

Missions in the Middle Kingdom

相遇华夏上千年



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Plans were afoot last year for the CAC Board of Missions to conduct a teaching course on the missions history of China, culminating in a study trip to China to see the various sites including the Great Wall in Beijing, the "Nestorian" Stele in Xian, the burial place of Matteo Ricci as well as to trace the steps of the British Methodist missionary Samuel Pollard in Shimenkan. But alas, all these were scuttled by the current coronavirus pandemic. While we were hoping that some semblance of normalcy would enable us to conduct the course in person, the decision to hold the session over zoom was nothing less than a divine intervention, as we were able to reach a regular attendance of about eighty over the four Saturday sessions in August 2020.

Why should we be interested in the mission history of China? Or for that matter, some may question, "Why bother with China?" But if we perhaps take note of what is happening around us, we soon realise that we live in a world where American global dominance has eroded with the rise of China, for which the defining geo-political contest of our times is between China and the United States. This has been further exacerbated by the trade wars under Trump and his repeated reference to the coronavirus as the "China virus". Since Martin Jacques' provocative publication, *When China Rules the World* and the more recent, *Has China Won?* by Kishore Mahbubani, China's economic and political ascendancy has been evident in such as China's Belt and Road initiative, the increasing unease in the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, as well as the phenomenal growth of the Chinese megacities. Perhaps prior to the Trumpian tagline, China has already been on the path of assuming the former glory of Tang China, in "making China great again." It is precisely that we live in these trying and increasingly tumultuous times that we must not forget the events that have shaped modern China, especially if we wish to understand Christianity in China.

In establishing a 'tradition' in the courses I teach, we began the course with a quiz, some of the questions are as follows:

- When did Christianity first arrive in China?
 - Who was the first Jesuit to attempt to enter China?
 - Who is the Chinese martyr commemorated on the west entrance of the Westminster Abbey?
 - Name any five Protestant missionaries to China.
- (If you are unable to answer correctly the above, it is perhaps indicative that this course was intended for you!)

But beyond just trivia, the history of Christianity in China is an account of the faithfulness of the people of God in bringing the Gospel to the Chinese people. Broadly, there has been four major waves of the advent of Christianity in the Tang, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, through the Church of the East (Nestorian Church), Roman Catholic missions (notably the Jesuits) and Protestant missions. And while the accounts are illuminated by such as Matteo Ricci, Robert Morrison, Hudson Taylor and Lottie Moon, the history of Christianity in China is further irradiated by others such as Alopen, John of Plano Carpini, Michele Ruggieri, Samuel Pollard and Wang LaiJun. These exemplify the biblical perspective that in the kingdom of God, the seemingly inconspicuous should not (and yes, never) be regarded as insignificant.

I will never forget the words of the poet, Yuan Mei (袁枚) inscribed on the door of a leper's village that we visited in Shimenkan. The poem is entitled 苔 (moss):

**白日不到处，青春恰自来
苔花如米小，也学牡丹开**

**Spring arrives even if the sun does not shine,
As with the peonies, so too the tiny moss flowers bloom.**

This poem is representative of the Miao people, often viewed as ordinary and perhaps even inconspicuous, when compared with the majority Han Chinese. But not so for Samuel Pollard who ministered among the Miao; living and eventually dying among a people he loved. In ways synonymous with the numerous missionaries in China, Pollard saw in the Miao - the precious among the seeming pedestrian, the priceless among the prosaic. The poem is also representative of the faithfulness of the missionaries in their choice to minister among the last, the least and the lost.

More importantly, the history of Christianity in China informs us that God will grow His church in His way and in His time. With each advent of the missionaries and the subsequent persecutions and prohibitions, it would perhaps be understandable to predict the dearth of Christianity in China. Yet despite the closed-door policy and the Cultural Revolution, Christianity continues to thrive in modern China. As the Lord reminded Isaiah that He has reserved seven thousand who has not bowed their knees before the gods (1 Kings 19:18), so too the history of Christianity is a reminder that God's mission among the Chinese continues. Jesus reminds us that the fields are indeed white unto harvest and He calls us to partner with Him - will you follow?

