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A Survey of Christian Missions in China and the Chinese Term Controversy

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A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN CHINA AND THE CHINESE TERM CONTROVERSY

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This Thesis is Dedicated to:
My wife, Amy, whose encouragement made it possible
The members of Trinity Lutheran Church, McFarland, Kansas
All the faithful missionaries who gave of themselves to bring the Gospel to the people of China

"A missionary to the non-Christians in the Orient must be a man of deep spiritual experience. A man who is to be an ambassador for Christ must know Christ; he must have intimate acquaintance with Him as with his own personal Savior … He must know himself to be saved only by the unfathomable grace of God in Christ Jesus."

Rev. Frederick Brand, "Whom Shall We Send?"

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Soli Deo Gloria!

ABBREVIATIONS

ELS	Evangelical Lutheran Synod
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
MELCM	Missouri Evangelical Lutheran China Mission

CHRONOLOGY

Crucifixion of Jesus	approx. AD 29–33
Legendary mission of the Apostle Thomas, which might have taken place while he was (according to tradition) serving as a missionary in India	AD 40–100?
Council of Nicaea	324–325
Beginning of Nestorian mission in China which is the first recorded missionary activity by any Christian group in the country	638
Erection of Hsî-an Fû Monument, the primary extant source of information regarding the Nestorian mission in China	781
Edict against "Foreign Religions" which effectively ended the Nestorian mission in China	845
Polos return to Europe from China	1269
John of Montecorvino reaches China, marking the beginning of the first Catholic mission in China	1294
Virtual collapse of Franciscan mission	1368
Beginning of Lutheran Reformation	1517
Death of St. Francis Xavier on Shangchuan, in sight of China. Xavier, one of the founders of the Jesuit Order, served as a missionary in Japan before turning toward China. He never reached China, but his efforts led to the inception of the later Jesuit mission.	December 3, 1552
Matteo Ricci and Michele Ruggieri establish residence in China as the first Jesuit missionaries in the country	1583
Death of Ricci	1610

Founding of *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, a supervisory body responsible for Catholic missions around the world	1622
Beginning of the Rites/Term Controversy in the Catholic mission	1643
Imperial Decree in Favor of Confucian Rites	1706
Conclusion of Rites/Term Controversy via Papal Bull	1742
Robert Morrison's arrival in China as the first Protestant missionary	1807
Publication of Morrison's Bible translation	1819
Karl F. Gützlaff, first Lutheran Missionary, arrives in China	1831
Opening of first "Treaty Ports" to foreign missionaries after the first war between the Western powers and China	1842
Hong Kong meeting begins joint Bible translation undertaken by Protestant missionaries working in all five treaty ports	1843
Missionary Conference resolves Chinese Term Controversy among the Protestants in favor of both terms	1904
Founding of *Evangeliche-Lutherische Missionsgesellschaft für Heidenmission in China*, the independent mission society which became the Missouri Evangelical Lutheran China Mission (MELCM)	1912
E.L. Arndt, founding missionary of the MELCM, opens the mission's first station in Hankow	1913
Missouri Synod takes over MELCM	1917
Founding of the Lutheran Church of China, a union of most of the Lutheran mission societies working in China, with the exception of the MELCM	1920

Beginning of Chinese Term Controversy in MELCM	1924
Field resolution of the Chinese Term Controversy in MELCM	1936
Final resolution of the Chinese Term Controversy in LCMS	1947
Founding of People's Republic of China	October 1, 1949
Beginning of the "Three-Self Patriotic Movement," the umbrella organization of Protestants in China	July 1950
Expulsion of final LCMS missionary from China	1952
Beginning of the "Patriotic Association of Catholics," the official organization of the Roman Catholic Church in China	July 1957
Cultural Revolution	1966–1976
Loosening of restrictions on churches	1979

GLOSSARY

Chan.	Immerse
Hsi.	Wash
Shang Ti.	Supreme Ruler
Shen.	God, Spirit
Sheng.	Spirit
T'ien.	Heaven
T'ien Chu.	Lord of Heaven

ABSTRACT

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This thesis surveys the history of Christian mission work in China from the (legendary) mission of the Apostle Thomas up to the present day, including the upheavals resulting from the Communist Revolution. The lens through which this history is presented is the Chinese Term Controversy, a centuries-long conflict regarding the proper translation of the term "God" in the Chinese language. Every major missionary effort in China wrestled with this question to some extent, and many found themselves torn apart due to their different answers to the question. In recent years the Controversy has fallen by the wayside, but understanding why the Term Controversy was so divisive may help modern-day Christians better understand the role of structure in the missionary context.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When engaging in mission work, it is vitally important that both the group sending the missionaries and the missionaries themselves are in accord on theological matters. After all, if there is disagreement among the missionaries or between them and the believers back home, it can cause serious conflicts. A recent example of missionary conflict over doctrine involved a missionary family serving in South America. The missionaries came into contact with a group of Pentecostals who believed in and practiced both faith-healing and speaking in tongues. Although the missionaries' sending organization rejected the Charismatic Movement, they themselves felt led to embrace it due to their experience with the Pentecostals. As a consequence of their newfound doctrinal dissent, they were required to leave both the sending organization and village where they worked. Although the sending agency, missionaries, and native believers came to an amicable agreement, the doctrinal controversy threatened to tear that mission apart.[1]

This holds true in all Christian missions: doctrine and practice inform the mission of the church, but they can also divide those engaged in it. When they cause disagreement and division, the ensuing controversy may severely hinder the missionaries' ability to carry out God's mission. This is particularly true when difficult decisions must be made and those in supervisory positions within the mission lack the necessary understanding of the issues at hand. A powerful example of this is the Chinese Term Controversy. This concerned the proper translation of "God" in the

[1] Bill Johnson and Randy Clark, *The Essential Guide to Healing: Equipping All Christians to Pray for the Sick* (Minneapolis: Chosen, 2011), 107–10.

Chinese language, a controversy which ensnared virtually every mission organization's early stages of work in China.

Why was this controversy among Christian missionaries so divisive? Given the vast number of idols worshiped by the Chinese, many missionaries expressed a real fear of leading the Chinese into a syncretistic worship of the true God by describing him in a manner too much in line with the gods they already worshiped. Because the term used for God would certainly impart its own linguistic baggage to the Gospel, the missionaries sought to choose a term which would teach the correct doctrine about the true God, rather than one to which they could then add Christian meaning. For many of the organizations in question, the fight over the term for God was fundamentally a fight about saying the right thing. If they did not preach the message the right way, they knew that it could be misunderstood and lead new believers astray.

Why did the missionaries and missionary bodies have such a difficult time resolving the controversy? As the controversy dragged on in each mission, each side's position became hardened, making compromise difficult. Even after the missionaries achieved some level of resolution in the mission field, the issues behind the controversy have continued to cause disagreements in the broader church.

Why do Chinese Christians use no less than three different terms to refer to the true God today? Each of the words currently in use among Chinese Christians has a long history behind it, and for some believers their church body is tied directly to the word that it uses for God.

While this controversy has been settled for more than half a century, studying the history of the Chinese Term Controversy will provide insight into not only the religious life of the most-populous nation in the world, but also into the structural issues facing Christian missionary organizations and the difficulties that these structural issues can cause in the missionary context.

This is particularly the case when those placed in supervising positions within the missionary organization use their positions against the missionaries in the field rather than supporting them. This is a risk which all Christian organizations face as they seek to carry out God's mission, especially when those involved give in to the temptation of hubris — a risk that becomes greater and the effects more devastating in a missionary context.

This thesis will treat the doctrinal aspects of the Chinese Term Controversy by surveying some of the theological issues factoring into the controversy, particularly the Doctrine of God and the different conceptions of natural knowledge. After offering this theological context for the issues in question, the thesis will proceed chronologically through the significant Christian missions that took place in China. For each mission a brief historical context including a survey of the linguistic problems involved and (when applicable) Chinese terms for God will be provided. I will conclude by analyzing how the controversy was handled in the various mission groups and the role that each mission's structure might have played in both fueling and resolving the controversy.

Because every Christian missionary organization working in China operated under a slightly-different church polity, this controversy was handled and resolved in widely-differing ways, with widely-differing results. Unfortunately, many of the agreed-upon resolutions were actually detrimental to the overall effectiveness of the missionary work.

This survey of the Chinese Term Controversy will touch on significant attempts by Christianity to enter China, a history spanning close to two millennia, beginning with the (probably legendary) mission of St. Thomas the Apostle in the first century AD and concluding with the expulsion of foreign missionaries from China in 1948. There is a dearth of available information about the earliest missionary attempts in China, but I will highlight connections to

the Chinese Term Controversy when they exist. The later missionary efforts left much more complete records, so most of the survey will focus on the Jesuit and Protestant missions, as well as the Missouri Evangelical Lutheran China Mission, the mission carried out by The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod.

