluctance in sending Jantzen was any indication, the missionaries' opportunities were already slipping. And though Wilhelmina Kuyf's plans to join them had been approved months before, she still had not done so-- and not until October would she leave the United States. Boehr proclaimed a "peculiar urgency" to "send forth laborers into His Harvest,"⁵³ and a sense of discouragement came over the missionaries, perhaps a letdown from their exhilarating hopes for expansion, or perhaps a frustration with the Board members for dragging their feet in deciding whether to

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Sept. 9, 1948, ibid., Folder 11.

approve that expansion. By mid-October, Boehr chastised them, and suspected them of cooling toward his China work; he told them "we feel somewhat like 'Orphans'; for since the latter part of August . . . there is no answer from you."⁵⁴ His mission found itself in a trap, still lacking the property he needed in Chengtu, and still without word from the Board about Kweiyang. To Boehr it was a crisis of cosmic proportions: "It is impossible for us to make plans for each worker, and to locate properly for the great and needy work of giving the Gospel to hungry people everywhere."⁵⁵

Rather undiplomatically, however, he confused the issue with a third request. Already, his demands for new workers and his prodding for another field had pushed the Board far enough, but now he requested a third item, a station wagon. Still enamored with the idea of "motorized evangelism," he decided the mission needed such a vehicle for "making our work more 'mobile' for the purpose of broadcast Evangelism, and to cover greater distances in West China." He was not ambivalent about which vehicle they sent: "We are advised not to get a Jeep Station Wagon, but an All-Metal body Chevrolet or Dodge Suburban Carryall, with 4 speed shift forward, and a half-ton chassis."⁵⁶ Yet with the Chengtu mission uncompleted, with the Kweiyang decision undecided,

⁵⁴Boehr to Nyce, Chengtu, Oct. 16, 1948, ibid.

⁵⁵Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Sept. 2, 1948, ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

and with the Red future of China moving west at every hour, how important Boehr's "broadcast Evangelism" seemed to the Board was dubious at best.

So when Kuyf finally left for China, about to sail on the Marchen Maersk to Hong Kong, about to fly into Szechwan at Chungking, and about to ride a truck to Chengtu, she left for a mission with too many priorities and not enough action on any of them. Although the Board gave Boehr a mostly green light that previous May, his insisting on more workers, his urging for another field, and now his demanding an "All-Metal body" station wagon, simply pushed his luck. The Board was not incensed, or outraged--far from it--they were dumbfounded, and while their commitment to the China field remained (Pannabecker's six points were only four months old), they could not determine how to handle Boehr.

CHAPTER THREE

(October -- Christmas 1948)

Men's natures are alike; it is their habits that carry them far apart.

--Confucious

In a less direct way, the Board could handle Mao Tse-tung no better than its missionaries, but even if they fought him in spirit and social dogma, theirs was a posher position than Chiang Kai-Chek's. While the missionaries had traversed western China to search for souls, Mao had traversed eastern China to shoot them, and while Chiang's June "Battle of the Plains" enthralled as far as it went, the Generalissimo's time now dwindled; even if he saved Szechwan, he could not ameliorate previous losses in Shantung, nor for that matter, his loss of the Tientsin-Pukow railroad back east. The Szechwanese soon doubted their own salvation, and despite Chiang's rhetorical "mopping up campaign," his promise of a Nationalist victory came to seem less like the shape of the future, and more like irrelevant, if magniloquent chant.¹

With cautious hope, however, Kreider wrote Nyce in early October that Nyce should "push the [China recommendations]

¹"Chinese Reds Lose Base," New York Times, Aug. 8, 1948.

as fast as possible."² Kreider suspected that his China hands were losing faith with their procrastinating Board, and he could also imagine that the excitement they felt toward opening a new field would not bode well with the Board's snail-like pace. "There is only one point that I would like to emphasize . . . ," the President wrote Nyce,

It is this,--that we as a Board should not cause needless delay. Our China workers, as I know, are waiting on the board to act on the plan proposed. Furthermore our workers are mature, experienced men and women and I am inclined to think that they can survey the situation in China and lay plans. I would like to think of them as able to do that.³

But they were not to be trusted ad infinitum, for as a corollary, he also asserted the "limits of the budget within which they must work,"⁴ and the battle with Boehr raged on.

In Chengtu, of course, that battle took backstage to the war, and the servants of God and missionwork soon established themselves with their old Paoki fervor. After the necessarily difficult adjustments of moving, they first drew largely from the small stock of Christians already living in Chengtu. William Voth, for example, met a well-educated county official who had heard the Gospel some twelve years before, and who had even bought a Bible, but typical of most

²A. E. Kreider to Howard G. Nyce, Goshen, Ind., Oct. 4, 1948, General Conference Board of Missions/Commission on Overseas Missions Collection, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 76, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kans.

³Kreider to Nyce, Goshen, Oct. 9, 1948, ibid.

⁴Ibid.

Christians then in Szechwan, had lost interest when the missionaries he knew left town, and when he was left with neighbors ignorant of his strange Western faith. When Voth met the man, he rekindled the fellow's dying interest, and before long had recruited one of his first regular attenders.⁵ Early recruits were invaluable in bridging the natural chasm between Western hope and Chinese glory, a perennial problem to be sure, but especially in the opening weeks of a nascent field.

They also relieved the more acute shortage of help, for often the only help around was inexperienced, or even worse, incompetent. Finding a literate "Bible woman" to accompany the missionaries was trouble enough; finding an inspirational one was usually hopeless, and of course, even with sparkling assistance, the audiences' reactions were rarely enthusiastic in the beginning. Truly, the ghosts of missionaries past mocked these newcomers wherever they traveled, and as Marie J. Regier (who worked along the Hopei-Honan border) later put it, "the earliest picture of mission work is still that of the missionary standing under a tree with the open Bible and the natives flocking to him to hear the word of God--or at least to see his strange foreign ways."⁶

⁵William C. Voth to the American Churches, Chengtu, Nov. 6, 1948, ibid., Folder 137.

⁶Marie Regier, "Cultural Interpretation in a Local Community in China" (Draft copy of M.A. thesis, University of Chicago Divinity School, 1936), 31.

If a Bible woman did not follow the missionary as he journeyed into the world, the missionary journeyed alone, but when a new mission came to be established, its proselytized Chinese would go out and preach. Regardless of who it was, typical services were held impromptu "on the street of the village where Christ has never been heard of,"⁷ and in a city the size of Chengtu, there were many such streets. At first, the missionaries would break into song, but soon they followed their singing with stories of faith or testaments of eternal salvation. Parables or stories from the Bible were obvious favorites, but not having heard the Bible before, or not having known it to carry the force it was said to, few Chinese were converted at once. Regier recalled that

the first attitude of the villagers is that of curiosity and often friendliness, though in a few instances there is fear. Everyone crowds around to hear and see. The Chinese Bible women get much disgusted because the people will not listen to what she had to say, but insist on asking the foreigner whether she has any children, how old she is, how far her home is from here or ask her to take off her hat to see how she combs her hair, etc., etc. After their curiosity has been satisfied, the majority leave.⁸

As novices quickly learned, foreign missionwork took thicker skin than was needed serving home folks in the states.

In a sense, it also took thicker heads. Missions historian William Hutchinson likened the missionaries' dilemma to "the Christ-and-culture problem squared." By placing their religious faith above national (or cultural)

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 32.

loyalty, missionaries often faced an internal contradiction when they grappled with their own identities. Most Christians have, even, as Hutchinson contends, the most nationalistic ones, but for missionaries the problem was compounded, for after reaching internal equilibrium, their balance was supposed to be apparent to those of a foreign culture,⁹ and if Anabaptists seemed immune to nationalistic pitfalls, they stumbled all the same with their cultural (usually pro-Germanic) ethnocentrism.

A story of Aganetha Fast's was revealing. She met a Mrs. Li, described as a "very zealous, illiterate" woman who was well known to missionaries in the area, for Mrs. Li had abandoned the gods of her tradition and had accepted "this Jesus of the foreigners." Aside from a look of "daring," however, she gave no outward sign of her inward faith, and as Fast described it, she looked no different from her unconverted neighbors: "hair unkempt, thread-bare, dusty, dirty clothes, unbuttoned in places, hanging carelessly from her shoulders. Her face and hands looked as though they had not been washed for a long time. Her teeth had never felt a toothbrush." Fast scolded her for hygienic laziness, and told her that Christians should not be seen in ways which would not bespeak of their clean spirit and shining heart.

But sternly the woman retorted: "The Lord looketh on the heart and not on the outward appearance." And Fast,

⁹William R. Hutchinson, Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions (Chicago, 1987), 4.

feeling rebuked, had to further explain that while that was true, "the outward appearance gives evidence of inner cleansing." Still Mrs. Li was unconvinced, and retorted again: "If I had as many clothes as you have, and soap to wash my clothes and people to do it for me, I too would keep clean."¹⁰

Had the story ended there, it might have served as a poignant example of Western haughtiness, but it did not. Fast went on to describe her internal commotion, but she hardly found revelation, and when "I acknowledged the truth," she wrote, "Still, I was puzzled. Somehow I felt there should be a difference. But!--I had been tactless." Predictably, the old woman returned, this time with hair glistening like radiant sunshine, and this time with laundered clothes neatly draped from her shoulders. "You were right; I was wrong," she burst forth, ". . . I must ask not only your forgiveness for my anger, but I must thank you sincerely for this admonition. It has changed my whole life and filled my heart with unspeakable joy." Indeed, the whole assembly of "women round about her reflected her radiance and peace."

As for the author, she praised "how graciously the Lord had over-ruled my blunder and tactlessness!" but neglected to also admit that His "over-ruling" of her tactics was actually

¹⁰Aganetha Fast, Out of My Attic (Freeman, S. Dak., 1970), 54.

an endorsement of her views. For all her talk of embarrassment and anguish, when Fast retold the story, grace came from below, not from above.¹¹

Still, Chinese hygiene usually was atrocious, and cultural standards clashed as often as ethnic ideals. Eventually, the missionaries realized that Chinese sensibilities were repulsed by Americans just as Americans were nauseated by Chinese, but most genteel Westerners suffered considerable surprise on their first encounter with Oriental filth. Voth's wife Mathilda, for example, who had accompanied William before the war, was shocked shortly after her arrival as she passed a man doing "his private toilet haunched in the open field nearby,"¹² and Fast decided that "in winter a closed room would need much airing after a couple of hours or half a day of study." The Chinese seldom washed their clothes, and wore the same clothes for days on end.¹³

Even less enviable was the (Old) Mennonite Dorothy McCammon's shipboard dinner, traveling by motor launch to Hochwan. As two boys prepared a dish of rice, they cooked it in river water and tested it with their fingers, then served it in bowls which were also doused in the cold river, and which were dried off with "a black greasy cloth." Chopsticks

¹¹Ibid., 55.

¹²Matilda K. Voth, Clear Shining After Rain (North Newton, Kans., 1980), 33.

¹³Fast, Attic, 22.

had been similarly washed, slopped around as a bundle in the water, and between meals, when the bowls were stored on the floor, their dishwashing pan became a footbath with which the whole kitchen crew enjoyed blissful relaxation. Similarly, food leftover from one meal was simply dumped into the next meal's supply,¹⁴ for clearly attitudes differed as much as methodology, and once, when Marie Regier could not coax a Chinese girl to push her broom, the girl demanded: "What is the use of all this sweeping? When we die we are buried in the dirt anyway."¹⁵ Likewise, the diner Dorothy McCammon "learned simply to sit where we couldn't see the kitchen"; as she put it, "a lot depends on the point of view."¹⁶

As a second shock came the Chinese language, and one way decided only those with "bodies of brass, lungs of steel, heads of oak, eyes of eagles, hearts of apostles, memories of angels, and lives of Methuselah" need even try to learn it.¹⁷ Yet every missionary had to converse with Chinese peasants who were not only ignorant of English and German, but who were also ignorant of their own grammatical intricacies, and who spoke dialects often far removed from the "official" Chinese of Shanghai. Written Chinese comprised better than 80,000 ideographs, and spoken Chinese

¹⁴Dorothy S. McCammon, We Tried to Stay (Scottsdale, Penn., 1953), 22.

¹⁵Regier, "Cultural," 91.

¹⁶McCammon, We Tried, 22.

¹⁷Quoted by Ibid., 14.

often derived six or seven meanings from a single syllable. Perhaps to forestall excessive panic, incoming workers were quickly assured that five thousands ideographs would enable them to read the Old Testament, and a mere three thousand would let them master the New, but they would have to be careful: the same syllable which meant "Lord" with one inflexion, denoted "pig" with another,¹⁸ and street Chinese was no more taught in books than the various dialects. F. Olin Stockwell mused that because his wife had skipped the "Profanity" chapter in her textbook, she "has not been able to understand more than half of any ordinary conversation since."¹⁹

Still, the language slowly shaped itself in the missionaries' minds; usually first in a classroom, where a number of new words would be introduced, and then missionary by missionary, in individual cells, where those same words were practiced with the help of tutors. Incredibly, these students paced their learning at twenty to thirty new words or word combinations a day, and somewhat less incredibly, they often required their tutors to use the New Testament as a textbook--driving headlong into the problem Hutchinson outlined; while trying to clarify the language of modern

¹⁸Fast, Attic, 25.

¹⁹F. Olin Stockwell, With God in Red China: The Story of Two Years in Chinese Communist Prisons (New York, 1953), 97.

China, these poor tutors were now confronted with the philosophy of ancient Judea.²⁰

In many ways, such Mennonite notions were typical of twentieth century Westerners in general, despite the China field's long history of missionary denominationalism, and despite the Mennonites' perpetual minority position.²¹

Marie J. Regier made quite an effort to compare Chinese and Mennonite cultures, even though Chinese culture originated before history and Mennonite culture dated back to the sixteenth century, and even though the world's 250,000 Mennonites were fairly dwarfed by 400,000,000 Chinese.²² The Chinese, she decided, "are inclined to be very eclectic in their religions" whereas the Mennonites "are very definite . . . and leave no room for any other way of salvation."²³ Both emphasized harmonious relations with one's fellowman, both realized the pitfalls of many men sharing one world, but the Chinese based their dogmatics on differing

²⁰Fast, Attic, 23; Mrs. Wm. C. Voth, What Happened in China (Newton, Kans., n.d.), 46.

²¹Hutchinson, Errand, 127; Hutchinson quotes the following figures: in 1910, the ABCFM and the Northern branches of the Presbyterians, the Methodists, and the Baptists each had over 500 missionaries. Other major bodies of Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, and Disciples of Christ each supported 100 to 225 missionaries. The combined Dutch German Reformed churches and the top ten Lutheran churches (also combined) supported a like number, but the Mennonites, by contrast, only supported twenty-three. See Ibid., 126.

²²Marie Regier, "Mennonite Teaching and Practice in a Chinese Community" (B.D. thesis, Chicago Theological Seminary, 1950), 72.

²³Ibid., 29(b).

assumptions. A Chinese bank employee once asked Regier, "If I love my neighbor as myself isn't that sufficient? Why bring God it?" and Regier's reply (at least in retrospect) revealed the underlying antithesis of a Mennonite approach: "To the Mennonites," she wrote, "a wrong relationship with God means that there is sin," and thus she carried her argument to an abstract description outside the Chinese mind, even though Chinese philosophy was often just as abstract.

A five-year-old student of Wilhelmina Kuyf's, as reported to Kuyf by the child's widowed mother, made that point yet even clearer. In the family's home, and at the appointed lunar points on his calendar, the child's uncle still burned an incensed offering of prayer to his old gods, but his newly converted nephew objected, doing so with force: "I don't worship idols anymore," the youngster protested, "I believe in God." For a minute, the uncle gave a look half of outrage and half of amazement, but because the child seemed to him so precious, he finally relented, and said: "All right, that settles it. You believe in God." Concluded Kuyf: "a little child shall lead them on,"²⁴ but even if she focused on the child's successful transformation to Christ, her student's uncle revealed what Regier called "eclectic"; that is, the amorphous attitude Chinese people

²⁴From Kuyf to Fast, June 2, 1950, in compilation of like extracts, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-5, Mission Workers Correspondence, Folder 69.

took about religion. If the child had lived in a Mennonite family, he likely would have been banished to the barn.

To be sure, the Chinese were hardly humanists--at least in the Western sense, for Confucianism had led them so far from an existential view of the individual that their values and moral logic comprehended man-in-society when Western thinkers comprehended man-despite-society. Secondly, the Chinese were no less fixated with the supernatural and occult; again, as Regier saw it:

Both [Mennonites and Chinese] believe in heaven and both believe that God or fate punishes people's sins by droughts and floods. Both believe that the gods or God answers prayer. Both believe in demon possession. Both emphasize the past and believe in the authority of the past. Though both quarrel a lot among themselves, they believe in a pacifistic attitude toward others.²⁵

Yet the Mennonites saw these things in a much more individualistic light than the Chinese. To the Mennonites, in fact, these were entirely individual beliefs--even the last one, so obviously relevant to interpersonal relations, was rooted in a personal commandment from Christ.

All this set the Mennonites and Chinese poles apart before they even met, and as the tedious process of evangelization took its course, the poles sometimes moved closer and sometimes did not. A number of less ethereal likenesses often helped, but could not overshadow the full panoply of their differences. "The Mennonites are a secluded people," observed Regier, "with a feeling of being sufficient

²⁵Regier, "Cultural," 28.

unto themselves. The same thing is true of the Chinese. They have always belonged to the Middle Kingdom, the center of the universe."²⁶ Likewise, both tended to be frugal, economical, and agriculturally-oriented.

Both also believed in the superiority of man over woman, but again, the social norms of Mennonite culture treated individuals differently than the Chinese did, and more often than not, these differences could handicap Mennonite efforts at Christianization. A Chinese girl was held to be visiting the home of her parents; her real home was that of her future husband, or his family's, and until she was married, she could only live with her parents as a guest. Predictably, Chinese betrothals preceded their Western counterparts dramatically in the lives of most girls, and Fast even recalled one prenatal engagement after two Chinese gentlemen, who wanted to do each other a favor, pledged away the offspring of their mutually pregnant wives, and concomitantly assumed the babies' sexes would define themselves as needed. The missionaries would routinely find girls of ten or fifteen leading their seven or eight year old future husbands by the hand, for when she is young, Chinese custom had determined, she can babysit him, and when she is grown she can become his wife.²⁷

²⁶Ibid., 30.

²⁷Fast, Attic, 53-57.

Custom differed from region to region and sometimes from village to village; when the babysitting arrangement was not used, an opposite approach was taken, and parents negotiated spouses for their eligible children with the children unaware of who was being consulted. In such cases, the betrothed could not meet until after they were married, and obviously, this contrasted remarkably with the Mennonites' European traditions of social courtship; to the Mennonites it seemed absurd.²⁸

Women's historian Jane Hunter has partly explained this sense of absurdity by reexploring the Chinese attitudes toward women. Whereas to female missionaries "evangelical etiquette demanded that the face transparently reflect the goodness and grace of the heart," to Chinese women "the appearance of true feeling was never as important as the performance of appropriate action." Or put another way, "the struggle of evangelical intimacy to penetrate Chinese face was the struggle of a Protestant culture of feeling with a Chinese culture of role."²⁹ On the surface, that explained why Chinese women (or even children) seemed more natural on stage or bellowing before a crowd; on a deeper level it manifested, again, the divergencies between Western individualist culture and Chinese Confucianism.

²⁸Regier, "Cultural," 29(b).

²⁹Jane Hunter, The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China (New Haven, Conn., 1984), 261-63.

The most conspicuous conflict regarding women was the missionaries' outrage with footbinding, something even their critics have named as a high point. Chinese women with normal feet were assumed to be prostitutes; their owners, or pimps, were assumed to have unbound them both to make them more desirable, and to prevent them from escape without stigmatization. Eventually, by grotesque predilection, Chinese men came to find this distortion appealing (most of their wives and daughters had been bound), and its practice was self-perpetuated through an interlocking number of customs and traditions. The Mennonites (and most other Western missionaries) insisted that it stop at once, all with the most humanitarian of reasons, but unwittingly with the result of tainting their religion as the faith of cultural imperialists. Nonetheless, forces against footbinding slowly gained momentum, and by the 1930's, women with bound feet were stigmatized, written off as "backsliders," prisoners to the antiquities of a passing and impotent age.³⁰

Small wonder why the missionaries were so convinced that China needed the Gospel of Christ, and the same month Kreider expressed his faith in the missionaries' maturity and experience, they rented another tea house in Chengtu. For whatever reason, Boehr thought its crowded sector needed the Word worse than others, and with their previous acquisitions, the Mennonites could now preach from two locations on East Ma

³⁰Fast, Attic, 37.

P'eng Kai Street: the new tea house (#25) and the house, or headquarters (#30).³¹ They wanted to open another chapel near the city's Old West Gate, but because of chaotic fluctuations in Chinese currency, and because of the impending Chinese New Year (when business dealings were restricted), the West Gate idea fell through.³² It forebodingly illustrated why purchasing property was scarcely an option, first because so little was being sold, and secondly because the terms were usually cash. William Voth, as chairman of the mission's Property Committee, was acutely aware of the housing shortage in Chengtu, and he compared the section they lived in to twelve hypothetical Newtons compressed into one.³³

Nevertheless, with rented property secured, the Boehrs rejuvenated plans for a Paoki comeback, and when Boehr informed the Board of his new tea house, he also mentioned this new agenda. Apparently, a ten-day revival (by non-Mennonites) was scheduled for Paoki in a matter of days, and Boehr very much hoped to attend. They are "practically within the communist area," he boasted--as if such an obvious affront to Mao somehow won him a holy victory--and he

³¹Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Dec. 18, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

³²Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Feb. 2, 1949, ibid., Series 1-4, Folder 11.

³³Voth to Mission Board, Chengtu, Dec. 31, 1948, ibid., Series 1-4, Folder 137. Voth referred to Newton, Kans.

pointedly referred to the loudspeaker system which evangelists in Paoki had but he did not. Most disturbingly, and in an admixture of rage and despair, Boehr did not understand why the Board would not write him--especially regarding Kweiyang--and he assumed for a while that their letters were lost in the mail.³⁴

Likely he did not know, or could not appreciate, the Board's complex predicament, and when he finally quit hinting, complaining outright of being ignored, Boehr's cry was one of confusion more than anything. "We are really at a loss to know what to do," he groaned in mid-October, "and the season is proceeding rapidly for advance Gospel work everywhere."³⁵ Clearly the season was, and as the missionaries liked to say, the fields were white, but all was not lost for them with the Board. By the end of that month, unbeknownst to Boehr, a major statement of policy was issued by Kreider. Writing Nyce again, on October 30, Kreider had put his thoughts in order, and while the light was to stay green (at least temporarily) for the China mission, the President drew a line at Kweiyang. "The political situation in China is very uncertain," he wrote,

[and] the present government is weak and the communists are advancing into new areas. . . . Yet China needs the gospel. The unsettled conditions should not lessen our efforts in evangelizing China's millions. Our mission policy may of necessity be somewhat different from that followed on our old field. Our work may not be

³⁴Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Oct. 21, 1948, ibid., Series 1-4, Folder 11.

³⁵Ibid.

centralized to the same degree. From this distance it does appear that our work in China will be widely scattered if the proposals approved at the China missionary conference [Aug. 17-25, in Chengtu] are actually adopted. Since we have made a beginning at Paochi, I too would approve as recommended by the conference that the work there be continued. If there is an area in the city of Chengtu, as the report gives it, which is largely unworked I would favor opening work there. . . . My hesitation with regard to the China report is the proposal to enter work in Kweichow province. This takes us into an other [sic] area. The language is somewhat different. Kweichow belongs more to south China. I would be inclined to urge our missionaries to make further efforts to locate open areas for work in the province of Szechwan with the thought of pushing still farther west if the Lord opens doors in that direction.³⁶

If they could not escape the war, they would at least avoid expansion in the face of it, and if they expanded in the face of it, they would at least expand in a direction they could someday run. "Furthermore," the President concluded, "I fully approve the plan to rent where that is possible. This is not the time to think of building schools or a hospital. The major emphasis now should be on direct evangelistic work."³⁷ Aware of a delay in responding to Boehr, Krieder blamed Nyce: "When for some reason we Board members are slow in replying on such important matters," he chided his Secretary, "you must insist that you need to know the mind of the Board so you can give the field some definite word."³⁸

³⁶Kreider to Nyce, Goshen, Oct. 30, 1948, ibid., Series 1-4, Folder 76.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

Not surprisingly, the China mission's principle defender disagreed about Kweiyang, but his support hardly had the heart of earlier times. Perhaps Pannabecker had begun to doubt China himself, or perhaps he only suffered a memory lapse, but his latest support was no ringing peroration: "as far as I remember we have not yet authorized that move, or am I behind the times?"³⁹ Other members were even less enthusiastic. In fact, less than a week after Kreider's seminal letter to Nyce, the Albert Jantzen issue, of all things, crowded Kweiyang yet again onto the Board's back burner.