华人年议会的宣教部从去年就开始计划开办中国宣教历史课程，其中包括中国学习之旅，实地考察课程中所提的地点：北京万里长城、西安大秦景教流行中国碑、利玛窦陵墓，并追溯英国卫理宣道士柏格理在石门坎的宣教足迹。可惜计划因疫情受阻。尽管我们还是希望可以如往常一样开办实体课程，但最后选择使用Zoom开课的决定，也许是上帝的心意。因为我们在2020年8月所开办的四堂课，平均都超过80人出席。

为何我们需要了解中国的宣教历史？甚至有人会问，“为何要关心中国的事？”倘若我们留意周遭所发生的事，就不难发现在现今的世界里，美国在国际上的地位，正慢慢地因中国的崛起而衰微。在这时代，地缘政治的划分，就属中美之间的博弈了。在特朗普领导下发起的贸易战，以及他屡次将冠病毒称为“中国病毒”的举动，都加剧了这场博弈。从马丁·雅克具有挑拨意味的《当中国统治世界》一书，和近期马凯硕所著《中国赢了吗？》我们可以看到，中国在经济和政治方面的崛起，包括中国一带一路的倡议，南中国海日益不稳定的领海纠纷，以及中国大城市的惊人发展。或许在特朗普发表他的演说之前，中国已经踏上了重建中国唐代盛世以“让中国再次伟大”的路上了。正是因为我们处在这样一个动荡的年代，我们更不能忘记塑造现代中国的历史。若我们想认识中国的基督教信仰，更应当如此。

如以往的教课“传统”，我以测验来开始第一堂课，其中有以下几道问题：
基督教是什么时候进入中国的？
谁是第一位尝试进入中国的耶稣会修士？
在威斯敏斯特修道院西边入口纪念的是哪一位中国殉道士？
请列出五位到中国的更正教宣教士的名字。
(若你无法答出以上的问题，这或许表示你应该要来上这节课！)

这不只是些考题，基督教在中国的历史记录了上帝子民的忠心，他们将福音传给中国人的过程。大体上来说，基督教在中国的历史可以分为4大部分，分别在唐元明清四个朝代，由东方教会（景教）、罗马天主教（耶稣会）和更正教的宣教士带入。当中有大家熟悉的利玛窦、马礼逊、戴德生和慕拉第，然而在中国的基督教历史中，阿罗本、若望·柏郎嘉宾、罗明坚、柏格理和王来俊也都扮演着重要的角色。这一切凸显了圣经中对上帝国度的诠释，我们不应该将那些不起眼的人或事，看作是没有意义的。

当我到石门坎的一个麻风村时，诗人袁枚在门上刻的诗句让我无法忘怀。这首诗的名字是《苔》：

**白日不到处，青春恰自来
苔花如米小，也学牡丹开**

这首诗讲述的是苗族群体，和汉族相比，往往被视为平凡不起眼的族群。但在苗族当中服事的柏格理却不这么看。柏格理与他们一起生活，最后更死在他所爱的这群人之中。和许多到中国的宣教士一样，在柏格理眼中的苗族人——相貌平凡，却是平淡无奇中的无价之宝。这首诗也表述了宣教士对宣教使命的忠心，他们牧养群体中最后、最小、和失丧的。

更重要的是，中国的基督教历史告诉我们上帝如何按着祂的时间和方式，建立祂的教会。随着每一位宣教士的到来，以及接踵而来的逼迫和禁忌拦阻，中国的基督教按常理而言，应该就此结束。然而，历尽闭关锁国政策和文革，基督教信仰依然在现代中国蓬勃发展。如上帝提醒以赛亚要为耶和華留下七千个未向外邦神明屈膝的人一样（列王记上 19: 18），基督教的历史提醒我们，上帝对中国人的宣教计划仍在进行中。耶稣提醒我们，庄稼已经成熟了，并呼召我们与祂同工配搭，你愿意跟随祂的脚步吗？