Before surveying the various missions, however, I will first lay a theological groundwork for the controversy by summarizing some of the theological issues involved in the controversy. Although the controversy involved more than just theology, the missionaries' understandings of specific theological doctrines did create and fuel the controversy. After surveying the missions, I will offer my analysis of why the Chinese Term Controversy was so divisive and how the unique ecclesiastical and structural conditions of the various mission organizations contributed to both its divisiveness and its resolution. The three groups that will be the primary focus of this survey employed widely-varying organizational frameworks, and consequently the eventual resolution of the controversy looked markedly different for each.

I hope that understanding this regional yet significant aspect of the missionary history of the Church will foster a closer look at the methods the Church uses in carrying out the Great Commission today, as well as the importance of cooperation and understanding between the missionaries in the field and their supervisors back home.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

At its core, the Chinese Term Controversy is a major, centuries-long theological argument over specific aspects of the nature of God. Therefore, it is important to begin by placing the controversy within its proper theological context. However, because of the great variety of Christian groups that operated in China and played some role in the controversy, the theological context for this study must be equally broad in order to say anything relevant about all of them. Consequently, the baseline for this discussion of theological context is the ecumenical creeds and specifically the Nicene Creed, which was adopted at the Council of Nicaea in 325 and expanded by the Council of Constantinople in 381. All of the Christian groups included in this survey — with the exception of the (legendary) mission of Saint Thomas, who lived roughly three centuries before the Council of Constantinople — would have subscribed to the Nicene Creed and its definition of who God is and how He relates to creation. Thus, the Nicene Creed offers a good starting point our purposes in terms of approaching the Doctrine of God.

Many of the arguments advanced on either side in the Chinese Term Controversy were linguistic: what is the true meaning of the word "God"[1] in English (θεος, "theos," in Greek and אֱלֹהִים, "Elohim," in Hebrew, as well as the native languages of the missionaries). Consequently, the question arose: what is the proper Chinese term to convey the concept of God to a Chinese

[1] And also "god" as a lower-case; there are entire books written about the significance of the capitalization.

audience?[2] Is "supremacy," as proposed by Shang Ti advocates like Medhurst, the primary attribute to be conveyed by God, or is "spirit, as distinct from person," as believed by Shen advocates like Boone? In both the Catholic and Protestant iterations of the Chinese Term Controversy, the two proposed terms fell on opposite sides of that particular divide ("Shen" vs. "Shang Ti;"[3] "T'ien" vs. "T'ien Chu").

The linguistic arguments put forward in the controversy also have a theological basis in the Doctrine of God. Only by understanding the Doctrine of God can we really understand why so many missionaries and theologians came to such divergent opinions with regard to the validity of these terms as translations for God. Connected with the Doctrine of God is the distinction between natural and revealed knowledge: natural knowledge can be found in creation; revealed knowledge can only be found in God's Word — what He has specifically revealed to man, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. How does a theological understanding of revealed knowledge account for Noah's knowledge of God (whom God spoke to directly) and the subsequent dispersion of his descendants at the time of Babel?

We will take these doctrinal points in order, starting with the Doctrine of God.

The Doctrine of God

In discussing the theological basis for the Chinese Term Controversy, only a single aspect of the Doctrine of God is really at play. The controversy does not (for the most part) involve God's identity as the God of the Bible who created the universe; caused the flood; revealed

[2] See Thomas H. Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2014), 82–84; S. C. Malan, *Who is God in China, Shin or Shang-Te? Remarks on the Etymology of [Elohim] and of [Theos], and on the Rendering of Those Terms into Chinese* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1855). Malan's entire book is an etymological study of the terms in question in Greek, Hebrew, and Chinese.

[3] Although there are multiple possible spellings in English for the Chinese "Shang Ti," I will use a consistent spelling apart from direct quotations.

Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; called Moses and led the Israelites out of Egypt into the Promised Land; was incarnate of the Virgin Mary; revealed Himself fully as Jesus Christ; died on the cross and rose on the third day; and came to create and strengthen faith in His people. There were some missionaries who identified God with the "Shang Ti of the Chinese Classics," which will be discussed below under "Natural and Revealed Knowledge," but beyond this exception, the missionaries all acknowledged the same God and the same definition of who this God was and was not.

The controversy does not even involve the Doctrine of the Trinity. Even the Nestorian missionaries who first preached the Gospel in China during the seventh-tenth centuries acknowledged the Trinity. The Nestorian Monument of Hsî-an Fû in Shen-hsî, one of the few surviving records of that early Nestorian mission in China, uses the Chinese phrase "Three-in-One" as a term for God,[4] indicating an acknowledgement of His Triune nature. On both these points — His activity and His nature — the missionaries were in agreement with the orthodox Nicene faith.

The primary element of the Doctrine of God involved in this controversy is in fact His attribute of jealousy.[5] In Ex. 20:3–6, God says:

> You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,

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[4] James Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsî-an Fû in Shen-hsî, China, Relating to the Diffusion of Christianity in China in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries with the Chinese Text of the Inscription, a Translation, and Notes and a Lecture on the Monument With a Sketch of subsequent Christian Missions in China and their present state.* (London: Trübner, 1888), 5.

[5] See E.L. Arndt, "Is 'Shangti' Wrong?" (Hankow, 1926), [1]: "It can never be an insult to give to God what is God's. Neither can it insult God to take the honor of which He has been robbed by idol worshippers, and return it unto Him."

> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.[6]

This is echoed elsewhere in the Old Testament, as in Ex. 34:14: "You shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God," and Deut. 6:14–15:

> You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you — for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God — lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

God is a "jealous" God, meaning that He refuses to share worship with idols.

If this is the case, then how does this affect the terms which are available for translating God into different languages? Can a jealous God be called by names, terms, and titles which have also been used of idols? At the same time, can a jealous God stand to have titles that (on the surface at least) properly belong to Him given to idols? Although the proponents of the different terms all agreed on who God was and that He is a jealous God, they could not come to a consensus on how to apply this to the proposed Chinese terms for God.

The Doctrine of Natural and Revealed Knowledge

The second key doctrine to understand in discussing the Chinese Term Controversy is that of natural and revealed knowledge.[7] Although the missionaries rarely used these terms in their writings on the controversy, their understanding of the origins of Shang Ti as well as the being to which the term refers in the Chinese Classics betrays a definite disagreement with regard to the extent of natural knowledge.[8] Although all were in agreement that there is such a thing as

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[6] All Scriptural quotations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

[7] See Geo. O. Lillegard, *A History of the Term Question Controversy in our China Mission and the Chief Documents in the Case* (Jamaica Plain: [s.n.], 1930), 14: "It is theologically wrong to use Shang-Di as a name for God, because its use is advocated and defended on the basis of a heretical teaching with regard to the natural knowledge of the true God that the heathen can attain to apart from revelation."

[8] See Matteo Ricci, who believed early Confucianism to be a "nearly perfect expression of the 'natural law' and that it served as a natural foundation for Christian teaching in China" and set out to show Christianity to be "the

"natural knowledge" by which people could know that there is a Creator, there was some disagreement as to the extent of this natural knowledge. The Lutheran understanding of natural knowledge holds that it cannot lead to saving faith apart from God's revealed knowledge, but this belief is not shared by all Christians (including Catholics). Even among those who accepted this understanding of revealed and natural knowledge, some missionaries disagreed on the exclusivity of God's revealed knowledge given to the patriarchs, Moses, Israel, and finally the apostles and early Church.

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the LCMS defines "natural knowledge" as follows in its 2013 report, *The Natural Knowledge of God in Christian Confession and Christian Witness*: "That knowledge of God, however dim or incomplete, to which humanity has access by means of natural revelation, and apart from special revelation."[9] The CTCR further defines "natural revelation" as "That general manifestation of God — whether recognized as such or not — in and through nature, as distinct from his special revelation in the incarnate Christ and inspired Scriptures."[10] This natural revelation comes in several different forms. The first is through the observation of nature. David writes in Psalm 19:1: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." Paul says the same in Ro.

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fulfillment of primitive Confucianism." In Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of The Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shih-i)*, trans. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985), 9. Ricci and his colleagues even considered the "Shang Ti" referenced in the Confucian classics to be "traces of the early theism they were looking for" (34). James Legge is said to have believed that the modern Chinese understanding of Shang Ti "is also the monotheistic, true God" and to have worshipped him at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. See Lillegard, *A History of the Term Question Controversy in our China Mission and the Chief Documents in the Case*, 12. Lillegard himself is one of the few to use the terms "natural knowledge" and "revealed knowledge" in his writings on the controversy in Lillegard, *A History of the Term Question Controversy in our China Mission and the Chief Documents in the Case*, 10–11, 14. Arndt expresses his intention of using "Shang Ti" as the term for God because it is the "remnants of natural theology" which the Chinese still possess in Arndt, "Why We Should Continue the Use of Shangti" (Hankow: [s.n.], 1925), 20.