After all the heat Jantzen's departure had aroused, the would-be missionary only reached San Francisco before he was indefinitely halted by a maritime labor strike. Philip Wedel notified Boehr rather promptly, but because no decision had been made before Wedel wrote, he only mentioned to Boehr that Jantzen would be delayed; he did not say that Jantzen was staying in the United States.⁴⁰ Yet the strike gave Jantzen time to reflect on China's teetering position, and still in America on November 5, he wrote the Board to request a reconsideration.⁴¹ The Board was happy to comply; they had not unanimously approved his trip in the first place, and

³⁹S. F. Pannabecker to Nyce, Chicago, Nov. 2, 1948, ibid., Folder 98.

⁴⁰Phillip A. Wedel to Missionaries, Goessel, Kans., Oct. 25, 1948, ibid., Folder 142.

⁴¹See Nyce to Kreider, Pretty Prairie, Kans., Nov. 5, 1948, ibid., Folder 76. Jantzen had sent an air-mail letter to Nyce.

Pannabecker had advocated a postponement several days before Jantzen wrote.⁴² Kreider found, as well, that he must concur, but naturally he wondered what alternate service could be found for the Jantzens, and urged Nyce to come up with something. As for the Saskatchewaner J. J. Thiessen, he thought Jantzen "would be the logical man to visit our schools in Canada."⁴³

Boehr, of course, waited and waited, oblivious to the meanderings of the Board. No one had written him (about anything), and the abandoned mission chief not only longed for word on Kweiyang, but also expected Albert Jantzen to arrive in Chengtu at any minute. Over 100,000 Communists, meanwhile, were driving hard on Sian, a strategic blow to the government, who had massed a large defense force (as well as their Shensi headquarters) there,⁴⁴ and on October 23, the Nationalists lost two more important posts--one in the strategic railroad town of Chengchow, where a Nationalists garrison was annihilated under a Yellow River bridge, and one in Paotow, the western terminus of the Peiping-Suiyuan

⁴²Pannabecker to Nyce, Chicago, Nov. 2, 1948, ibid., Folder 98, also reveals that even H. J. Brown (then in Shanghai) suggested a change of plans for Jantzen.

⁴³Thiessen to Nyce, Saskatoon, Nov. 23, 1948, ibid., Folder 129. The Board refrained from ordering Jantzen to stay; rather they advised him to stay. Obviously, an order would have been silly--he requested to stay in the first place, but had he elected to continue his travel (as Marie J. Regier did) they very likely would have allowed it. See Pannabecker to Jantzen, Chicago, Nov. 20, 1948, ibid., Folder 98.

⁴⁴"Chinese Reds Win Big Port, Menace 2 Key Cities," New York Times, Oct. 12, 1948.

railroad. This time, Chiang found more than his defenses falling apart; now voices were heard in his own legislature questioning the effectiveness of his rule, and one old legislator of seventy, Lu Fu, stood up and demanded that Chiang take a "vacation" in the United States.⁴⁵

Li Kwang Ming, the Mennonite pastor in Paoki, reported that nightly gospel services were still being held in a rented street chapel, and boasted that nearly a hundred faithful showed up each evening, but not all Paoki reports seemed so cheerful. Writing Nyce in the midst of these new Communist incursions, Boehr said that while some say Paoki was included in the siege of Sian, others say it was not, and even if it was not, an eastern offensive into Shensi was likely in the future. As Boehr put it, his newly-hoped-for trip to Paoki was once again "delayed now somewhat indefinitely."⁴⁶

In addition to the military threat, the exchange rate had mushroomed, and Boehr wondered "whether missionaries will not get into precarious situations because of high prices." Coal was nearing \$50.00 a ton,⁴⁷ and with all their hardships combined, Boehr decided the mission's situation was graver than the one they had faced in Paoki that previous

⁴⁵"Chiang is Urged to Take 'Vacation' as Communists Win 2 More Cities," Ibid., Oct. 24, 1948.

⁴⁶Boehr to Nyce, Chengtu, Oct. 16, 1948, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

⁴⁷Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Oct. 21, 1948, ibid., Series 1-4, Folder 11.

April. Chengtu's Americans met with a consular officer and arranged assistance for those wishing to leave, and in a comment which could hardly have been apolitical, Boehr insinuated that his own mission was considering a direct move to Kweiyang--with or without Board approval--and even declared that "should there be a sudden change, with possible Anarchy reigning in case of a turn-over, our being at Kweiyang might not be of sufficient help."⁴⁸ For Boehr to write in such darkened terms foretold a perilous perch, to be sure, but after he had found himself so ignored by the Board, he may have felt less compunction in describing the urgency of his situation. Still, when he scribbled a final line in the margin, he sent along one indication of a stubbornness to stay: "our attitude and action may well be influenced, and possibly guided by what other missions will do."⁴⁹

Yet if Boehr had tried to provoke urgency, he narrowly escaped provoking panic--again owing to his ignorance of the Board members' doubts about China. Nyce agreed to write the mission after his mild retribution from Kreider, but he found his options crippled with these new Communist advances. "I will be willing to write the Boehrs," he complained to Kreider, "but what can one say as the result of [his letters] in which he says 'just now we are faced with a seemingly more

⁴⁸Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, n.d., ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

serious crisis than we Paochi missionaries faced April 22-24'?" How can we possibly give Boehr what he wants, thought Nyce, when he himself writes of impending doom? "I can write and ask if they are still thinking of China," Nyce suggested, but he could not think of much more to say;⁵⁰ clearly, he assumed that Boehr was ready to come home just as readily as Boehr assumed the Board was committed to his staying. When the Secretary did write Boehr, he was mostly only trying to keep in touch, but his letter must have hit Chengtu with the force of a bomb, for not only did he finally inform Boehr that Jantzen was not coming, but he also set the Board's priorities in obvious order and told Boehr that "naturally we would expect you to abide by the suggestions of the Consul for the sake of safety."⁵¹

Pannabecker, meanwhile, met with a member of the Church of the Brethren's Mission Board, and learned that they had no plans for evacuation from China. Contrasting Nyce considerably, he suggested the Board give Boehr an advance approval for any decisions the missionaries wished to make in emergency situations, and furthermore, the freedom to stay even if communication is lost. Pannabecker did stipulate that those lacking "A-1 health," or those burdened with the responsibility of children should not stay, but once again, his voice of support for the China field grew in its

⁵⁰Nyce to Kreider, Pretty Prairie, Dec. 4, 1948, ibid., Folder 76.

⁵¹Nyce to Boehr, Pretty Prairie, Dec. 8, 1948, ibid., Folder 11.

solidity, and once again, at the urgency of this old⁴China hand, the Board reconsidered their nervous policies toward the former Middle Kingdom.⁵²

News from the field seemed also to favor a calmer approach, and Boehr even began to talk about staying under Communist rule. In his letter to the Board of December 18, he reported that "treatment given foreigners in Tsinan [was] not too encouraging; they had been systematically looted by the communists, but were permitted to stay,"⁵³ and when Wilhelmina Kuyf finally reached Chengtu on Christmas Day, she did not find a mission wrought with the wailing of voices and the gnashing of teeth; she found a mission thoroughly convinced of its service to the world, and thoroughly hopeful about its future--even if that future was short, or if it would be darkened by a red flag overhead.

Christmas was taken philosophically. "For His Kingdom's sake," wrote William Voth, "our family is widely separated. . . and our Christmas joys will needs be shared in spiritual communion rather than see each other face to face."⁵⁴ In describing his trip with Elizabeth Goertz earlier in the year, he nearly made China sound like a perilous Paradisio, recalling that "our eyes feasted on the

⁵²Pannabecker to Nyce, Chicago, Dec. 13, 1948, ibid., Folder 98.

⁵³Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Dec. 18, 1948, ibid., Folder 11.

⁵⁴Voth to the American Churches, Chengtu, Nov. 6, 1948, ibid., Folder 137.

flooded fresh green rice paddies that cooled the summer air, and on the staid [sic] brick structures of centuries old Chinese architecture. . . ." Still, "as we proceeded along steep mountain roads we observed an ever increasing number of trucks alongside the highway in wreck and ruin, mute evidence of the treacherous roads, wreckless [sic] driving, or mechanical unfitness of old trucks";⁵⁵ evidence also of a nation at war.

Earlier in December, a nearby Methodist church had performed a rendition of "The Messiah" in English. Although like most things in China, it was produced simply and plainly, the message it conveyed, and especially the Chinese faces which conveyed it, spoke to Boehr in a voice which held him fast to his mission and which illuminated within him the work he wanted it to do. The following evening, while temporarily safe on Ma P'eng Kai Street from the terrible events around him, he copied the Soprano soloist's words down on paper:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, . . . And he shall speak Peace to the Heathen!"⁵⁶

⁵⁵Voth to the American Churches, Chengtu, Nov. 6, 1948, ibid.

⁵⁶Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Dec. 18, 1948, ibid., Folder 11.

CHAPTER FOUR

(January - March 1949)

A fish trap exists because of the fish; once you've gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. . . . Words exist because of meanings; once you've gotten the meanings, you can forget the words.

--Chuang-tzu

As the new year progressed, the missionaries' inherent optimism resurfaced, and despite their recent anxieties, they soon felt thankful for having survived as long as they had. H. J. Brown, now looking forward to impending retirement, also favored the West China work, and writing Nyce just three weeks into January, he admitted "the new missionfield is not without problems," but thanked God "there are all over great opportunities." "We judged the Chengtu situation correctly," he even concluded, and citing the missionaries' efforts at street preaching, at Bible teaching, at founding a Chinese church, and when needed, at rescue work, he proclaimed their work as nothing less than "a grand job."¹

Certainly it was ambitious. The tea house rented in October could handle slightly over fifty worshipers, and with

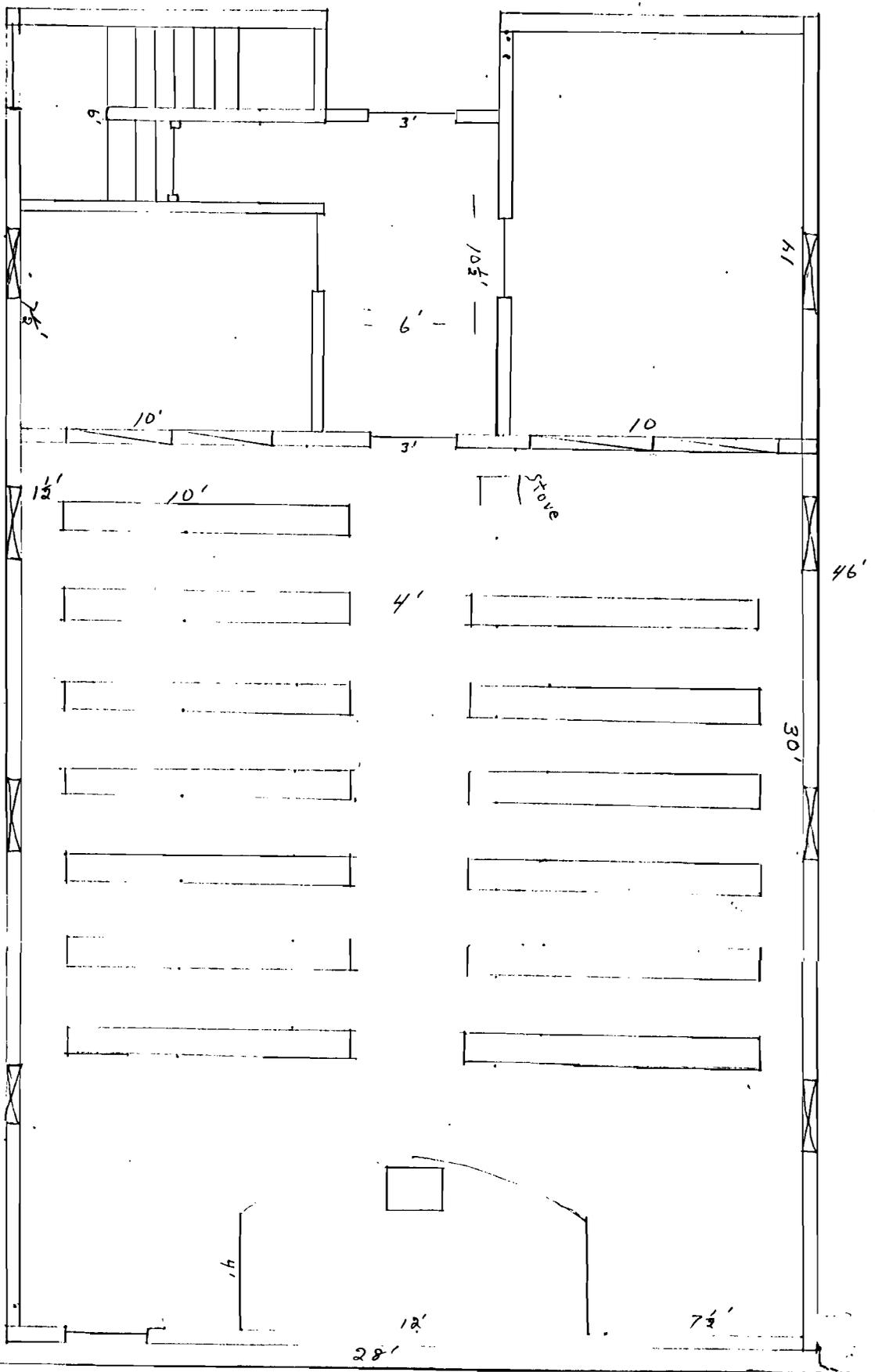
¹H. J. Brown to Howard G. Nyce, Shanghai, Jan. 21, 1949, General Conference Board of Missions/Commission on Overseas Missions Collection, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 13, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kans.

preaching services held there twice a day, it was frequently filled. Conveniently, a brisk twelve minute walk from the missionaries' headquarters could get them there, and with one side open to the street, the house worked well for drawing passers-by away from their daily routines. Unfortunately, it also drew in a great deal of noise, compounded by the tea shop which still operated in another part of the building, and by the noisy of nature China in general. Occasionally, the missionaries found this unwelcome accompaniment more diabolical than divine, but Boehr pacifically decided that "we must figure on a 'carry-over' of this noisy spirit," and on December 27 and January 13, they used the tea house for "Inquirer's Instruction Classes," public evangelical meetings which introduced a number of Chinese to the mission, but which did not result in any baptisms.²

Through it all, Boehr complained that they needed more room; in addition to the tea business and the preaching services, three missionaries and twelve Chinese workers slept in that building, and while they were no longer jammed together at #30, they were still jammed together. Even at #30, where Boehr judged "under more normal conditions a missionary family with a few Chinese helpers should live," no less than ten of them were forced to stay,³ but the reason they did stay was the same reason they refused to leave

²P. J. Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Feb. 2, 1949, ibid., Folder 11.

³Ibid.



1 in = 4 ft.

William C. Voth's diagram of the Tea House Chapel.

China--because if they were to accomplish their work, they had no choice.

The work they chose, by the post-war era, had ossified around three areas of concentration: evangelization, education, and medicine. As was apparent with their real estate dealings alone, the mission's ultimate power was its fiscal authority, or to paraphrase Orwell, he who controlled the purse controlled the future, and he who controlled the present controlled the purse. So Brown's justification in his laudation of the Chengtu work was tempered not only by cultural confrontations, but also by the relative success or failure of these three objectives, and of their appropriateness to prevailing Chinese needs. Because evangelical, educational, and medical works were so constrained by financial limitations, and because financial control was so autocratic, historians such as James Juhnke have specifically chided the Mennonites for lethargic prorogation in handing money and mission keys to Chinese Christian leaders.⁴

Yet Juhnke also complained of the missionaries' preoccupation with individual needs; he did not believe they spent enough effort addressing social ills, including very complex ills such as justice and oppression,⁵ and to be

⁴James C. Juhnke, A People of Mission: A History of General Conference Mennonite Overseas Missions (Newton, Kans., 1979), 64. Juhnke wrote specifically of the General Conference Mennonites, but most Western missions did the same.

⁵Ibid.

sure, the Mennonites were not Social Gospelists; beyond education and disaster relief, their modest size and resources did not tolerate elaborate expansion, and their concept of missionary responsibility focalized evangelism even above the scourges Juhnke wished they had addressed. An exception was medical work, and even in times of fiscal constraint (as with the Chengtu mission), medical budgets were among the last to be cut, and were seldom cut severely.

Unfortunately, their clinics' high prioritization was rarely appreciated by the patrons, and most Chinese judged medical quality by medical quantity; if a doctor gave them a huge number of pills to swallow, they would easily believe he knew the cure, but if a doctor--especially a Western doctor--only gave them advice, they would politely smile and leave his office, smug in their contention that this doctor had no cure at all. Sometimes, blatant as a child, they would ask a missionary doctor to pay for traditional treatments administered by local doctors,⁶ and admittedly, the missionaries did not offer the most expert of care--at one point Aganetha Fast took up dentistry after trying it once on herself⁷--but compared to Chinese methods, they usually offered the most advanced techniques in rural or outlying areas.

⁶Marie Regier, "Cultural Interpretation in a Local Community in China" (Draft copy of M.A. thesis, University of Chicago Divinity School, 1936), 37.

⁷Aganetha Fast, Out of My Attic (Freeman, S. Dak., 1970), 70-72. She quickly gave it up, however, when she met a man whose teeth were so bad she did not know how to help him.

In some regions, for example, sacrificial mournings were still held when one of a family lay near death. Beseeking the gods to sweep the illness away, a loved one would cut from his or her arm or leg a strip of flesh, usually six inches or more, and would boil it in water before feeding its broth to the patient for which it was made. Custom decreed the sacrificial party's identity not be divulged, but the gods knew who did it, and everyone hoped they would bless such valor with a gift of life to the dying infirmed. In one instance, Fast knew of a woman who literally skinned her arm from wrist to elbow, all in a selfless act for the one she loved.⁸

Birth was nearly as barbaric, and often occurred in a hopeless lack of sanitation. In the parturient tradition of her ancestors, a Chinese woman would squat over a large crock or jar to deliver, and if a crock could not be found, her baby dropped into the dust on her cottage floor. Worse yet, no one dared to pick it up until the afterbirth appeared, and because most women feared cutting the umbilical with rusty scissors, they usually sawed it off with a sharpened cornstalk. Needless to say, infant mortality soared, and most youngsters who survived found themselves lacking in clothes (diapers, for example, were only sandbags), for few parents prepared much by way of toddler's apparel; if the child died, what would have been the use? The missionaries

⁸Ibid., 26-27.

would deliver babies for only \$1.25, sometimes even reducing that price,⁹ and when they proved how they could reduce the mortality, Mennonite women were constantly called to work as midwives. Matilda K. Voth even began to sound as much like a scientist as a missionary: once the Chinese learned that tetanus "is found in the dirt and not the wind or evil spirits," she wrote, "an entirely new world opened up and they took to hygienic methods gladly."¹⁰

Scientific doctors were, of course, rare, and on one occasion, while still in eastern China, Elizabeth Goertz filled in for a doctor who temporarily left town. She treated an average of fourteen patients a day, some of whom needed minor surgery (such as lancing boils), and many of whom had ailments beyond the usual expertise of nurses. Nonetheless, "on the mission field one is called upon to perform many more kinds of duties" and before the doctor returned, she had cared for 435 patients in all.¹¹ So successful were some missionaries that their reputation surpassed their technology, and when Marie Regier was asked to eradicate a small town's malaria epidemic, she regretfully told the man who asked her that that was impossible. "But

⁹Elizabeth Goertz, "We are Wanted Here," The Mennonite 65 (Jan. 10, 1950): 23.

¹⁰Matilda K. Voth, Clear Shining After Rain (North Newton, Kans., 1980), 209-210.

¹¹Quoted in ibid., 107-108.

don't you always carry medicine with you," he argued, and "don't you always do good?"¹²

Even in large cities doctors were scarce, but in Chengtu, teachers were not. The city sector where Ma P'eng Kai Street ran was especially dotted with high schools, and throughout the city, there were three large universities and over one hundred high schools or business schools. "From the poorest ricksha puller to the wealthiest, even the women (and quite aged ones) could read," wrote Fast. "It seems to me that in one term I have not touched as many people with the Gospel message as I have here now within one year."¹³ Their mission was luckily situated next to a printing press, and the missionaries luxuriated in the availability of literature--in fact, one of Fast's first acquaintances was a Canadian worker at the press, a Miss Fee, who proved to be a valuable friend when leaflets were produced. Rarely did the Chinese refuse a leaflet, and even when pulling the missionaries around, ricksha drivers always grinned and thanked the missionaries for the sermons they received en route. When Fast wrote back to the Mission Board, she was quick to let them know of these reactions:

Hundreds and hundreds of people have thus been reached by one of your representatives alone and if you then figure in that many for each of the others of your

¹²Regier, "Cultural," 36.

¹³Fast to Mission Board, Chengtu, Feb. 2, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 38.

missionaries, who will dare to say, that it was foolish to send out the missionaries spending so much money."¹⁴

"We have not walked upon roses without thorns," her letter metaphorically rang, "but we did see roses and most beautiful ones and most fragrant ones."¹⁵

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Mennonites were flooded with invitations to teach once they reached Chengtu. Both P. J. and Frieda Boehr taught English classes throughout the week, and on Sunday mornings Boehr taught one more before his weekly sermon. Actually, their English classes almost mimicked sermons, and about half of them were devoted to New Testament study; the idea was to teach English and Christianity simultaneously, an economical ploy to be sure, but also an intertwining of cultural imperialism and religion.¹⁶ Rather reluctantly, Fast taught for six months at a government university, and less reluctantly at Chengtu's own Union Theological Seminary where her class covered "Personal Evangelism." She also tutored individual Chinese who came to the mission for personal lessons, and when she taught for the government school, she made good use of her walking time between it and the mission. Leaving hours before she had to, she stopped along the way and handed out leaflets or preached

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶P. J. Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Feb. 2, 1949, ibid., Folder 11.

impromptu on the city's streets, and at one point, estimated three to four hundred souls being "touched" every week.¹⁷

Missionary education by the 1940's had shed most of that hyperbolic racism so prevalent with nineteenth century preachers like Samuel Wells Williams and Elijah Coleman Bridgeman, but a degree of racism (or ethnocentrism) remained, and as late as 1925, one book of "missionary rhymes" for children made it clear:

Three little heathen didn't know what to do;
One learned our language, then there were two.

Two little heathen couldn't have any fun;
One gave up idols, then there was but one.

One little heathen standing all alone;
He learned to love our flag, then there were none.¹⁸

Mennonites, of course, paid scant heed to flags, but they could be as stern in their dogma as any nationalist was in his patriotism. Their classes were not so much shields against ignorance as swords for the propagable good of God and Christ. In a tract outlining their approach, the stateside Mennonite teacher Elva Mae Schrock made her primary purpose sparkingly clear: "To bring to our children the personal challenge of Christ's 'Go ye,' that each one might hear His voice, and develop within himself the urge to find his place in the task." The "demands of adulthood" obscure

¹⁷Fast to Mission Board, Chengtu, Feb. 2, 1949, ibid., Folder 38.

¹⁸Quoted by William R. Hutchinson, Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions (Chicago, 1987), 123.

this directive unless there is "a deep and abiding interest," and "the time to arouse this interest, this conviction that the church's effort to carry out Christ's last commission is most important, is in childhood."¹⁹

Before the war, missionary pedagogy had been archaic; most students still studied out loud, except when one recited and the others were ordered to be quiet. Those reciting a passage from the Bible or a previous lesson of English were expected to do so from memory, and while a few questions of interpretation were asked, memorization was emphasized more than anything.²⁰ By the West China mission's time, however, a number of voices were raised for modernization, and Schrock was one of the loudest among them. Given "a leader with . . . vision," she reasoned that capturing a child's interest would ultimately capture a child's soul. "Much information comes by way of activity, and information is a part of knowledge only when it has entered into the experience by finding expression in some way."²¹

Although Schrock wrote mostly in the hope of recruiting future missionaries from those growing up in America, her methods were also used in China, spurring the creation of games and the production of Biblical plays, perhaps

¹⁹Elva Mae Schrock, That They May Know: A Manual of Suggestions for the Missionary Education of Children (Newton, n.d.), 1.

