

**‘How I am brought into the Light’: Representations of Childhood by Missionary Schoolgirls in East China, 1917-1930**

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This paper explores how missionary-educated Chinese schoolgirls applied childhood pedagogy that they learned at school to what they perceived to be the pressing demands of Chinese nationalism in the early twentieth century. Although there have been many studies of Christian schools in China from the missionary perspective, we know much less about how Chinese women themselves made sense of the education they received at missionary schools. Based on a study of two elite mission schools for girls in Republican Era East China, this paper explores how girls applied child-rearing practices, hygiene and domestic education to the children whom they taught in the vicinities of their schools. Like their missionary educators before them, they carved out new roles for themselves by claiming authority to speak for a downtrodden ‘other’: Chinese children. In doing so, missionary schoolgirls created new knowledge about Chinese childhood in the early twentieth century.

Keywords: China, Childhood, Gender, Education, Christianity, Service.

## Introduction

In 1922, Bang Vaung Tsien (彭望荃 Peng Wangquan) a pupil at McTyeire in Shanghai, one of China's most prestigious missionary schools for girls, wrote a short article for her school magazine, in which she assumed the voice of a ten-year-old village girl in an article entitled 'How I am brought into the light.'<sup>1</sup> After detailing her difficult upbringing by her father (a peddler) and her mother (a spinner), in which she often does not have enough to eat, her life is transformed by the well-educated 'ladies' (McTyeire schoolgirls) who come and offer her a place at their village school, eventually persuading her parents to let her study:

The ladies came to teach us every afternoon from four to five. They provided books, pencils and paper. They taught us how to live a happy life, no matter how poor we might be. They talked to us about many things, for instance, how to be hygienic. We played and exercised and had lots of fun ... What it means most to me is that I am no longer hopeless, no longer wish to be somebody else. Everyone has his work; I can study as well as others. The cottage seems more cheerful, my parents look more happy. Whenever there is trouble, my gracious teachers always come to our assistance.<sup>2</sup>

Missionary schoolgirls, equipped with their Christian education, claimed authority to speak for poor, uneducated Chinese children. Like their missionary educators before them, they used traditionally sanctioned spheres of female activity, homemaking and childrearing, through which they claimed to effect a transformational change in Chinese society. By structuring children's learning through play, teaching them how to be hygienic, and helping to create a happy family life, missionary schoolgirls believed they could create healthy, creative and productive future Chinese citizens.

Bang's piece is reminiscent of how foreign missionary women showcased their successes and demonstrated the importance of their work to male-dominated missionary boards

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<sup>1</sup> Bang Vung Tsien "How I am brought into the Light", *The McTyeirean* (Shanghai, 1922), 52–54.

<sup>2</sup> Bang Vung Tsien "How I am brought into the Light", 54.

at home. Missionaries appropriated the voice of Chinese women in similarly self-congratulatory ‘vignettes’ which depicted the transformation of Chinese women’s lives upon their conversion to Christianity. Indeed, this power dynamic of self-advancement through representing the downtrodden female ‘other’ remains much the same in Bang’s article, with class and educational status, rather than race, becoming the main dividing lines. Chinese missionary schoolgirls emulated these tactics, and went a step further, empowering themselves by tying their gendered Christian education to the patriotic fervour that was sweeping the nation in the May Fourth period. By applying their Christian training to the needs of Chinese children, knowing how to make hygienic, happy homes, missionary schoolgirls positioned themselves as the crucial agents who could strengthen the nation at a moment of national crisis.

Following the series of disastrous military defeats which led to the signing of unequal treaties with foreign powers, by 1922 Chinese intellectuals were engaged in an iconoclastic attack of Confucian traditions, which they saw as responsible for fatally weakening China. Known as the May Fourth Movement for the political protests that erupted in Beijing on 4 May 1919 after the handing of former German concessions in Shandong province to Japan in the Treaty of Versailles, the period saw widespread social, cultural and intellectual change as reformers, many of whom had recently return from studying in Japan, Europe and the United States, debated how to strengthen China. In their iconoclastic attack on the old society, May Fourth youth positioned themselves as the hope and saviours of the nation.<sup>3</sup>

Alongside introducing new ideologies and technologies from abroad, intellectuals also targeted the Chinese family system itself, which they believed was inhibiting the creation of happy and productive citizens. Linked by their shared status of ‘unproductive dependency’, Chinese women and children became favourite target groups for the reformers. As Susan

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine E Pease, “Remembering the Taste of Melons: Modern Chinese Stories of Childhood”, in *Chinese Views of Childhood*, ed. Anne Kenney (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 287.

Glosser, Limin Bai and Margaret Tillman have explored, this period saw the emergence of new conceptions of Chinese children as rational beings entitled to a free and protected childhood.<sup>4</sup> Chinese reformers adapted ideas about child-centred pedagogy from Japan and the West and applied it to the project of national strengthening. Pioneers in Chinese childhood psychology, such as Chen Heqin 陳鶴琴 (1892–1982), envisioned a kindergarten education system that was adapted to Chinese children’s specific needs and capabilities.<sup>5</sup> During the May Fourth era, Chinese children not only needed ‘saving’ and ‘protecting’ from the damaging influences of Confucian culture and a growing industrial capitalistic society, but were also held up as the key to China’s future strength and prosperity. It is in this context of reforming ideas about the Chinese family system and needs of Chinese children that we examine missionary schoolgirls’ representations of Chinese childhood in the May Fourth era.

This article explores how the gendered intersections of Christianity and nationalism in missionary schoolgirls’ education played a role in shaping new ideas about Chinese childhood that were emerging in the early twentieth century. It uncovers how and why missionary-educated schoolgirls represented poor Chinese children whom they encountered in the vicinity of their schools through their social service activities. How did they harness Christianity to nationalism during the May Fourth period? How did they internalize, reject, appropriate or redefine ideas they learned from school about the needs of Chinese children? The article sheds light on how deeply intertwined gendered Christian ideas about social service, namely their mission to create hygienic, loving and moral families learned from their Christian education, became with May Fourth ideas about childhood and family reform in the thought of these girls.

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Glosser L. *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915 – 1953*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Bai, Limin “Children and the Survival of China: Liang Qichao on Education before the 1898 Reform”, *Late Imperial China*, 22.2, (2001). Margaret Mih Tillman, *Raising China’s Revolutionaries: Modernizing Childhood for Cosmopolitan Nationalists and Liberated Comrades, 1920s–1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Tillman, *Raising China’s Revolutionaries*, 30.

Indeed, some Christian-educated women, such as Hu Binxia 胡彬夏 (1888-1931), went on to play leading roles in family reform.<sup>6</sup> Others served as child experts for the New Life Movement's Women's Advisory Council during the War. While for missionaries creating the preconditions for spreading of the gospel was the primary aim, for missionary schoolgirls, carrying out Christian social service could not be separated from the broader goal of national strengthening. Although their intentions to strengthen the nation were the same as other non-Christian educated reformers, Christian educated girls often drew on the language, tactics and methods of their missionary school teachers in their work with Chinese children.