[9] Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *The Natural Knowledge of God in Christian Confession and Christian Witness* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2013), 7.

[10] Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *The Natural Knowledge of God in Christian Confession and Christian Witness*, 7.

1:20: "[God's] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made." By looking at creation, it is possible to come to the conclusion that there is a Creator responsible for the creation of the world. Beyond this, however, Christians differ in their belief as to the extent of natural knowledge and whether (imperfect) natural knowledge of God as Creator of the Universe can be saving faith and thus by itself enough to bring someone to a knowledge of the true God.

The second form of natural revelation by which people can have a natural knowledge of God is the Law which is written on all people's hearts. This is what Paul means in Ro. 2:14–16 when he says:

> When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Because all people know from their conscience that certain actions are wrong, they may conclude that there must be a source of absolute truth by which the actions of all people are judged. If certain actions are universally approved and others are universally condemned, there must be a common basis for determining these things, and thus a common Law and common Lawgiver/Judge for the entire world. However, is this imperfect natural knowledge of God as Lawgiver and Judge enough to bring someone to the knowledge of the true God?

Roman Catholics answer this question with a qualified "yes," following in the footsteps of St. Thomas Aquinas, who in his "Fifth Way" posits that human reason possesses the capacity to recognize and understand the existence of a divine being ("God") based on natural knowledge alone. According to the "Fifth Way," man is able to look at the natural world and recognize that it has been divinely ordered:

> According to Thomas, it is fairly apparent to the average person that there exists a superior being that is responsible for ordering natural substances to their ends. This superior being is what we call God. As a result people recognise naturally that they are subject to this superior being, like the rest of nature, and should honour it. They recognise that God is to be loved above all else.[11]

Aquinas argues that man by his own reason is able to understand that the natural world has a certain order to it, an order which presupposes the existence of a greater power which imposes its order on the world. If the universe has an order and there is a higher power ordering it, then that higher power must be recognized as God.

A natural knowledge of God originating from recognition of His handiwork in creation does not require His special revelation, but Aquinas does acknowledge that God plays a role in creating the conditions by which the human mind can grasp the natural knowledge of God. Rather than revealing Himself to man, however, for Aquinas God provides man with the gift of divine illumination by which he can see and acknowledge God's truth.

> In St. Thomas, man receives from God everything he receives from Him in St. Augustine, but not in the same way. In St. Augustine, God delegates his gifts in such a way that the very insufficiency of nature constrains it to return toward him; in St. Thomas, God delegates His gifts through the mediacy of a stable nature which contains in itself — divine subsistence being taken for granted — the sufficient reason of all its operations. Accordingly, it is the introducing into each philosophical problem of a *nature* endowed with sufficiency and efficacy that separates [T]homism from [A]ugustinism.[12]

According to Aquinas, God has given man the ability to recognize Him by natural knowledge, by observation of God's natural revelation in creation. However, Aquinas stops short of asserting that the natural knowledge of God comes without God's activity. Indeed, the ability to receive

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[11] Dominic Farrell, *The Ends of the Moral Virtues and the First Principles of Practical Reason in Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical, 2012), 211.

[12] Lawrence K. Shook, *Etienne Gilson* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 68; quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Faith, Reason and Theology: Questions I–IV of his Commentary on the* De Trinitate *of Boethius*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1987), xvii–xviii. See Aquinas, *Faith, Reason and Theology: Questions I–IV of his Commentary on the* De Trinitate *of Boethius*, 14.

the natural knowledge of God is only made possible by God acting upon the mind, opening it to accepting the knowledge of the truth — activity which God has done for all humans by virtue of their creation, so that all human beings have this capacity.

In his commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate*, Aquinas asserts that natural knowledge not only contains the knowledge of God's existence as creator, but also that "the mind is capable of knowing the divine Trinity by natural reason."[13] Because, according to St. Augustine, the condition of being three is inherent in all that exists (Augustine defines these "three" as "measure, beauty, and order"[14]), the human mind, which already accepts the existence of God as creator, may therefore infer that God must also have this condition of being three. This same reasoning allows Aquinas to posit that natural knowledge can arrive at the conclusion that God is "savior": "Religiosity not only supposes that there is a 'God', but that divine providence is concerned with man's salvation."[15] Thus three of the primary elements of God's nature and action — creation, salvation, and the Trinity — may be grasped by virtue of natural knowledge apart from God's revelation.

However, Aquinas' commentary on Romans reveals that his purpose in proposing this ability of humans to come to a natural knowledge of God was not to give Gentiles the ability to be saved apart from God's revealed Word in the Bible. Instead, his purpose was to establish that the Gentiles truly are "without excuse" for their unbelief:

> So in the concrete situation of human beings the natural cognition of God is explicitly and logically dependent upon the revealed cognition of God — that is upon the

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[13] Aquinas, *Faith, Reason and Theology: Questions I–IV of his Commentary on the* De Trinitate *of Boethius*, 29.

[14] Aquinas, *Faith, Reason and Theology: Questions I–IV of his Commentary on the* De Trinitate *of Boethius*, 30.

[15] Farrell, *The Ends of the Moral Virtues and the First Principles of Practical Reason in Thomas Aquinas*, 226.

> revealed cognitions of God properly and effectively so called or the *revelabilia* as God's form in the world, engaged in informing human beings toward their end of friendship with God. That will become clearer when … Thomas begins to characterize three ways to do natural theology wrong. In fact, Thomas uses the term '*theologia naturalis*' only in that negative sense.[16]

Because the Gentiles have the capacity to know God through His revelation in nature, Aquinas argues, they are "without excuse" for their lack of faith. Consequently, the only way in which the Gentiles may come to know God is through His revelation.

Later Catholics, however, lost Aquinas' understanding that natural knowledge can only be called "knowledge" as a framework for discussion because no one has a true knowledge of God apart from His divine self-revelation. The Jesuits constantly searched for evidence of the natural knowledge of God while carrying out their missionary ventures, believing that such knowledge would demonstrate some saving knowledge on the part of the non-Christian peoples. Upon reading the ancient Chinese classics and learning of their portrayal of "Shang Ti," the Jesuits believed that this represented an example of China's ancient natural knowledge of God.[17] Nevertheless, they chose not to use "Shang Ti" as the primary term for God in their mission.

According to its *Catechism* the Roman Catholic Church today believes that man is capable of knowing God via natural knowledge, as is seen in the following two quotes:

> Man's faculties make him capable of coming to a knowledge of the existence of a personal God. But for man to be able to enter into real intimacy with him, God willed both to reveal himself to man and to give him the grace of being able to welcome this revelation in faith. The proofs of God's existence, however, can predispose one to faith and help one to see that faith is not opposed to reason.
>
> "Our holy mother, the Church, holds and teaches that God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known *with certainty* from the created world by the natural

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[16] Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 131.

[17] Ricci, *The True Meaning of The Lord of Heaven*, 34.

> light of human reason." Without this capacity, man would not be able to welcome God's revelation. Man has the capacity because he is created "in the image of God."[18]

Although it is possible for people who have not been exposed to the Gospel to have a natural knowledge of the true God — to know Him "with certainty from the created world" — Catholic theologians recognize that this is not the same as "real intimacy with him." Further, this natural knowledge is a prerequisite for receiving the revealed knowledge of God. However, both the natural knowledge of God (which "can predispose one to faith") and the revelation of God are necessary in the Catholic understanding for one to have "real intimacy" with God — in other words, faith.

This was a point of contention for some of the missionaries involved in this controversy: Lutherans and many others believe that natural knowledge alone cannot get someone to the true God. In order to know God, it is necessary to know Him as He has revealed Himself.[19]

Revealed knowledge is the specific revelation of God, as seen in His revelation to Abraham (Gen. 11–15). God revealed Himself in this way in the Old Testament to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the prophets. In the New Testament He revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit through the apostles (Heb. 1:1–2). According to many Christian groups, it is only by this knowledge — God as He has chosen to reveal Himself — that one can know the true God (Jn. 14:6).

However, what sources are there for revealed knowledge? Scripture itself is the only truly reliable source of revealed knowledge of God available to us today, but it is not the only historical source of revealed knowledge (see Heb. 1:1). God revealed Himself directly to the

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[18] *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*, 2nd. ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), 16, emphasis added.

