

CONTRIBUTIONS OF PROTESTANTISM IN THE INITIAL PERIOD OF INTRODUCTION INTO CHINA AND VIETNAM

Abstract: *In comparing the contribution of Protestantism in China and in Vietnam in the first period of evangelisation through the aspects of education, healthcare, information, press, publication, social charity and cultural exchanges between the Occident and the Orient, the contribution analyses the main causes leading to a difference of the social influence degree of Protestantism in China and Vietnam.*

Keywords: *Contribution; Protestantism; China; Vietnam.*

China was one of the paths that Protestant missionaries passed through on their way to Vietnam. However, there were certain differences in the process of propagation in two countries that led to different effects on society. Protestantism failed to make a large impact on Vietnamese society, while it made significant changes in the domain of education, health, media and social security that contributed to promoting the development of Chinese socio-culture in the modern period.

1. The contribution in the field of education

Education was the most major activities (outside of religious activity) that the Protestant missionaries carried out the educational establishments on the land of China. It was also the most important activity in spreading culture and the most profound effect on Chinese society. In the book “Principles of Christian education” (*Tôn chỉ của giáo dục Kitô giáo*) wrote that: “Christian education is Christianization China, the biggest goal is to turn China into a Christian nation”. Stemming from this purpose, after receiving the compensation of war during the Boxer Rebellion (Boxer Uprising or Yihequan Movement), the European countries and the United States

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of America poured into the building of education and training establishments that belonged the Protestant Church.

Protestant education development triggered off the modern education in China. The first Western-style schools of China were the Protestant Church schools that were constructed by missionaries. The education system included elementary, intermediate to advanced and specialized schools which fundamentally reformed the modern education's concept of China and developed a new educational institution. In particular, the establishment of universities in China accelerated the removal process of the Confucian court examination system and built modern schools in the history of educational development in China. Therefore, the universities which founded by foreign missionaries had a positive impact on the development of modern education in China.

The early 20th century, almost churches had a primary school. According to incomplete statistics, in 1914, there were 4,120 primary schools with 104,841 pupils and 286 junior high schools with 13,453 students. In 1919, there were 5,637 primary schools with 151,582 pupils; 962 junior high schools with 32,899 pupils; 291 secondary schools with 15,213 students¹.

Protestantism also aimed to build and develop colleges and universities in China that made the Chinese educational system had historical advances. The emergence of the Protestant university was a major breakthrough in the Chinese education history. It created the Chinese higher educational systems in the modern period. Basically, the Protestant universities overcome the shortcomings of the traditional educational system of China. It brought a higher education system with new content on many aspects such as model schools, teaching content, fostering talents, social adaptation. The construction of the Protestant universities promoted the Chinese higher education system. Graduated students of the Protestant universities became professors of universities in China.

Before the Protestant universities were built, the Chinese higher education system mainly taught classical literature and history. By the early 20th century, the best universities of the Protestant Church in

China were nearly on a par with universities in Europe, America at that time. The emergence of the Protestant universities made the Chinese higher education closing the gap for several hundred years in comparing to the Western universities.

Protestantism was introduced into Vietnam in 1911, however, until 1952 the Vietnam Protestant Church really paid attention to evangelize through education by establishing a committee to be in charge of the high school. In 1953, the first primary and high schools were operated. In 1975, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South) had 142 primary and high schools with 800 classes, annually attracted about 50 thousand students². In 1975, Seventh-day Adventist Church also had many cultural and educational establishments such as Southeast Asia University, Saigon Christian high school, and 18 primary and high schools³. World Vision, according to the statistics in 1974, had opened more than 90 primary and secondary schools, gathered 800 teachers, 90 employees, and 30,000 students⁴. Protestant schools in Vietnam were mainly primary and secondary schools; there was no higher education, such as college and university, so they were not able to change the face of the educational sector in Vietnam.