Much scholarly attention has been paid to how female missionaries used the image of their 'downtrodden' and 'benighted' 'sisters in the East' in order to empower and carve out new spheres of operation for themselves.<sup>7</sup> However, in much of the early scholarship on the missionary education in China, little attention was paid to how women who received a missionary education internalized, rejected or appropriated this education for their own ends. One difficulty lies in locating Chinese Christian women within the missionary archive. As Kwok Pui-Lan has highlighted, Chinese Christian women's voices were seldom recorded in conference reports or minutes of church meetings.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, Chinese Christian women's voices have also been downplayed within the historiography of the May Fourth women's

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<sup>6</sup> Hu Binxia graduated from Laura Haygood Normal School in Suzhou. She later became the editor in chief of *The Ladies Journal* which was an important forum for the dissemination of knowledge about domestic management and childcare. Weili Ye, *Seeking Modernity in China's Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1900-1927* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 136-141.

<sup>7</sup> See for example, Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven, Yale University Press: 1984), Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994), Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo, ed., *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960*. Durham: Duke University Press: 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Kwok, Pui-Lan, "Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century", in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel H Bays (Stanford, CA, 1996), 196.

movement, dismissed as having imbibed a foreign-inspired ‘bourgeois’ feminism, which could not foster a truly ‘Chinese’ national women’s movement.<sup>9</sup>

Over the last decade and more, newer studies have sought to address this imbalance by examining how Chinese women adapted missionaries’ messages for their own ends. This scholarship has shown how Christianity became a Chinese religion through the efforts of male and female Christians to apply their faith to the problems faced by Chinese society in the early twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> These include studies of early female Chinese Christian doctors whose service was a result of the medical training they received in the USA, Shi Meiyu and Kang Cheng.<sup>11</sup> The careers of pioneer Christian women educators and the social service contributions of women who worked for the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) have also been uncovered.<sup>12</sup> Aihua Zhang has shown how Chinese Christian women working for the YWCA in Beijing sought to reform Chinese family life through a variety of social-gospel inspired initiatives focusing on women and children. These initiatives included domestic training in the form of ‘better homes’ and ‘better baby’ campaigns, the establishment of schools and playgrounds for poor children, and classes for former slave girls (*binü*). Zhang characterises the Chinese Christian women by their commitment to social service, down-to-earth practically-

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<sup>9</sup> For more on how non-CCP feminists were written out of May Fourth history see: Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment, Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Much of this scholarship on the sinicization of Christianity has focused on leading male Chinese protestant reformers. See: Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of Modern China, 1857–1927* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2001); Lian Xi, *Redeemed by fire: The rise of popular Christianity in Modern China*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). Daryl L. Ireland, *John Song: Modern Chinese Christianity and the Making of a New Man*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Connie Shemo, *The Chinese Medical Ministries of Kang Cheng and Shi Meiyu: On a Cross-Cultural Frontier of Gender, Race and Nation* (Bethlehem P.A: Lehigh University Press, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> See M. Christina Zaccanini, “Chinese nationalism and Chinese womanhood in early twentieth century China” in *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Culture and Social Mobility*, ed. Jessie Lutz (Bethlehem P.A: Lehigh University Press, 2010), 351-370, Dong Wang, “The advance to higher learning: Power, modernization and the beginnings of women’s education at Canton Christian College” in *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Culture and Social Mobility*, ed. Jessie Lutz (Bethlehem P.A: Lehigh University Press, 2010), 371-386, Jennifer Bond, “‘The One for the Many’: Zeng Baosun, Louise Hester Barnes and the Yifang School for Girls at Changsha, 1893–1918.” *Studies in Church History* 55 (2019), 441–462, . Xia Shi, *At Home in the World: Women and Charity in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

oriented programs and willingness to cooperate with a broad group of other national and international womens organizations.<sup>13</sup> Zhang does not focus on how these women's efforts changed conceptions of Chinese childhood in this period, and children in her study are essentially recipients of Chinese Christian women's reform efforts. It also remains unclear how Chinese women engaged with and formulated their own conceptions about what Chinese children needed in dialogue with ideas circulated by western missionaries and YWCA secretaries. This article argues that Chinese missionary schoolgirls were essential participants in creating and defining new Christian-inspired ideas about Chinese childhood. It draws our attention to forums for exchange and how girls formulated their own conceptions of what Chinese children needed in dialogue with internationally-circulating ideas. It reveals how missionary school students appropriated and redeployed the methods, tactics and rhetorical devices of their missionary teachers in constructing these new ideas about Chinese children, empowering themselves in the process. Missionary-educated schoolgirls applied their education to what they perceived as the pressing demands of Chinese nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century. Like their missionary educators before them, they carved out new roles for themselves by claiming authority to speak for a downtrodden female 'other': Chinese women and children. In doing so, they helped to shape new conceptions of Chinese childhood that were emerging during the first decades of the twentieth century. However, girls were not just passively imbibing and copying ideas from their missionary teachers. Instead, they claimed that only they, as Christian-educated, Chinese women, could effectively represent and minister to the needs of their less fortunate Chinese counterparts. Borrowing from their missionary teachers' Christian crusade that empowered them through a gendered rhetoric of 'service', they added the trump card of nationalism in the May Fourth period.

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<sup>13</sup> Aihua Zhang, *The Beijing Young Women's Christian Association, 1927-1937: Materializing a Gendered Modernity* (Langham M.D: Lexington Books, 2021).

This article draws upon the writings of missionary-educated schoolgirls from two southern Methodist missionary schools for girls in East China. In Shanghai, I look at McTyeire (Zhongxi nüzhong 中西女中), founded in 1892. In Suzhou, the Laura Haygood Normal School (Jinghai shifan nüzhong 景海師範女中), established in 1902. While McTyeire gained a reputation for being the most expensive missionary school in Republican China, to which the social and political elite of Shanghai sent their daughters, Laura Haygood was patronized by more ordinary merchant and church families.<sup>14</sup> Laura Haygood was established specifically to supply the demand for Chinese Christian teachers and was renowned for having one of the first dedicated Kindergarten training programs in the country.<sup>15</sup> I also draw on oral history interview materials with graduates from these schools.

The school annual magazines allow us an insight into the daydreams and motivations of nine to twenty-one year-old schoolgirls.<sup>16</sup> As official sources, written for and produced by the school for an audience of parents, teachers and mission board members, as well as their peers, they reflect an officially approved version of girls' motivations for social service. Girls of the graduating class were responsible for editing the magazine with the help of a missionary 'advisor' who also sat of the editorial board, normally comprised of six or seven pupils.<sup>17</sup> Copies of the magazines made their way back to missionary headquarters in the United States and it is likely that girls' writings were used as promotional material to showcase the missions'

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<sup>14</sup> Earl Herbert Cressy, "Middle School Standards, Second Study" *East China Studies in Education*, No.5 (Shanghai, 1929), 87.

<sup>15</sup> Jiang Guiyun, 'Wo ren Suzhou jinghai nü shi xiaozhang de huiyi' [Memoir of serving as the principal of the Laura Haygood Normal School in Suzhou]. In *Wenshi ziliao xuanji di shijiu ji* [Selected works of Historical Materials], 1964.12. SMA – JL-1-327-42.