[19] CTCR, *The Natural Knowledge of God in Christian Confession and Christian Witness*, 37: "A natural knowledge of God might *sometimes* be true, will *always* be incomplete, and will *never* suffice for salvation."

apostles, both in the person of Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. God revealed Himself directly to the prophets. God knew Moses "face to face" (Deut.34:10). God even spoke directly to Adam, Eve, and Cain after their respective problems with sin (Gen. 3:9; 4:9). Significantly for this discussion, God revealed Himself directly to Noah in commanding Him to build the ark and establishing His eternal covenant with Noah and his descendants (Gen. 6–9). Given that Noah became the father of all the nations of the earth after the flood, could Noah and his sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) have passed the revealed knowledge of the true God down to their children orally? Furthermore, according to the genealogy in Gen. 9:28; 11:10–19, at least Noah and Shem were both still alive at the time of the Tower of Babel[20] and thus could have told their descendants about the flood and God's covenant with them before they were all scattered around the world. This being the case, might an extra-biblical source of revealed knowledge of God have been transmitted orally to all the people of the world at the time of Babel, and if so, could that have been preserved by any of those people groups for any period of time following the Dispersion? That a majority of ancient cultures have some record of a great flood in their mythology would appear to confirm this theory as more than just a possibility. Ro. 1:21 also suggests this, since Paul says, "*Although they knew God*, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him" (emphasis added). If it is a possibility, could the ancient Chinese (who according to the biblical account must have been descended from one of Noah's sons) have brought this knowledge of the true God with them to China — with this forming the basis for their early (apparently monotheistic) religion worshipping "Shang Ti"?

This understanding of revealed knowledge and its potential connection to the ancient

[20] Noah lived 350 years after the Flood (Gen. 9:28); Shem 502 years after the Flood (11:10–11). The Tower of Babel happened during the time of Peleg (10:25), who lived from 101–340 years after the Flood (11:10–19).

monotheistic worship practices of China would become a major ground for theological disagreement among the missionaries involved in the Chinese Term Controversy, as would the history of the Greek θεος, *Theos*. Some believed that the "Shang Ti" of the Chinese Classics was evidence of ancient Chinese knowledge of the true God;[21] others believed it to be nothing more than an idol like Zeus and Jupiter.[22] The connection to the Greek and Roman deities and thus the polytheistic history of the Greek term θεος would be commented upon by several writers on the Chinese Term Controversy.[23] When they noted the use of the term for idols, many authors would dismiss this history by stating that the term's very use in the Bible "imported" monotheistic meaning to it, thus elevating it to the point of becoming an appropriate term for the true God. Those missionaries who favored the use of "Shen" would argue on this basis that "Shen," as the "generic" term for deity, was the Chinese equivalent and could likewise be loaded with Christian meaning through biblical usage.[24] Advocates of "Shang Ti," on the other hand, argued that the term "Shang Ti" already conveys much of what the Christian usage of "God" conveys, including many specific attributes of God.[25]

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[21] Arndt references Terrien de la Cuperie's *Western Origin of Chinese Civilization* as stating that "Shangti is the exact equivalent of Melchizedek's and Abraham's 'El Elyohn' and is used by a man who may very well have come direct from Babylon" in Arndt, "Is 'Shangti' Wrong?" 6. Arndt further asserts that Hwangti, the first Chinese emperor to worship Shang Ti, was a contemporary of Melchizedek and worshiped the same God with the same name, though Hwangti's worship "deteriorated" away from worship of the true God into idolatry in Arndt, "Why We Should Continue the Use of Shangti," 8. Based on this claim, Arndt argues that "Shangti" is "the authentic ancient Chinese version of the patriarchal name for God" in Arndt, "Why We Should Continue the Use of Shangti," 8.

[22] See Lillegard, *A History of the Term Question Controversy in our China Mission and the Chief Documents in the Case*, 30.

[23] Lillegard and Arndt both discuss the etymologies of θεος and אֱלֹהִים, as does Malan. Arndt in fact argues that the "Zeus of Cleanthes" whom Paul references in his discussion with the Athenians was the true God in Arndt, "Why We Should Continue the Use of Shangti," 14.

[24] See Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire*, 82–83.

[25] See Arndt, "Why We Should Continue the Use of Shangti," 9–10 (creation, eternal); Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire*, 85 (lordship, majesty, receiving of worship and sacrifice).

Both these doctrinal points will prove to be significant in guiding and shaping the Chinese Term Controversy in the missions for which we have substantial written records.

CHAPTER THREE

EARLY CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN CHINA

In studying the first three phases of Christian mission work in China, it becomes painfully obvious just how ineffectual and temporary these missions were. Although remnants of the second and third missions lasted until the Jesuits arrived in the sixteenth century, these traces were minimal and had relatively little long-term impact on the people and culture of China. Only one of these missions left any specific record of which Chinese term for God it used. The others left no extant written records in Chinese, but we can infer from the available information how this translational question may have impacted them.

Although with regard to their specific missionary methods and the challenges they faced these phases of mission work left little in the way of written records, they do provide an important foundation for surveying the more important later phases of mission work. Each of these missions, if its specific linguistic decisions with regard to the proper term for God had been better known, might have provided an important historical authority through which the Chinese Term Controversy could have been amicably resolved. As it stands, however, none of these missions left more than scant testimony to its specific linguistic challenges and the methods by which it overcame them. At the same time, these missions hint at some intriguing reasons why they might not have struggled with the Chinese Term Controversy in the same way that all later missions did.

Despite the anecdotal evidence supporting an earlier, apostolic date for the first Christian mission in China, the most likely origin for Christianity in China remains as the result of

Nestorian mission work beginning in the seventh century. The history of this Nestorian mission has been well established, as has that of the Catholic mission undertaken by the Franciscan brothers six centuries later. By contrast, the legendary apostolic mission left little information regarding its history. However, in order to do proper diligence in surveying the entire history of Christian mission work in China, I must first briefly examine Matteo Ricci's evidence for that earliest mission.

The Legendary Phase

According to sources discovered by Fr. Matteo Ricci, the missionary considered the "Father" of the Catholic Church in China, the earliest Christian missionary to preach the Gospel in China was none other than the Apostle Thomas. According to tradition, when the Apostles divided the world among themselves for the purpose of evangelism, Thomas was assigned to work in India, where he served for many years, bringing in converts, training pastors, and planting churches in the Malabar region along its southern coast. Thomas' ministry in India finally ended when, according to tradition, he was martyred by Hindu priests on what came to be known as St. Thomas Mount. Beyond this tradition, however, there is some written evidence that during his time in India, Thomas also preached in China.

In his *Journals*, Matteo Ricci lays out a case for this earliest phase of Christian mission work in China based on sources from the Chaldean Church in the Malabar region of coastal India, which according to tradition was founded through the ministry of Thomas. A breviary found in the Malabar Church of St. Thomas includes the following two notes attesting to this legendary mission of Thomas in China. The first is in one of the lessons for the Feast of St. Thomas:

> The error of idolatry was banished from India by St. Thomas. The Chinese and Ethiopians were converted to the truth by St. Thomas. From St. Thomas they received the sacrament of baptism and became children of adoption. Through St. Thomas they believed in and professed the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through St. Thomas they preserved the faith in one God which they received from him. Through St. Thomas the splendor of a life-giving faith flourished through all of India. Through St. Thomas the Kingdom of Heaven took wings and sped its flight to the Chinese.[1]

The second one is in an antiphon for the same day: "The people of India, of China, of Persia and others on the islands, together with those of Syria, Armenia, Greece, and Roumania [sic], venerate The Holy Name, in memory of St. Thomas."[2] Unfortunately, Kenneth Scott Latourette, author of *A History of Christian Missions in China* (one of the most comprehensive histories of the subject before World War II), casts serious doubt on the authenticity of the breviary's claim:

> One estimate places the date of the composition of this service book in or after the thirteenth century and suggests that the tradition may have arisen from the reports of the envoys of the Malabar Church who visited Cambaluc (Peking) in 1282 and who may have met the Nestorian Christians who resided there under the Mongols.[3]

The only additional evidence Ricci offers beyond the two notes from the Chaldean Breviary is circumstantial at best. Ricci notes that the Chaldean Church in Malabar had a long history of claiming jurisdiction over China as well as India. However, even if this claim proved that Malabar Christians worked in or traveled to China at some time between the founding of the church and the Jesuit arrival in China, it does not prove that Thomas was the one to go. It is more likely that individual Malabar Christians went to China after the founding of their church. These three are the only extant Christian sources suggesting that Thomas reached China. Based on this evidence, it is difficult to assert conclusively that Thomas carried out a mission in China.

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[1] Matteo Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, trans. Louis J. Gallagher, S. J. (New York: Random House, 1953), 113.