²⁰Regier, "Cultural," 43.

²¹Schrock, That They May Know, 1-2.

coincidentally illumining the Mennonite intertwining of faith and works. Some of the missionaries' fondest reminiscences came from the time they spent with children. Aganetha Fast wrote of a boy she knew named Malcolm who made up the following story:

There was a horse. He went out to eat grass. He was a silly horse. His name was Billy. He knocked down the fence. Billy is not a good horse, because he knocks down people's things. But he does like peanuts. Billy has a friend to play with. Billy's friend is a cow.²²

Such creativity became the catchword of Mennonite pedagogy, if not of Mennonite theology.

In fact, the ultimate paucity of Chinese Christendom testified to demerits in the Mennonites' system; for all its newfound methods, their ineffectiveness seemed to recall Tolstoy's dilemma of "trying to teach without knowing how or what,"²³ and when an "indecent" drawing was found on the door post of a Mennonite school in East China, the chasm of cultures challenged those teachers again. Chinese instructors punished the whole class, but when Marie Regier asked why they had, one Chinese girl looked up and asked, "Isn't the sin of one the sin of all?"²⁴ New words, old thoughts.

Throughout the winter of 1948-1949, the missionaries used every method they knew to get their message across, and Boehr was pleased to report in January that Gospel meetings

²²Fast, Attic, 49.

²³Lyof N. Tolstoi, My Confession in My Confession, My Religion, The Gospel in Brief (New York, 1899), Chapter II.

²⁴Regier, "Cultural," 44.

were being held every evening and afternoon as they had been for the preceding three months. In their chapels they offered regular classes for the children, and when Christmas arrived, the students helped with holiday programs. Frequently, the missionaries visited their churchgoers' homes, and when possible, they worked on periodic city-wide campaigns, usually involving tract distribution and door-to-door preaching. When he wrote, Boehr was especially excited about their newly-arranged catechetical instruction, "given to those interested in learning more of the Christian doctrine."²⁵

"Cottage Bible classes" were also effective for recruiting women, offering local women a chance to meet weekly in one or another's home and to discuss various points of this quirky Western religion. Ordinarily, a meeting began with the hostess choosing a song or prayer, followed by her choosing of a Biblical reading as well. When the Bible was not used, a Mennonite tract or book of some sort was, and when the reading was finished, the hostess attempted to explain its significance in her own words as well as she could. Once a woman had been accepted into the group, she was considered a "Big Sister," and shared equally in the responsibility for her "Little Sisters" (or inquirers), as well as the unconverted.²⁶

²⁵Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Jan. 24, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

²⁶Fast, Attic, 60.

In Eastern China, tent revivals were popular--much like those which once flourished in the United States--but in Chengtu, a local prison offered superior opportunities for converts. At first, the missionaries would preach there twice a week, but when the prison authorities complained that their inmates lost too much work time, the meetings were reduced to weekly affairs.²⁷ Regardless of where they preached, their ingenuity often determined their effectiveness. Thus Agnes Wuthrich made good use of her accordion to attract crowds into their street chapels, or to soften the resolve of resisting prisoners,²⁸ and William Voth resourcefully converted his motorcycle into a make-shift locomotive, roping a bicycle behind it so two could travel with the effort of one.²⁹

Of course, bringing the Chinese to church was only a fraction of their work, and as was mentioned in the previous chapter, only a few inquirers stayed very long, but even those who stayed rarely approached the Western model of a congregation. As Marie Regier put it, "the sense of awe and worship seems to be very much lacking," and even during sermons, people would enter and leave at will--usually with excessive noise. "A Bible woman feels it her duty to hush up

²⁷Frieda Boehr to Mission Board, "Personal Report as of Fourth Quarter 1949," GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

²⁸Lester Wuthrich to Nyce, Chengtu, Feb. 4, 1949, ibid., Folder 149.

²⁹Voth, Clear Shining, 178.

a newcomer," and with increased attendance came increased noise, offering those Bible women ample chance to ply their trade.

A few preachers make definite efforts to halt the conversation by means of a reprimand, but everyone seems to be perfectly impervious to it. The church school youngsters all sit in the front row which gives them a wonderful opportunity to indulge in spitting contests and take-offs on the preacher. One nudges his neighbor or else snatches away his Sunday School pictures which may lead to fisticuffs.³⁰

A congregation of church members differed considerably from a roomful of inquirers, but even with the supposedly serious, periodic recreation breaks were advised, and those who wished to discuss religion could while those who declined could do whatever they were inclined to do.³¹

At other times, the mission's neighbors objected to its noisy services, or complained about the hectic traffic it produced. During the summer of 1949, Boehr wrote of a Mrs. Hsing, his land-lady, whose apartment adjoined one of the chapels (and whose name, he noted, "means 'bear' and she is of somewhat that nature"), and he described her stubborn adversity to the children's meetings which perpetually disturbed the "idle rich" life she tried to lead. "We pray for her conversion to Christ, and need the faith for it too," he wrote, but his frustration must have been considerable, for as his letter continued, he ascribed to the God of Mercy some fairly Draconian means:

³⁰Regier, "Cultural," 52.

³¹Ibid., 52-5.

Just this morning (July 31st) the Lord spoke to her, I want to believe, thru the serious and sudden illness of her older son, who was then attended by our good christian Dr. coworker Mrs. Chu. I had already thought it might take something like serious illness to bring this opponent of the Gospel to terms, so we keep on praying and believing.³²

To the Chinese, these would-be lessons took on as many meanings as they would have for a like number of Westerners, and the missionaries never knew if their word was spreading as they wished it to. No doubt they all remembered the Hopei-Honan congregation which was left without Mennonite supervision years before. With the Americans gone, this congregation reasoned, their church had completed its function; it had given the Americans a chance to do their God's will, and thus achieve their place in white-man's Heaven. Now, alone, the Chinese could go back to finding the Heaven of their forefathers.³³

But to other Chinese, Christianity did not even relate to Heaven; it was just a new form of magic, a formula to be tried when the old formulas failed, and to still others, it was a form of magic found in themselves. Regier recalled one woman who was greatly respected by her neighbors for the way she bore herself after losing three daughters to a single plague. The woman never flinched in her Christian convictions, and as Regier put it, "to see her happy smile

³²Boehr (P. J., as always unless specifically noted) to Mission Board, Chengtu, July, 30, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

³³Voth, Clear Shining, 85. Voth, rightly or wrongly, decided these were Buddhist notions.

convinces one that she has really found some thing worthwhile." For that woman, at least, her religion had relegated canon to its proper mythical place, and had quantifiably improved her life--even while not physically or socially improving a thing. She exemplified the success of missionary endeavor, a success which occurred far too rarely.

Of course, P. J. Boehr thought its occurrence would be greatly increased if only Kweiyang was under his benevolent wing, and to ring in the new year, H. J. Brown helped him by reopening that painful argument in a letter to the Board. "The Methodists have offered us . . . two or three counties north of the city," he told them, emphasizing how there are "very few Christians there," and most all the people "are very backward and exceedingly poor." Somewhat less enthused than Boehr, Brown admitted "no hope" for "establishing an independent church," but he saw a better rationale: Kweiyang breathed easier under the fluttering threat of red flags, and it lay along a highway connecting Chungking, Chengtu, and even Paoki. Thus the missionaries could expand to Kweiyang now, and escape to it later if such a move was ever forced upon them. He neglected to mention that the highway was a thousand miles long.³⁴

Nevertheless, Boehr had determined to move ahead, and had even begun a search for property in Kweiyang. Along with a Mr. Ts'ao, one of the Chengtu evangelists, William Voth was

³⁴Brown to Nyce, Shanghai, Jan. 21, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 13.

sent to Kweiyang just before Christmas, and when Boehr informed Nyce of Voth's property-seeking voyage,³⁵ Nyce was not at all impressed. The Executive Secretary reminded Boehr that the Kweiyang field had never been approved and he quoted one Board member as fuming about the missionaries' failure to prove their case with facts. Mission funds simply could not be thrown around so haphazardly, Nyce scolded, "after all, we are servants of the Conference and we must answer to them for extravagance."³⁶ But while his words were clear, his voice was weak, and despite Nyce's tone, the fact he took four weeks to respond underscored Boehr's self-assured justification. Additionally, Mr. Ts'ao's reports were encouraging, and, to a lesser extent, so was the general mood about the war. Most missionaries were playing their future by ear, and were planning only to wait and watch for further developments; thus the C.I.M. determined to keep its Chengtu workers put, but the Scandinavian Alliance Mission packed themselves up for Kweiyang. Others traveled all the way to Canton, and while a goodly number elected not to move, those who did thought they should while they could. Boehr told the Board to send their Kweiyang decision by cable; with Ts'ao's report, he was simply tired of waiting.³⁷

³⁵Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Dec. 18, 1948, ibid., Folder 11.

³⁶Nyce to Boehr, Pretty Prairie, Jan. 14, 1949, ibid. The fact-minded Board member remained anonymous.

³⁷Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Jan. 26, 1949, ibid.

His sentiments were echoed by Aganetha Fast, who rose to eloquent heights in expressing her opinion:

Dear Brethren, if you could have been here during the Christmas season and have gone with each one of us and seen how many, many souls were reached by each one of us individuals--dear folks, you would have been overwhelmed and said in wonder: "Lord it is enough, I can't hold anymore!"³⁸

As for the Board's negligence in corresponding, "your missionaries were true to their churches trust. We did not fail them. Did they [fail us]?" Fast even railed at the Board's neglect in sending young people to China (something which had not yet come up), and queried: "Do you realize that half your missionaries here are over 60 years old. . . . It quite struck me a few weeks ago."³⁹

Again, the Board was hardly impressed. Just before Fast sent that letter, Nyce had complained to Dyck that

reading and rereading Miss Fast's letters are a trial. She just rambles on and on. In that respect she and Brother Boehr have much in common. She writes about the fact that we must have patience with her and other missionaries for while we have all the comforts of home, she and the others are not only homeless but refugees. Naturally it is an awful way of living but after-all, I think the Board has been most patient with the China workers.⁴⁰

"It is rather hard," he concluded, ". . . to decide just what is the right thing to do when one writes this and another

³⁸Fast to Mission Board, Feb. 2, 1949, ibid., Folder 38.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Nyce to Walter Dyck, Pretty Prairie, Jan. 26, 1949, ibid., Folder 31.

something just a little different,"⁴¹ and to be sure, there were discrepancies in letters the Board received, but their failure to face the China question was grotesquely apparent by mid-February, when Dyck wrote back to Nyce: "I wonder whether our Board would like to join other groups in the observance of a world-wide day of prayer for China? Judging from Miss Fast's letter, we are not doing nearly enough here to promote interest in China missions."⁴²

As if to soothe their fears, H. J. Brown send a series of letters to both Boehr and Nyce expressing his optimism for China's future--even if the Communists won. As early as February, he had used recent Communist gains as reasoning for Albert Jantzen's departure by arguing that "this change-over may take time and create confusion in getting a China visa";⁴³ better to get one now than after Mao's victory is complete when they may not be available. Writing Boehr, Brown flatly asserted that "the communists have repeatedly said, that they want church and school work to continue,"⁴⁴ and he reported to the Board that

we have very definite word by Miss Sayre of Kaifeng, and Miss Regier, Miss Quiring and Mrs. Schrag of Ningling, that the communists are not interfering in church and school work. In Kaifeng our Bible School has a greater

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Dyck to Nyce, Newton, Kans., Feb. 23, 1949, ibid.

⁴³Brown quoted by Dyck to Nyce, Newton, Feb. 1, 1949, ibid.

⁴⁴Brown to Boehr, Shanghai, Mar. 24, 1949, ibid., Folder 13.

enrollment than last year. Two mission high schools are at work as before.⁴⁵

Not only were American dollars financing their operations, but according to Brown, Communist officials had actually encouraged the missionaries to bring more in and put them to work at the mission.⁴⁶ "In case you have no way of getting them in," he quoted the officials as saying, "send them through our office in Hongkong. They will come here via Shihchiachuang."⁴⁷

By the second of March, the Board was still balking, and Boehr freely expressed his opinion of their methods,⁴⁸ but two days later their methods changed, and a decision was finally imparted to Boehr: "We inform the China Missionaries that if they are still of the opinion that they would like to move to Kweiyang and surrounding territory, it is agreeable to the board."⁴⁹

Boehr had got his wish, and the Board had satisfied their noisy mission chief, but little did the mission chief expect that each favor the Board granted exacted equal evidence from Boehr that the China field was worth it. The bigger the favor, the better the results would have to be,

⁴⁵Brown to Nyce, Shanghai, Mar. 23, 1949, ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Brown to Boehr, Shanghai, Mar. 24, 1949, ibid.

⁴⁸Boehr to Goering and Nyce, Chengtu, Mar. 2, 1949, ibid., Folder 16.

⁴⁹Ibid.; Mission Board to Boehr, Mar. 4, 1949, ibid., Folder 11.

and when the Board took as long as they did in approving Kweiyang, the size of their favor should have been blatantly obvious.

CHAPTER FIVE

(April -- June 1949)

When God wishes to send disaster upon a person, He first sends him a little luck to elate him and see whether he can receive it in a worthy manner; when God wishes to send blessing upon a person, He first sends him a little mishap and sees how well he can take it.

--Chinese Proverb

As early as January, and long before the Board's Kweiyang verdict, Kreider admonished Nyce again for the Board's failure to keep in touch with its Chengtu workers. The President understood how his missionaries "anxiously await[ed]" any news from America, and he also understood that when no word arrived, they could come to feel abandoned, yet even he could not alleviate the Board's inertia, and even he could not foretell the future of Szechwan.¹

Neither was he, as the Board's leader, wholly responsible for their bureaucratic meanderings, and indeed, a good part of their problem was simple inefficiency. Because they met in person very rarely, a typical proposition would trundle through days or even weeks of red tape before finally

¹A. E. Kreider to Howard G. Nyce, Goshen, Ind., Jan. 1, 1949, General Conference Board of Missions/Commission on Overseas Missions Collection, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 77, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kans.

being passed or rejected, and generally, Nyce sent such propositions to the Board's Executive Committee (Kreider, Unruh, and Goering) before sending them to anyone else. The first copy went to Kreider, who attached either his endorsement or his veto, and then sent it along to Unruh, who did the same. Goering received it from Unruh, and generally returned it directly to Nyce; if the Executive Committee was in agreement, the proposition would go to Pannabecker, Thiessen, and Wedel, but occasional resolutions were passed on Executive unanimity alone. Tedious as it was, their system was far more efficient than constant meetings would have been, and by mid-1949, they determined to meet in person only twice a year.

Thus even if they had decided quickly about Kweiyang, their decision would still have been delayed in bureaucratic machinery, and it could not have been rushed to Chengtu with the blinding speed that the missionaries wished it would be. Neither could Boehr receive positive word about his hoped-for station wagon, and owing partly to inefficiency and partly to hesistance, the Board almost seemed (in China) to have forgotten about the car; even H. J. Brown was wondering why the Board delayed, for Brown supported Boehr's request, and had written his own home pastor, the Rev. Erland Waltner of Mountain Lake, Minnesota, with the car in mind--and about when Boehr wrote Nyce. Brown had heard that Waltner sympathized with the mission's plight, and rumor reached Shanghai that the good reverend was even collecting donations

for their needed vehicle. If the rumors were true, and if Waltner kept his efforts up, Brown thought his Chengtu brethren might have their car after all, but both he and Boehr were acutely aware of a rabid pessimism plaguing the Mennonites' China-watchers in the states, and as Brown warned his Minnesota pastor: "Someone suggested that we appeal to another church, but I said 'No.' This is your offer and also opportunity. I am sure that you with one big move will bring in the amount needed."²

His sentiments were unanimous among those in Chengtu, and at various times, nearly every conceivable argument was used to coerce the Board into approving this new expenditure. Conscious of the Board's notoriously tight fist, Boehr even tried to conclude that buying a car would glean them a profit, and he carelessly bragged about a missionary in Chungking who reportedly sold his own vehicle for a cool five U.S. million--"when it would possibly not cost more than . . . \$1,500 to \$2,000 . . . in the United States."³

Needless to say, the Board was unimpressed, and at one point, Krieder feebly offered \$100 for more bicycles,⁴ but

²H. J. Brown to Erland Waltner, Shanghai, Aug. 30, 1948, ibid., Folder 13.

³P. J. Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, n.d., Doc. No. 17, ibid., Folder 11.

⁴Kreider to Nyce, Goshen, Nov. 25, 1948, ibid., Folder 76. This actually resulted from a flap caused by Fast when she wrote requesting one bicycle for one Chinese worker who did not have one. Pannabecker had been particularly upset: "I favor those needing bicycles getting them if necessary with mission help. I do not favor individual missionaries writing to the Board for bicycle money until the plan has been

ultimately Waltner's church did purchase a car in Mountain Lake, and ultimately the Board did feel responsible to pay for it. Minnesota was a long way from Chengtu, however, and shortly after the car was purchased, its opponents begged to sell it back, and with conditions tightening around Szechwan, their cries were not totally ignored. When (inevitably) rumors of a resale reached Chengtu, Boehr wrote as if beside himself with grief; he called such a move "premature," and waxed eloquent in describing the mountainous passes and rickety rickshas he and his wife would otherwise have to bear.⁵ When more concrete rumors reached the mission, Boehr's furor broke: "We are very much surprised to hear that the Mt. Lake Station wagon . . . has been ordered sold! Is that the case? Oh, how we've waited for that: God help our home friends not to lose heart for the China work!"⁶

Three days later, the car still lingered on his mind, and Boehr felt "like 'blazoning' [his] thought about that Station Wagon" on the Board members' minds as well. Not only could more souls be saved with the mission's evangelization on wheels, but the car could help them escape, he reasoned, as Szechwan's stability was increasingly challenged. Boehr wrote in a tone of constrained frustration, and while he

approved by the group on the field." See S. F. Pannabecker to Nyce, Chicago, Nov. 20, 1948, ibid., Folder 98.

⁵Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Feb. 17, 1949, ibid., Folder 11.

⁶Boehr to Nyce family, Chengtu, Feb. 19, 1949, ibid.

begged the Board to "please pardon my direct way of speaking," he was also "wondering sometime whether the churches are actually thinking of slowing down too much on the China mission schedule." Perhaps as an additional prod, he referred in the margins to two of the missionaries' favorite Biblical passages, interjecting them as if hinting that the Board should take note:

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying, 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."⁷

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'⁸

Only in this case, pleaded Boehr, ask that the Lord send a station wagon.⁹

Aganetha Fast, who was oddly convinced that H. J. Brown opposed the vehicle, was even more emphatic: "To our grief here in West China we hear that our dear church is planning

⁷John 4:34-38. "Lift up Your Eyes, And Look on the Fields; for they are White Already to Harvest" also became the mission's motto, and appeared on all of their stationery.

⁸Matthew 9:36-38.

⁹Boehr to Nyce, Chengtu, Feb. 22, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

or perhaps has already sold the lovely station wagon just because the Board or Mr. Brown have advised them to do so. It is too bad," she continued, for how inspiring it would be to think that our church in spite of all the disturbing reports and advises faithfully stood by us and would at the risk of losing out financially send it in on first opportunity. . . . But as yet we [are] waiting, waiting, but waiting with God. Again here too, not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,--prayer--will accomplish the impossible.¹⁰

Shameful it was, she concluded, that "in the meantime it could have been used to bring dear old mothers and fathers to church services or take them to the shopping district"; shameful it was that Brown's word "is only his word and not that of the mission," and finally, how obtuse of the Board to listen to Brown, for "he is where the walls of Jericho totter, while here everything is so far peaceful and everybody goes about his or her work as usual."¹¹

All this over a station wagon, thought Nyce, and with some astonishment he informed Boehr that "yes, . . . I believe the Station Wagon is resold, at least they were planning to resell it," but unbeknownst to Nyce, those in Mountain Lake were equally astonished, and they had determined not to sell--if for no other reason because they felt it unfair to their Chevrolet dealer. When he learned of that decision, Nyce suspected that the Board could still buy the car from Mountain Lake, but he insisted that the mission

¹⁰Aganetha Fast to Waltner family, Chengtu, Feb. 26, 1949, ibid., Folder 38.

¹¹ibid.

act as a unit if they really wanted it; several of the missionaries had written in, and their stories occasionally diverged. Fast's description of Chengtu as a city where "everybody goes about his or her work as usual" hardly coincided with Boehr's notion of using the car to escape in, and Fast's accusations against Brown baldly refuted Brown's earlier position. Clearly the Board was more confused than anything, and when Nyce wrote, he somewhat incredibly asserted that even if this car had been sold, the Board could always buy another!¹²

When the Mountain Lake Church decided not to sell, however, the Board decided not to buy, and the Church continued to hold their car in Minnesota indefinitely. Nyce and Goering, who were relieved to learn that the car would not be sold, even suggested sending it with Albert Jantzen if Jantzen finally left for China,¹³ but while Pannabecker concurred with their notion, he did so with an even greater impetus to act; unlike most on the Board, he was convinced "that this is the time they need transportation if ever. If it is feasible to send the vehicle out there I would not advise selling it."¹⁴

¹²Mission Board (Nyce) to Boehr, Pretty Prairie, Kans., Mar. 4, 1949, ibid., Folder 11.

¹³Nyce to Sam Goering, Pretty Prairie, Mar. 11, 1949, ibid., Folder 48; Goering to Nyce, North Newton, Mar. 14, 1949, ibid.; Nyce to Brown, Pretty Prairie, Mar. 17, 1949, ibid., Folder 13.

¹⁴Pannabecker to Nyce, Chicago, Mar. 16, 1949, ibid., Folder 98.

By mid-March, Nyce mailed a resolution suggesting that Jantzen leave "as soon as possible" and that he take the car with him; he also asked Rev. Waltner for the station wagon's bill. When Nyce wrote to Kreider, he sent a voucher for the vehicle's expense (which was to be signed by Kreider), and informed the President that several Bethel College students would bring the car to North Newton on their return from Easter vacation. "Then we will let Brother Jantzen use it," he concluded,¹⁵ and by early April, after the resolution was circulated and returned (and after several more bureaucratic reforms had been installed), the Board agreed both to "accept" the station wagon and to grant Albert Jantzen the "privilege" of returning to China. Jantzen would, of course, be responsible for the car after both he and it reached China, and for a time, at least, the matter seemed settled to all.¹⁶

Also settled was H. J. Brown's retirement; he would be replaced, the Board determined, by William Voth, who they now decided should move from Chengtu to Shanghai. Brown preferred to see Jantzen succeed him, but Jantzen's role in China remained unclear, even if the Board had approved his departure. To be sure, he could have found work at home, and among other things, he did visit the Canadian schools

¹⁵Nyce to Kreider, Pretty Prairie, Mar. 22, 1949, ibid., Folder 77.

¹⁶Circular Letter of Resolutions, Apr. 4, 1949, ibid., Folder 42.

Thiessen wanted him to,¹⁷ but pro-China Board members, Pannabecker chief among them, again succeeded in swaying the Board toward the inclusion of this missionary onto their favorite field.¹⁸ Kreider had mentioned as early as February 18 that "we should bear in mind our responsibility to the young people whom the Browns have been helping and working with,"¹⁹ and with communications between America and the Chinese inland perpetually threatened, the Board did not want to continue without a go-between along the coast. A few missionaries also worked in Kaifeng, and as long as Mennonites stayed China anyway, the Board concluded that they could manage most effectively with a central treasurer--be it Jantzen or be it Voth--who was physically detached from either field.

On April 1, Nyce informed Brown of both the station wagon's purchase, and the Board's decision to finally send Albert Jantzen. He expressed his sorrow that the car could not have been purchased in China, for one week earlier (and in direct contradistinction from Boehr) Brown had written of two other station wagons, one a Dodge and the second a Willys, that were recently sold in Shanghai "still in the

¹⁷For Jantzen's itinerary in Canada, see J. J. Thiessen to Nyce, Saskatoon, Jan. 6, 1949, ibid., Folder 129. This had been a second copy; Nyce lost the first one (Nyce to Thiessen, Pretty Prairie, Dec. 31, 1948, ibid.).

¹⁸Pannabecker to Nyce, Chicago, Feb. 26, 1949, ibid., Folder 98.