<sup>16</sup> These include: McTyeire's *The McTyeirean* (Moti, 墨梯), and Laura Haygood's *Laura Haygood Star* (Jinghai Xing, 景海星).

<sup>17</sup> Magazine articles came from girls' classwork or were commissioned directly for the magazine. Although girls self-censored to a certain extent, their different levels of English, jokes, cartoons and doodles, suggest that this was a production for and by the graduating class, serving as a memento of their schooldays. Editorial experience also led at least one student to secure work in journalism upon graduation. Renee Kwang Ming Nieh in McTyeire Almene Association (eds.), "Telling Women's Lives: In Search of McTyeire, 1892–1992", (San Mateo, 1992). (Unpublished oral history collection).



work and to secure further donations. While we must be aware of the adult audiences for the magazine who almost certainly had an input into girls' writings, we should see these magazines as a product of a two-way dialectic between parental and teacher authority and student agency.<sup>18</sup>

The magazines remain an important source for understanding how missionary schoolgirls, still children themselves, reformulated their Christian education and applied it to the needs of the poor Chinese girls they encountered in the vicinity of their schools. The article thus discusses the construction of two types of childhood: Elite girls, who position themselves as enlightened due to their Christian educational status, and poor Chinese children who are the objects of their social service teaching work. Not only do girls relate their own experiences, they also depict the lives of poor children, sometimes assuming their voices in order to represent them. Their perspective allows us to understand how elite Chinese girls were active agents in diagnosing the problems and constructing what Chinese childhood should be for all of China's children. While their views were mediated by an awareness of class and educational differences, their voices do not share the 'disillusioned view of social reality' that characterizes adult May Fourth writers' work on children.<sup>19</sup> They are more utopian and direct in their style and appeal to the reader. However, unlike the idealized innocent children of May Fourth writers' imaginations, who can transcend class barriers with ease, and thus get closer to ordinary working people, missionary schoolgirls' writings demonstrate that they are highly aware of their privileged class and educated status, to the extent that they consciously depict themselves as 'other' in the eyes of their less privileged counterparts.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Aaron William Moore, "Growing up in Nationalist China: Self-Representation in the Personal Documents of Children and Youth 1927–1949", *Modern China* 42, no.1 (March 2016), 78. Catherine Sloane, "'Periodicals of an objectionable character': Peers and Periodicals and Croydon Friend's School, 1826–1875", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 50, no. 4 (Winter 2017), 769–786.

<sup>19</sup> Pease, "Remembering the Taste of Melons," 281.

<sup>20</sup> Pease, "Remembering the Taste of Melons," 300–301.

Influenced by overlapping missionary and May Fourth discourses on the backwardness of Chinese family life, missionary schoolgirls believed they were ideally equipped to ‘rescue’ Chinese children from the baneful influences which were stunting their physical, intellectual and spiritual development. By applying their Christian education to what they perceived as the pressing needs of Chinese society, missionary schoolgirls presented their own image of how ‘social service’ would be beneficial for China and their own ideas about what Chinese children needed. According to missionary schoolgirls, Chinese children should be entitled to a happy and free childhood, protected from labor. They should live in hygienic, loving homes with access to safe spaces to play. They needed to be protected from harmful and immoral social influences such as superstition, foul language, drinking and smoking. Given the absence of such spaces in China, the safest method to ensure Chinese children were given a wholesome upbringing was by putting them in kindergartens. In kindergartens, their bodies could be strengthened through play and their minds nurtured through child-led study of the natural world. Their moral characters would be developed through the teaching of Christian stories, and their creativity and spirituality nurtured through music. According to missionary school graduates, music was a distinctive part of the Christian kindergarten pedagogy. Students believed that the introduction of Chinese Christian music could also foster love in families by uniting them around this spiritually-nourishing pastime. Missionary schoolgirls would thus create the creative, energetic, morally-awakened future citizens that China so desperately needed.

### **Gender, Christianity and Social Service in the May Fourth Era**

As Angela Ki Che Leung and Xia Shi have shown, we have evidence of a long history of elite participation in philanthropy in China, particularly in the Jiangnan region.<sup>21</sup> Such activities included the distribution of famine relief, the establishment of foundling homes, institutions

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<sup>21</sup> Angela Ki Che Leung, “Relief Institutions in Nineteenth Century China” in *Chinese Views of Childhood*, ed. Anne Kenney (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 251–278. Xia Shi, *At Home in the World*.

for the support of virtuous widows and lineage schools.<sup>22</sup> In the late nineteenth century, according to Xia Shi, elite married women pioneered new public roles for women through their establishment of relief associations, girls' schools and other charitable organizations.<sup>23</sup> To this long history of elite, often female-led, charitable activism, missionary schoolgirls harnessed new ideas about 'social service' in the May Fourth era.

During the 1910-20s the craze for social service swept college campuses in Britain and America as the 'social gospel' was expounded by inspirational speakers such as Sherwood Eddy, John Mott and John Dewey. As Georgina Brewis has explored, the global spread of student social service was facilitated by international Christian student conferences, missionary educators and traveling YM/YWCA secretaries. This Christian concept of student social service also became fused with longstanding indigenous ideas about charity and service around the world.<sup>24</sup> In China, returned students from the United States played a big part in the spread of social service, resulting in new modes of student activism. Perhaps most famously, Chinese Christian, James Yen (YanYangchu, 晏陽初), graduated from Yale and Princeton and after teaching literacy to Chinese laborers digging trenches in France during the First World War, returned to China in 1921 to start the Mass Education Movement (平民教育運動 pingmin jiaoyu), which developed into the Rural Reconstruction Movement (鄉村建設運動 xiangcun jianshe yundong).<sup>25</sup>

This type of social work activity was not limited to returned Christian student leaders. Schoolgirls and boys at mission, private and government schools all participated in the craze

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<sup>22</sup> Leung, "Relief Institutions," 252.

<sup>23</sup> Xia Shi, *At Home in the World*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Georgina Brewis, *A Social History of Student Volunteering: Britain and Beyond, 1880-1980* (London: Palgrave, 2014), 43.

<sup>25</sup> For more on James Yen's work see Charles Hayford, *To the People: James Yen and Village China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) and Kate Merkel-Hess, *The Rural Modern: Reconstructing the Self and State in Modern China* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016), 23-54.

for social service by running schools for poor children in their local vicinity. Robert Culp has explored how participation in social service activities was an important means of inculcating citizenship in middle schools in South China during the early twentieth century.<sup>26</sup> Ryan Dunch has also shown how Fuzhou Protestants were able to position themselves as leaders of republican society through their social service and philanthropic enterprises.<sup>27</sup> However, while Culp excludes Christian schools from his analysis, Dunch does not pay much attention to how this Christian notion of citizenship which was produced by Fuzhou Protestants was gendered.