[2] Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, 113.

[3] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 48–49. It is important to note that recent research has elevated the view of oral history among scholars beyond the view of Latourette and his contemporaries.

If Thomas did reach China, that might be the furthest distance from Jerusalem traveled by any of the original twelve Apostles in their missionary journeys. However, unlike Thomas' work in India, where the church he (traditionally) founded has survived in some form for nearly two millennia, China shows little evidence of this earliest phase of mission work. No Christians in China encountered during the later phases of Christian mission work ever claimed descent from this mission. No written records in China before the Jesuits arrived in the sixteenth century reference this mission. For these reasons, it is difficult to establish or accept this early date for Christianity's introduction into China.

The lack of written records also makes it impossible to determine how St. Thomas pursued this mission (if he did so at all). We cannot know what term was used for God, or even what *language* was used. Unfortunately, a similar lack of evidence also characterizes the two subsequent phases of mission work in China, although the second (Nestorian) phase provides Chinese-language sources.

The Nestorian Phase

Nestorianism as a distinct sect of Christianity originated during the Christological controversies of the third – fifth centuries and served as the primary focus of the third and fourth ecumenical councils.[4] Following their exclusion from the Orthodox Church at the Council of

[4] Nestorius, an Antiochene monk appointed Bishop of Constantinople, began preaching in 428 against the long-standing tradition of calling the Virgin Mary "Θεοτόκος" ("Theotokos," "God-bearer"), declaring this title to be a degradation of Jesus' divinity. This ignited a controversy which would not be resolved in the church until the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) both determined that Nestorius' position was heterodox because it divided the two natures of Christ. Consequently, Nestorius and his followers were excluded from the Orthodox Church. After the Council of Ephesus, Nestorius himself returned to the monastery in Antioch that he had left to become bishop, while his followers eventually fled from the Roman Empire to Persia. For a complete overview of the Nestorian Controversy, see Douglas W. Johnson, *The Great Jesus Debates: 4 Early Church Battles about the Person and Work of Jesus* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 109–16; Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325–787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1983), 140–67.

Chalcedon, Nestorian missionaries began working throughout Asia, including India, before a missionary named Olopun reached China around AD 638. This missionary received an audience with the Emperor T'âi Tsung in which he presented him with some translated Scripture passages and received permission to operate throughout China. Olopun built a monastery for twenty-one priests to live in, and from this beginning the Nestorian mission expanded significantly over the next fifty years.[5]

Despite opposition from the other religious groups in China (particularly the Buddhists), Nestorian Christianity survived for two centuries until 845, when Emperor Wû Tsung issued an edict prohibiting "foreign religions" — targeted specifically at Buddhism, but also affecting other "foreign religions" such as Nestorian Christianity.[6] This edict confiscated monastic properties, forced monks and nuns to "return to the ways of common life," and drove the remaining foreign missionaries out of the country. Although Buddhism was restored by Wû Tsung's successor after his death one year later, the Nestorian mission did not enjoy the same popular support as Buddhism, was not supported by the new emperor, and thus was unable to recover from the persecution. The surviving believers disappeared back into the population, leaving little record of their church beyond their monument (which was hidden until a friend of the Jesuits discovered it), though some Nestorian missionaries worked in China during the next mission phase.[7]

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[5] James Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsî-an Fû in Shen-hsî, China, Relating to the Diffusion of Christianity in China in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries with the Chinese Text of the Inscription, a Translation, and Notes and a Lecture on the Monument With a Sketch of subsequent Christian Missions in China and their present state* (London: Trübner, 1888), 9–25.

[6] James Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsî-an Fû in Shen-hsî, China, Relating to the Diffusion of Christianity in China in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries with the Chinese Text of the Inscription, a Translation, and Notes and a Lecture on the Monument With a Sketch of subsequent Christian Missions in China and their present state*, 47–49.

[7] James Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsî-an Fû in Shen-hsî, China, Relating to the Diffusion of*

There are few textual sources for information about the Nestorian mission in China. The most definitive source for information about this mission is the Hsî-an Fû monument of 781, erected to commemorate the great success of the mission during its first 150 years. The monument contains two sections. The second recounts the history of the mission, but the first, a doctrinal statement, lays out the beliefs of the Chinese Nestorians and offers the first significant historical documentation relevant to the Chinese Term Question. In the first place, the writer of the inscription makes extensive use of Taoist terms and phrases in describing both the Creation account and the Christian religion. In the second place, the terms for God used on the monument are not those used by later missionaries; rather than repurpose an existing Chinese term, the Nestorians spell the Syriac equivalent of the Hebrew "Eloah" (אֱלוֹהַּ), "God," phonetically in Chinese[8] in one instance. Later the author does the same with the Syriac equivalents of "Satan"[9] and "Messiah."[10] The most common means of referring to God in the inscription is with the Chinese equivalent of "Three-in-One" ("Three" followed by "One"), indicating "Trinity."[11]

Christianity in China in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries with the Chinese Text of the Inscription, a Translation, and Notes and a Lecture on the Monument With a Sketch of subsequent Christian Missions in China and their present state, 50. These Nestorians were probably fruits of other Nestorian mission work among the Mongols themselves, rather than of the Nestorian mission in China proper.

[8] James Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsî-an Fû in Shen-hsî, China, Relating to the Diffusion of Christianity in China in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries with the Chinese Text of the Inscription, a Translation, and Notes and a Lecture on the Monument With a Sketch of subsequent Christian Missions in China and their present state*, 3n 5.

[9] James Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsî-an Fû in Shen-hsî, China, Relating to the Diffusion of Christianity in China in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries with the Chinese Text of the Inscription, a Translation, and Notes and a Lecture on the Monument With a Sketch of subsequent Christian Missions in China and their present state*, 7n 4.

[10] James Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsî-an Fû in Shen-hsî, China, Relating to the Diffusion of Christianity in China in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries with the Chinese Text of the Inscription, a Translation, and Notes and a Lecture on the Monument With a Sketch of subsequent Christian Missions in China and their present state*, 7n 8.

[11] James Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsî-an Fû in Shen-hsî, China, Relating to the Diffusion of Christianity in China in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries with the Chinese Text of the Inscription, a Translation, and Notes and a Lecture on the Monument With a Sketch of subsequent Christian Missions in China and their present state*, 2, 6, 28. According to Dr. Jeffrey Oschwald, a member of my Thesis Committee fluent in Chinese, the

In defining God by His Triune nature, the Nestorians avoid the possibility of the Chinese misunderstanding and conflating God with their own gods. Likewise, transliterating their own term for God avoids the danger that future missionaries in China would face: using names, terms, and titles associated with specific Chinese gods to refer to the true God. However, to the new believer (or unbeliever) a transliterated term would be meaningless without substantial teaching and explaining — indeed, this would risk the true God appearing to the Chinese to be a new god to add to their pantheon.

Unfortunately, there is no information available to indicate how the Nestorian missionaries arrived at these terms for God. Furthermore, the Nestorian mission's records were lost until after the Jesuit mission had been well-established, and the provenance of their monument was disputed by European scholars during the nineteenth century, so the Nestorians' decision to use "Three-in-One" as a term for God did not factor in to the later history of the Chinese Term Controversy.

The Early Catholic Phase

Following the expulsion of foreign Nestorian missionaries, Christianity's place in China was greatly diminished for the following three centuries, though it did spread throughout Mongolia due to the work of Nestorian missionaries.[12] During this same period, China was largely ignored by Europe. However, China returned to the European consciousness in 1269 when Italian merchants Maffeo and Nicolo Polo returned to Europe from the court of Mongol

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phrase used by the Nestorians consists of four characters which literally translate as "three one wonderful body/substance." This is slightly different from the phrase used by later missionaries to describe the Trinity, which literally translates as "three persons one body/substance." However, because there are so few extant writings of the Nestorian mission, we have no way of knowing how the native Chinese understood "three one wonderful body/substance."

[12] The Nestorians operating in China during this phase of the mission were the fruits of mission work among the Mongolians.

Emperor Kublai Khan which was located in Beijing. The Emperor sent letters to the Pope requesting that he send teachers to bring European learning to the Chinese.[13] Because the first two parties dispatched to China did not arrive, the Franciscan John of Montecorvino became the first Roman Catholic missionary in China on his arrival in Cambaluc (modern Beijing) in 1294.[14] John met the new Emperor, Ch'ên Tsung, and received permission to build a church and begin preaching. Despite opposition from the Nestorians who had reentered China with the Mongols, John's mission quickly grew. After a decade of work, John reported baptizing 6000 converts.[15] He also worked extensively among the (non-Chinese[16]) tribes living in the northern part of China. John was elevated to Archbishop around 1307 (with jurisdiction over most of Asia) and joined by three suffragan bishops.[17] However, due to lack of support from home (primarily caused by the difficulty with travel), the mission was not resupplied enough to replace missionaries who died. This left the China mission without leadership from John's death in the late-1320s-early-1330s until the arrival of a papal legate in Beijing in 1342, and then following the papal legate's departure until the mission collapsed with the fall of the Mongol dynasty in China in 1368.[18]

When the Jesuits arrived in China in the sixteenth century, they did encounter some "Christians" in the northern regions of China who worshiped the cross and claimed descent from

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[13] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 68.