¹⁹Kreider to Nyce, Pannabecker, and Wedel, Goshen, Feb. 18, 1949, ibid., Folder 77.

crates" for half their U.S. price.²⁰ Brown also suggested that when Jantzen arrived, he should travel directly to Shanghai, for in Brown's opinion, he was not especially needed in Chengtu. The mission's old plans to employ him had been made when the Boehrs still hoped to return to Paoki, when William Voth and Aganetha Fast intended to work in Kweiyang, and when Goertz and Jantzen would have been alone in Chengtu. Now Kuyf had arrived, a number of Chinese had been proselytized, and the Boehrs, so far as Brown knew, were not intending to move anywhere.²¹

But Brown did move, and on April 28, he left Shanghai (where he had first set foot in 1909) a wizened and respected Mennonite patriarch.²² He left a few weeks earlier than planned, but the shipping company would not assure that their President Cleveland could call again on Shanghai, so they offered the Brown's space aboard the President Wilson instead--and gave them only two days to pack.²³ Everywhere his field was in crisis, and Brown was certainly willing to

²⁰Nyce to Brown, Pretty Prairie, Apr. 1, 1949, ibid., Folder 13. For Brown's station wagon story, see Brown to Nyce, Mar. 23, 1949, ibid.

²¹Brown to Nyce, Shanghai, Apr. 7, 1949, ibid. Brown was agitated with the Chengtu workers, and had recently felt offended when they requested their own bank accounts in the U.S. "Judging from that," he wrote Nyce, "I may have been dismissed as treasurer, although only voted in on Aug. last." For a more detailed explanation, see Brown to Nyce, Shanghai, Apr. 1, 1949, ibid.

²²Telegrams, Brown to Nyce, Shanghai, ibid., Folder 13.

²³Brown to Nyce, Honolulu, Hawaii, May 7, 1949, ibid.

stay, but how much he could have done was questionable. With Shanghai's political stability eroding, banks refused to forward funds into the interior, and in some of the missions, students panicked and fled, victims of the fear which preceeded a Communist advance. In the city of Shanghai itself, banks would pay only ten percent of anyone's deposit, and exchange rates fluctuated by the hour.²⁴ So concerned was Brown about leaving his field in good hands, that he hardly felt he could leave at all, and in his own account of those last good-byes and final hours, his criticism of the Board sounded much like Boehr's:

Although I had months ahead requested the Foreign Mission Board to appoint another missionary or Chinese to come and take over our work and later urgently requested that before our Easter services at HengYang definite word should be sent to me, none came. James Liu [from the Mennonite's orphanage at Hengyang] with his family was willing to come to Shanghai and take over; but I told him to wait, until we should get back to Shanghai, for I was so positive that a letter from the secretary would be there waiting for me. but no! Not a word!²⁵

By that time, Communist troops had already crossed the Yangtze, railroads were cut, and air service between Shanghai and Hengyang was irregular to say the least; when Brown left, Liu had still not reached his destination.²⁶ Nevertheless, and perhaps as a parting gesture toward his Chengtu workers, the old pioneer requested while steaming away that another

²⁴Brown to Mission Board, Freeman, S. Dak., June, 23, 1949, ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

thousand dollars be sent them; he knew well that Boehr's people might have to leave,²⁷ and reports from western China were not encouraging. Brown was deeply distressed with the Yangtze River crossing, but he probably had not heard of the Nationalist turncoat Tai Yung-kwan, who not only allowed the Communists to cross, but who also shelled his compatriots at Kiangyin to see that the Communists could. Only four days before Brown left, the Reds which Tai assisted took Nanking, and while Nationalist brass promised to make Shanghai a "second Stalingrad,"²⁸ Brown must have seen the advantages of leaving, even if he still loved China enough to stay.

Meanwhile, the American Consulate in Chungking sent another warning to those in his district, within which, of course, was Chengtu. "In view of the further rapid deterioration" of the Nationalists' position, he warned, even "those with compelling reasons . . . are urged to consider seriously once again whether they are prepared to remain." "Serious disturbances and inconvenience" (such as being shot or suffering through famine), were possible, but even if drastic disasters did not occur, losses of water, light, telephone, and telegraph services probably would, and perhaps most frightening, contact with the outside world was expected

²⁷Record of cables sent, n.d., ibid., Folder 11.

²⁸F. F. Liu, A Military History of Modern China, 1924-1949 (Princeton, 1956), 266-67.

to become "limited or impossible."²⁹ Naturally concerned, Chengtu's foreigners held another meeting--there were by then about 150 missionaries in the city³⁰--and in general, their feeling was to "stay it out." Yet Boehr detected a concurrent sense of premonition, "a strange feeling of uncertainty about the future," and for the first time, even he somewhat wistfully alluded to non-Chinese work. "One could wish that our church had a mission-work in either the P[hilippine] Islands or in Japan," he mused, but then he quickly added that if they did, his people would only plan to "temporarily leave,"³¹ and while he compared those of his peers who planned to stay at any cost (like the Methodists) with those who "would like to leave before they would be 'behind the iron curtain,'" Boehr characteristically applied to himself another of his favorite verses: "When ye see that these things come to pass, lift up your eyes, for your salvation draweth nigh."³²

To be sure, the mission business boomed every time Red troops stormed another city, and in their Quarterly Report of April 27, the missionaries boasted that over sixty Chinese had attended their Sunday School the previous Sunday, and

²⁹American Consulate to American Citizens in Chungking Consular District, Chungking, Apr. 25, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Subject Series, Series 1-4, Folder 11.

³⁰Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Apr. 27, 1949, ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.; the verse quoted is Luke 21:28.

about fifty showed up for church services at the Tea House. The Boehrs' mutual prison ministries, which were again held twice a week, drew crowds in excess of a hundred, and with obvious satisfaction, Boehr reported of some twenty prisoners having requested baptism. The missionaries worried about the finity of baptisms possible before a takeover, and Boehr considered reducing the characteristic six-month "probation" between inquiry and that final act, but prudently he elected not to artificially accelerate that which the Lord had plenty of time for, and on April 16, his missionaries opened another chapel in one of the city's west suburbs. Its two hundred-worshiper capacity was likely to be stretched, so they determined simply to do their best in the time that was remaining.³³

Still, their sense of urgency (or dubiousity) persisted, and not unlike that ancient decade of virgins, they quickly saw what work was left undone. In something of an emergency effort, the missionaries began to form a central Christian Fellowship to speed the creation of an embryonic local church, and they hoped that if the mission would fail as a foreign venture, it could perhaps survive under Chinese rule; to be sure, missions had folded in the past when treading those crucial waters, but with a core leadership of fifteen

³³Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Apr. 17, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11. A detailed account of the mission's activities were required by the Board on a quarterly basis, even if loquaciously epistolary workers like Boehr reported more often.

South

Approx June, 1950

Chengtu, Szechuan
West China

East + West Street

120 babies born under
our care first year.

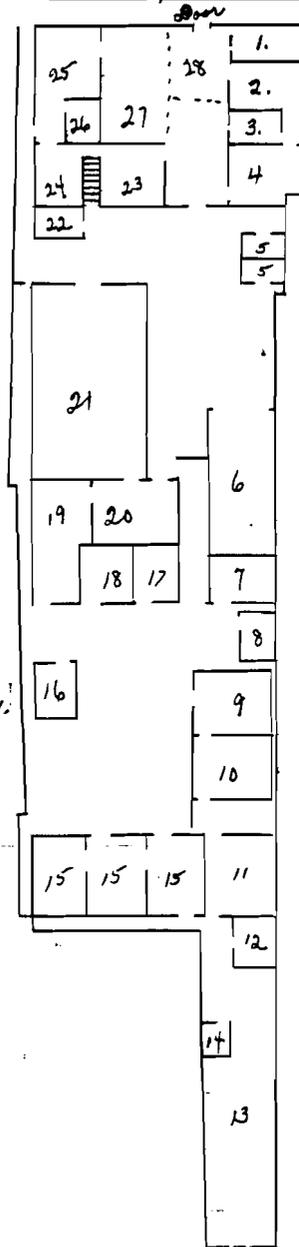
This place is outside of
the city wall, on the
very busy, big east and
west street

The spaces where there
aren't any numbers
are plain ground,
with some bushes, etc.
no trees.

Services are held here
each night except ~~Saturday~~ ^{Sunday}.

There are also classes for girls,
men and women.

Half of the folks who are
baptized ^{in our church} come from this
place



1. Registration room
2. Diagnosis "
3. Dispensary
4. Clinic dressing room
5. Men's and Women's toilets
6. Garage for truck
7. Bedroom for Rev. Chang's daughter -in-law.
8. Rev. Chang's kitchen
- 9.) Rev. Chang's rooms
- 10.) Wang family kitchen
11. Small storeroom
12. Back storage room
13. Toilet
14. Wang's home
15. Doctor's kitchen
16. Nurses room
17. " "
18. Dr. Kuo's "
19. Reading and class room
20. New church (with straw roof)
21. Kitchen for gateman
22. Women's examination room
23. Delivery room
24. In-patient department (room for 3 mothers)
25. Drug - store room
26. Street chapel
27. Upstairs room for gateman.
- 28.

North

The West Suburb Chapel,
Chengtu.

to twenty Chinese, Boehr thought he could "start the ball a-rolling" before he left, and with additional emergency travel funds from the Board, he prayed that the missionaries would not flee from the ruin of their work, but from its fruition. Already, Fast and the Wuthrich's talked about leaving, and with William Voth taking over for Brown, Goertz and Kuyf and the Boehrs could easily recognize their need to lay the mission's future in converted Chinese hands.³⁴

The promise of expansion now played like a cruel joke, and their Kweiyang dream carried with it the melodrama of everything that never was. Those who remained in Hopei and Honan gave their West China brethren cause to worry; no one knew what befell them, and every report extolling Communist sympathy was countermanded by reports decrying those atrocities which missionaries in the East supposedly suffered and missionaries in the West most definitely feared. The most the Chengtu workers could do was wait, pray, and continue as if their cause remained as hopeful as it had been when Boehr and Brown traveled through Shensi only a year and a half before. "It is still quiet here," Boehr wrote in early May,

and one sees people carrying on as though there were nothing serious ahead. Our house is next to a large Girl's School playground where hundreds of girls play and laugh, and seem so carefree. In general the people all over as we see them are a friendly lot, and one notices laughter among the young, and the older people too are not taking things too seriously. But we feel

³⁴Ibid.

for the youth of this land who have so little prospect for the future. . . .³⁵

Appropriately, he referred to the children again on May 12, when he repeated his message that, "things are going on as usual here, and there does not seem to be anxiety. Even missionaries with a few small children have said today that they are not planning to leave. . . ."36

Three of Boehr's workers did leave, however, and the mission chief reluctantly watched Fast depart on the advice of a doctor, and the Wuthriches depart after their own painful decision. Predictably, Boehr and the Board managed to bicker over the method by which these missionaries left (the Board arguing that "most direct" routes were ignored),³⁷ and predictably, they argued mostly over money; yet their arguments were not without reason, for as the war inched closer, Chengtu's economy was in contortions, and even Nyce suggested that if Boehr really was to stay, he should be supplied with as many funds as possible before a Communist takeover; conversion might be impossible after the Reds took

³⁵Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, May 3, 1949, ibid.

³⁶Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, May 12, 1949, ibid.

³⁷On their way out, the Wuthriches had been delayed in Chungking while their steamship reservations were arranged in Hong Kong. No one was allowed into Hong Kong without such reservations in hand, and unless they would use them within three weeks of their arrival. The Board had not understood, and they did not like the Wuthriches stalling in Chungking; first, because it wasted time, and secondly because planes charged \$1 a pound to carry passengers; trains were considerably cheaper. See ibid.; Nyce to Boehr, Pretty Prairie, May 12, 1949, ibid.

power. Basic living costs inflated dramatically, and at one point, Boehr accidentally sent one of his letters in the regular mail (instead of by air) because he mistakenly stamped it with a paltry \$220,000 after the current rate had climbed to \$580,000. In another of his letters, he calmly remarked that \$840,000 would be needed to put it through-- "another raise from yesterday of about a half-million."³⁸

Perhaps most interesting to Boehr was the chaotic natural corollary of these economic woes toward housing. He suspected that once the Reds took over, China's ancient landed gentry would lose their property, and while he hardly looked forward to the Communists' victory, he did think it might work to the missionaries' temporary advantage. Why not buy property now, reasoned Boehr, with the gentry convinced they are about to lose it? Certainly it sold cheaply enough, and having rediscovered his old enthusiasm, Boehr roughly estimated (for the Board's sake) that \$4000 could furnish their remaining workers with facilities that would have previously cost \$10,000. His figure eventually proved another sticking point, but his ideas were not wholly borne of conjecture, for the landlords they rented from at #30 had notified the Mennonites of their eviction, not because the missionaries failed to pay rent, but because the owners wanted the house for themselves; they, too, had feared that

³⁸Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, May 7, 1949, ibid. Obviously, Boehr referred to Chinese currency.

prospects of a Nationalist redoubt in Szechwan grew increasingly dim.⁴² In the United States, Nyce was informed by the Post Office that all mail and parcel post service to Szechwan would be temporarily suspended,⁴³ and by early June, Boehr wrote that gold and silver shortages in Chengtu were so acute that selling large items (such as cars) was nearly impossible; as far as he could tell, most of the city's rare metals supplies had been hoarded by the wealthy and flown to Hong Kong.⁴⁴

Naturally, the Board was worried about Brown's old apartment in Shanghai, a costly burden of dubious merit, especially now with James Liu's plans diverted. Wilber Lind, of the Mennonite Central Committee in Shanghai, agreed to hold the apartment temporarily, but by June, with the property still unsold or rented, Lind warned of "unsympathetic tenants" who might "voluntarily occupy" what they thought could go to better use.⁴⁵ Fortunately, an unidentified buyer offered \$2200 for the place, and the Board was definitely inclined to accept, but again their bureaucracy seemed amazing. Before a course was finally

⁴²Wuthrich to Nyce, Chungking, May 22, 1949, ibid., Folder 149; "Attempt to Cross Whangpoo Beaten, Shanghai Reports; Reds Claim Capture of Sian," New York Times, May 22, 1949.

⁴³Nyce to Kreider, Pretty Prairie, May 30, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 77.

⁴⁴Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, June 5, 1949, ibid., Folder 11.

⁴⁵Brown to Mission Board, June 23, 1949, ibid., Folder 13; Goering to Kreider, North Newton, ibid., Folder 77.

determined, Lind had notified Brown who notified Goering who notified Kreider who then ordered Nyce to notify Brown to notify Lind!⁴⁶ S. F. Pannabecker feared that the "unsympathetic tenants" might be Communists, but Brown cleared up their decision himself when he searched through his records and found that, "I have no papers to show it belongs to us, so we had better sell it."⁴⁷

Already in May the Board had given up on Shanghai as a base of operations, and in the same meeting wherein they urged Fast and the Wuthriches to return home directly, and wherein they voted to postpone (again!) Albert Jantzen's voyage, they also decided to send William Voth to Hongkong; when he left Chengtu on June 5, therefore, he traveled south, not east.⁴⁸ "I have very little information about Shanghai," Voth gloomily informed the Board, "but [we are] not likely to get in there for some time." He had found the decision to leave Chengtu a difficult one "while work [there] was going so well & Chinese there felt I should stay," and indeed, Voth had intended to remain there even if the area fell, but when he learned of the Board's decision (indirectly, through his wife), he thought he had better follow their

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Note typed by Nyce on bottom of Goering to Nyce, North Newton, June 18, 1949, ibid., Folder 48, before Nyce recopied the letter and sent it to the other members of the Board.

⁴⁸Minutes of the Executive Cmte. Meeting, Newton, May 10, 1949, ibid., Folder 42. Also of note, Goering suggested at the meeting that the Minnesota station wagon be sent to India.

instruction. By the time Brown's apartment was dispensed with, postal contact with western China was nearly nonexistent, and Voth did not think mail had reached Chengtu in over a month, but because he understood the hold-up to be in San Fransisco, he suggested that future correspondence be addressed directly to him at Hong Kong; he thought he could reach Chengtu from there, and indeed, Voth had soon proven himself a competent and invaluable point\$man along the coast.⁴⁹

At the mission itself, Boehr slowly recuperated from his ten-day stay in the hospital, doing some singing, some preaching, and attending a Prison Inquirer's Class. With all the foreboding apparent from Brown's adventures, the winds of Albert Jantzen's future had changed again, and now even Boehr reluctantly agreed to what he dubbed Jantzen's "tentative non-return." Of course, he still insisted that the Board acknowledge "the need of some remaining here and holding forth,"⁵⁰ and he still insisted that they understand his property dilemma, for when Voth left, as Boehr noted, their Sunday School had grown to over one hundred, but because it was held at the residence of a rich man who sympathized with

⁴⁹William C. Voth to Nyce, Hong Kong, June 6, 1949, ibid., Folder 137. See also Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, June 6, 1949, ibid., Folder 11, and Nyce to Goering, Pretty Prairie, June 16, 1949, ibid., Folder 48.

⁵⁰Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, June 20, 1949, ibid., Folder 11.

the mission, its future was no more certain than his.⁵¹ Fast was even more profound while leaving China, and she actually suggested that the mission buy a place to hide their belongings should Chengtu finally fall. Her logic won no prize for valor, but her persistence could have; firmly, albeit somewhat ambiguously, she maintained that "a church building has more value as a unifying factor than one realizes until one is face to face with a situation."⁵²

Between June 11 and 13, two of Chiang's Moslem generals were defeated in heavy fighting outside Sian; they had been sent in to cover the Kuomintang's retreat from central Shensi, but were themselves subdued,⁵³ and with Shensi's Nationalist forces in disarray, the Communists began their long drive for Szechwan. Seventy miles from Sian, they were briefly stalled when one of the Nationalist generals turned and attacked, but like the flowing current of the Yangtze, he too was washed away when two more Communist contingents rushed in to their comrades' aid.⁵⁴ Boehr did not know exactly what to think; he had largely resigned himself to a Nationalist defeat, and had grown more interested in what Communist life would be like than what Nationalist militarism

⁵¹Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, June 6, 1949, ibid.

⁵²Fast to Mission Board, Kowloon, June 5, 1949, ibid., Folder 38.

⁵³"China Reds Charge U.S. Spy Network," New York Times, June 19, 1949. For the record, the generals were Ma Hung-kwei and Ma Pu-fang.

⁵⁴Liu, Military History, 269.

would win. "Matt. 9, 36-38 is so very applicable here," he wrote, for the mission's Sunday School was packed, and reports from Hopei continued to sound optimistic--one counted seventy recent baptisms at Ch'angyuan. "We want to believe that the picture of occupied China is not as dark as many had feared it was. However, there are also reports not so hopeful, and often the most we can say is that we hope for the best, and we wait for even better reports."⁵⁵

Yet the report Boehr found especially disheartening came not from eastern China, but from the U.S.; Nyce admitted that the chapels' increased attendance was "interesting and encouraging," but he also informed Boehr that the Board was "not anxious to buy property at present."⁵⁶ Once again, Boehr felt himself fighting a two-front war; one against the idolatry of pagan China and one against the obstinance of a pessimistic Board. "Among the magnificent ornaments and apparel of Eastern despots," an even more pessimistic Arthur Schopenhauer had earlier written, "there is always a costly vial of poison."⁵⁷ Schopenhauer, unlike Boehr, felt that China could never be Christianized, but perhaps as that German philosopher also would have, Boehr began to wonder in

⁵⁵Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, June 20, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11. As for Matt. 9:36-38, see p. 120.

⁵⁶Nyce to Boehr, Pretty Prairie, June 25, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

⁵⁷Quoted by Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy (New York, 1929), 357.

the summer of 1949 whether a despot's costly vial had just been opened.

CHAPTER SIX

(July -- November 1949)

The land does not hold back the
water; every year comes disaster;
The wind beats up the waves;
everywhere is danger.

--Liu T'ieh-yun

Men of the East have traditionally risen with the sun, but the eldest among them have often risen sooner; as the poet of Ecclesiastes wrote, their days of trouble come, and new years arrive in which they find no pleasure.¹ Haggard faces meet the dawn with crowing roosters, for while their days are painful, their nights of slumber strike them even crueller

when men rise up at the sound of
birds,
but all their songs grow faint.²

Likewise missionaries of all denominations wondered, as Mao began his final drive to the west, whether they, too, and most particularly their message, had gone its course, had spent its youth, and now sounded like the poet's birds, with a voice broken by the tireless years.

Perhaps they recalled their nineteenth-century pioneers, temporarily absolved them of those imperialist stigmata, and

¹Ecclesiastes 12:1

²Ibid. 12:4

recalled them carrying forth the word of that same God which these descendants also carried, but to a China vastly changed, much more cunning, and highly suspicious of hymns they had heard before. Perhaps, on the other hand, these missionaries cursed their forebears, spitting out their names behind closed doors, and wished if only they, the missionaries of the modern Christ, had been there first, China, too, could have become a Christian nation.

Whatever their thoughts in those few moments between Bible meetings, or between trains in China's filthy, crowded stations, or perhaps even in those split-seconds of reflection while handing out leaflets or bandaging a scraped elbow--moments akin to all who wonder who they are or what they do--whatever their thoughts in those all-too-awkward moments, the missionaries found by mid-1949 that their emotions had reached a razor-bladed edge. Fast, for example, reflected on her China years while ending them, and after she flew from Chengtu by Chennault plane on May 26, she stayed briefly at Kowloon, and then not-so-briefly at Kweilin, where rumors flying back to Chengtu suggested she was surrounded by Communists, but fact carrying over from Chengtu gave her a case of ptomaine poisoning to overcome.³ Pouring out her thoughts in ink, the woman who declared in Paoki that "any

³Aganetha Fast to Mission Board, Kowloon, June 5, 1949, General Conference Board of Missions/Commission on Overseas Missions Collection, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 38, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kans.

body bringing out or having to bring out a beauty rest better stay home,"⁴ now compromised the absoluteness of her

mandate: "I hated VERY much to leave," she wrote,

and still grieve over it. I especially hate to go home . . . [but] I do not feel justified, due to physical needs to go back interior. This because we do not know what the future has in store for us. If deprived of funds and food, the doctors said I need every vitamin I could get, well-balanced food.⁵

Although she surely meant no offense, she further contended that

I do not have any fat to fall back on like the rest (accept Rev. Voth who also feels he is too much depended on accidity) [?] Since I am having Liver Shots I feel much better, And the doctors said with Normal living conditions and well-balanced food I could get along nicely with booster liver medicines.⁶

Fast was willing to go to India or the Philippines, and her medical frailties may well have been genuine, but when she responded (in the same letter) to one of the Board's recent memos, her sentiments came to a head. Nyce had written Wuthrich shortly before Fast left Chengtu, informing him that the Executive Committee wished, for all missionaries desiring evacuation, "that they come (home) to the United States by the most direct route."⁷ "Home" was so emphasized because it had not been in the resolution's

⁴Fast to Mission Board, Nungkinug, Shensi, Apr. 26, 1948, ibid., Series 1b-1, Circular Letters, Folder 9.

⁵Fast to Mission Board, Kowloon, June 5, 1949, ibid., Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 38.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Howard G. Nyce to Lester Wuthrich, Pretty Prairie, Kans., May 13, 1949, ibid., Folder 149.

tion, but did appear in the resolution's final form; Fast misunderstood, and she queried Nyce with a tone exceptionally explicit in its emotional candor:

Rev. Wuthrich had a letter to the group asking the missionaries to come directly "home." I wondered what you meant by "home." Do you mind, if I ask you: Did you mean your home? Well--I know how you feel at this assumption, but you see every member of our conference feels just like that. Folks now-a-days are just too busy, to preoccupied, too crowded in their homes to want another member to enter and make their home with them. For an hour probably: if they don't stay for a meal; or for a wash-up and you know we too are tired being an unwanted guest always having to come in with an apology, and being at the mercy of a host and hostess.⁸

Lester and Agnes Wuthrich found themselves at the mercy of more than that, and their return voyage also proved a vehicle of reflection--even a more chilling one than Fast's. After loading cargo at Hongkong, their Egyptian freighter the Star of Suez sailed on to Shanghai but was denied permission to port; continuing its journey, it reached Tinsin, where more passengers boarded, and where the ship's Norwegian captian learned of a Nationalist blockade at the mouth of the Yangtze. Already one ship had been bombed, and several others were sprayed with machine gun fire; everyone hoped or prayed on board that they might escape such a fate, but when the Wuthriches' ship emerged from the river, two Nationalist destroyers quickly loomed into view. In open defiance, the Norwegian sped up, and the destroyers immediately warned him with their floodlights; he held his course; they opened fire. After an eighth shot was heard, exploding overhead, the

⁸Fast to Mission Board, Kowloon, June 5, 1949, ibid., Folder 38.

captain stopped, and several uniformed Nationalists approached to board the ship. Although the passengers were forced to wear life preservers, none were hurt, and although they momentarily feared the worst, the ship continued the following morning sans its apprehended captain, and after government troops briefly boarded it a second time, leaving as they carried an unidentified sheaf of papers.⁹

On July 1, the rest of Nationalist China received their own jolt as Mao issued a formal statement extolling his victory--a statement that could have only increased these feelings of alienation among the missionaries. "Under the leadership of the CCP," China's new dictator boomed, "the Chinese people . . . fought the people's war of liberation . . . and gained a basic victory." He declared "the civilization of the Western bourgeoisie" to be "bankrupt in the minds of the Chinese people," and while he promised that his new civilization would be devoted to "universal fraternity," he also decided that the right to vote would go only "to the people and not to the reactionaries."¹⁰ Boehr tried again to use Mao's triumph as an impetus for buying buildings, for if buying was risky, he argued, renting was even riskier. "There has been organized a church now, and

⁹Wuthrich to Nyce, at sea, June 25, 1949, ibid., Folder 149; Fast to Mr. and Mrs. Nyce, Kowloon, June 25, 1949, ibid., Folder 38.