2. The contribution of the health sector

In the medical field, the Chinese already has a long history and incisive philosophy, but they mostly based on the metaphysics, the five elements of yin and yang as a basis to diagnose the origin of the diseases so they fell into a vague and abstract situation. Overall, it is impossible to deny the advantages, but it could not hide its defects. Chinese medicine had arisen shortcomings since the Western medicine has been introduced into China. The introduction of modern Western medicine into China could not help mentioning the role of Protestantism.

Protestantism established the Chinese medicine for the purpose of promotion and development evangelisation. However, the healing operation of Protestant missionaries helped to access Western medicine, to promote the modern medicine in China.

In 1834, Peter Parke, an American Protestant missionary and a doctor, arrived China. Since the Protestant Church has started

combining medical treatment with evangelisation. This combination included the establishment of medical associations, clinics next to the Church by missionaries. On that basis, the Protestant hospitals were established, the books, newspapers, and bibliographies related to the health sector also were published. In 1835 Peter Parke opened an ophthalmic clinic in Guangzhou. This is the first Western hospital that was built by foreign missionaries in the modern period in China.

In the 20th century, the number of Protestant hospitals rapidly increased. According to statistics of “Christian Yearbook” in 1936, the Protestant missionaries built more than 260 hospitals in China.

To train medical staffs of the Church, many medical institutions and nurses training schools were built. In 1937, there were more than 140 schools with nearly 4,000 students. Before the year 1949 the hospitals of the Protestant Church accounted for 70% of the total number, 90% of nurses in these hospitals were Protestants⁵.

The medical practices and introduction the Western medicine theory of foreign missionaries founded the development of Western medicine and New pharmaceuticals in the modern period in China.

In Vietnam, some Protestant denominations such as the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, Seventh-day Adventist Church of Vietnam also interested in health care activities and built some hospitals in small scale, however, they were not enough to change the Vietnamese medicine. The most outstanding achievements contributed to the Vietnamese medicine that was the establishment of the Indochina Pasteur institution in Nha Trang, Hanoi Medical University and a lot of valuable researches in the field of medicine by Dr. Alexandre Yersin (1863-1943), a Protestant.

3. The contribution in the field of the Press and publishing

Since the beginning of evangelization in China, the Protestant missionaries have focused on writing books and publishing. There was no official publishing agency in the period of the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Qing dynasty, but the publishing activities of missionaries were extremely lively. Writing and translating books of foreign missionaries and Chinese protestants flourished and spread out

as a movement. After the Opium War, the foreign missionaries started founding the editorial offices of newspapers and the publishers. These activities fundamentally changed the traditional publishing of China. Since the concept of modern news and mass media of the Chinese has started building. The first political comment and religious journals were founded by the Protestant missionaries that were considered as the beginning of the Chinese journalism in the modern and contemporary periods. The news publication of the Protestant Church since the 19th century has really built the foundation for the development of the publishing business and has inspired to the modern journalism in China.

The newspapers in the Chinese and English languages were established by the Protestant missionaries have created favourable conditions and journalistic experiences in mainland China in the future.

Entering the 20th century, a career in journalism of the Protestant Church retained development. In 1936 there were 238 types of publications published by Protestants in China, including 211 magazines in Chinese and 27 magazines in English⁶.

In Vietnam, Protestants had a few magazines such as the Bible journal (*Thánh Kinh báo*, later renamed Monthly Bible journal - *Thánh Kinh Nguyệt san*), Sacred Torch (*Đuốc Thiêng*) and Dawn (*Hừng Đông*, later renamed *Rạng Đông*), Voice of Eastern France (*Tiếng gọi Đông Pháp*), etc. Although it was a small amount and the issue was interrupted, it had a little social impact.

The first publisher of the Protestant missionaries in mainland China was “Society for the dissemination of pragmatic knowledge in China”; it was established in 1934 in Guangzhou. In 1935 Protestantism built 69 publication establishments in China. The most famous one was the “Society for the promotion of study” (*Quảng học Hội*). It was the largest publisher of Protestant missionaries in China. It also was a famous professional Christian publishing house inside and outside of China.