[14] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 68–69.

[15] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 69.

[16] The ethnic group that is considered "Chinese" is known as the "Han," named for the second Chinese dynasty (206 BC – AD 220). The vast majority of the Chinese population belongs to this ethnic group.

[17] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 70.

[18] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 72–73.

this mission, but they had retained little of the Christian faith.[19] It is unclear whether these Christians were remnants of the first Roman Catholic mission, descendants of the Nestorians, or immigrants to the region unconnected with any previous Christian mission. Regardless, it is clear that this early mission had relatively little long-term impact on China.

In terms of language, John of Montecorvino's mission appears to have primarily used languages other than Mandarin Chinese for worship and teaching. Some of his earliest successes came among the previously-Nestorian Öngut tribe of Mongolia.[20] The mission was requested and supported by the ruling Mongol Dynasty. Neither of these groups spoke Chinese. Thus it is reasonable to assume that John of Montecorvino did not give much thought to the term for God that he would use in written Chinese — and that John may not have written much, if anything, in Chinese. Furthermore, there is evidence from his reports to Rome that John of Montecorvino devoted considerable time to teaching native boys Latin and Greek so they could worship using the Roman order of service.[21] In fact, the only "missionary language" Montecorvino reported learning was Mongolian,[22] into which he translated the New Testament, Psalter, and Latin Rite. Nothing is recorded as having been translated into Chinese.[23]

Given how much emphasis John of Montecorvino placed on evangelizing the Mongols, a ruling dynasty that was not native to China, it should come as no surprise that so little of his mission survived past the expulsion of the Mongols from China in the fourteenth century.

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[19] Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, 110–1.

[20] Jean-Pierre Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, trans. M.N.L. Couve de Murville (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002), 101–2.

[21] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 101; Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 69.

[22] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 103.

[23] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 103.

Conclusion

The first three Christian missions to operate in China left little in terms of lasting impact. Both the Nestorians and the Franciscans devoted considerable time and effort to their respective missions, but they did not engage the native Chinese and build a sizeable native Christian population that could survive the expulsion of their foreign missionaries. In fact, the Nestorians' greatest accomplishments in the region came among the non-Chinese tribes of Mongolia and northern China, rather than among the Han Chinese themselves.

In the case of both latter missions, the missionaries appear to have made a conscious decision to focus their efforts on appeasing and gaining support from the rulers of China, rather than on evangelizing the common people. In the case of the Nestorians, the rulers granted them favors but did not themselves become Christian. In the case of the Franciscans, the rulers expressed interest in the faith and followed Genghis Khan's program of promoting religious toleration, but themselves were a foreign dynasty and not originally native Chinese. In both cases, dynastic upheavals caused the collapse of the mission.

In all of these missions, it is possible that any concerns with regard to the correct terms to use in translation were immediately addressed by the senior missionaries and accepted without question by their subordinates and successors. John of Montecorvino was consecrated bishop for the express purpose of giving him greater authority over his mission, and during this period the bishop's office was accorded great respect and honor within the Church. In all of these missions, the senior missionaries' offices, coupled with experience, would have sufficed for their assistants to accept their word.

Although the Nestorians adopted an intriguing solution to the Term Question — "Three-in-One" and also by transliterating the Syriac term into Chinese characters—this compromise was not given a chance to catch on in the later missions. This was because knowledge of the

Nestorian mission was lost until well after the beginning of the Jesuit mission and the evidence for it was rejected by many European Protestants.[24] I can only speculate as to the effect on the Chinese Term Controversy if the Nestorian solution had been known and accepted by the later missions. It is possible that they would have pointed to the Nestorians as historical precedent and simply adopted their specific terms for the name of God;[25] it is also possible that the later missionaries would have rejected the Nestorians and their missionary efforts as heretical and refused to consider their terms as a compromise.

Regardless, the Nestorian mission was lost to time and its monument buried until after the Chinese Term Controversy had begun in earnest in the Jesuit mission. Consequently, both the Jesuits and the Protestants turned to different solutions to determine which Chinese term they would use for God.

[24] James Legge is a notable exception. His translation of the Nestorian stele and lecture on its contents (see note 4 above) offers several compelling arguments from himself and other scholars in favor of the stele's authenticity. As an additional argument in favor of the monument's authenticity, if the Jesuits had forged it, I would have expected them to use one of their own terms for "God" ("T'ien Chu" or "T'ien"), rather than a transliterated Syriac term.

[25] Unfortunately, even this would not entirely have forestalled the Chinese Term Controversy. "Three-in-One" can be used as a name for God, but it cannot be used in every place that "god" is used. For example, the First Commandment: "You shall have no other Triune."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE JESUIT MISSION IN CHINA

History of the Mission

After the collapse of the earlier Franciscan mission to China, the Roman Catholic Church did not make another attempt at mission work there for almost three hundred years. A number of events and conditions in Europe prevented them, including the collapse of Mongol rule in China, the Muslim control of most routes between Europe and East Asia, the great papal schism within the church, and the threat of a Muslim invasion of Eastern Europe.[1] It was not until the middle of the sixteenth century that mission work in China was brought back into the European consciousness through the efforts of Francis Xavier, one of the original founders of the Society of Jesus (more commonly known as the Jesuit Order).[2]

Xavier went to Japan to open a Jesuit mission there in 1549.[3] During his time in Japan, however, he realized that the Chinese were the intellectual leaders of the Far East: the Japanese "commonly asserted, that if the Christian religion was really the one true religion, it surely would have been known to the intelligent Chinese and also accepted by them."[4] Because his mission in Japan seemed to hinge on his ability to convert the Chinese, Xavier decided to stop at China on the return journey to look into prospects for opening a mission there. At the Portuguese trading

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[1] For a more complete picture of the conditions in Europe that hindered the resumption of mission work in China, see Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 123–6.

[2] The Jesuit Order was founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola, in part as a response to the Lutheran Reformation already underway in Germany and northern Europe.

[3] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 131.

[4] Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, 117–8.

station of Shangchuan, he met with trader Diego Pereira and suggested to him the idea of meeting the Chinese Emperor as part of a trade delegation, an idea which Pereira supported. With assistance from both the Viceroy of India and the Bishop of Goa, Xavier and Pereira prepared the trade delegation with Pereira as its director.[5] For the delegation to be successful, the Governor General of Malacca needed to permit its departure. Unfortunately for Xavier, the Governor, Alvares Taidio, disliked Pereira and refused to allow his ship to leave port. This was despite Xavier's best efforts at flattery and conciliation, as well as threats of political and ecclesiastical censure — which eventually led to his excommunication by Xavier.[6] When his trade delegation plan failed, Xavier decided to enter China by any means possible, and commissioned a Chinese trader to smuggle him into the country. His Portuguese friends advised against this, and in the end his plan failed and he died of a fever on the island of Shangchuan, within sight of Canton.[7]

Following Xavier's death, efforts by the Franciscan, Dominican, and Augustinian orders to open missions in China met with stiff resistance due to the political situation in Europe. Following the exploration of both Africa and America by Spanish and Portuguese navigators, Pope Alexander VI had negotiated the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal to establish distinct spheres of influence for the two kingdoms with their known territories. This had the later effect of dividing the newly-discovered, though not yet recognized, Americas between them. This treaty was followed in 1529 by the Treaty of Saragossa, which divided Asia

[5] Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, 118.

[6] Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, 120–1.

[7] For a fuller description of Xavier's final attempts to enter China, see Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, 122–7.

between Spain and Portugal.[8] These spheres of influence guided not only the political and economical disposition of the lands in question, but also the national, religious coloration of their Catholicism. Spain and Portugal were charged in these treaties with ensuring that missionaries be sent to their newly-acquired lands in order to spread the faith among the inhabitants. This arrangement often led to conflict between missionaries and the political and economic interests, particularly in China, which was divided between Portugal on the west and Spain on the east. As one example, a group of Franciscan missionaries (which included three Spaniards) was betrayed to the Chinese authorities in Guangzhou (Canton) by Portuguese merchants interested in protecting their economic interests, leading to the missionaries' arrest, imprisonment, and expulsion.[9]

Despite these failures, the Jesuits eventually succeeded in entering China under the guidance of Father Alessandro Valignani, an Italian Jesuit who was appointed "Visitor to the Indies" for the Order.[10] Valignani understood that learning the Chinese language would be vital to success in China, and brought in Michael Ruggieri (1579) and Matteo Ricci (1582) from the Jesuit mission in India to begin language studies in Macao and await their opportunity to enter the country.[11]

Ricci and Ruggieri made numerous attempts in 1582 to secure permission to remain in Canton and build a house and chapel, but were rebuffed every time.[12] Their opportunity

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[8] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 128. These treaties were claimed by the Portuguese to give then exclusive right of patronage in their territories, a policy known as the "Padroado."