¹⁰Quoted by Lionel Max Chassin, The Communist Conquest of China: A History of the Civil War, 1945-1949, trans. Timothy Osato and Louis Gelas (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 233. The CCP was the Chinese Communist Party.

he needs a 'home.' More Szechwan people are inquirers now, and soon more baptisms should take place." If a property could be found for as little as \$4000, he could not imagine passing it up, and before he even stated his case to the Board, Boehr had talked himself into buying a second property, this one to fortify their suburb operations. To be sure, those souls remaining were the hardest headed, those most intently held in firm conviction, and on July 11, Boehr noted that the Scandinavians had actually increased their workforce.¹¹

In Hong Kong, William Voth moved in with the Lutheran World Federation, and reported in early July that the war lolled "somewhat in a standstill," although he admitted that "increasing floods in Central China" were more the cause than Communist magnanimity. Shanghai, he wrote, was getting worse, not better, but "Chengtu is quiet at present." Yet he feared the peace Boehr now enjoyed might prove a "temporary breathing spell" at best, for rumors of a Red assault persisted, and Voth suspected that Paoki soon would fall.¹² Days later, that assault began, tri-pronged, driving

¹¹p. J. Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, July 11, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

¹²William Voth to Nyce, Kowloon, July 12, 1949, ibid., Folder 137. The next day, Voth discouraged again any Mennonite hope of returning a man to Shanghai. "The blockade is seemingly quite tight," he wrote, and detailed the procedures someone destined for Shanghai had to follow, procedures requiring nebulous permits to enter, and little hope to get out again. See Voth to Nyce, Kowloon, July 20, 1949, ibid.

outhward from the Communists' newly-won northwestern positions. By the nineteenth, Peiping radio announced new Communist victories, and reports from western China noted two of the Reds' spearheads within one hundred air miles of the Szechwan border. The first, commanded by Gen. Lin Pao, captured the Yangtze River port of Ichang, which lay at the terminus of China's long interior highway. Ichang stood only two hundred miles from Szechwan's natural guardian Hankow, which like Ichang, now mobilized for meeting Lin, all as the rebel general maintained his southward momentum.¹³

As Voth predicted, the other drive took Paoki, and resupplied Communist reinforcements there ostensibly to move on Szechwan. The Kuomintang had tried to forstall them, and had even tried to retake Sian the previous month, but failing, they were progressively pushed back to Paoki, where they crossed the Wei River and futilely blew up a bridge behind them. Now, however, the Communists had captured six sites in Shensi, and the Nationalists' escape was hopeless; on July 12 alone, four Nationalist armies--some 30,000 troops--were captured, 10,000 more were killed or wounded, and thousands more were drowned uncounted in the Wei. Those few Nationalists who ran south, seeking sanctuary in Szechwan, were effectively pursued before they ever saw a

¹³"Communists Open South China Drive," New York Times, July 19, 1949; "Chinese Red Drive is Gaining in South; Victories in North-west," ibid., July 20, 1949.

provincial border, and the news of their deaths effected a
dramatic indication of Szechwan's impending peril.¹⁴

Nyce read Voth's reports with obvious interest, and quickly distributed copies to the other members of the Board. "One wonders just what the outcome of this all may lead to," he answered Voth, and reiterated as firmly as he could that "the Board is convinced at present at least, that we will not send any more workers." Indeed, the return of the Wuthriches especially befuddled Nyce, for he remarked how enthusiastically the couple had left for China nearly two years before, and when combined with the Red's systematic choking off of foreign funds, the secretary wrote with little hope for the mission's future. He instructed Voth to send cables in case of an emergency, for clearly the Board felt the worst was yet to come.¹⁵

On that score, they agreed with Boehr, but still harping about his need for property, Boehr's tactics in meeting the challenge were his alone; having failed to stress the economic, he shifted to the strategic, and having failed to impress those in the states with Chengtu's veritable bargains, he now advised that "unless we act now and get a church property soon in these sections of this great city, another mission will act and secure a permanent property,

¹⁴Ibid.; "Peasant Rebellion in Manchuria; Drive on Chungking Seen," ibid., July 24, 1949.

¹⁵Nyce to William C. Voth, Pretty Prairie, July 29, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 137.

us making work for us more difficult."¹⁶ In light of this great danger, Boehr puffed with indignation and described himself as "far from satisfied" with the Mission Board's haltry communication. "It seems you are too busy to look after the Missionary Correspondence, for which we are indeed sorry." Truly, thought Boehr, the Board does not understand; isolated in their American citadel, they fail to comprehend the vastness of heathendom; "we believe that we must NOW get property else [we] may be forced to discontinue the prosperous work which has begun."¹⁷

August reports from William Voth verified Boehr's sense of urgency, but belied again his wisdom in the eyes of the Board. Voth, to be sure, allied himself with Boehr, and the words he wrote could have quickly flowed from the mission chief's own pen: "The Church of Christ is going through a deep, dark valley of trial," Voth dramatically explained to the Board. "All the fear, anxiety and suffering of scores upon scores of Christians, many missionaries and nonChristian people, will never be told." The "one encouraging sign" he saw, China's lone "bright ray of hope" was "the courage and marvelous fortitude" of those Christian workers carrying on, "confident that Christ will lead them through."¹⁸ Diligent

¹⁶Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, July 30, 1949, ibid., Folder 11.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Voth, Third Quarter Report -- 1949, Hong Kong, n.d., ibid., Folder 137.

to do his part, Voth did some preaching, helped the Lutherans he stayed with, and continued the distribution of Christian tracts.

He soon noticed, however, an increasing number of Communist tracts, some of which made promises which missionaries under stress might find inviting. "We have heard that your mission is a philanthropic enterprise," one Yunnan mission was told by propagandist Reds, ". . . likewise our troops are ready for any sacrifice in order to bring universal relief to all the poor people in distress. Our aspirations are widely know and it is recognized that they fall into one line with your philanthropic spirit . . ." If any missionaries' belongings are confiscated, they are "taken by our troops [and] are conscienceously [sic] used for the relief of others." Thus, they "fulfill a holy purpose," the tract's author concluded, "we do not enrich ourselves with them. I believe that your mission agrees in full with this conception."¹⁹

To be sure, all Communists promised that "Chiang's tumbling government will soon be overthrown," but they were less uniform about what would then occur. The Yunnan tract promised only that when the People's Army finally dealt with "foreign countries and foreign missions, which are based on

¹⁹Translation of Propaganda Release, Yunnan's People's Liberation Army to Yunnan Mission representative of the Southern District, Kunming, Aug. 10, 1949, *ibid.*, Folder 16. This mission was, of course, not a Mennonite enterprise, as the Mennonites did not operate in Yunnan.

the Unequal Treaties and which have acquired possessions in our country," that army would prevent those possessions from falling to "evil men." It made only one point unambiguously clear: "The Army is a communist Army which holds the military power of the people."²⁰

In following up his earlier reports, Voth enclosed a copy of the tract in his subsequent letter to Nyce. "I would comment that it does not necessarily represent the full view of the highest authorities of the Communists in China," he added, "nor whether these men in the Kunming area would carry out all their plans, and rules." From all over China, rumors continued to conflict; while Voth felt "that on the whole there has been more leniency in most places," he had also learned the previous week of a Catholic priest's having been shot, and of two other protestant leaders having lost their lives as well. The Lutherans he lived with heard from their contacts in Hunan that Communist officials confiscated all their Bibles, but reports from northern Hunan suggested "very good, successful evangelistic meetings with much interest in the Gospel." As for Hong Kong, Voth admitted that "there is much talk and evidence of defense preparations."²¹

When Nyce saw the tract Voth sent him, he was so amazed to read its salutation "with religious greetings" that he briefly reverted to his slopbucket Deutsch: "Wass kon dess

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Voth to Mission Board, Kowloon, Aug. 22, 1949, ibid., Folder 137.

maena?" he queried.²² With likely stronger language, Chiang asked his Szechwan generals why they hesitated in bringing the war to their homeland. Many suspected the generals of hoping to stall the war in Shensi, and trying to opt for a "stand-off deal" with the Reds.²³ Given the Szechwanese people's less-than-perfervid loyalty to Chiang, the generals may well have feared having to deliver an army, and later that month when two "conscription agents" for a local warlord tried it in Canton, they were kicked, clubbed, beaten, and nearly killed by a local mob, until police officers literally roped them and dragged them to a nearby hospital, the angry mob chanting all along the way. Small wonder Szechwan's Nationalist generals were so hesitant to fight; Szechwan's warlords would not do so either.²⁴

On September 10, Nyce quoted to Voth from a letter the secretary had received from Orie Miller of the MCC. Miller vowed that his organization would stand by the Mennonite's China workers, but perhaps peering into a crystal ball, he also predicted that only Hong Kong and Formosa were likely to remain outside the Communist sphere. Hong Kong, he thought, might well become a "liason point" between Maoist China and

²²Nyce to Voth, Pretty Prairie, Sept. 10, 1949, ibid., Folder 137.

²³"Guerilla Forces Threaten Canton," New York Times, Sept. 3, 1949.

²⁴"Canton Mob Beat War Lords' Agents," ibid., Sept. 15, 1949.

the Western world,²⁵ and when Kweiyang fell several days later, not only were the missionaries' once-grand expansion schemes dashed yet another time, but Fast was stalled again in reaching that Western world, and she now sat delayed in Jagdeeshpur.²⁶

By then, "the China situation," as everyone called it, had reached a point so fluid, and so dramatic, that even the Board found no qualms in sending Boehr a definitive answer regarding his property request. Indeed, they had already done so earlier in August, and they minced few words in clarifying their position: "WE ARE NOT BUYING PROPERTY FOR A CHURCH," they wrote in captivating letters; only if the missionaries are short of housing might a property be purchased, but "such property is not to be purchased unless absolutely necessary," and under no conditions was Boehr to exceed \$4000.²⁷

The Board could not have anticipated their mission chief's next step. After receiving Nyce's letter on a "return from the hills" August twenty-seventh, Boehr promptly informed them that eleven days before, he had spent \$6500 for a combination chapel, clinic, and house. Boehr's motives were plain and obvious; his was a mission of evangelization,

²⁵Nyce to Voth, Pretty Prairie, Sept. 10, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 137.

²⁶Fast to Mission Board, Jagdeeshpur, Sept. 19, 1949, ibid., Folder 38.

²⁷Nyce to Boehr, Voth, Wilhelmina Kuyf, Pretty Prairie, Aug. 8, 1949, ibid., Folder 11.

not of simple existence. He would stay in China until the Chinese threw him out or killed him; he would preach in China as long as he stayed. Perhaps out of courtesy, he agreed in principle with the Board's concern, but "we need some space for christian services," he implored them, "where we can preach and teach, so as to win people for Christ, who in turn will themselves want to get their own church bldg." The missionaries' landlord, that bearish Mrs. Hsing, was determined to throw them out, and when their rent expired, as Boehr put it, "we were faced with a situation where we would not have any place for Christian work"--given those conditions, he followed his conscience and with the money already spent, those on the Board would simply have to accept his decision.²⁸

Realizing Boehr's noble motives, Nyce was in fact the man to blink. He admitted that Chengtu's rental rates were unacceptable, and deigned that Boehr did the best he could "under the circumstances."²⁹ Boehr tried to sooth the Board by comparing his purchase to an American home, noting that \$17,000 might not suffice "for a parsonage in a small town," while, in China, only \$6500 firmly entrenched them in a major urban area.³⁰ Funding was critical on both sides of the Pacific; in China, bankdrafts were all but useless and people

²⁸Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Sept. 3, 1949, ibid.

²⁹Nyce to Boehr, Pretty Prairie, Oct. 10, 1949, ibid.

³⁰Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Sept. 3, 1949, ibid.

dealt as much as they could in silver; in the United States, heavy rains had damaged the Kansas wheat crop, and with that state one of the Mennonites' most important, General Conference officials expected their coffers to sharply suffer.³¹ As Nyce noted to William Voth, "there have been entirely too many demands made on our people;"³² the MCC, the seminaries, the parochial schools all demanded to be tended; West China was pricing itself out of the Mennonites' market as battlelines continued to encircle the hold-out province of Szechwan.

Nonetheless, in early October, the Board approved Boehr's purchase "in view of the circumstances as presented to us by the workers in China."³³ Predictably, China's workers were elated, and William Voth most succinctly set their sentiments on paper: "At this time," he wrote, "with so much of the world in a spiritual upheaval and uncertainty we need to press forward with greater zeal in sharing the abundant blessings God has showered on us; that Christ may be proclaimed the only Hope and Savior!" Unfortunately, he also wrote of a letter he had recently received from Wilhelmina

³¹Ibid.; see also F. Olin Stockwell, With God in Red China: The Story of Two Years in Chinese Communist Prisons (New York, 1953), 52-3.

³²Nyce to Voth, Pretty Prairie, Sept. 29, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 138. It should be noted, in fairness, that the Mission Board spent far more time contemplating expenditures than revenues; their approach stressed resignation over opportunism.

³³Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, Oct. 3, 1949, ibid., Folder 42.

Kuyf--apparently Boehr's \$6500 deal had not gone through.³⁴ In a sense, Voth was actually glad it had not, for while he agreed that a property should be purchased, he had seen the property in question when he lived in Chengtu, and he had never been particularly impressed. Boehr, of course, was more upset, and on October 27, he wrote the Board confirming that the deal had indeed fallen through.³⁵

Fortunately, however, a smaller property (this one "a yard full of houses, or 22 rooms of houses as the Chinese count rooms"), came up for sale and could be had for less than \$6500. Because of the lower cost, Boehr concluded that he could purchase both this property and a second property along the city's west suburbs for "the money allowed by the Board." He admitted that further properties may have to be rented--he even alluded to a slight increase in his needed budget--but he praised the Board for allowing him to "carry on evangelism and Dispensary and Clinic in an effective way." Of course, he knew by now the Board's unenthusiastic leanings, and he concluded piously that "we are in need of further prayer."³⁶ On Halloween [!], Boehr sent the Board his new proposed budget for 1950; he would need \$12,000 for all West China operations; he would need more if the exchange

³⁴Voth to Nyce, Hong Kong, Oct. 24, 1949, ibid., Folder 137.

³⁵Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Oct. 27, 1949, ibid., Folder 11.

³⁶Ibid.

rates worked against them, and he would need still more if faced with "higher costs when new regime comes in."³⁷

According to William Voth, who had far greater access to news in Hong Kong than Boehr had in Chengtu, the new regime continued on its way. In his letter about the property, he also wrote of Communist armies within miles of both Kweilin and Kwangsi. An additional force supposedly gathered in western Hunan, premeditating its designs on Chungking, and the armies which took Paoki were, of course, still marching southward. "It might be possible that the Nationalists hold them for a while," Voth predicted, "but it seems to be only a matter of time. Some think here that Szechuan might hold out until about New Year. One of course may have a surprize"--a surprize which could go either way.³⁸ Indeed, by October 28, thirteen hundred Nationalists were reported killed in South Hunan; a Communist spearhead had broken through the Nationalist pocket there, and Szechwan's primary line of defense no longer existed.³⁹

By November, the government controlled only Kwangsi, Kweichow, Szechwan, and Sikang. Canton had been lost on October 14, so Chungking was selected the new Nationalist capital--their third since the start of the war. Although Chiang flew there in mid November, the government's acting

³⁷Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Oct. 31, 1949, ibid.

³⁸Voth to Nyce, Oct. 24, 1949, ibid., Folder 137.

³⁹"Foe in China Loses 4 Armies Reds Say," New York Times, October 28, 1949.

President Li Tsung-jen refused, preferring to remain in his native Kwangsi;⁴⁰ militarily, Chiang fared no better, and on the tenth, Communist troops took their first step on Szechwanese soil. Although the Reds' drive was supposedly blunted at Lungten, some 150 miles east of Chungking, they had crossed the provincial border aided by two Nationalist divisions from Hunan, who not only looked the other way, but revolted against their commanders when ordered to attack. Soon Communist irregulars were reported as near as Pengshui, only ninety-five miles from Chiang's new capital.⁴¹

One day later, government reports "declared the situation stabilized,"⁴² but in Kweiyang, Provincial officials abandoned their capital, and Nationalist forces in Kwangsi were cut off from those defending Chungking; forces in Yunnan were very nearly cut off. Indeed, the danger to Chungking (as well as Kunming) was radically increased with Kweiyang's fall,⁴³ but in Hong Kong, Voth's first concern was Chengtu, imperiled now that "Szechwan is almost hemmed in." Communists, Voth had heard, marched within seventy-five miles of Chungking in the east, and in the west, they moved

⁴⁰Keiji Furuya, Chiang Kai-Shek, His Life and Times (New York, 1981), 907.

⁴¹"Chinese Troops Desert," New York Times, Nov. 11, 1949.

⁴²"U.S. Pilots Split on Red China Job; Chungking Threat Unchanged," ibid., Nov. 12, 1949.

⁴³"Chinese Reds Near Kweichow Capital," ibid., Nov. 14, 1949; "Chiang Summons Chungking Parley," ibid., Nov. 15, 1949.

eighty miles north of Kweiyang, approaching Chungking from that direction. Daily newspapers chronicled the deepening rift between President Li and Chiang, and Voth noted some papers as surmising that Chungking may have less than two weeks before it also fell. "This means that our West China missionaries will likely be under the New Regime within a few weeks," he glumly prophesied, "for it is unlikely that there will be appreciable resistance to protect Chengtu after Chungking falls." Voth knew he would have to watch his former colleagues and erstwhile home swallowed up by Maoist armies; he knew he could do little to help them and nothing to prevent their obvious fate. Perhaps, he hoped, he could sneak in some surgical instruments, or the Board's latest drafts, before Chengtu's final curtain, but even that was more hope than possibility, and permission to travel north was not likely, either, so Voth doubted his plans to reach Shanghai were much more likely. He was disturbed with the Communists' treatment of missionaries in eastern China, and he described some of the missionaries as being "tricked" out of their fields by slippery promises or by the machinations of a Marxist despot.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, Li and Chiang found their differences irreconcilable, and Li resolved to leave for the United States. As Communist armies now closed around his beloved Kwangsi, Li's dreams of a western redoubt there were

⁴⁴Voth to Mission Board, Hongkong, Nov. 16, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 137.

shattered, and Chiang's less ambitious plan for Formosa gained in credence; in the United States, Li ostensibly sought treatment for a gastric disorder, but Chiang knew well that his President had abandoned him, and the Generalissimo commented in his diary that Li was "concerned only with his own selfish interests. His behaviour is shameless and beneath contempt." Chiang alone would have to end his fight with Mao, for although he could not have known it then, Li would remain in the U.S. for fifteen years.⁴⁵

On November 23, the one-eyed Communist general Liu Po-cheng appealed by radio to Nationalist troops in Szechwan, Kweichow, Sikang, and Yunnan--all areas of his command. Put down your arms, he pleaded with them, cease your resistance, end your scorched-earth tactics, and await reorganization by Communist agents. Government employees were promised the continuation of their jobs; Kuomintang policemen were promised an opportunity to "repent" and begin "decent lives," and village and county officials were asked to keep the peace until Communist officials could take their place.⁴⁶ Naturally, Liu's offer was declined, but not because of Nationalist gains on the field, and even as Liu spoke, a

⁴⁵Furuya, Chiang Kai-Shek, 907-8; F. F. Liu, A Military History of Modern China, 1924-1949 (Princeton, 1956), 264-5. In fairness to Li, Liu points out that Chiang took almost all of Nationalist China's gold reserves, most of their American armaments, and huge concentrations of their military personnel to Formosa; Li had very little to fight with if he planned to hold the West. See ibid.

⁴⁶"Chinese Reds Urge Southwest Yield," New York Times, Nov. 23, 1949.

sweeping withdrawal had begun, draining Szechwan of its defenses, and moving toward Sikang or Tibet, crossing the rugged roads of southwest Szechwan by truck or by mule or by foot. The Nationalists had begun their final, all-consuming, westward trek.⁴⁷

At the mission, attendance was good, Chengtu's schools were all open, and baptisms continued even as each sunset marked one less before the coming of the new regime. Boehr wrote that

colder weather has begun, but we have plenty of oranges and all kinds of foodstuffs. There seems to be a spirit of expectancy of a change to come soon, and it feels as though we were living on an island, with nearly all areas already overrun. . . . There is a strange cheerfulness among the people, schools function as usual, and there seems to be less of a jittery attitude than there was last spring.⁴⁸

Although he noticed that property-owners around the city began preparing for the looting and the anarchy which war inevitable brings, Boehr worried very little about such scourges. Despite his recent letters, he was more concerned with saving the mission's usefulness than its buildings, and was determined to secure what he needed if Christian services were to continue after he or his compatriots had to leave. Boehr found a property he could purchase for less than \$6500 (although he nonchalantly added that "necessary repairs and changes will be outside this amount"), and he judged it to be

⁴⁷"Chinese Nationalist Armies Withdrawing in Szechwan," *ibid.*, Nov. 24, 1949.

⁴⁸Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Nov. 25, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11.

spacious enough for both domestic and evangelical use. Actually, the new purchase was not a single structure, but a group of smaller buildings, featuring first a front building of six 10 x 10 feet rooms, secondly two smaller buildings, each 15 x 30 feet, and finally, a large, six-room structure (with a 30 x 32 feet center area)--all contributing a total of twenty-five rooms. Their roofs were tight, and they were noted to have many new bricks; they reinforced in Boehr that iron will to stay, and on November 25 he baldly stated that there would be "no exodus of missionaries now."⁴⁹

On the evening of the twenty-ninth, Chiang urged his aides to leave Chungking; he would stay until the city's final moments, but he saw no reason for them to remain.⁵⁰ Shortly before noon on November 30, the city did fall to an estimated 20,000 Communist troops, uncoincidentally led by the native Szechwanese Liu Po-cheng. Early that morning, and only hours ahead of his pursuers, Chiang was rushed to the Peishiyi Airfield, nearby the city, and left for Chengtu aboard his personal Skymaster airplane. Although Chengtu was to serve as his new capital, so dubious was its future that Nationalist officials already spoke of moving to Sichang, Sikang once Chengtu tumbled the way of its predeceasing sister.⁵¹ Before the day was over, a Communist column was

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Furuya, Chiang Kai-Shek, 908.

⁵¹"Chungking Falls to Reds; Chiang Arrives in Chengtu," New York Times, Dec. 1, 1949; "Reds Came Close to Seizing Chiang," ibid., Dec. 3, 1949.

seen leaving their new conquest, striking north toward Hochuan, forty miles outside Chungking and well en route to Chengtu. On its march, it passed the Peishiyi Airfield from which Chiang had fled, and as it did so, the field transformed into chaotic panic with Nationalist officials fighting among themselves for the few plane seats that remained.⁵²

Chengtu was now enmeshed in the last act of Nationalist China's closing drama, but the denouement was to be no grand finale. Many of the Szechwanese warlords, and several top government officials, had already sung their overtures to incoming Communist aggressors; the people of western China were also drained by that effluvium of war which first drifted above their heads so many years before, and by that fearful, sickly ennui which so often bounded as its counterweight. Military historian (and former French General) Lionel Max Chassin called the Communists' conquest of Kweichow and Szechwan "a veritable military promenade,"⁵³ and indeed, sitting in Chengtu as its Nationalist leaders scrambled for their outbound flights, a casual observer might even have recalled those famous lines of T. S. Eliot:

⁵²"Chungking Falls; Chiang in Chengtu; Column Heads for Chengtu," *ibid.*, Dec. 1, 1949.