At missionary schools for girls, 'service' not only had mutually reinforcing, patriotic and Christian connotations, it was also highly gendered. As Helen Schneider has explored, Chinese women used the sanctioned sphere of homemaking to expand what it was possible for Chinese women to do in society, into the realms of child welfare, social work and improving domestic environments.<sup>28</sup> At Christian missionary schools for girls, training perfect Christian housewives and mothers remained central to Protestant missionaries' vision for a modern, Christian Chinese nation. All missionary schools for girls included domestic education in their curriculum, and girls were exhorted to go forth and teach their benighted counterparts how to make clean, Christian homes, in which children could be properly reared and nurtured. Some missionary schools invested in building a 'model Chinese home' where girls took it in turns to live in family-sized groups for several weeks to practice homemaking. Esther Gauss, a Presbyterian Missionary stationed at Riverside Academy in Ningbo, explained that the purpose of these model homes was so that 'each girl by actual experience in every branch of homemaking shall have learnt the different ways in which she can make her own and other

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in South-eastern China, 1912–1940* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of Modern China, 1857–1927* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Helen Schneider, *Keeping the Nations House: Domestic Management and the Making of Modern China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

humble homes in China sanitary, pure, and lovely, as Christ would have them.’<sup>29</sup> In their description of their social service activities, missionary schoolgirls, harnessed this idea of homemaking and childrearing as a sanctioned realm of female expertise, and used it to put forward their own vision of how to save China.

### **Improving Childhood via Making Christian Homes**

A survey of the school magazines in the 1920s reveals the extent to which missionary schoolgirls, positioning themselves as experts in the field of homemaking and childrearing, saw their biggest contribution to social service within this sanctioned sphere. In the 1920 McTyeire school magazine students made a review of their social service activities under four headings including; ‘Sunday Schools’, ‘the Missionary Society’, ‘Social Service Work’, ‘Volunteer Band’, and ‘S.O.S - Sent on Service’, all of which were undertaking work with children and families. The various overlapping activities of these societies included setting up Sunday Schools for poor children in the local villages around their school, teaching children working in local factories, visiting and studying the conditions of families in the vicinity, distributing food and medical aid, and collecting money for famine relief.<sup>30</sup>

A good example of the ways in which missionary school girls used social service work with children to professionalise their homemaking roles is provided by Chang E. Tsung (Zhang Aizhen 張藹真), a student at McTyeire, who in 1921, published a ‘Study of the village life around McTyeire Highschool’. Throughout the article Chang positions herself as the crucial agent of change, who is experimentally applying her missionary education to what she perceives are the needs of Chinese women and children, envisioning new forms of Sino-Western social modernity. She describes the village as her ‘laboratory where we can make an

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<sup>29</sup> Esther M Gauss to Mr Speer, 26 February 1920, PHS RG82 – 18 – 17. Practice houses became an essential part of the Home Economic curriculum at government normal schools and at some missionary colleges in this period. Schneider, *Keeping the Nations House*, 115-119.

<sup>30</sup> Wong Chong Ming “Social and Religious Activities,” *The McTyeirean* (Shanghai, 1921), 41-41.

experiment in different reforms by investigating, assimilating and adopting certain phases of western civilization to our village life.’ Chang is clearly influenced by the social scientific studies of village life which were being undertaken by intellectuals in this period. She cites Mary Richmond’s pioneering social work text *Social Diagnosis* (1917) which she has read at school.<sup>31</sup> After documenting the problems that villagers face under the subheadings: ‘Lack of real homes’, ‘Superstition’, ‘Lack of sanitation’, ‘Child Labor’ and ‘The absence of social gatherings’, she then suggests implementing several projects to help overcome these problems including: ‘Visiting families’, ‘A full day school and playgrounds should be established’, ‘Public lectures’ and ‘Mothers meetings or social gatherings should be organized’.<sup>32</sup>

Tsung applies her missionary school education to what she sees as the real needs of her compatriots. In particular, she targets child labor as degenerating China’s future citizens by weakening their bodies, denying the mental stimulation of an education, and sapping their spirit by taking away their joy in life. Tsung accepted the notion that children should be treated as real people who should be entitled to a happy and protected upbringing, free from labor: ‘The child has a right not only to existence but to real life, to strong and joyous life. The older children of the village, except seven boys who go to school in the city, go to work in the factories where they secure ten cents in return for their hard labor of a twelve-hour day.’ Tsung believed that girls, in particular, should be protected from labor, because of their physical frailty: ‘The girls suffer the most because they are not fitted by nature to bear the strain and they are weakened and die before their time. When they go back home, they have no recreation or any social hour but on the other hand they have to help their parents with the domestic affairs. Most importantly, child labor was denying China healthy, happy and productive future citizens:

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<sup>31</sup> Mary Richmond was a pioneer of professional social worker. See Donna L. Franklin, “Mary Richmond and Jane Addams: From Moral Certainty to Rational Inquiry in Social Work Practice.” *Social Service Review* 60, no. 4 (June 1986), 504–25.

<sup>32</sup> Chang E Tsung, “A study of the village life around McTyeire High School,” *The McTyeirean* (Shanghai, 1921), 111-116.

‘These young citizens who are the future leaders of China are living miserable lives, and instead of being developed in the way of high ideas and wholesome lives, are just being degenerated, bodily, mentally, and spiritually.’<sup>33</sup>

In her proposed solutions to the problems that she has documented, Tsung’s focus remains on the traditionally-sanctioned female sphere of strengthening China via the home. The article reveals how girls combined the national imperative of ‘saving China’ with their missionary teachers’ doctrine of Christianizing the home: ‘Home is one of the most sacred words in the human vocabulary because the home is and must be the center of our holiest emotion. The parents are needed to create and keep the home fires burning and to make a homey atmosphere without which a family may have a lodging place, but can hardly be said to have a home, in the best sense of the term.’ Crucially, this holiest of emotions, ‘love’, between husbands and wives is needed for to creation of Christian homes: ‘Husbands and wives do not know what real love is, nor how to enjoy real life. They do not help each other in the best spirit.’ Without love in families, children cannot be properly nurtured or reared. Instead, children will be harmed by the unhealthy and immoral pastimes of their parents: ‘When money is plentiful drinking and smoking are the amusements and when money is lacking the children suffer.’<sup>34</sup>

There is a certain element of ‘self-orientalizing’ going on here as Chinese students internalized missionary assumptions about the superiority of western cultural norms, living habits and child-rearing practices. Building on Said’s notion of Orientalism, Arif Dirlik suggests self-orientalism is the process by which ‘Euro-American images of Asia may have been incorporated into the self-images of Asians.’<sup>35</sup> As Schneider and others have explored, this idea that China’s current weakness was rooted in its lack of happy, hygienic homes was

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<sup>33</sup> Tsung, “A Study,” 114.

<sup>34</sup> Tsung, “A Study,” 113.