In Vietnam, the Protestant missionaries also paid attention to printing and publishing. Since 1920, after 9 years of introduction into

Vietnam, a publisher of French Eastern Evangelical Association was founded in Hanoi. Because of limited funds, of war, the printer had to move many times and the number of publications could not be compared with China. The Vietnam Protestant publications mainly served the evangelizing.

4. The contribution in the field of charity

Besides hospitals, clinics as mentioned above, the Protestant Church in China also built a series of charitable establishments for children, including orphanages, schools for the blind, the deaf and dumb people, etc.

Since the 1820s the Protestant missionaries in China have started building orphanages for Chinese. The first Chinese orphanage was founded by Walter Henry Medhurst, a missionary of the London Missionary Society.

According to statistics in 1914, 37 orphanages were built by Protestants and they received and nurtured nearly 2,500 orphans the whole of China.

In 1928 the Protestant missionaries established the Union of Children Charity in Shanghai. This association consisted of 5 parts: Protection of children, Education of children, Hygiene of children, Studies on children, and Social education. It also created a number of branches in major cities.

In 1874 W. Murry, a missionary, founded the first school for the blind people in Beijing. In 1907 the Protestant Church in China had 12 charitable establishments for the blind. The number increased to 38 establishments, received and nurtured more than 1,000 blind people in 1926.

The first deaf and dumb school in China was the *Đặng Châu* private school founded by J. L. Nenius, a missionary of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of North America in Shandong. This kind of schools was established by the Protestant missionaries as the foundation of the educational cause for the disabled in China.

It could not help mentioning a network of charitable foundations that were nursing homes, hospital for the disabled. In addition,

Chinese Protestants also extended charitable work and social services, such as helping the disabled, looking for livelihood to the unemployed and creating favourable conditions to help lawbreakers become kindly people, using social welfares for working people and the construction of museums, libraries, bookstores for intellectual expansion.

Meanwhile the charitable activities of the Protestants started quite slowly in compared to the development process of Protestantism in Vietnam. In the early years, there was sometimes a few of charitable work on a small scale, such as helping the poor or people suffered from natural disasters. Until 1953, after 42 years of presence in Vietnam, the first orphanage of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam has been established. In the process of building this orphanage, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam faced internal opposition. Pastor Lê Văn Thái said that “The reason for such opposition was that it was influenced by the Christian and Missionary Alliance from the beginning of the Church. The Christian and Missionary Alliance specialized in preaching the gospel all over the world without worrying about the social work and education. Missionaries of this society never mention social issues and education”⁷.

The period from 1954 to 1975, due to more favourable conditions, Protestantism in Vietnam expanded charitable activities, mainly in the domain of parenting orphans, of helping war and natural disasters victims, etc. However, Protestantism was just a small association in society in Vietnam, so it did not cause a big impact as it made in China.

5. The contribution to promoting East-West cultural exchanges

In the process of evangelization in China, protestant missionaries had an important contribution toward promoting East-West cultural exchanges. They introduced to Western people the Chinese history and society at that time, promoted Western countries to study Chinese culture. In the context of falling into a semi-colonial situation by Western powers, missionaries published a lot of books and newspapers of the Chinese situation. The missionaries’ letters and reports and their recommendations after coming back their countries were important data for Chinese study.

The English-Chinese Dictionary by Robert Morrison, a missionary, was the most famous. It became first facilities for compiling the English-Sino Dictionary, and it was an important event in the history of cultural exchanges between China and the United Kingdom.

The Protestant missionaries introduced Confucian Classics to the Westerner. The most successful person in this area was James Legge with the first book “Chinese Classics” in English, published in 1861. Over 25 years later, James Legge published books such as “Analects”, “University”, “Centristism”, “Mencius”, “Spring and Autumn”, “Book of rites”, “Scriptures”, “Classic of Filial Piety”, “Classic of Changes”, “Book of Poetry”, “Book of Ethics” and “Chuang Tzu” in English. This translation has been the standard English translation until now.