⁵³Chassin, Communist Conquest, 236.

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.⁵⁴

⁵⁴From "The Hollow Men," in T. S. Eliot, Complete Poems, 1909-1962 (New York, 1963), 82.

CHAPTER SEVEN

(December 1949 -- November 1950)

We should rid our ranks of all impotent thinking. All views that overestimate the strength of the enemy and underestimate the strength of the people are wrong.

--Mao Tse-tung

In his lighter moments, Mao liked to amuse guests with a story about China's antiquated fathers. "They were indeed wise," he would say, "for while they invented printing, they did not invent the newspaper. While they invented gunpowder, they used it only for fireworks. And finally, while they invented the compass, they were very careful not to use it to discover America."¹

Mao spoke as if those Chinese fathers somehow sensed that the New World had no gifts for the Middle Kingdom; he spoke as if Americans could not avoid a faith of hauteur and indifference, a faith spread through its imposition on those it broken by imperialist treaties, or disadvantaged by military or industrial weakness. Yet now, as the doctrine which Americans considered their anathema swallowed the few remaining provinces of China, Americans (as well as Western Europeans) found themselves ridden out as they had ridden in,

¹Clifton Fadiman (ed.), The Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes (Boston, 1985), 382.

watching their revealed absolutes replaced with borrowed ones, borrowed this time from Russia, where, according to Paul A. Varg, men were more disposed toward adaptation to the Chinese mind. As for the Chinese, freedom (a much-banded word which no one ever clarified) was seen less politically, and more economically, and for many of that less than one percent which followed the path of an American Christ, freedom was finally seen as possible, or as the natural extension of what they now believed, for as one Chinese Christian put it, "Communism is practicing what Christianity merely professes."²

On the first of December, Communist troops from Pichieh took Lungchang, and regardless of what they believed, now marched one hundred and sixteen miles from Chengtu, effectively cutting off the Chungking-Chengtu highway. Inside their new capital, Nationalist officials discussed again an evacuation, and already all non-essential personnel had been ordered out. The central Szechwan plains offered little natural resistance to approaching Reds, and one day later, that force which took Lungchang was reported near Neichiang--only ninety-two miles from Chengtu--while a second force advanced simultaneously from Chungking.³

²Paul A. Varg, Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952 (Princeton, 1958), 308-9.

³"Only Mop-up Task Faces China's Reds," New York Times, Dec. 2, 1949.

Communists now controlled four-fifths of the Chinese population, and over four-fifths of the nation's land; indeed, they controlled more land than the Kuomintang ever had at one time. Yunnan and Sikang, which braced themselves for what Szechwan now suffered, still stood alone, untouched by Communist expansion, and as the Nationalists turned to them for a final route of escape, they usually found them remote, barren, and generally inhospitable. Those few Nationalists who remained in Szechwan fared even worse, and demoralized as they had become, fought with an almost mindless futility against Reds already celebrating apparent victory.⁴

"And yet we hear that there are also Christians in [the Communists'] ranks," wrote Boehr, ". . . we also hear that missionaries have been promised freedom to return to their mission fields in other parts of China." For the present, however, his workers were advised to store a few weeks (or even months) worth of foodstuffs, and no longer belittling their danger, they promptly canned some meat in empty fruit jars, and replenished their stores of flour, lard, oranges, eggs, and sweet-potatoes. They double checked their stock of wood and coal and planned to draw water from the well behind their house; they prayed continually for help and hope and guidance, utterly unaware of how the new regime would treat them, unaware especially as reports from the east lacked all

⁴Ibid.

consistency. Among the natives, they detected a change, for the pressure of war seemed to stretch everyone's patience to the point of breaking, and in his Christmas letter to the American churches, Boehr wrote of life

in a barricaded city now, with almost every street-entrance having a high Pole-Gate, which can be closed anytime it is deemed necessary. . . . Hence as we from our address go to our lately purchased chapel and residence property . . . we must pass thru three (3) Stockade-Gates. Going up town to the jeweler [to transact silver] or photographer, we must go thru around a dozen such stockade gates; and the strs. are chuck-full of people and cars and trucks, and rickshas, and men (or women)-drawn coal and goods wagons, and cyclists, and pedestrians which are a nuisance. These folks seem to hear no bell or horn but walk right in the center of street as though they wish to be touched or harmed so they can "kick up a fuss."⁵

Many of the city's property owners were more afraid of the looting which they assumed would accompany their police department's demise than they feared the new regime. The Mennonites' landlord stashed a huge bundle of bedding and clothing in his attic, which was accessible only by ladder, and which was not obviously detected by someone passing by. He strongly advised his tenants to do the same, but Boehr told him, perhaps in line with a heritage of non-resistance, that Mennonites were not so "looting-conscious" as Chinese were.⁶

⁵P. J. Boehr, Christmas letter to home churches, Chengtu, Dec. 3, 1949, General Conference Board of Missions/Commission on Overseas Missions Collection, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 11, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kans.

⁶Ibid.

By December 5, a defense line was set up thirty to fifty miles outside the city, but its hopelessness was obvious,⁷ and two days later, with Neichiang having fallen, Chiang decided to leave for Kunming and Hoihow--ostensibly he would confer with his generals about Formosa, but their decision hardly drew suspense, and by the following day, it was made official. Even before Chiang had left, and even as the defense line was being built, Nationalist commanders streamed to Chengtu's airport, destined for Formosa.⁸ If anyone maintained hope in Chengtu--foolish as that would have been--they now had no reason to continue.

Days later, Communists came within fifty miles, and Yunnan, having been attacked in the meantime, began to totter as well. William Voth was informed by the Lutherans he knew in Hong Kong that their plane, the "St. Paul," might never reach Chengtu again,⁹ and in Chengtu, those who wished to evacuate felt increasingly desperate. Fortunately, a brief Communist slowdown enabled many of them to escape, but at a price for the Nationalist army. The Reds had slowed to swing south, to cut off a government escape route to Sikang, and their move facilitated an increase in civilian evacuations, but eventually Nationalist troops were trapped within the

⁷"Communist Army Nearing Chengtu," New York Times, Dec. 6, 1949.

⁸"Resistance Fading on China Mainland," ibid., Dec. 7, 1949; "Chinese Nationalists Move their Capital to Formosa; Now Plan A Guerrilla War," ibid., Dec. 8, 1949.

⁹William C. Voth to Howard G. Nyce, Hong Kong, Dec. 9, 1949, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-4, Subject Files, Folder 137.

city. Nonetheless, one unidentified civilian plane left for Hong Kong, and those on the ground promised that if its pilot succeeded, others would hazard the trip as well.¹⁰

Yet the Communist's change in strategy hardly stopped their advance, and by the middle of the month, the governor of Sikang, the governor of Yunnan, and two of Chiang's top Szechwan generals all defected to Mao. As early as December 8 (one day before Chiang left Chengtu), two of those men announced their adherence to Marxist ideas, and promised to "redeem" themselves for past misdeeds. Those concentrations of troops involved in the defections were promptly defeated by loyalists, but the idea of defection was scarcely defeated. Indeed, so strong had been the defectors' numbers, that at one point, some of them plotted to take Chengtu themselves,¹¹ yet by the evening of the eighteenth, Nationalists still controlled Chengtu, even though they did so under heavy fire. Communist forces had finally reached the city, and Nationalist forces knew they could no longer flee to Sikang;¹² realizing a southern route was useless, they tried to move north, and on Christmas Day, Communists stormed the city's southern gates just as Nationalists

¹⁰"Chiang Aide Freed by Yunnan Leader," New York Times, Dec. 13, 1949.

¹¹"Sikang Gov. Joins China's Reds," ibid., Dec. 16, 1949.

¹²"Kunming Retaken by Nationalists," ibid., Dec. 20, 1949.

retreated in the opposite direction.¹³ The city fell completely on December 27.¹⁴

Mao's armies had taken eleven months to march from Mukden to Chengtu; they crossed over 2000 miles and averaged well over six miles a day.¹⁵ Yet to those who lived in Chengtu, little seemed awry as the Communists marched in, and Boehr described "by and large a fairly quiet change to the new regime."¹⁶ Somewhat surprisingly, the new government agreed to reregister the mission's Dodge truck for use in preaching, and "as far as we can see," the missionaries found "a continued friendliness toward the Gospel."¹⁷ By mid-January, they even constructed another West Suburb chapel, their fourth chapel in total, and designing it along "very ordinary" lines, roofed it with straw. Boehr thought the chapel would hold around one hundred and fifty worshippers, and with the new government so silent (and frankly, easy to deal with), he believed it probably would be filled. Because

¹³"Reds Charge Tokyo Sends Formosa Aid," ibid., Dec. 26, 1949. Interestingly enough, the Reds were also charging that Japan supplied Chiang with huge blocks of aid--a plot masterminded, of course, in Washington.

¹⁴"Guerilla Hopes in China Held Dim; Chengtu Capture confirmed," ibid., Dec. 28, 1949.

¹⁵F. F. Liu, A Military History of Modern China, 1924-1949 (Princeton, 1956), 270.

¹⁶Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Jan. 30, 1950, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-5, Mission Workers Correspondence, Folder 19.

¹⁷Ibid.; First Quarter Report, Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, n.d., ibid.

it would stand on property leased by their nascent local church, he assured the Board that they would not have to fund the project.

On Friday and Sunday nights, Bible Classes were still held each week, and the Chinese were "as anxious to get hold of a tract as ever." Especially heartening were the children, for "it is a great joy to hear the tender voices of the youngest . . . pray audibly and with a seemingly spiritual understanding."¹⁸ No sooner was a baptism service held (sanctifying forty-six in late 1949 alone) than calls went up for another, and a Mr. Chang, one of the Mennonites' former students in Kaichow, had moved from Changtsun, Honan to assist them at Chengtu; he quickly proved a most valuable worker, as well as a particularly gifted speaker, and though at first he handled mostly Friday night services, his duties soon expanded, so on Christmas Day--even as Communist troops poured into the city--Chang baptized eighteen people. During that first month under Communist rule, especially now with Chang, whom Boehr called "strictly Biblical and with the prophetic outlook as few preachers are,"¹⁹ the mission chief reported that "now maybe more than ever come to the Gospel meetings held nightly at both the West Sub. and the Tea-House chapels."²⁰

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Boehr to Nyce, Chengtu, July 20, 1950, ibid.

²⁰Boehr to Mission Board, Jan. 30, 1950, ibid.

Although the mission's prison work had to be suspended, its "weekly schedule of evangelism" went nearly uninterrupted. Home visitations, medical services, and even weekly preaching "by auto-truck" were still performed, and word from both Li Kwang Ming in Paoki and his assistant there, Mrs. Tuan Li Shen, suggested similar success at the Boehr's old home--in fact, Paoki had had its own Christmas baptismal service.²¹

Yet perturbingly, no mail was received from the Board, and even as of January 30, the missionaries only gathered a single telegram from Voth. Air mail was apparently halted, but regular mail still arrived in Chengtu by truck, and in Chungking by Yangtze River steamer. When Nyce finally did write, having procrastinated until April, he professed himself to be very interested in the new baptisms, and expressed considerable elation with the mission's full attendance, but he wrote nonetheless with a delicate air of detachment, almost of latent disinterest, and speaking for the Board, lamented only that "we wish the mission support might be much greater but it seems the devil hinders wherever he can."²²

Spring weather always carried rains in Chengtu, and when the rains arrived in 1950, they carried both their usual powers of refreshment, and their usual mold to the closets

²¹Ibid.

²²Nyce to Boehr, Pretty Prairie, Kans., Apr. 5, 1950, ibid.

and clothes of those whose roofs leaked. In March, the missionaries began constructing a second storey onto one of their houses, and by May it neared completion; in addition to gaining three rooms, they would have a veranda where their clothes could be properly dried.²³ In Newton, Sam Goering told Nyce to hint about the missionaries' coming home, and in New York, the Mission Board's bank refused to accept liability for any further drafts sent into China. "We do appreciate your willingness to stay," Nyce finally wrote his workers, but "we are . . . being pressed by a large constituency. We want to give them the assurance that while we have given you the liberty to return some months ago, that we have written you again asking you to come home anytime you want to."²⁴

Perhaps not having seen Nyce's note, or perhaps in defiance of it, the missionaries opened another instruction class on July 17; some sixty students enrolled, and the class was promised to run for two weeks of three hour sessions each. The government said little about their preaching or their home visitations, and in Boehr's words, "as far as our work is concerned there is freedom."²⁵ When the Mennonites' General Conference was held in South Dakota that August,

²³Boehr to Mission Board, May 4, 1950, Chengtu, ibid.

²⁴Nyce to Boehr, Pretty Prairie, July 8, 1950, ibid.

²⁵Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, July 18, 1950, ibid.

Boehr proudly telegraphed his old companion Brown to boast of these new successes:

MISSIONARY BROWN FREEMAN SOUTH DAKOTA HARVEST FULL
 SWING URGE STRONG INTERCESSION COMBAT SPIRIT
 CONFLICT ONE CORINTHIANS SIXTEEN NINE
 GREETINGS CHINA QUARTET²⁶

Even the Board was rethinking China, and although they had never abandoned China so much as diverted their attention to greener fields, the appeals and accomplishments of their workers were beginning to impress them. True, they were exasperated now and again, but their support had never really wavered; their adherence to the mission's objectives had never really diminished, and when tested by the mission's recent successes, even those who thought the Board was wasting its time privately prided themselves on the fortitude of their China Quartet.²⁷ That Boehr took pride was obvious; he repeated his telegram to Brown continually in letters and reports sent during the next few weeks.

Yet if Boehr was proud, he was also touchy, and when he learned of comments made by a Mennonite compatriot in India, the old China hand was beside himself with indignation. "We praise the Lord for what He had done thru the testimony of His weak children," Boehr raged, for

our Christian friends at home do well to prayerfully consider their attitude toward Christian work in China, and hardly permit such statements as, we hear, have been

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Although not stated so directly, much of this comes out in Nyce to Brown, Pretty Prairie, May 25, 1950, ibid., Folder 22. He mentioned a letter from Elizabeth Goertz as particularly impressive.

uttered by Brother Thiessen from India in public, to the effect that there is no use to carry on further work in China. Missionaries originally went out at the risk of their lives, and in that spirit one would rather think a great work could still be done in China.²⁸

Toward assisting in that work, two more temporary workers, a Mr. Neo, probably of the (Old) Mennonites, and a Miss Dseng, of the C.I.M., came to work at least until the end of the summer and maybe slightly longer. Boehr thought Miss Dseng, especially, "should be a great help among young people and in women's work with Frieda," and he predicted the mission to be "set for a great summer season." As of Easter alone, the year had seen sixty-six inquirers baptized, fifty-six of which were still in the area, and the missionaries made a point of keeping in touch. In the back of their minds, however, they could not help but worry that their new government would suddenly turn surly, and more recent accounts of Communist involvement with missions in smaller areas renewed these worries. Some restrictions were cropping up on educational institutions, and some options were being discouraged as to what could be taught. Specific restrictions appeared to differ widely from region to region, and the missionaries in Chengtu strained for any accurate information they could find. Yet all continued to go well in Chengtu, as in most of the larger cities, and they still felt free to operate their mission as they saw fit.²⁹

²⁸Boehr to Nyce, Chengtu, July 20, 1950, ibid., Folder 19.

²⁹Boehr to Nyce, Chengtu, July 27, 1950, ibid.

Nonetheless, these reports did give the missionaries pause--even Boehr reconsidered going home--but perhaps his long tenure in China, perhaps his deep compassion for the Chinese people, or perhaps even his fear of failure, of returning home unable to retire from that project which he was appointed to lead, but rather to run from it, all led to a stubborn conclusion that work in China was destined to go on. "We four on the field far removed from the Home Churches do want to do that which is best, and shall not try to count hardships where God says that we should not," he wrote. "That the world situation is 'tightening up' we also keenly feel, but we do hope for better days still, and surely cannot believe that missions in China are to discontinue as yet."³⁰

But by the end of July, the missionaries had lost some faith in a permanent church's ability to survive. "Political conditions during these years of war in this land have made it nearly impossible for people to make their own living, much less to support any kind of church-machinery." No longer was Chengtu the relatively prosperous city the Mennonites found it in early 1948, and fearing an excessive tax burden, new churches frequently refused their parent mission's property when their parent missionaries left. Yet pulling a page from the Anabaptist's European saga, Boehr did not believe these problems to be insoluble: "We need not urge the young Christians to take upon themselves large

³⁰Ibid.

financial obligations," he wrote, "if only they will accept the main responsibility of propagating the Gospel . . . our churches grew up that way we know."³¹

Attendance, after all, was staying high, and nightly services continued at both the Tea House and the West Suburb chapels. Opportunities for charity work were everywhere, and charity work could often lead to Gospelization. A recent campaign against cholera, for example, had canvassed the city, and eager to assist, the Mennonites dispensed over four hundred free injections;³² likewise they opened a free minor injury clinic later in the year, and treated the poor for cuts, slight infections, or eye disorders.³³ But even if practically all of their inquirers derived from the two congregations, those were enough to keep the workers busy, and again, the youngest among them proved the most inspiring. When their children's schools let out, over four hundred attended the final programs, and Boehr described the event as if those children had been his own. "How these little ones sing when they have been drilled and drilled," he wrote, obviously following a philosophy out of line with those Marxists who favored "spontaneity."³⁴ Indeed, Boehr even

³¹Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, July 31, 1950, ibid.

³²Second Quarter Report, Chengtu, n.d., ibid., Foreign Fields -- Correspondence, Folder 3.

³³Third Quarter Report, Chengtu, n.d., ibid.

³⁴Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Aug. 28, 1950, ibid., MWC, Folder 19.

believed the Chinese children helped to keep his people young when they may have otherwise aged far beyond their years, and more than children school's were going well that summer. With the second-storey construction project, begun in March, now completed, Goertz and Kuyf were given larger rooms--these nearly as large as the Boehrs'--and with Chengtu's food supply still plentiful, the missionaries ate as well in China as they would have in the United States. Only their home visitations were discouraged (although Boehr did not explain just what the Reds said about them), and as of July 30, a "Junior-Church" (or Bible School) opened to supplement the Sunday schools and nightly preaching.³⁵

With summer came the days of scorching heat, the year's most fiery season both "in weather and in spiritual things." Since the start of June alone, some ninety-eight Chinese were baptised in Chengtu, and the Mennonite mission in Paoki reported twenty over that same period. A new one-day baptismal record--thirty-two--was reached on August 20, "possibly the hottest day," and Boehr suspected that each of his workers wished to be the first to tell about it. After a morning message, and a message on baptism's meaning by the Fukienese "Intervarsity leader," Sister Cheng (for Rev. Chang was sick with high blood pressure), missionaries and congregation alike spent the afternoon discussing their fledgling local church, and comparisons were readily made

³⁵Boehr to Mission Board, July 31, 1950, ibid.

between their own plight and that of Jerusalem's nineteen-and-a-half centuries before. "There was light thrown on matters that all Christians should know about," Boehr recounted, and again turning an eye to the world outside, he commented that their church meeting "was much better, I believe, than the 'Lake Success' Security Council meetings, Ha!"³⁶

Although the Mennonites continued separate services at the Tea House and the West Suburb complex, both were to be governed as a single, somewhat departmental church. Six delegates would be chosen by each congregation, and those twelve would appoint any necessary officers, including a church chairman, a secretary, and a treasurer. The twelve delegates were not actually elected until a second meeting was held, August 27, a meeting which the Chinese propensity for disarray and procrastination managed to drag out for three and a half hours. Watching them vote, however, was nothing less than fascinating--a study in the adaptation of ideas. Unlike at the Tea House, where simple printed ballots were used to vote on six delegates, those in the Suburb found Western democracy incompatible with Chinese hieroglyphics, so each parishoner was assigned a number and given a numbered name card, which they wore for all to see. People then voted for each other by number; some of the less educated or oldest or youngest among them could not have possibly drawn

³⁶Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Aug. 21, 1950, ibid.

everyone's name, so they drew their selection's number instead.³⁷

If this suggested a breakdown of Chinese resistance to the West, however, it also suggested a facade: within hours of the meeting, Boehr married a couple who had met only two days before. Rev. Chang, who would lead the new church, diagramed its intended governance, and illustrated not only the missionaries' diminished centrality, but also the delegates' increased authority, the role of specific committees, and the superior importance of the church as a whole. Of the smaller committees, at least one each would address evangelistic, educational, and medical concerns (corresponding symmetrically with the three Mennonite concerns outlined in Chapter Four), and on each committee (excepting the first) would sit at least one missionary, the evangelical committee having two.³⁸

In Boehr's words, the church must increase, and the mission must decrease; such had been and was the ultimate objective of his China tenure. More immediately pressing, however, was the significance he found in his parishoners' number: sixty-one from the West Suburb, fifty-nine from the Tea House--the same number (120) that met in Jerusalem's "upper room" when that city's own first church was founded.

³⁷Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Aug. 28, 1950, ibid. This document is recommended reading; it contains a very detailed account of this most important meeting.

³⁸Third Quarter Financial Statement of Mission Funds, n.d., ibid., FFC, Folder 3.

Some thought this a curious coincidence, but others-- including Boehr--were certain that it was not: "Indeed the hearts of a number were touched as we thought of such a similar situation, and that the Lord surely meant that we 'take the hint' and claim the Spirit's Pentecostal Power."³⁹

Emboldened with such authoritative confirmation, the Boehr's took their annual vacation in early September. Although they only traveled across town to West China University (WCU), they took two suitcases, a briefcase, and two typewriters, all of which were inspected by the police. Carrying forth the German doctrine of "Gute Erholung," they stayed with Wesley Day, a Methodist friend, and used the time to rejuvenate and prepare for a vivified return to their mission. Diversions included first the reading of their Miniatuur Bibel, and secondly "the first lengthy installment on the experiences of Miss Crawford the governess of Elizabeth and Margaret, daughters of King George," whatever that was. Just before they had left for the University, a Monthly Prayer Meeting for Chengtu (its first) had attempted to gather all the Western missionaries in town, of which twenty-six out of forty showed up. The C.I.M., the United Church of Canada, the Swedish Free Church, Oberlin in China, and Methodist and Baptist groups all attended, there to sing songs, discuss the travails of Communist life, and pray

³⁹Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Aug. 21, 1950, ibid., MWC, Folder 19.

either for better times, or a way to cope with the times they had. Someone had placed the Mennonites in charge of hymn selection, and everyone seemed to enjoy their rendition of "Die Sach ist Dein," an old favorite to be sure.⁴⁰

Through all of this the Board was hardly heard from, and Americans of all persuasions began to think of China as hopelessly lost to the West. Sam Goering found himself arguing with a Western Union employee in Newton about sending the missionaries funds, and when the gentleman told Goering that nothing--not even letters--still went to China, Goering had had enough, and produced his copy of Boehr's latest letter, if for no other reason to shut the fellow up.⁴¹ Similarly, when Nyce did write Boehr in late September, he used more space to tell Boehr about the U.S. than to ask Boehr about China. Apparently, IRS agents had just visited the Mennonite community where Nyce was living, and after reviewing some of their records, the agents were amazed. Soon the Mennonites were also amazed, and the Rev. Silas Grubb declared that the "land of the free" was quickly becoming the "land of the rich and the home of the slave." Nyce himself confided to Boehr that while everyone hoped for peace, "there are many who believe we are having a socialist

⁴⁰Boehr to Nyce Family, Chengtu, Sept. 13, 1950, ibid.

⁴¹Nyce to Boehr, Pretty Prairie, Aug. 17, 1950, ibid.

government [in America] at present and [are] headed like some of the other countries."⁴²

Boehr might have chuckled harder at the perils of returning, had not the perils of staying turned sharply for the worse. Still sick, Rev. Chang was now believed to suffer from diabetes as well as high blood pressure,⁴³ and slinking in like a winter fog, the government began its crackdown on evangelical activities. "Seems the future will bring more restriction," worried Boehr, "but with our simple setup here . . . we may not have them soon." The mission's preachers were still shouting and singing through amplifiers, and the Paoki workers, who sought to raise another chapel, had asked for a building permit--not something they would have done if they had feared it would put their work in jeopardy. But from eastern China--where political windstorms began--Boehr heard that the "Sun mu-shih" (or, Dragon-King) of their old field now insisted that he not be called a pastor, for pastors were not doing well in Mao's new civilization.⁴⁴

Also, when the Mennonites officially associated themselves with WCU's seminary that August, they had noticed increased restrictions on education; indeed by then, all education was scrutinized, and at the least, "guided" into

⁴²Nyce to Boehr, Pretty Prairie, Sept. 26, 1950, ibid.