<sup>35</sup> Arif Dirlik, “Chinese history and the question of orientalism,” *History and Theory* 35, no. 4 (December 1996), 104.

also expounded by May Fourth reformers. Many reformers had recently returned from studying in the United States, where they internalized ideas about the superiority of the nuclear family structure and marriage based on free-choice love matches, as being able to produce happier families, and thus more productive citizens.<sup>36</sup>

Missionary schoolgirls not only imbibed overlapping missionary and May Fourth discourses on the backwardness of Chinese family life in their representations of Chinese childhood, they also encountered similar problems and used similar tactics in their efforts to transform the lives of these benighted others. They used the same tactics of ‘intimate evangelism’ as their missionary educators in their social service work with children and families. Jane Hunter has shown how missionary women claimed that they, as women, had privileged access to the inner quarters of Chinese homes and thus a greater chance of ‘getting in vital touch’ with Chinese society and opportunity to convert Chinese women than their male counterparts.<sup>37</sup> Missionary schoolgirls’ social work also included this type of ‘intimate evangelism’, through regular visits to specific families, as Tsung described.<sup>38</sup> However, much like their foreign missionary teachers before them, missionary schoolgirls encountered numerous difficulties in attracting an audience for their message. This was partly due to the fact that female children’s labor in spinning and weaving at home or in factories as well as taking care of younger siblings, sometimes provided an economic life-line to their families, and girls consequently had little time to study. For example, in her description of the factory school work undertaken by McTyeire girls, Chen Chi Ye (Chen Jiyi 陳紀彝), reported with much frustration that she and her classmates had to give up trying to teach girls, who had no

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<sup>36</sup> Schneider, *Keeping the Nations house*, 20-56. Glosser, Susan L. “‘The Truths I have Learned’: Nationalism, Family Reform and Male Identity in China’s New Culture Movement, 1915-1923”, in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, ed. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 120-144.

<sup>37</sup> Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, 190.

<sup>38</sup> Tsung, “A Study,” 115.



time to study due to the piece-work labor they performed, and resorted to teaching boys instead.<sup>39</sup>

Missionary schoolgirls resorted to various ‘inducements’ to encourage children to come to their classes. For example, McTyeire students attempted to keep girls interested in their day schools through small prizes and gifts to keep attending. Wong Wei Wein (Huang Huixian 黃慧嫻), explains how girls ‘offer pretty pictures to those who come regularly for five weeks.’<sup>40</sup> Girls also threw ‘tea parties’ and ‘Christmas celebrations’ which were excellent opportunities for distributing gifts such as handkerchiefs and stockings to interest and reward their new pupils.<sup>41</sup> In so doing, missionary schoolgirls emulated the tactics of their missionary school teachers who often gave small tea-parties in their own homes and used Christmas celebrations in order to attract girls to Christianity.<sup>42</sup> How Loo Tuh (Xia Lude 夏璐德) in her ‘letter relating to village work’ explained:

Last Christmas the girls gave a very interesting party. At first, they had the children do some things such as reciting some bible verses, singing Sunday school songs, and telling the story of the birth of Jesus. Then the teachers gave part of the program. At last, prizes were given to those who attended the Sunday school every week. Then everyone present was given a small package of eatables. Everyone went home with a smile and a happy heart rejoicing over the party.<sup>43</sup>

The extent to which these parties and visits blossomed into real intimate friendships across the class divide, as often happened with missionaries and their female converts, is however, not evident in the magazines. Unlike the idealistic version of the ‘class-blind’ child of May Fourth writers’ imaginations, missionary schoolgirls show they are acutely aware of the class and

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<sup>39</sup> Chen Chi Ye, “An account of our factory work,” *The McTyeirean*, (Shanghai, 1922), 49.

<sup>40</sup> Wong Wei Yien, “Town Sunday Schools of McTyeire,” *The McTyeirean*, (Shanghai, 1922), 58.

<sup>41</sup> Bang Vung Tsien “How I am brought into the Light,” 54.

<sup>42</sup> Hyaewol Choi, “The Missionary Home as a pulpit: Domestic Paradoxes in Early Twentieth Century Korea,” in *Divine Domesticities: Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Margaret Jolly and Hyaewol Choi (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 29–55.

<sup>43</sup> How Loo Tuh, “Letter Relating to village work,” *The McTyeirean*, (Shanghai, 1922), 48.

educational differences which separate them from the poor girls who are the targets of their social work. In fact, it is this ‘otherness’ of having received an education that provides missionary schoolgirls with the means and ‘responsibility’ to minister to their benighted lower-class female compatriots. This power dynamic become clear when we critically examine girls’ motivations for undertaking their work with children.

While some students may have undoubtedly undertaken these activities out of true patriotic and religious zeal, and others simply joined in, perhaps to curry favour with their missionary teachers, for many students, it becomes clear that their ability to represent and ‘speak for’ a downtrodden female ‘other’ is essential for their own empowerment. It is this female ‘other’, who they as missionary-educated Chinese women are uniquely placed to ‘serve’ that justifies their ambitions for higher education and careers beyond marriage and motherhood. As Helen Schneider explains in her study on Ginling College students’ social service work among rural women in Sichuan during the Second Sino-Japanese War: ‘Like the missionaries who constructed images of backward and heathen Chinese, Ginling women constructed a group of individuals less advanced than themselves – rural Chinese women, who needed saving and guidance out of a condition of ignorance.’<sup>44</sup> A good example of this power-dynamic is provided by a McTyeire student’s fictional story in which the heroine, Ming Tsung, convinces her father (who is opposed to the higher education of women) that she should go to university. She is inspired by the words of her teacher and reasons that it is her ‘duty’ to help her less fortunate sisters, who have not had the privilege to receive an education as she has had:

“It’s not fair”, she cried, “not fair. I ought to have that chance. It is my duty to society. I owe it something which I must repay, but, I’m not ready for that work yet. College will prepare me for it and then I can truly be useful for society. I ought to have this chance. I

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<sup>44</sup> Helen Schneider, “Raising the Standards of Family Life: Ginling Women’s College and Christian Social Service in Republican China,” in *Divine Domesticities: Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Hyaeweol Choi and Margaret Jolly (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 139.

must. I hear the women of China calling to me, calling for freedom, for equality, for life, while I sit here and do nothing. It is impossible! What am I made for if not to serve?"<sup>45</sup>

The author of this article, Tsong Tuh wei, (Zhang Dewei 章德衛) employs the same language that missionaries used to describe and justify 'women's work' and their own calling to be female missionaries.<sup>46</sup> The fictional heroine in her story uses the rhetoric of her 'calling', 'duty', and 'service' to help her less fortunate sisters in China in the same way that missionary women justified women's work as a natural extension of their caring roles.

This empowering language of 'service' was not just a rhetorical device. Some students saw their social service work at school as important vocational training and used it as a stepping-stone to careers in social service and child welfare upon graduation.<sup>47</sup> These include McTyeire graduates Zhang Aizhen 張藹真 (Chang E. Tseng) and Chen Jiyi 陳紀彝 (Chen Chi Ye), cited above, both of whom worked for the YWCA upon graduation. During the Second Sino-Japanese War they helped to coordinate wartime relief work for women and children as founding members of the National Association for Refugee Children (NARC).<sup>48</sup>

### **Pedagogical Experiments: Kindergarten Training**

The kindergarten and Sunday schools that missionary schoolgirls ran were also part of this vocational training, equipping them to become childhood experts upon graduation. As teaching was one of the few professions open to women in this period, the majority of female missionary school graduates became teachers if they did not marry immediately upon graduation.<sup>49</sup> Most

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<sup>45</sup> Tsong Tuh Wei, "The two wills," *The McTyeirean* (Shanghai, 1930), 185.