Besides, the missionaries also founded newspaper editorial offices in foreign languages in China in order to introduce Chinese history and social situation at that time to the Westerner, to publish their research results. These works were not only a great effect on the Western countries at that time of learning about China, but they have been the most precious materials, valuable references to the Chinese and Western scholars.

Arthur Henderson Smith, a missionary, was considered as a grand expert on China issues. The book “Chinese Characteristics” was published in 1892 and was translated into 6 languages including Japanese. This book caused a certain influence in the West and Japan.

The Protestant missionaries spread Western culture in China with views of value, moral, humanity and culture of Western capitalism.

In addition, schools of the Protestant Church and young Protestants also introduced the Western culture, science, and technology during this period. Especially, the Protestant Youth Association introduced fitness, art activities to many young Chinesees that were useful for the healthy development of youth. Obviously, the Western academic backgrounds introduced by Protestant missionaries during the Xinhai Revolution have helped encourage and inspire the Chinese intellectuals at that time.

A large number of Protestant schools were founded by missionaries as well as a series of new intellectuals were trained in the universities of the church the first half of the 20th century who have agitated for the academy, science and technology, religions and have had a certain contribution to society.

Business management in the editorial offices, hospitals, schools founded by missionaries in the modern period in China was a product of Western civilization. Generally, these establishments were managed democratically, efficiently with practical knowledge and advanced equipment.

In this domain, Vietnam Protestant seemed to have shortcomings. There were not any famous works of the Vietnam Protestant missionaries introduced the Western culture, society, economy, medicine and there were a few works introduced Vietnam to other countries.

6. Comments

As mentioned above, Protestantism left different impacts on Vietnamese and Chinese society during its evangelisation. However, what is the main reasons to make a large difference between Vietnam and China in the level of social influence? In my opinion, they are as follow:

Firstly, the Protestant missionaries in China interested in social issues. They actively advocated social - cultural activities, engaged in social reform, but they did not just aim at salvation, change the traditional Chinese culture. It was totally different from Protestants in Vietnam. The Christian and Missionary Alliance confirmed “They did not have the purpose of social reform as William Carey did in India. The Society did not aim at social security as it had done in India. It did not engage in education as the other Protestant missionaries did in China”⁸. And, “The Christian and Missionary Alliance never planned in their programs the establishment of secular schools for Vietnamese. The policy of the Christian and Missionary Alliance did not open schools in the land where the local government could provide a full educational system. Vietnam’s educational system under the French regime and national government as well was considered as surplus, at

least according to the representatives of the Christian and Missionary Alliance”⁹.

Secondly, the Protestant missionaries in Vietnam were different from missionaries in China. At the beginning, they were academic people, knowledgeable about China. After arriving China, they became celebrities, played an important role in the field of Chinese social life, such as Robert Morrison was a pioneer in the domain of cultural exchanges between China and Western countries at the modern time; Elijah Coleman Bridman was the first person took Chinese education out of the Middle Ages; Peter Parker, a missionary, was the first doctor brought Western medicine to China.

While in Vietnam, the Protestant missionaries were young people, were not knowledgeable about the culture and indigenous religions. Le Hoang Phu wrote that “The disadvantage is that most of the missionaries did not spend time as their colleagues had done in India and in China, it means that they should speak fluently Vietnamese and French, understand more about the Vietnamese culture and history. Their writings, including leaders, revealed some deficiencies in understanding the social structure and educational practices of the major religions, even the most important events in the development of the Roman Catholic Church in Vietnam”¹⁰.