⁴³Boehr to Nyce, Chengtu, Oct. 4, 1950, ibid.

⁴⁴Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Oct. 12, 1950, ibid.

official channels. Nonetheless, the Mennonites took five young students under their wing, and financially supported one, grooming all for the dubious life of a Christian minister in a Communist land.⁴⁵ Most important, of course, remained their infant local church, and in an effort to buy it a property on Chengtu's busy West Street, as well as to buy a second property in the West Suburbs, the missionaries finally sold their Dodge truck, which had served them even in Paoki. Despite a shortage of vehicles after the war, they only recovered about one-third of its original price, but fared much better in selling its fuel supply; in fact, the truck's gasoline actually turned them a profit.⁴⁶

Despite such periodic leaps of faith, however, there remained a certain somber tone in the missionaries' correspondence; no longer did they speak much of converting China or of bringing a great nation to the feet of God. The eloquent rhetoric of their nineteenth- and early twentieth-century predecessors was much less heard now, and though Boehr's rhetoric could be eloquent enough, the victories of which he spoke were smaller or more distant. Likewise, he spoke of other nations (suggesting, for example, that Albert Jantzen be sent to Japan, where the Board began another project),⁴⁷ and he wrestled with the gradual realization

⁴⁵Boehr to Nyce, Chengtu, Oct. 4, 1950, ibid.

⁴⁶Boehr to Mission Board, Oct. 31, 1950, ibid.

⁴⁷Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Oct. 12, 1950, ibid.

that his mission's immediate future might be harder than its past, a realization to some extent which haunts the chess player who finds his strategy to be sadly ineffective, or finds that his final moves are more derived toward keeping the game alive than winning it. Boehr's compassion for the Chinese never left him, nor his faith in why he had it--those thoughts remained with all the Mennonites, in China or on the Board--but after having moved his mission once, after having watched the battle fronts sweep closer for two years, after having sacrificed his dream for expansion, and now, after having to watch the new government impinge upon or close the Chengtu work, Boehr thought again of his Mission Board's extended welcome home, and like their chief, his workers may have almost felt that peace which comforts Christians in moments they think of death, or (on a hardly comparable level) the somnolent resignation of chess players in moments before they lose--a painless, speechless, almost peaceful understanding that the table at which they sit will not set itself forever.

In mid-October, Boehr began one of his letters with a heart-felt tirade ambitious even for him, and wrote a salutation of

greetings with Ps. 107, where we read of Israel's trials and testings, and how the Lord led them through the stormy world-sea to find victory and rest,--a picture also of the saints of this day in their tempest-tossed experiences on the sea of the nations, and the final victory through Christ in His Glorious Return, and coming Kingdom Reign.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Boehr to "Dear Coworkers in Christ's Vinyard" [Mission Board], Chengtu, Oct. 21, 1950, ibid.

But by mid-November, Boehr wondered if the Kingdom was better served as it watched him leave China, for

to me that seems to be the crucial question now. However, what is called 'devolvement' (or having responsibility for the Work placed in Chinese Christians' hands) also makes the presence of missionaries less needed, and maybe desireable for them to leave, especially under certain circumstances.⁴⁹

In short, Boehr always believed in the consummate victory of Christ; indeed, China did nothing to dispel its possibility. But the Chinese Revolution had begun to challenge Boehr that he might not live in China when Christ returned.

⁴⁹Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Nov. 18, 1950, ibid.

CHAPTER EIGHT

(Christmas 1950 -- July 1951)

The idols were set up by the peasants, and in time they will pull down the idols with their own hands.
--Mao Tse-tung

December the first was a birthday. Parades lining Chengtu's major streets began in the early morning and continued late into the night; literally thousands marched for the glory of their one-year-old revolution.

More somber were the Mennonites, although not necessarily less inspired. They had discontinued the Tea House as a meeting place some weeks before, but Christmas programs still sounded from their West Suburb chapels, and those services seemed to give both the missionaries and their congregations a rejuvenated purpose for the work they hoped to carry on. As usual, the mission attracted large crowds, and offered both a morning church service and a children's program later in the day; only this year the Chinese were in charge, providing even the gifts they gave their children, and Christian carollers strolled the same streets where rejoicing Communists had swaggered several weeks before. When the carollers reached the Boehrs' house, P. J. and Frieda promptly invited them in, not only offering them candy,

walnuts, and oranges, but a friendly accompaniment to their Christmas songs as well.¹

Also alert to the mission's decaying stature with Chengtu's government, however, Boehr and Frieda had begun returning their books to the U.S. where their house was rented out to seminary students. Because Chinese assets in America were already frozen, American assets in China suffered a like retaliation, and imbued with the Mennonite propensity toward virtuous frugality, Boehr sought to watch his expenditures in all departments. "God has His hand in this too," he decided, and he left no doubt about the source of his inspiration.

We believe Rom. 8, 28 is being fulfilled toward us and the church here. We have been told that our needs will be arranged for when that question comes up. Phil. 4, 19 we believe has already been vouchsafed to us before all this frost and Phil. 1, 6, and Heb. 13, 8 is sufficient assurance for the future.²

Not only were the missionaries worried for their supplies, but even more frustrating was their emerging inability to assist the Chinese church they had just begun, and Boehr

¹p. J. Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Jan. 3, 1951, General Conference Board of Missions/Commission on Overseas Missions Collection, Series 1-5, Mission Workers Correspondence, Folder 19; Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Jan. 9, 1951, ibid.

²Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Jan. 3, 1951, ibid.; Rom. 8:28 reads: "And we know that in all things God works for those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Phil. 4:19: "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Phil. 1:6: "[I pray] . . . that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Heb. 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

feared that with a drying up of Western funds, the voluntary schedule his Chinese churchmen had adopted, namely self-support within five years, would have to be accelerated--perhaps to hazardous speeds. Yet if holy script provided the comfort, it alone did not provide a panacea; the pressure and the doubts remained, and as their final year swept in, Boehr noted, for example, that Wilhelmina Kuyf apparently suffered from a case of nerves.³

Of course, the missionaries accepted any letters they could with great delight, but as new, and often seemingly random, regulations were either thrust upon them, or rumored to be in the making, those in the field were especially happy to keep politics far away from their correspondence. Not only was Boehr afraid that political letters would fail to pass Chinese censors, but worse yet, he feared they might land their addressees in prison. Repeatedly he wrote to thank his friends for keeping away from such inflammations, and advised them, instead, to "write of what God can do for a sin-cursed humanity."⁴ Indeed, the mission was scarcely a week into January, when Communist politics dealt a ringing blow to its local church, and Boehr lamented that because "the urge is so strong for complete independence in every way," even the Board would have to quit sending money to Chengtu. The freezing order could be subverted (most

³Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Jan. 3, 1951, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-5, MWC, Folder 19.

⁴Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Jan. 9, 1951, ibid.

bureaucratic fetters had their faulty locks), but Boehr advised that it should not be: now foreign assistance had been expressly banned to those Christian churches still remaining.⁵

Likewise, and in near-poetic symmatry, Chengtu's winter took a chilling turn for the worse, and the missionaries feared a dangerous shortage of "burning wood"; eventually, in fact, they resorted to old books or useless papers to make up for the fuel they lacked. In the West Suburb, however, they installed a roomful of sewing machines (by mid-January, there were nine=, and announced their presence for the "learning and personal use of Christians." When one of the mission's number needed a machine, he or she could come to the mission and find one free of charge; if a person did not know how to operate it, or it broke while it was in operation, the experienced Chinese left in charge would help the one in need. Apparently, the machines proved quite a hit, for Paoki Mennonites hoped to find one of their own as soon as they were able.⁶

Yet as admirable, and appreciated, as those machines were, even they could not impress the new regime, and on the twenty-ninth of January, Chengtu's anti-mission crackdown finally reached the Mennonites. While eating supper, Boehr and Kuyf were called to the foreign office "without delay,"

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

and hurrying over on their bicycles, they tried to assume that a routine matter awaited them. En route, however, four Swedish women, also missionaries, hailed them from a ricksha, and intimated what the government most likely had in mind. The Swedish ladies, in fact, were just returning from the very office which Boehr and Kuyf were hurrying to, and the women were quite elated about their exit visas having been approved. Rumors, they told the Mennonites, suggested that two other approvals concerned Boehr's mission, but specifically whose visas were involved they did not know.

Baffled, Boehr and Kuyf continued; they could hardly believe that the government, erratic as it was, would actually send the two of them, particularly as Boehr was married. Yet when they reached the office, what they did find made more sense; not Boehr and Kuyf, but Goertz and Kuyf, would soon be leaving China--they had no choice, and neither, by that time, did they have much compuncture to stay. When Boehr wrote the Board about his workers' impending departures, he expressed a solid satisfaction that Goertz and Kuyf could leave, and even somewhat sadly hoped that he and Frieda might soon follow them out of Chengtu. But for the meantime, only ten days were allowed for packing, and before the two women would ever see Hong Kong, they knew they would have to endure a truck, bus, or car ride to Chungking, a river boat excursion down the Yangtze, and a train trip from Hangkow to the coast. So resigned was Boehr to the fact of following them that he instructed Nyce not to

send further letters to Chengtu; rather, they were to go to Hong Kong where William Voth could handle things from there.⁷

Members of the Board, who described themselves as "alarmed" over Kuyf's nerves (surely an over-reaction), and who were enraptured to see Kuyf and Goertz leave China, suggested that Boehr return via Japan, where the old China hand could assist in his conference's new project there. Board members also felt that if William and Mathilda Voth were reunited in the spring or summer, both could resume their careers on a permanent basis in Japan,⁸ for if the Chinese Marxist line toward religion seemed amorphous to the missionaries, it looked phantasmagoric to those in America who, like the Board, tried not to lounge about in simple anti-Marxist hype, but to understand precisely how their missionaries stood. To be sure, the Chinese gave all Americans continued cause for puzzlement, and in many areas (including Chengtu), they expressly refused to resurrect the violent approach used in Russia when meeting with religious opposition. Although it proved less concrete than it sounded, the Communist Constitution even guaranteed a "freedom of religious belief," and despite the rampant rumors of atrocity, many imprisoned Christians--including the

⁷Boehr to Mission Board, Chengtu, Jan. 30, 1951, ibid.

⁸Nyce to Boehr, Pretty Prairie, Feb. 22, 1951, ibid.

Chengtu Methodist F. Olin Stockwell--called their captors' methods "decent and civilized in every respect."⁹

Therefore, unlike their Bolshevik predecessors who filled unmarked pits with Christian victims and who favored sticks of dynamite to topple Christian steeples, Chinese Communists looked for natural laws which would doom religion to a self-contained decline. For one thing, they saw how the Russian approach had failed; for another, they saw from their own history how revolutions (or counterrevolutions) could be sparked from religious persecution; and for yet another, they maintained the traditional Marxist doctrine which posited religion as one of primitive man's inventions, developed because he feared the elements, and systematized when he broke his society into classes. With science to tame today's elements, and Communism to tame today's classes, modern man could throw off religion just as he threw off his ancestors' pitiful picks and axes. "Therefore," wrote one government official, "it is radically impossible to use compulsory methods as the solution when dealing with people's religious beliefs, only by adopting a policy of freedom in religious belief can we agree with the law within religion."¹⁰ In other words, only if religion is allowed to die of its own absurdity can Communism ever replace it; only if it is kept

⁹F. Olin Stockwell, With God in Red China: The Story of Two Years in Chinese Communist Prisons (New York, 1953), 78.

¹⁰Chang Chih-i quoted by Richard C. Bush, Jr., Religion in Communist China (Nashville, Tenn., 1970), 18.

alive through the clumsiness of its opponents, or if the Marxist utopia is never reached, will religion live on.¹¹

For those reasons, a freedom of belief was assured, but not the freedom of assembly, of demonstration, or of practice. The right to vote or to run for office was denied to "counterrevolutionary" Christians, and some even argued that outwardly religious services--or even buildings--were unconstitutional because they impinged on the rights of atheists. Because atheists did not preach in churches, this silly theory ran, believers should not preach on the streets; thus, according to Communist logic, everyone's freedom of belief was respected.¹² Perhaps even more disturbing to anyone apprised of early missionary blundering was the Communists' perennial assertion that Christianity was the cloak within which bourgeois imperialism crept. In that sense, Maoists could tap into resentments older than Mao and nearly as old as the missions, and they could also cast Christianity as the foulest of foreign offenders. Indeed, as historian and theologian Richard Bush has noted, a tolerance toward Buddhism and Islam offered the Chinese diplomatic advantages in the Middle East and in Africa, but Christianity was strictly the faith of their enemies.¹³

¹¹Ibid., 17-18, 29.

¹²Ibid., 15-16, 19.

¹³Ibid., 38-39.

At first, persecution varied from region to region, and through 1949 and 1950, Mennonites were often amazed at how diverse reports would be, but F. Olin Stockwell, held in Chengtu and Chungking, wrote of no threats, no beatings, and even no rude behavior on the part of his guards; in fact, he portrayed them more as playful adolescents, toying with a revolver while they alternately watched their prisoners. "I knew if they shot us," Stockwell wrote, "it would actually be an accident, but I wished they would quit monkeying with the fireworks."¹⁴ Not that his captors were "friendly"--they were not--and they did accuse him of imperialist spying, but his cells were usually equipped with tables, chairs, bamboo beds, occasional mattresses or sleeping bags, and sometimes even cuspidors, and he suspected the rice gruel, soups, meat, and mantous he ate were probably the same fed to those who held him.¹⁵ Nonetheless, religion had its stringent limits, for as Chairman Mao had said, "democracy is correlative with centralism and freedom with discipline,"¹⁶ and those who stepped away from the center, or who had never been there in the first place, were likely first to be reprimanded by the police, but if they persisted, to be arrested and forcefully informed of their errors. Of course, indefinite imprisonment or execution came only to those most fiery in their belief,

¹⁴Stockwell, With God, 78.

¹⁵Ibid., 74-5. A mantou is a type of Chinese steamed bread.

¹⁶Mao Tse-tung, Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung, ed. Stuart R. Schram (New York, 1967), 144.

or to those most fervently opposed to Maoist ways, and when it did come, it was invariably enameled with the so-called lofty wishes of the Chinese people.¹⁷

That such a fiery believer as P. J. Boehr would finally cross those wishes was probably inevitable. In a sermon he delivered early in March, Boehr stated "that every knee should bow before the Lord, even Stalin," and for his fervor he was promptly arrested and taken to Chungking for further detention.¹⁸ Frieda, who was the last Mennonite to leave Chengtu, followed her husband two days later on March 3, and for the next three months, they lived together in a makeshift camp for foreigners, studying, praying, and even writing as they could, although letters to the U.S. were apparently forbidden, or at least discouraged. At hardly any time from their arrival in mid-March to Boehr's second arrest in mid-May, did either of the two ever leave their camp.

On May 16, Frieda traveled to the British Consul in Chungking, hoping to secure a visa for her return home; by that time, of course, the American Consul was closed, but the British had been very helpful to Americans heading home. At first, she asked for her passport, but when she found it was expired, the British gentleman she spoke with suggested writing an affidavit to take its place. Patiently, she

¹⁷Bush, Religion, 30.

¹⁸Howard G. Nyce to A. E. Kreider, Mar. 27, 1951, ibid., General Correspondence, Folder 169. Nyce learned of Boehr's arrest in a phone call from Sam Goering; Goering learned it in a note to him from Elizabeth Goertz.

waited for her new document to be prepared, but added to the tedium when she refused to swear an oath, forcing the Brit to recast his work, although, as Frieda recalled it, he did so most courteously. Earlier, when she had left the camp, her husband had mentioned that he would write some letters before leaving; his own passport was already approved, and now as Frieda waited by herself, she assumed that Boehr had already left by steamer, the only "reliable" transport left. She did not assume, and would probably never have guessed, that he literally left under the barrel of a Chinese gun.¹⁹

He had been writing to Dorothy McCammon when the police came in. They ordered him, and another British missionary, Grace Belcher, to the Foreign Office in one hour. Frieda had not returned when Boehr left, but she had planned to ask the British Consul to send his passport to the Foreign Office, and he hoped to find it there. On his way to the office, the missionary felt Szechwan's summer rains one more time, and trudging after the policemen, he and Miss Belcher carried only their bedding roll, leaving most of their other possessions behind. While walking, Boehr "mused audibly" that they might meet Calvin Bright, another missionary and mutual friend of theirs at the station, and when they reached it, he was proven right. All three were led upstairs where

¹⁹Frieda Boehr to Nyce, Chungking, May 23, 1951, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-5, MWC, Folder 19.

they spent their first night and most of the following day under guard.²⁰

Shortly before five p.m. on the seventeenth, the prisoners were ordered into a government jeep, and along with their baggage, were "swished" to the city's riverfront, then sent on board, of all things, an oil tanker bound for Canton; in the morning, they sailed, and arrived in Hankow at noon on the twenty-first. After another thirty-six hours on slat-wooden train seats, during which time they were denied sleep and could not so much as use a restroom without permission, and during which even his captors ate little ("to keep 'in harmony' with The Party," thought Boehr), they reached Canton, where those policemen who had escorted them disappeared, and they were turned over to Canton's police department. Three agents in Canton's Foreign Office (whom Boehr called "kids," for all looked to be eighteen or less), ordered the missionaries to remove their shoestrings, belts, watches, and all contents of their pockets. While these items were inspected, the missionaries were ordered to drag their luggage in by way of a long court yard, and then they were taken under guard to the prison itself.²¹

Sitting on the ground, they could only see two muzzles aimed directly at their faces, and one by one, they were ordered to stand, Boehr being ordered first, and with arms

²⁰Boehr to Mission Board, May 25, 1951, Hong Kong, ibid.

²¹Ibid.

raised, were inspected again. Bright was, of course, inspected after Boehr, and in another quarter, Miss Belcher was inspected by a police woman. Each prisoner was then assigned a metal number, and now no longer known by their name, each was marched into his or her appropriate cell--cells which according to Stockwell, were typically "built on the architectural plan of New Jerusalem, cube shaped, and ten feet in each direction."²² Although his bed was only a wooden plank, Boehr, now called number seventeen, slept well, and resourcefully used his sweater for a pillow.

Although Boehr was released the following day, along with the other two, he had overheard his captors in Canton as they considered holding him permanently in that city.²³ Yet as temporary as his imprisonment was, it naturally provoked in him a period of reflection, and he recounted to the Board later on that "Calvin and I embraced each other that strange night in CANTON prison, and committed you all and us to 'The Eternal God'."²⁴ Imprisoned for Christian sentiments, Boehr compared his plight with Paul's (and surely also to his sixteenth-century brethren), charitably admitting that "we cannot speak of suffering except in a small measure in our soul." Likewise, he took his flight from China philosophically, deciding that "the Lord sent us to China, and we

²²Stockwell, With God, 74-5.

²³Boehr to Mission Board, Hong Kong, June 1, 1951, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-5, MWC, Folder 19.

²⁴Boehr to Mission Board, Hong Kong, May 25, 1951, ibid.

believe He again called us out. This . . . that our Chinese friends might be spared additional trials because of the presence of foreigners."²⁵ Words which Boehr had heard from another Chengtu missionary when he was first apprehended, and which he had found bizarre at the time, now seemed at his release to be fulfilled with the startling accuracy of an ancient prophecy: "You will later on find that this will be one of your most precious experiences to give."²⁶

Meanwhile, Frieda, who was still in Chungking, had secured her passport only to fail in securing boat tickets. Many of the ships leaving Canton, which normally would have carried hundreds of passengers, now only transported troops, and civilian travelers could not always find a seat. Using her time for correspondence, Frieda wrote of a Chinese Christian in Chengtu, who had worked as a scribe in the mission there, and whom she now had learned was killed for alleged involvement with Chiang's regime. When the Boehrs had left Chengtu in March, their Chinese friends warned them not to write, especially as P. J. was already known by the Communists, but after some reflection, their friends had also thought that Frieda could write if she only used her first

²⁵Boehr, "We Leave China," The Mennonite (Nov. 6, 1951): 699.

²⁶Quoted in Boehr to Mission Board, Hong Kong, June 1, 1951, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-5, MWC, Folder 19.

name. Now, following the scribe's death, another friend she met in Chungking advised her not to even write like that.²⁷

Safe in Hong Kong, Boehr hoped his wife was also safe, but did not know. Because China's usually unreliable transit system had turned even more unreliable during the war, he suspected she was still in Chungking, and used the time he waited for her to plan their careers after China. A most enticing option was the new Mennonite work in Japan, but other trips, one to the Holy Land of Palestine, another to the Mennonite homeland of Switzerland, and still another to Boehr's father's German birthplace at Dorf Stockborn, bei Kaiserslauten were also possible, and Boehr asked the Board about them all.²⁸ Though Nyce had hardly written in the last six months (in large part because he did not know how to reach Boehr), he was prompt in replying now, and as for Japan, he announced a reversal of the Board's earlier position, and declared that the answer was no. "We believe the experience through which you have passed should be enough reason for you to want to come [home]." Kuyf was already in Canada, well off in her new life recruiting for Mennonite summer camps, and Elizabeth Goertz had gone to India, still plying the trade of a Christian nurse.²⁹

²⁷Frieda Boehr to Nyce, Chungking, May 23, 1951, ibid.
Also, for more on the shooting, see Boehr to Mission Board, Hong Kong, June 6, 1951, ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Nyce to Boehr, Pretty Prairie, June 27, 1951, ibid.

Toward the last of June, and after the Boehrs were finally reunited, their travel plans were organized, and a visit to Frieda's nephew in India was added to their schedule. Naturally, any expense they incurred beyond the cost of direct return was paid by the Boehrs, and both of them looked forward to their trip, despite the considerable traveling they recovered from. When they learned, just as they prepared for their final exit, that their son had died in an auto accident near Goshen, Indiana, they were obviously distraught, but even then did not change their travel plans, and continued to speak and write of the Chinese church they left behind.³⁰

From what scraps of information left Chengtu, the missionaries learned somewhat later that none of their mission's buildings remained in the hands of Christians; apparently the government had seen fit to tax them beyond their ability to pay. Nonetheless, the Mennonites' former clinic was still a clinic, and the Chinese Christian workers who had helped with it kept their jobs. Wilhelmina Kuyf learned that twenty-two groups of Christians still met in private home on Sundays, and there were still those "who take the task of shepherding these people as part of their Christian duty."³¹ As for Boehr, he could not have left China without feeling at least a tinge of failure; having

³⁰Boehr to Nyce, Hong Kong, June 27, 1951, ibid.

³¹Wilhelmina Kuyf, "Let Us Not Forget China," The Mennonite (Nov. 6, 1951): 699.

first seen the country in 1915, he had never led a mission before he went to Paoki in 1947. Yet if Boehr failed in living up to his rhetoric, if China as a nation never understood the salvation proffered before it, the mission's failure was tempered by a continuation of those ideas it expounded, and more importantly, by a quantifiable, if often immaterial, gratefulness from those it converted. Their religion, after all, needed only the justification of its adherents to prosper, and the missionaries needed only their converted to promote a religious message.

The worst, of course, was yet to come, and in the years that followed, those Chinese who kept the faith often paid for it very dearly. Even as Boehr was leaving, he admitted that "the Christians are going through a far greater test than missionaries have and are going through,"³² but given his optimistic temperment, he doubtlessly felt that the Christians would stay, and as if in solemn agreement with his hope, Rev. Chang baptitized nineteen on the Easter following Boehr's departure.³³ For a religion founded on a life which conquered death, hope would seem quite enough to conquer Communism, and peering over the railing of his steamer, Boehr the failed missionary may well have slightly smiled at the fight those Reds had just begun; he may well have left the country as much an optimist as he sailed to it, and he may

³²Boehr to Mission Board, Hong Kong, June 1, 1951, ibid.

³³Boehr, "We Leave China," 699.

even have felt that the time he spent there, the life he had spent there, was compensated enough.

Steaming away from Hong Kong, P. J. Boehr was sixty-five years old.

CONCLUSIONS

What the superior man seeks is in himself; what the small man seeks is in others.

--Confucious

The plain fact why Boehr left China was Mao Tse-tung and the Communist revolution. The Mennonites did not leave because Christianity had failed, for small as their numbers might have been, Chinese Christians were plentiful enough by 1951 to keep the mission open. Just as Sophocles's chorus had bemoaned the death of religion some millenia before, so Christianity's death in China was mourned over prematurely, and in hastily writing off the China missions, historians might have recalled that Oedipus's dreaded oracles proved themselves right after all.