<sup>46</sup> Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> Tsu Tsung Ling and Wong Yoeh Wo, "Is the village school worthwhile?" *The McTyeirean* (Shanghai, 1922), 56–57.

<sup>48</sup> The NARC was a cross-party organization that grew out of new co-operation between New Life Movement's Women's Advisory Council headed by Song Meiling, the Women's National Salvation Association and prominent female CCP members in Wuhan during the wartime. Vivienne Xiangwei Guo, *Women and politics in wartime China: Networking across geopolitical boundaries* (London: Routledge, 2019), 42–44.

<sup>49</sup> Chindon Yiu Tang, "Women's Education in China," Bulletin 9 in *Bulletins on Chinese Education issued by the Chinese National Association for the Advancement of Education*, Vol. 2 (Shanghai, 1923), 14.

missionary schools for girls in East China saw their Sunday schools as informal but important venues for teaching practice, where girls would learn by being ‘thrown in.’<sup>50</sup> The exception was the Laura Haygood Normal School which had a dedicated teacher training program, where girls could choose to specialise in primary or kindergarten education upon entry. Girls at Laura Haygood thus unsurprisingly pay more attention to pedagogy in their descriptions of their work with children. It is also worth highlighting the different class backgrounds of the children they were teaching. While village and factory Sunday school work was generally categorised as social service to poor children, kindergarten work could include children from more privileged backgrounds whose parents had the means to enroll them in kindergartens attached to the school. Regardless of the different class background of the children they were working with in Sunday schools and kindergartens, it seems that missionary schoolgirls employed similar pedagogies of play, child-centred learning and nature study. They believed that with the right training and environment, all children could develop into creative, moral citizens.

In the absence of properly trained Christian parents, missionary schoolgirls, much like their teachers, were convinced that the best way of protecting children from the ‘unhealthy’ and ‘immoral’ influences that surrounded them in Chinese society was through establishing kindergartens, staffed by graduates of missionary schools who were educated in the latest childrearing techniques. In her article entitled ‘What Kindergartens’ mean to China’, Laura Haygood student Sung Yoeh Kyoen explained how kindergartens are essential to protect children from the ‘evil influences which surround them, such as immodesty, dishonesty, disobedience, foul and abusive language.’ This was not only an issue for the lower-classes. In well-to-do households, servants replaced parents as the ill-equipped care-givers. She stressed that ‘Influences in early years are the most lasting and the most determining factors in the adult

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<sup>50</sup> Milton T. Stauffer (ed.), *The Christian Occupation of China: A General Survey of the Numerical Strength and Geographical Distribution of the Christian Forces in China, Made by the Special Committee on Survey and Occupation, China Continuation Committee, 1918-1921* (Shanghai, 1922), 411.

life.’ Sung believed that Chinese children, rather than being a “blank-slate”<sup>51</sup>, were like adults, both good and bad by ‘nature’, but advocated the transformative power of ‘nurture’ to produce healthy normal citizens:

Kindergarten is another society. Within it we have good children, likewise bad ones. We have the weak and the strong, mentally and physically... We have the careless, thoughtless, and types representing all the gradations of human temperament. They work together in a wholesome, normal atmosphere where a spirit of kindness and helpfulness is fostered, and the outcome is a natural, normal development. Teachers live with them and watch them, teaching them what is right.<sup>52</sup>

Ultimately, the purpose of the kindergarten, according to Sung, is to produce morally upright future citizens who are the foundation for a strong and prosperous China: ‘A nation’s greatest wealth and highest possibilities is wrapped up in the welfare of its little ones. If China is to realize its highest possibilities, she must look after the welfare of her children. How can she better do this than to establish kindergartens so that the children may get the early training which is their rightful heritage?’<sup>53</sup> Missionary school girls again become the crucial agents who, by virtue of the Christian education are equipped to know what Chinese children need, and thus save the nation. This gendered duty of producing morally enlightened citizens through kindergartens is not just a patriotic imperative but also part of the Christian mission to improve family life. We will now turn to the content of this education.

A child-centred approach based around free play and nature study formed an important part of a transnationally-circulating kindergarten pedagogy in this period.<sup>54</sup> As Limin Bai has

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<sup>51</sup> For more on the influence of enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke on early Chinese childhood educationalists, see Tillman, *Raising China’s Revolutionaries*, 44.

<sup>52</sup> Sung Yoeh Kyoen, “What the kindergarten means to China,” *Laura Haygood Star* (Suzhou, 1924), 28.

<sup>53</sup> Sung Yoeh Kyoen, “What the kindergarten means to China,” 28.

<sup>54</sup> Maria Williams has explored the global circulation of the Montessori method, a famous child-centered approach to kindergarten education which stressed enabling children to develop according to their natural talents. Maria Williams, “The Contribution of ‘A Sister of Notre Dame’ and the ‘Nun of Calabar’ to Montessori Education in Scotland, Nigeria and Beyond”, *Rivista Di Storia dell’Educazione* 8, no. 2 (November 2021), 123-32. For more of the global spread of these ideas see Roberta Wollons (ed.), *Kindergartens and Cultures: The global diffusion of an idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

shown, Chinese reformers at the turn of the twentieth century, such as Liang Qichao, worried that Chinese children were not able to compete mentally and physically with their western counterparts because their bodies were weakened and minds cramped by having to spend all day indoors in rote memorization of the Confucian classics.<sup>55</sup> By the 1920s Chinese educational reformers had embraced this social-Darwinian view of the importance of play in the healthy development of Chinese children. As Margaret Tillman and Stig Thøgersen have shown, Chinese intellectuals such as Chen Heqin returned with MA degrees in Education from the United States and started to apply progressive educational ideas about child psychology developed from thinkers such as Charles Darwin, John Dewey, Friedrich William August Fröbel and John Frisk to the needs of Chinese children.<sup>56</sup> Chen Heqin, advocated ‘free play’ in natural settings which would encourage children to learn about the natural environment through observation.<sup>57</sup> John Dewey also advocated a child-centred approach to teaching children during his lecture tours in China in 1919–20.<sup>58</sup> Not only were famous returned Chinese students and foreign male intellectuals responsible for circulating this knowledge, foreign missionary and Chinese women were also active conduits in the international circulation of these ideas. Many of the missionary teachers who were sent by the Southern Methodist Mission to McTyeire and Laura Haygood were college graduates with advanced teacher training, and promising Chinese graduates were sponsored by the mission to gain higher degrees in education from famous teacher training colleges in the United States.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Bai, “Children and the Survival of China,” 131.

<sup>56</sup> Tillman, *Raising China's revolutionaries*, 30–52, Stig Thøgersen, “1957: A Fatal Year for Progressive Education in China,” *Twentieth Century China* 45, no. 2. (May 2020), 169-178.

<sup>57</sup> Tillman, *Raising China's Revolutionaries*, 48.

<sup>58</sup> Pease, “Remembering the Taste of Melons,” 282.