[9] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 136.

[10] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 91.

[11] Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, 131; Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 141.

[12] See Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, 135–44.

eventually came in 1583 when they were given permission to set up residence in Chaoch'ing.[13] While in Chaoch'ing, Ricci and Ruggieri met and began catechizing a local man. When they were forced to leave the city they entrusted their altar to this new Christian until their return. On their return they discovered that he had been worshiping at the altar and had placed a sign above it with the name "T'ien Chu," "Lord of Heaven." Taking this as a sign, the Jesuits chose this title as their term for the true God in Chinese.[14]

Ricci made a concerted effort to present Christianity in an intellectual way that would sway the Mandarins. This led him to write his "catechism," "The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven ("T'ien Chu")," which was first published in 1603. He wrote the "catechism" in a question-and-answer format, using the scenario of a Christian speaking with a Chinese Mandarin to explain the Christian religion in terms that the Chinese would understand. He used conversations he had had with Mandarins as the basis for parts of the book. Although it was termed a "catechism," the purpose of this book was not to teach the Christian faith as much as it was to introduce Christianity into the intellectual climate of China and position Christianity as a fulfillment of the tenets of Confucianism.[15]

Due to his emphasis on Confucianism and presenting the Gospel to the Mandarins, Ricci also became familiar with the various rites that the practice of Confucianism required of them. This specifically involved the "funeral rites" — homage paid to the ancestors — and the rites to Confucius which were carried out regularly in the temples to his honor. In observing these rites and conversing with the Mandarins themselves, Ricci determined that these rites did not

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[13] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 92; Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, 144.

[14] Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, 148–9.

[15] Ricci, *The True Meaning of The Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shih-i)*, 14–22.

constitute ancestors worship or worship of Confucius. Instead, he considered them to be a form of civic ceremony:

> This practice of placing food upon the graves of the dead seems to be beyond any charge of sacrilege and perhaps also free from any taint of superstition, because they do not in any respect consider their ancestors to be gods, nor do they petition them for anything or hope for anything from them. However, for those who have accepted the teachings of Christianity, it would seem much better to replace this custom with alms for the poor and for the salvation of souls.[16]

> With the coming of each new moon and also at the time of the full moon, the magistrates congregate in this temple [to Confucius], together with those of the baccalaureate order, to do honor to their great master... This they do because by means of these doctrines they acquired their literary degrees, and the country acquired the excellent public civil authority invested in the magistracy. They do not recite prayers to Confucius nor do they ask favors of him or expect help from him. They honor him only in the manner mentioned of honoring their respected dead.[17]

Based on this understanding of the rites as civil ceremonies, the Jesuits, led by Ricci, permitted the Mandarins who joined their mission to continue observing these rites as part of their civic duty.

Following Ricci's death in 1610, a number of new missionaries and religious orders began work in China. These new groups struggled to come to terms with the "compromises" which Ricci had allowed: both the rites and the proper term for God.

Controversial Issues in the Mission

Early in their mission work, the Jesuits struggled to find an acceptable Chinese term to use for God in Chinese. Due to the Jesuits' belief in natural revelation, Ricci originally considered "Shang Ti," "Supreme Ruler," as a suitable translation for God because "in the person of *Shang-*

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[16] Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, 96. It is interesting to note that the Catholics distinguished between the veneration of the Christian dead (praying to the saints) and veneration of non-Christian dead (ancestor worship), with the first permitted and the second prohibited.

[17] Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583 – 1610*, 96–97.

ti or Lord on High, they believed they had found the traces of the early theism they were looking for."[18] Despite this potential connection, use of "Shang Ti" raised concerns of syncretism within the mission due to its previous usage as the name of the chief god in Taoism.[19]

Ricci also considered the Confucian term for the divine, "T'ien," "heaven." In the Confucian tradition, "T'ien" was regarded as referring not only to heaven itself, but to the one above heaven who set heaven in its place. Despite its common usage, "T'ien" was considered to be too impersonal to be used for God.[20]

As noted above, the problem was finally solved when Ricci and Ruggieri discovered their catechumen worshipping God on their Christian altar using the name "T'ien Chu." Unfortunately, this was also a term used for a Chinese idol, but one obscure enough that only one of his early converts recognized it as such. This was acceptable to Ricci and Ruggieri throughout their service in China, although Ricci also accepted and used both "Shang Ti" and "T'ien" at various times.[21]

The controversy in the mission was not confined solely to the term for God, though that was a significant part of it. The greater question for the Catholic missionaries, one which they connected to the Chinese Term Controversy and addressed simultaneously, involved how their converts should treat the Confucian rites. Both of these issues involved specific aspects of

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[18] Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shih-i)*, 34.

[19] Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shih-i)*, 34; for the commonly-asserted origin of Shang Ti as the deified ancient emperor whom the current emperor was to worship, see E. T. C. Werner, *Myths & Legends of China* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1922), 94. Robert Eno notes that "Di" ("Ti," which Eno argues was modified with the adjective "Shang") has an uncertain origin: "Modern scholars argue whether Di ["Shang Ti"] was conceived as a particular high ancestor, as a collective body of high ancestors, as a single force of nature, or as Nature itself" in Robert Eno, "Deities and Ancestors in Early Oracle Inscriptions," in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 44–45.

[20] Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shih-i)*, 34.

[21] Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shih-i)*, 34.

Chinese culture, and specifically the ways in which Confucianism could be accepted by the Catholic Church. "T'ien" and "Shang Ti" were both terms used by Confucius for the divine; the rites to Confucius and the ancestors are mandated in the Confucian works.

Although Ricci and the early Jesuit missionaries considered the rites to be purely civic in nature and not connected to idol worship, this assessment was questioned, not only by members of the other religious orders, but also by later Jesuit missionaries as well. Ricci's hand-picked successor as superior of the Jesuit mission, Niccolò Longobardo, rejected all such compromise in order to avoid confusion.[22] Likewise, after the Franciscans and Dominicans were able to begin mission work in China, some of their number denounced the Jesuits' compromises on these issues. One, the Dominican Juan Bautista de Morales, "considered [the rites] as superstitious" and developed a list of twelve questions against them.[23] He left the mission field in 1640 to personally deliver both his questions and his assessment of the rites' religious nature to Pope Innocent X, which he did in 1643. This ignited the so-called "Rites Controversy" in the Catholic China missions.[24]

Resolution of the Controversy

On his arrival in Rome, Morales' documents were delivered to the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* ("Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith"), a supervisory agency founded in Rome in 1622 to organize and coordinate the missionary efforts of the various religious orders operating throughout the world. Although the "*Propaganda*" did not send out its

[22] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 207.

[23] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 221.

[24] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 221–2.

own missionaries, it exercised substantial authority over the missionaries.[25] However, as this controversy would demonstrate, the authority of Rome itself, which had been called into question a century earlier during the Lutheran Reformation, was not as absolute as previously. Many missionaries would question the *Propaganda*'s authority with regard to this specific missionary question based on its lack of direct experience in China. Ecclesiastical supervisors within China were not accorded the same honor and respect by the missionaries that their predecessors in medieval Europe had received from their priests before ecclesiastical authority was called into question by the Reformation.

Spurred by Pope Innocent X, the *Propaganda* concurred with Morales' arguments and in 1645 issued instructions to all Catholic missionaries at work in China ordering the condemnation of the rites.[26] As soon as these instructions arrived, the Jesuit Martino Martini appealed the decision to a different congregation, the "Roman Inquisition" or "Holy Office," arguing that the rites were ceremonial and civic in nature and not religious. The Inquisition issued a decree approved by Pope Alexander VII in 1656 that reversed the previous decree from the *Propaganda*. The *Propaganda* then issued a modified set of regulations in 1659 which "emphasized the need for respecting local customs."[27] These contradictory statements from different Roman offices and popes created confusion among the missionaries, which was only furthered in 1669 when the Inquisition issued a decree that both previous decrees were still in effect. They "were to be observed 'according to the questions, circumstances, and everything set

[25] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 84; Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 222.

[26] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 222.