In a sense for the Mennonites, their West China mission played its own role as a very tiny oracle, revealing in its brief four years both the inspiration behind Christian proliferation, and the failure of Western missions to inspire their Chinese hosts. As William Hutchinson discovered, when missionaries preached a Christocentric canon, they were scorned for being calloused, and when they mixed personal witness with social commentary, they were scorned as ethnocentric; their refuge lay in a fortress mentality, in their call from on high to preach the Word at all costs, and

against all opposition.¹ "How much prayer is needed to keep all Christians close to the Lord and His BOOK," wrote Boehr when he learned of a native C.I.M. worker who had disappointed his employers, for "then Christians will have a truly Christian character and will 'give forth a certain sound'."²

Yet to baldly assert that missionary fundamentalism doomed their doctrine would be simplistic; not all missionaries used a fundamentalist approach. Indeed, before the close of the nineteenth century, Western man (both at home and in China) had tired of his own prophecies, and was already searching for a quicker, less painful salvation; he was discovering to his amazement that faith could exist in the temporal, but he failed to simultaneously discover that once religion became materialistic, it was well advised not to be utopian. The Social Gospelists' answer, an over-adjustment of Christianity, never reformed all that it thought it did; it merely replaced collective cosmic salvation with collective social salvation, when in fact the Chinese could understand neither one.

¹William R. Hutchinson, Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions (Chicago, 1987), 13.

²P. J. Boehr to Howard G. Nyce, Chengtu, Oct. 4, 1950, General Conference Board of Missions/Commission on Overseas Missions Collection, Series 1-5, Mission Workers Correspondence, Folder 19, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kans.

Using the teachings of one of history's most vociferous anti-materialists to increase the average Chinese's consumption was not only fruitless, but it still failed to escape the antithetical mode of thought which missionaries rarely ventured beyond. In a discussion of Chinese literature, Lin Yutang saw the problem in its clearest light. The Chinese language, he positioned, offered Chinese scholars with no modicum of jargon; to them a black-out remained a black-out, it could never be a termination of illuminating light. Likewise, "the sea of human life forever lays upon the shores of Chinese thought, and the arrogance and absurdities of the logician, the assumption that 'I am exclusively right and you are exclusively wrong,' are not Chinese faults." "The Chinese philosopher," wrote Lin, "is like a swimmer who dives but must soon come up to the surface again; the Western philosopher is like a swimmer who dives . . . and is proud that he never comes up . . . and is happy in his profundity."³

The Chinese were appalled at those so stuffed with reason that they could not make moral judgements, or so scientific that they could only see the world as molecules and atoms. Indeed, one Chinese doctor actually wrote a book describing his heart as happily pumping in the right side of his chest, and if quizzed about his shoddy science, Lin suspected, the doctor would have wondered why anyone had to

³Lin Yutang (ed.), The Wisdom of China and India (New York, 1942), 568.

know exactly where his heart was. "If you cut it out, you'll see it anyway, and if you don't cut it out, you can't do anything with it. So why does it matter where the heart is; it is much more important to have it in the right place." So long as mechanical techniques and materialistic methods are ruled superior to all their competitors, thought the Chinese, "human values" will always exist beyond the empyrean of attainable thought.⁴

The Chinese were, in a word, anti-modern, and Lin was equal in his fury at that Western pride as well. Modern man, wrote Lin,

seems to think that the gathering and systematic presentation of data confer upon the scientist a Godlike wisdom, that facts are like cold figures, and the human mind is like an adding machine, and that if you put all the facts into the machine, you automatically draw out the correct, infallible answers and the world will then be saved. The folly of this conception is beyond belief. We are suffering not from lack of facts, but rather from too many and from lack of judgement.⁵

Rather faciously, he added that because in the West, "God and Satan are eternal verities, . . . [and] since there is no way of tackling problems of good and evil by either percentage or statistical charts, the problem must remain unsolved and ignored."⁶

⁴Ibid., 570-73.

⁵Ibid., 571. Lin actually applied this to H. G. Wells, but he was using Wells an allegory for "modern man."

⁶Ibid., 573. Because Lin was gearing his argument toward literature, it is also interesting to note that only Whitman, Thoreau, and Emerson did well in his assessments, while most other Western writers--all of whom he considered pessimistic--were basically accused of intellectual whining.

But of course, he knew the West had not ignored that problem, and that its missionaries had riddled their own beliefs with Western thinking--yet therein lied the problem. While most missionaries (of which the Mennonites were included) thought in terms of antithesis (that is, A cannot, nor ever will, equal non-A), their Chinese congregations were much more labyrinthine, even more dialectical than the missionaries, only dialectical in the sense of poets and not philosophers. Or put another way, the missionaries sought to know God, but the Chinese simply tried to live with Him.⁷ Consider Lester Wuthrich's dilemma not long after he left the field, and after he heard of the Board's accepting a candidate who questioned both the bodily resurrection and "the first six or twelve chapters of Genesis." Outraged, Wuthrich queried Nyce, "Is this true? I do not see how I could work with such a person on the field."⁸

Recounting their saga in a somewhat different light, historian Joseph R. Levenson has maintained that the missionaries' zeal drove them headlong into paradox, for in

⁷Cf. Adolf Harnack, who believed that Christianity took a wrong turn when it merged with Hellenic rationalism.

⁸Lester Wuthrich to Nyce, Santa Barbara, Calif., July 15, 1950, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-5, MWC, Folder 276. Significantly, Nyce answered "Yes," but insisted that the gentleman in question was doing well and "that he will grow in grace." See Nyce to Wuthrich, Pretty Prairie, Kans., Sept. 15, 1950, *ibid.* Also, see James C. Juhnke, A People of Mission: A History of General Conference Mennonite Overseas Missions (Newton, Kans., 1979), Chapter 5, for an excellent overview of the General Conference's struggle between fundamentalism and modernism in the first half of this century.

the words of one mission worker, many insisted that "while it is always true that Christianity civilizes, it is never true that civilization Christianizes."⁹ According to Levenson, Christians from the very start (some dating back to the sixth century) had promised to the Chinese that Jesus traveled with them, and that, despite her multiple iniquities, China could still be saved; but on hearing this, the poor Chinese were baffled, and could only ask "saved from what?" What the missionaries offered as an answer stressed salvation less than Western history, and such a tactic did not impress the lofty Middle Kingdom, so over the centuries, the Christians refined that message; they acknowledged Christ's role in their own history, but they insisted on the interrelatedness of all histories, proffering a less opaque truth--a truth transcendental to culture--and a truth which placed Christ back in the noumenon of existence, where (they insisted) he had always belonged. Yet as Levenson put it, "cultural relativism [was] a poor servant . . . to the Christian religious absolute,"¹⁰ for if Christ's truth lay not in phenomenon, but in some ultimate or supra-historical source of history, then why could Chinese history (or Chinese culture) not embody that truth just as much? In essence, the

⁹C.I.M. missionary Henry Frost quoted by Hutchinson, Errand, 115.

¹⁰Joseph R. Levenson, "The Changing Character of Chinese Opposition to Christianity," in Jessie G. Lutz (ed.), Christian Missions in China: Evangelists of What? (Boston, 1965), 91-92.

missionaries were selling the Chinese meat after they had taught them how to hunt, and when the Westerner complained of his own culture as fleeting and superficial, the Chinese "notes the sacrifice, and accepts it, and stands pat."¹¹

So the Social Gospelists appeared, and Christianity regrouped; they decided that if this monster Chinese culture could not be patted on the head, they would kick it in the shins. A frontal assault was mounted with superior Western medical, mechanical, and agricultural technology; into China the missionaries marched again, this time dragging science by the ears, and this time certain that the Chinese would recoil at their own barbarity when they saw the advancement of a Christian world. Up went their hospitals, in went their scientific farming, out sprawled their factories, but still, no more than a handful of Chinese were ever converted to the Gospel.¹²

"It has not been the West that has been hit by the world," Arnold Toynbee once observed, "it is the world that has been hit--and hit hard--by the West."¹³ China was in

¹¹Ibid., 92. A revealing comment by Marie J. Regier also implies that the Mennonites viewed Christianity as extra-cultural: "Once [foreigners] are removed and the Chinese church is independent, many of the foreign elements will be swept away." See Regier, "Cultural Interpretation in a Local Community in China" (Draft copy of M.A. thesis, University of Chicago Divinity School, 1936), 50.

¹²Levenson, 93-94.

¹³Arnold Toynbee, "Russia and the West," in Horace Knowles (ed.), A Treasury of American Writers from Harper's Magazine (New York, 1985), 615. Toynbee specifically included China as part of the "world."

tatters when World War II was over; its traditions were either lost or laughed at, and its government was corrupted into what Stockwell called a "family-archy."¹⁴ Both the nation, and the nation's individuals craved for something new, for something which would create meaning where there existed only chaos, and which would give individual Chinese a way to focus their emotional and rational elements toward a transcendental whole¹⁵--China craved, in short, for a new faith, and to those like P. J. Boehr, Christianity's opportunities seemed greater than they had in decades.

That Communism--in many ways, a Christian heresy--would steal the Gospel's victory seemed to indict the entire mission movement. Communism's dogmatic absolutism, its inherent sense of sin, and its frequent use of "confessions" all reflected a number of mission projects; the Communists' pendantic scrupling over money was also "reminiscent of the Puritan horror of blasphemy and bad language."¹⁶ Because Christianity was foreign, the Reds could rage at imperialism, because it was Western, they could warn about capitalism, and because it appeared to them a relic of ancient superstition, they could speak of glorious human progress; but the man on

¹⁴F. Olin Stockwell, With God in Red China: The Story of Two Years in Chinese Communist Prisons (New York, 1953), 31.

¹⁵C. K. Yang, Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors (Berkeley, Calif., 1961), 380.

¹⁶C. P. Fitzgerald, The Birth of Communist China (New York, 1966), 133-34.

the street, the average Chinese, reserved a much more stinging condemnation--to him, the Christians were those who did not practice what they preached;¹⁷ to him the Christians were imperialistic because they humiliated him by stripping away his traditions, or insulted him by throwing out his medicine, or wrecked his family by "liberating" those women whose feet he had bound.¹⁸ They were foreigners who replaced his old values with a seemingly metaphysical explanation of why those values were wrong.

To be sure, the Chinese could live by neither prayers nor bread alone, but along with a meaning of life, they lacked a teaching of it; they lacked a faith which could both answer their natural questions and anchor their wrecked society, if not in utopia, at least in a calmer harbor. Therein lay another chance for missionaries, for in the words of Leo Tolstoy:

the power of Christ's teaching is not in its explanation of the meaning of life, but in what is deduced from it--in its teaching of life. Christ's meta-physical doctrine is not new; it is that eternal doctrine of humanity inscribed in all the hearts of men, and preached by all the prophets of the world.¹⁹

¹⁷T. Z. Koo, "The Future of Christianity in China," in Milton Stauffer (ed.), China Her Own Interpreter (New York, 1927), 144-45.

¹⁸Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Missionary Enterprise and Theories of Imperialism," in John K. Fairbank (ed.), The Missionary Enterprise in China and America (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 363-67 passim.

¹⁹Lyof N. Tolstoi, My Religion in My Confession, My Religion, The Gospel in Brief (New York, 1899), 261-62.

Confucious had already given China meaning--and order--but once the social manifestations of his meaning were shattered, that sage's barren teachings lingered only helplessly, and shriveled from lack of use. Perhaps the missionaries who hoped to build on Confucionism's failure should have further thought of Tolstoy and his notion that "the power of Christ's teaching is in the application of this metaphysical doctrine."²⁰ Once applied, Christ's "teaching of life" could not only improve the life of the man who learned it, but could rely on a truth not imposed by Marxist revolution.

Another story of Aganetha Fast's proved the point. One Sunday morning when she worked in eastern China, Fast watched a stranger from their village burst into the mission's chapel, hurry down the aisle, and scream before the congregation that he wished to "give a testimony." Naturally, the congregation was eager to hear him out, and when the man spoke, he could hardly contain his emotion. "My wife had heard about your Jesus teachings," he told them, and he told them of his furor every time she left for the chapel. Eventually, he said, he had forbidden her to go, but when she defied him, he cursed her, and when she defied him again, he resolved that she must be punished; if necessary, she must die. Then he told of the "kitchen hatchet" that he carried with him to their yard gate, and told them how he waited

²⁰Ibid., 262.

there for her return. "Our neighbors watched to see what would happen."

Yet when she did arrive, she saw him waiting there, and she watched him lift the hatchet above his head, preparing to strike. Quickly, she grabbed his arm, but then simply told him:

Before you kill me I want to ask you some questions. Since I became a Christian, have I ever scolded or cursed you as I used to? Haven't you found I made better meals and weren't they always ready in time and hot when you came from the field? Weren't the children better behaved and cleaner than before? Didn't you find your clothes washed and mended ready to wear? Wasn't the home and the yard swept and the bedding clean?

The man had to lower his hatchet, and now speaking before Fast's Chinese congregation, he asked if he could also be a part of their church.

What a fool I was to kill her! All that she said was true, O what a fool I was! Now I have come to tell you, I too want to learn about this God, who so changes people. I want to believe on this God also!²¹

When the missionaries (Mennonites as well as others) could induce such a tangible improvement in Chinese lives, their Gospel would sell itself, even if the Chinese standard of living remained unchanged; but where cosmology was stressed over compassion, where doctrine was stressed over virtue, the missionaries won converts not to Christianity but to Westernism, and no one realized that truth lay at the nexus of all possible worlds, not in the harborage of any of them.

²¹Recounted by Aganetha Fast, Out of My Attic (Freeman, S. Dak., 1970), 62-63.

Pity the poor Chinese, then, who promised to renounce his newfound Christianity if only the gods would make his daughter well.²² He was caught in a world of conflicting absolutes, prisoner of two conflicting metaphysics, or if Tolstoy was right, between conflicting dogmas of the same metaphysics. The Christianity he learned only argued with his old faith; it added nothing to it, and while it gave him plenty to think about, it only confused the way he lived. Religious historian Adolf Harnack once wrote that "we ought to regard [Christianity] as an energy,"²³ as something (like consciousness itself) hardly definable in materialistic terms. A Chinese writer of the 1920s, Hsu Po-chien, went even farther:

I suppose we will all agree that the most important of all Christian doctrines is that of incarnation, the Word made flesh. Now I believe that this task of incarnating the Word of God was meant to be undertaken by every Christian.²⁴

To Hsu, Christ's commandment on the Mount to "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven"²⁵ was really a challenge for all men to become Sons of God, and as such, Christ's teaching "may be called the doctrine of reincarnation." "According to

²²Mathilda K. Voth, Clear Shining After Rain (North Newton, Kans., 1980), 223.

²³Adolf Harnack, A Scholar's Testament (London, 1933), 220-22.

²⁴Hsu Po-chien, "Christianity, a Religion of Love Spread by Force," in Lutz, Christian Missions, 65.

²⁵Matt. 5:15

my thinking," concluded this Chinese Christian, ". . . [a non-Christian's] questions cannot be answered apart from this doctrine of reincarnating the Word of God."²⁶

Thus religious faith became the action of truth in individuals, and doctrine was partly exonerated. Indeed, even Harnack admitted that dogma served a purpose, and to suggest that the missionaries should have reduced their message to a moral creed would have been equally unfair to their cause.²⁷ Some Chinese began to "prove" Christ using their own great teachers, and one writer described Him as the synthesis of Hindu, Sino, and Western ideas all in one. Because the Hindu is ideally a reverent and contemplative person, because the Chinese is a master of nature, and because the West is technologically superior, the writer saw in Christ "the life of man with God developed to its highest form, . . . the life of man with man exemplified in a most touching and compelling manner, . . . and the right use of material resources."²⁸ Another writer believed that "Christianity has the realism of Confucianism, the mysticism of Taoism, and the sharing essence of Buddhism, [only] excels

²⁶Hsu, "Christianity," 65.

²⁷Cf. C. S. Lewis, who professed that "you can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." See Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York, 1952), 40-41.

²⁸Koo, "Future," 155-56.

it in dynamic power." Yet sadly, the same man who wrote this, also described himself as "grieved to think that Christians are not always worthy to preach Christ."²⁹

Mennonite historians Robert and Alice Pannabecker Ramseyer picked up on his point, specifically chiding both the Mennonites and their converted for a failure to realize "that they needed to share their understandings of what it means to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in this world," or put another way, that "no one seems to have felt the need for true mutuality."³⁰ Perhaps, as James Juhnke has suggested, this stemmed not so much from the Mennonite's lack of resolve, as from their unfortunately weak orientation toward Mennonite heritage. If they had been less Protestant and more Anabaptist, they might have better understood "the possibility of a remnant church which endeavors to be faithful in an unregenerate world." Instead, as Protestants, they focused on the salvation of China, even if, unwittingly, they let the salvation of Chinese slip by their grasp.³¹

When the Mennonites were in touch with their message, they could even surprise themselves with their success, and once when one of the (Old) Mennonite Henry Bartel's followers, an old woman, was demanded by the Reds to denounce

²⁹Y. Y. Tsu, "Our Native Religions," in Stauffer, China, 65-66.

³⁰Robert and Alice Pannabecker Ramseyer, Mennonites in China (Winnepeg, 1988), 98-99.

³¹See Juhnke, A People of Mission, 64.

a mission family, she refused, imperiling herself and citing how kind and helpful they had been to her.³² Additionally, the Mennonites were quicker than most denominations to turn administrative control over to the Chinese,³³ and they were often more tolerant than their rhetoric made them sound: writing to friends about the Paoki project, Aganetha Fast admitted that while "we cannot approve of everything they do," her heart was wholly with them.³⁴ Finally, a number of the Mennonites, including Elizabeth Goertz as previously mentioned, simply transferred to India, Indonesia, Formosa, the Philippines, or Japan,³⁵ and even among those who left the field for good, none were afraid to learn from their mistakes; considerable effort was spent after the China workers came home in using their experiences to improve missionwork for the future.³⁶

Still the missions succeeded in a much more obvious way as well--they effectively transplanted Christianity in China, effectively because in continued, and continues, to expand.

³²Ramseyer, Mennonites in China, 75.

³³Ibid., 98.

³⁴Fast, "To my Friends," mass-produced letter to friends in the U.S., n.d., 10.

³⁵P. J. Boehr, "We Leave China," The Mennonite (Nov. 6, 1951): 699.

³⁶See, for example, "Lessons from China Missions," The Mennonite (Oct. 30, 1951): 699; and "An Interpretation of Lessons to be Learned from the Experiences of Christian Missions in China," Nov. 5, 1951, GC BOM/COM, Series 1-5, Foreign Fields -- Correspondence, Folder 3.

Clearly, they did not convert the whole nation, but national conversion was doomed the moment individual action and commitment was stressed, and while correspondence between the missionaries and their fields lasted only shortly after the Westerners' departures, by the late 1970s new reports began reaching Mennonites that Christian groups still existed. Public meetings were out of the question, but worshippers still crept silently into homes, hide-outs, or even caves to explore those ideas first shown to them by mission teachers.³⁷

Some Chinese who were assumed dead, such as James Liu, were happily found to be living, and now with the recent liberalizations of Deng Xiaoping, Liu has written that most Chinese have enough to eat, that grain and rice production increases every year, that village collectives are expanding into businesses they have never tried before, and even that "I am glad I did not leave, because now we take pride in our great socialist motherland." Liu and his Chinese brethren also take pride in their Christian faith, and today Mennonites are returning to China to assist them, this time not as missionaries, but through the China Educational Exchange as doctors, teachers, nurses, or agriculturalists.³⁸

Other missionaries, oftentimes illegally, are posing as tourists to find their way in, and Christianity is spreading

³⁷Juhnke, A People of Mission, 62-63.

³⁸James Liu and Stephen Wang, Christians True in China, ed. Robert Kreider (Newton, 1988), 81-82, 85.

surprisingly well among the young. The 700,000 Christians whom the missionaries left behind have now grown to over 10 million, and Christian officials claimed as late as April, 1989 that a new church is opened every thirty-six hours. Many Chinese are still looking for that new faith they thought they would find in Communism, but did not; and as one Chinese Christian observed, "party members are not the ones helping others. They just do things to get ahead. But Christians do good deeds without telling anyone about it."³⁹ Here the words of Fast's would-be murderer were echoed, and the Gospel continued despite its purveyors' earlier mistakes.

Indeed, across the mountains of Shensi, westward onto the Szechwan plains, and into the city of Chengtu, Christianity now almost moves in the open. A subtle injustice appears in the fact that P. J. Boehr cannot see it happen. For if he would only pick an afternoon when the wind was not too heavy, and if he would only strain his ears just right, that old optimist might even hear the whisper of an oracle in China.

³⁹Dorinda Elliott, "Let a Hundred Lilies Bloom; Christ Returns to China," Newsweek (Apr. 10, 1989): 59.

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APPENDIX

List of Mennonites in the Narrative

- Bartel, Henry C. (Old) Mennonite missionary at time of West China Mission.
- Boehr, Frieda. Wife of P. J. Boehr; the last Mennonite to leave Chengtu.
- Boehr, Mary Ellen. Daughter of P. J. Boehr; sent back to U.S. when West China missionaries fled Paoki.
- Boehr, P. J. (Peter J.) Head of West China mission, 1947-1951; missionary in Hopei-Honan field, 1915-1933; Home: Pandora, Ohio
- Brown, Henry J. Treasurer of China field (Shanghai), 1947-1949; missionary in Hopei-Honan field (interned during war), 1909-1943; Home: Mountain Lake, Minn.
- "Mr. Chang." Preacher at Chengtu, 1950-51; schooled by Mennonites at Kaichow.
- De Garmo, Mary. Mission worker at Henry Bartel's mission; killed by a hand grenade, 1948.
- Dyck, Walter H. Treasurer of Mission Board in time of West China mission; Board member, 1953-1971.
- Fast, Aganetha. Missionary in West China mission, 1947-1949; missionary in Hopei-Honan field, 1918-1941; Home: Mountain Lake, Minn.
- Goering, Samuel J. Mission Board member, 1947-1959; missionary in Hopei-Honan field, 1919-1935
- Goertz, Elizabeth. Missionary in West China Mission, 1947-1951; missionary in Hopei-Honan field, 1921-1946; with MCC, 1946; Home: Hillsboro, Kans.
- Jantzen, Albert. Missionary in Hopei-Honan field (interned during war), 1938-1945.
- Kuyf, Wilhelmina. Missionary in West China mission, 1948-1951; missionary in Hopei-Honan field, 1936-1942; with MCC, 1946-1948; Administrative Assistant for Mission Board, 1951-1963; Home: Philadelphia, Penn.

- Kreider, A. E. (Amos E.) President of Mission Board in time of West China mission; Board member, 1935-1953
- Li Hong Liang. Evangelist in Hopei-Honan field; killed in Kaifeng during Japanese bombing raid, January, 1941.
- Li Kuang Ming. Head of Paoki mission after Boehr's departure; missionary in Hopei-Honan field before and during WWII.
- Lind, Wilbur. Worked for MCC in Shanghai; assisted the Board in selling H. J. Brown's apartment following Brown's retirement.
- Liu, James. Chinese Mennonite converted in the Hopei-Honan field, mistaken for dead until late 1970s; visited the United States in 1985.
- Pannabecker, S. F. (Samuel F.) Mission Board Member, 1947-1965; missionary in Hopei-Honan field, 1923-1941; with MCC, 1945-1946; President of the Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Chicago.
- Nyce, Howard. Executive Secretary of Mission Board, 1948-1954; Mission Board Member, 1935-1947.
- Thiessen, J. J. Mission Board member, 1947-1957.
- "Mr. Ts'ao." Preacher at Chengtu, assisted William Voth in canvassing Kweichow for possible mission site.
- Tuan Li Shen. Li Kwang Ming's assistant at Paoki.
- Unruh, Daniel J. Vice-President of Mission Board in time of West China mission; Board member, 1941-1953.
- Voth, William C. Missionary and architect in West China mission, 1948-1951; Mission-Mission Board correspondent in Hong Kong, 1949-1951; missionary in Hopei-Honan field, 1919-1935; Home: Gotebo, Okla.
- Waltner, Erland. Mennonite pastor in Mountain Lake, Minnesota during the time of the mission; assisted in securing a station wagon meant for mission use.
- Wang Jui Ting. Worker in West China Mission; assisted Elizabeth Goertz with the dispensary.
- Wedel, Phillip A. Mission Board member, 1943-1959.
- Wuthrich, Agnes. Wife of Lester Wuthrich.

Wuthrich, Lester. Missionary in West China mission, 1947-1949; missionary in Hopei-Honan field (interned during war), 1940-1945.