<sup>59</sup> Several missionary and Chinese teachers working at Laura Haygood had advanced training in kindergarten and primary work, including Laura Haygood graduate Sieu E Yui and American missionary Alica Alsup both of who had attended the renowned Peabody Teachers College. Annie E. Bradshaw ‘Our Teacher Training College in China – The Laura Haygood Normal’, Methodist Archives and History Center, 1459-4-1-24.

Missionary schoolgirls were also a vital vector via which these internationally circulating ideas were adapted and applied to China. Girls imbibed the importance of play and child-centred learning based on the study of nature in their pedagogy. The lack of safe and meaningful toys and space for play is a constant refrain in girls reports' about Chinese children. According to Chang E. Tsung of McTyeire (Zhang Aizhen, introduced above), the games she observed children playing in the village close to her school were 'uninteresting' and their surroundings unhygienic with 'dogs, cats and chickens and babies' playing in the same yard. She sarcastically bemoans the fact that Chinese parents do not have the slightest knowledge of how to play with their children, 'a thing outside their wildest imagination.'<sup>60</sup> Chang adapts what she has learned about early childhood education and the importance of play from her missionary teachers, and applies it to the needs of her juvenile compatriots, taking into account the current conditions in which the majority of Chinese children are living. She stresses:

Though we are not able to establish any playgrounds as are in New York and Boston, certainly we are able to get some playgrounds and work out a lively program which all the children can get a chance to enjoy. Playground work has been carried on in one factory where the management is sympathetic to the idea as well as regular classes.<sup>61</sup>

The importance of encouraging children to learn for themselves by playing in natural settings was also applied in the kindergarten teaching practices of Laura Haygood graduates. Laura Haygood graduate of 1919, Liu Su hua, reported to her classmates how she applied a child-centred pedagogy to her teaching work in the first grade of the demonstration school at the Government-run teachers' college in Nanjing. Liu explained how the study of nature shaped this child-centred kindergarten curriculum, it encouraged children to learn from observation, to question the world around them, and to gain understanding by interacting with the natural environment:

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<sup>60</sup> Tsung "A study," 112.

<sup>61</sup> Tsung "A study," 112.

In teaching nature study, we have no textbooks. All knowledge we get is absolutely based on observation. The children are learning to plant, to fish, and to have birds cared for by themselves. They are learning to raise silkworms in the right season. During the class time, most of the time is spent for the children to ask questions and express their own opinions about what they have learned. We ask them to have independent thinking by picking different kinds of wild flowers, examining them first, and then asking the teacher about what they do not know. Whenever a child is not willing to do his work, we let him alone, and do not force him to do anything he is not interested in.<sup>62</sup>

According to trainee-teachers at Laura Haygood, future Chinese citizens needed to be strengthened physically, through playing outdoors, and their minds nourished to become creative and inquiring, through child-led nature study.

Perhaps more important than using nature as a guide, Chinese children needed ‘moral’ or ‘spiritual’ direction, an area in which the Christian aspects of the missionary kindergarten training curriculum becomes most apparent. This moral training in the missionary kindergarten curriculum was delivered in several ways: via prayers and hymns, as well as music and bible stories. In some cases, this moral training was not just a Christian message, but could also be complementary with Confucian tenants. For example, Liu Su Hua explains that every morning she led ‘spiritual training’ for the children.<sup>63</sup> She explains that:

the purpose of this training is to help them to overcome all the faults they fall into usually every day. The creed I am teaching them now is: ‘I will not be rude to nor strike a classmate. To be rude to a classmate is to be rude to myself; to strike a classmate is to strike myself.’ The creed must always be simple, constructive, and based on the willingness of the children. I try to

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<sup>62</sup> Liu Su Hua, “A normal graduate at work,” *Laura Haygood Star* (Suzhou, 1921), 27.

<sup>63</sup> Liu transliterates ‘Spiritual training’ as ‘Yang Hsingti Hyuin lien’ in the Suzhou dialect. Yang Xingti Xunlian 養性體訓練 in Mandarin— Literally meaning ‘training to cultivate the character and body’.



explain it to them so as to direct the practical result. We also sing a song which has dignity and serenity.<sup>64</sup>

Liu takes from her Christian school education the moral of ‘doing as you would be done by’, and applies it in her ‘spiritual training’, again using a child-centred method, which forms an important part of her kindergarten curriculum. In this example we can see how the moral principles that girls were taught via their missionary training also complemented Confucian tenets of kindness to others, encapsulated in a phrase from the Analects: ‘己所不欲勿施於人 ji suo bu yu, wu shi yu ren’, equivalent to ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you’.

Music was also seen as one of the most important tools for cultivating children’s spirituality at missionary schools. This was particularly important after 1927 when new Nationalist government regulations meant that religion had to become an elective rather than compulsory subject. Elite missionary schools such as McTyeire prided themselves on the strength of their musical education, and music was an essential component of the missionary kindergarten normal training curriculum. Mary Jean Dai (Dai Lizhen 戴麗真), who graduated from Laura Haygood in 1937, recalled that during her kindergarten teacher training, three years of piano education was a prerequisite for students who wanted to enter the kindergarten training course. When I asked what was Christian about the missionary kindergarten curriculum, she recalled that music was a distinctive feature of this training which was used to inculcate Christianity: ‘I played the piano, and when they heard the music, they learned to thank God.’ The study of the natural world also featured in her spiritual training, and she combined this with music in teaching her kindergarteners: ‘When I sent the children home, they had to walk through a meadow where they could see birds flying. Through this I would tell them bible stories, telling the story through singing to them about what they saw, it was very cheerful and

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<sup>64</sup> Liu “A normal graduate at work,” 28.

energetic. On Sundays I would use a song which was for children's worship.' Dai Lizhen not only thought music could be used to inculcate spirituality, it was also an essential aspect of cultivating children's creativity and liveliness: 'My older sister used her ability to play piano to teach the children how to dance. The students that she taught were very creative.'<sup>65</sup>

The idea that music was important for cultivating creativity and spirituality was also affirmed by other students from McTyeire who graduated as late as 1940s. Theresa Chen (Chen Zongci 陳宗慈), who graduated from McTyeire in 1947, remembered that she got her religious education from the music education that she received at school:

De, zhi, ti, 德智體, Morality, Academics and Physical education. These are important aspects. But McTyeire had another one that make the students very vivacious [Huoyue 活躍]... This was not very obvious, but there was this kind of underlying [education], there is a cultivation of people's characters. At McTyeire, in addition to this de, zhi and ti, there was Music. Music is that emotional appreciation, that art appreciation, that uplifting appreciation. And to me, because by this time we did not have religious classes, this was our religious education. It was also from art. If you look at the hymns they are very poetic. And so it cultivates your appreciation for art.<sup>66</sup>

Writing in their magazine, missionary schoolgirls explained how music could not only transform individual character, it could also help transform Chinese society. Writing in 1921 Kwoh Me Li (Guo Meili 郭美麗) and How Loo Tuh (Xia Lude 夏璐德) believed that music 'encourages man's mind and lightens his heart ... Most people get their enjoyment by doing harmful things, because they have nothing else to take their place. Now music is one of the things which can be substituted. In this way many social evils in China can be abolished.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Dai Lizhen, 1 July 2019, Shanghai, China.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Theresa Chen, 10 November 2016, San Mateo, USA.