Thirdly, the indirect method of evangelization through education, health care, charity, Chinese Protestantism attracted a great number of intellectual believers in Chinese contemporary society. They absorbed, propagated and helped to develop the modern Western culture and knowledge in Chinese society. In contrast, in Vietnam, missionaries singly operated with direct missionary method without the support of the government and they faced a tight cohesion of community with a long cultural tradition of the village system in Vietnam and a stiff competition on “sharing” with the other as Catholicism, Buddhism, etc. Thus, Protestantism’s evangelisation in Vietnam aimed at two main classes: *firstly*, towns’ residents included farmers, craftsmen, workers, small traders, students and a small group of secretaries, officers, teachers and soldiers who were separated from village communities to work and live in the urban areas; *secondly*, the ethnic minorities who

had inceptive culture and religions. They were small and vulnerable groups in society, so they could not be able to absorb and transmit the modern Western culture and knowledge in Vietnamese society as Chinese Protestants did./.

Notes:

- 1 Lý Khoan Thục (1998), *Lược sử Kitô giáo Trung Quốc*, Nxb. Văn hiến Khoa học xã hội, Bắc Kinh: 277. (*An Outline History of Christianity in China*, Beijing: Social Sciences Pub.).
- 2 Nguyễn Thanh Xuân (2002), *Bước đầu tìm hiểu đạo Tin Lành trên thế giới và Việt Nam*, Nxb. Tôn giáo, Hà Nội: 391. (*The Initial Study on Protestantism in the World and in Vietnam*, Hanoi: Religions Pub.).
- 3 Nguyễn Thanh Xuân (2002), *ibid*: 434.
- 4 *Monthly Bible journal*, No. 12/1971, Hanoi: 28.
- 5 Trác Tân Bình (Chief author, 1998), *Kitô giáo, Do Thái giáo chí*, Nxb. Nhân dân Thượng Hải, Thượng Hải: 268. (*The writings of Christianity and Judaism*, Shanghai: Shanghai's People Pub.).
- 6 Trác Tân Bình (Chief author, 1999), *Kiến thức cơ sở về Kitô giáo Trung Quốc*, Nxb. Văn hóa Tôn giáo, Bắc Kinh: 80. (*A Basic Knowledge of Christianity in China*, Beijing: Religious Culture Pub.).
- 7 Lê Văn Thái (1970), *Bốn mươi sáu năm trong chức vụ*, Nxb. Tin Lành, Sài Gòn: 234. (*Forty-six years in the Ministry*, Saigon: Protestantism Pub.).
- 8 Lê Hoàng Phu (1974), *Lịch sử Hội Thánh Tin Lành Việt Nam (1911-1965)*, Trung tâm Nghiên cứu Phúc Âm, Sài Gòn: 44. [*A History of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (1911-1965)*, Saigon: Centre for Gospel Research].
- 9 Lê Hoàng Phu (1974), *ibid*: 120.
- 10 Lê Hoàng Phu (1974), *ibid*: 108.

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3. Lê Hoàng Phu (1974), *Lịch sử Hội Thánh Tin Lành Việt Nam (1911 - 1965)*, Trung tâm Nghiên cứu Phúc Âm, Sài Gòn. [*A History of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (1911-1965)*, Saigon: Centre for Gospel Research].
4. Lê Văn Thái (1970), *Bốn mươi sáu năm trong chức vụ*, Nxb. Tin Lành, Sài Gòn. (*Forty-six years in the Ministry*, Saigon: Protestantism Pub.).
5. Lý Khoan Thục (1998), *Lược sử Kitô giáo Trung Quốc*, Nxb. Văn hiến Khoa học xã hội, Bắc Kinh. (*An Outline History of Christianity in China*, Beijing: Social Sciences Pub.).
6. Nguyễn Thanh Xuân (2002), *Bước đầu tìm hiểu đạo Tin Lành trên thế giới và Việt Nam*, Nxb. Tôn giáo, Hà Nội. (*The Initial Study on Protestantism in the World and in Vietnam*, Hanoi: Religions Pub.).