<sup>67</sup> Kwoh Me Li and How Loo Tuh, "Instrumental Music at McTyeire," *The McTyerian* (Shanghai, 1921), 54.

Like their missionary educators, Haygood girls saw music it as a healthy recreation, and stressed its role in bringing family members together and creating happy homes.

However, while girls clearly imbibed the strategies and rhetoric of their Christian educators, they were far from passively imbibing this education. Instead, girls stressed that only they, as Christian Chinese women, could be the ones to unlock the transformative power that music could have in the homes of China. For example, although Mo Shi Tsung (Ma Xuezhen 馬雪珍), decried the current state of music in China along self-orientalizing lines and believes that China should accept Christianity ‘from which all great music springs’, she advocated that a fusion of western and Chinese music would be the solution to China’s national problems. Mo explained that while on the one hand, Christian music suffered ‘from being adapted from the outside’, on the other hand, she felt that Chinese music ‘is not uplifting.’ She therefore advocated that:

Two processes are necessary to furnish China with music, first adaptation and then production. So far as China is concerned adaptation is not a disgraceful, but a wise thing to do, because she is beginning a new era now. And the wit of being able to adapt shows our ability to produce for ourselves later. As for Christianity, it is to begin with an Eastern religion, but because of Western countries’ capacity for absorbing it into their lives, it seems to have originated with them.<sup>68</sup>

Mo thus illustrated her belief that it is only through Chinese people’s ‘adaptation’ and ‘production’ of new forms of Christianity (taking Chinese Christian music as her example) that the religion will become acceptable to Chinese people. Mo went on to expound a utopian vision in which the ‘adaptation’ and ‘production’ of new forms of Chinese Christian music would produce love in families which would expand to include ‘country love’ and ultimately transcend the nation and help produce world peace: ‘We know that music is love in search of

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<sup>68</sup> Mo Sih Tsung, “The influence of music in the future homes of China,” *The McTyeirean* (Shanghai, 1919), 29.

a word... Since home love can expand to include country love, it can also be perfected by being extended to all our brothers and sisters all over the world.’<sup>69</sup>

Music was therefore a long-lasting and distinctive feature of missionary schoolgirls’ vision of how to mould children into model, moral Chinese citizens. Not only could music serve as a form of religious education, it could also make children lively and creative. Beyond this individual impact, music could also transform society. Joshua Howard has shown how in the 1920-1930s Chinese composers, such as Nie Er 聶耳 (1912-1935), through blending elements of western music with Chinese folk music, developed a new Chinese music that they believed could have revolutionary potential by giving voice to the suffering of the Chinese masses.<sup>70</sup> Missionary schoolgirls also advocated for the transformative potential of a new type of Chinese music based on adaptation of western forms in the May Fourth period. For missionary girls however, the power of this new music was not only about arousing patriotism, but also deeply influenced by their gendered Christian education, which stressed women’s homemaking roles. As Christian mothers they would be responsible for uniting the family and spiritual education of their children. It was through music that happy loving families could be brought together, strengthening China as a result. It was, however, Chinese girls themselves, rather than their missionary teachers who would be able to introduce culturally-acceptable ‘Chinese’ forms of Christian music to families. The ways in which missionary schoolgirls adapted their education to China’s pressing needs, belie later criticisms made by Chinese missionary school headteachers. During the Cultural Revolution Laura Haygood principal Jiang Guiyun 江貴雲, wrote that missionary schools were just producing graduates who completely accepted and replicated an imperialist American education system in China.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Mo Sih Tsung, “The influence of music in the future homes of China,” 29.

<sup>70</sup> Joshua Howard, *Composing for the Revolution: Nie Er and China’s Sonic Nationalism* (Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 2021).

<sup>71</sup> Jiang, “Wo ren Suzhou jinghai nü shi xiaozhang de huiyi.”

Missionary schoolgirls thus positioned themselves as crucial agents, who through adaption of their missionary school education and ability to apply it to the needs of Chinese Children, were able to rejuvenate the nation.

## **Conclusion**

During the May Fourth Era missionary schoolgirls engaged in a variety of social service activities ranging from visiting poor families, to distributing food and medical aid and setting up Sunday schools and kindergartens for children in the vicinity of their schools. Like their male and government school counterparts, they were swept up in the patriotic fever of strengthening the country at a time of national crisis. Missionary schoolgirls harnessed a gendered Christian rhetoric learned from the missionary education, which equipped them to become expert homemakers and child-carers, to claim authority to represent and minister to the needs of poor Chinese children who were the beneficiaries of their social service work. Like their missionary educators before them, girls used the accepted female rhetoric of ‘duty’ and ‘service’ to less privileged women and children in order to justify their own ambitions for self-advancement, empowering themselves to pursue new careers and continue to higher education.

While missionaries were delighted that their goals of spreading the gospel via their Chinese pupils seemed to have succeeded, and while school students may have found it useful to borrow from the methods, tactics and language of their foreign missionary teachers, girls were far from passively imbibing missionary educators’ messages, or mirror copies of them. Instead, they applied their Christian education to what they perceived as the pressing needs of Chinese society, producing new knowledge about Chinese children in the process. Girls combined Christian, patriotic and gendered ideas from their education to produce a new

understanding of what Chinese children needed and the best methods by which to shape them into moral and productive future citizens.

This knowledge that they produced was inflected by both May Fourth reformers' ideas about children as key to national strengthening and by the Christian education which they had received: They asserted their belief in the powerful role the Christian home could play in transforming the Chinese family system and, by extension, the Chinese nation. They advocated the need for morally awakened caregivers and the rights of children to enjoy wholesome and happy childhoods in which they had safe spaces to play and were protected from labor. They insisted that music could help unite and produce such happy families and was essential in children's psychological and spiritual development. These ideas about what Chinese children needed were concertized in their kindergarten training pedagogy. Girls drew on transnationally circulating ideas about the importance of child-centred learning, play and nature study, and applied this to the conditions they found in the vicinity of their schools. Christian-educated girls in East China thus interpreted the pedagogical training they received at school, combining Christian aspects of their education with reforming Chinese ideas about the needs of Chinese children in their kindergarten pedagogy. In doing so, girls created new knowledge about Chinese children and empowered themselves as the crucial agents who could strengthen China through applying this knowledge.

### **Notes on contributor**

Dr Jennifer Bond is a Lecturer at University College London. Her research focuses on Gender, Education and Christianity in Modern Chinese History. She is currently completing a book manuscript entitled *Dreaming the New Woman: Missionary Schoolgirls in Republican China*, to be published by Oxford University Press. Thanks to Dr Helen Schneider for her invaluable feedback on an earlier draft of this paper. I am grateful to Dr Isabella Jackson, Dr Margaret Tillman and the two anonymous reviews their helpful suggestions. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Historical Society for Twentieth Century China Conference and the Institute of Historical Research Christian Missions in Global History and History of Education Seminars. I would like to thank the convenors and members of these groups for their

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