[27] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 222.

forth in them."[28]

Following these decrees, the missionaries working in China attempted to reach a compromise position (to which all but the Dominicans[29] agreed), but the compromise was ultimately reversed by Charles Maigrot de Crissey, the French Vicar Apostolic of Fujian Province, in 1693. He issued mandates banning the use of "T'ien" and "Shang Ti" among the missionaries under his jurisdiction and forbidding Chinese Christians from participating in the rites.[30] Maigrot forwarded his mandates to Pope Innocent XII, who ordered the Inquisition to reopen the matter in 1697.[31]

During this stage of the controversy, the Jesuits in Beijing appealed to the Chinese Emperor Kangxi, himself, to render an opinion as to the proper term to use for the true God, as well as whether or not the rites are considered to be worship. With regard to the name for God, the Emperor stated that "T'ien" refers "not to the visible heavens but to the Supreme Lord, the creator and preserver of heaven and earth and all that is contained in them."[32] With regard to the rites, the Emperor declared them to be "a purely civil and ethical ceremony, without religious content."[33] In their deliberations, however, the Inquisition ignored the Emperor's statements, deeming them an inappropriate interference of secular authority in a religious matter.

Pope Clement XI issued a decree drafted by the Inquisition in 1704, superseding the

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[28] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 138; interior quote A. Thomas, *Histoire de la mission de Pékin depuis les origins jus qu'a l'arrivée des Lazaristes* (Paris, 1923), 165.

[29] Interestingly, the first Chinese bishop in this mission, who was given the name "Gregory Lopez" when he joined the Dominican order, opposed the rest of his order and supported Ricci's position with regard to the rites. See Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 138.

[30] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 139.

[31] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 139; Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 253–4.

[32] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 140.

[33] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 254.

previous attempts and declaring that it resolved the controversy. This decree declared "T'ien Chu" to be the only permissible name for God in the mission — forbidding the use of "T'ien" or "Shang Ti" — and forbade Chinese Christians from participating in the rites to Confucius and ancestors. Only civil servants who were required to attend were permitted to be present for the rites to Confucius without actively participating.[34]

The Pope dispatched Charles Maillard de Tournon in 1703 as a papal legate to deliver the decree and ensure that it was enforced. In part due to his own mistakes, his efforts at implementing the decree (which he did not receive until 1706) were met with hostility from both the Portuguese authorities and the ecclesiastical leadership in the region. Maillard chose Maigrot as his counselor to help him understand Chinese literature and culture. This proved to be a poor choice. During an interview with the Emperor in 1706, Maigrot demonstrated himself to have a poor understanding of Confucius' works and the Chinese language. The Emperor explained to Maigrot that "T'ien" actually refers to the "Lord of Heaven," but Maigrot refused to accept this translation. In the end, Maigrot was exiled from China and returned to Europe.[35]

Following these interviews, the Emperor issued a decree in December 1706 requiring missionaries to accept "the method of Matteo Ricci" (permit the Confucian rites) and agree to remain in China for their entire lives. Simultaneously, Maillard made the 1704 decree from Rome public and ordered all of the missionaries to abide by its decision. In response, the Emperor ordered Maillard arrested and delivered to the Portuguese authorities in Macao, where

[34] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 140–1; Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 255.

[35] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 141–3; Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 255–62.

he ended his life under house arrest.[36]

Subsequently, the Pope issued decrees in 1710 and 1715 approving of Maillard's decisions and binding all missionaries in China to them. This included the prohibition on the Confucian rites. Another papal legate arrived in China in 1720 and attempted to soften some of the requirements (without changing any of the previous wording), but his "permissions" were condemned by Pope Benedict XIV in 1742.[37]

Following the controversy, the Catholic mission faced persecution from Kangxi's successor, Yongzheng, who strictly enforced his father's edicts against the Church, expanding them to repress Christianity throughout the empire. Some missionaries were allowed to remain at the imperial court as scientific advisors; others continued to operate in the rural provinces. For the most part the mission's work passed to native priests.

To this day, the Roman Catholic Church in China uses "T'ien Chu" as its name for God. Today, the term for Roman Catholicism in Chinese is "T'ien Chu Chiao," "Church of the Lord of Heaven."[38] It is considered to be a separate religion from Protestant Christianity because of its separate term for God.

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[36] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 262–4.

[37] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 264–5.

[38] David G. Kohl, *Lutherans on the Yangtze: A Hundred Year History of the Missouri Synod in China, 1913–2013* (Portland: One Spirit, 2013), 87.

CHAPTER FIVE

PROTESTANT MISSIONS IN CHINA

Because of the multitude of Protestant denominations and mission societies which operated in China between the inception of Protestant mission work in 1807 and the closing of China to foreign missionaries after the Communist revolution in 1949, this survey will focus on a broader view of conditions which affected mission work during these two centuries, primarily as they concern the Chinese Term Controversy. I will highlight a few important figures and organizations, but cannot by any means cover every person, organization, and event. Because the Lutheran mission societies operating in China before 1913 participated in the Missionary Conferences and thus were involved in the general Protestant resolution of the Chinese Term Controversy, they will be included in this chapter.

History of the Missions

There are many reasons why Protestants did not begin mission work in China until several centuries after the Catholic mission had been established. The initial contact between the Protestant territories and China was on the part of the British and Dutch, both of whom were primarily interested in China for economic and commercial reasons. For its part, the Chinese government held the European powers at arm's length and only tolerated their presence in Macao (which was controlled by Portugal) and Canton (during the annual "trading season"). Because of the Chinese government's disapproval of missionary activity, the British East India Trading

Company prohibited missionaries from sailing to China on any of its ships[1] in the interest of protecting its commerce. The Portuguese Catholic authorities at Macao were strongly opposed to any Protestant missionary activity in their city. In addition to these factors, the Chinese government also passed a law prohibiting native Chinese from teaching Mandarin to foreigners, which made it difficult for missionaries to learn the language.

Robert Morrison, who became the first Protestant missionary in China, offered his services to the London Missionary Society in 1804 with the intention of serving in China.[2] While waiting for a response from the Society, Morrison began studying the language with Sam-tuk, a Chinese man living in London.[3] In 1805 the London Missionary Society decided to accept Morrison's services and start preparation to open a mission in China. Due to the abovementioned circumstances, the Society decided to focus most of its efforts on Chinese expatriates living on the islands under European control in Southeast Asia.[4] After searching for another missionary to join Morrison, the Society eventually sent him alone in 1807 by way of New York.[5] He spent his first two years living in hiding, alternating between Canton and Macao while completing his language studies under the tutelage of two Chinese Catholics.[6] After a little over a year in the mission field, in 1809 Morrison was offered the position of "Chinese Secretary and Translator to the English Factory in China" by the East India Trading Company,[7] a position which secured his place in the country during the official trading season and allowed him opportunities to travel as

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[1] Ernest H. Hayes, *Robert Morrison: China's Pioneer* (Wallington: Carwal, 1946), 21–22.

[2] Hayes, *Robert Morrison: China's Pioneer*, 12.

[3] Hayes, *Robert Morrison: China's Pioneer*, 18–19.

[4] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 211.

[5] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 212. Due to the East India Company's prohibition on missionaries, all British missionaries assigned to stations in Asia sailed on American ships.

[6] On Morrison's living conditions, see Hayes, *Robert Morrison: China's Pioneer*, 36–41, 46–48.

[7] Hayes, *Robert Morrison: China's Pioneer*, 54–5; Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 212.

far as Beijing as part of trade delegations. Although his official duties occupied much of his time, Morrison still focused as much effort as possible on his missionary activities.

Morrison and his later associates did not see much in the way of numerical growth during this early period: Morrison did not baptize his first convert until 1814,[8] and in their first twenty-five years they only baptized a total of ten people. Rather than focus on preaching, the missionaries focused most of their effort on literary pursuits, primarily translating the Bible. The first Chinese New Testament, Marshman's, was completed in 1811, although it was crude and not widely circulated.[9] Morrison completed his translation of the whole Bible in 1819 with assistance from William Milne, who had been sent by the London Missionary Society in 1813. Because the Portuguese prohibited Milne from remaining in Macao, he toured the islands before settling in Malacca to open a mission there. He was later joined by a printer, Walter Henry Medhurst, who printed their tracts and books.[10] Morrison's Bible was widely distributed among the Chinese people living on the islands, as well as on the mainland.[11]

During this early period other mission societies sent workers to Southeast Asia, but only a handful succeeded in entering mainland China at this time.[12] The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions sent the first medical missionary to China, Peter Parker, in 1834.[13] The first Lutheran missionary to work in China, Karl F. Gützlaff, arrived in 1831 as an independent missionary (having originally been sent to Java by the Dutch Missionary Society in

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[8] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 212.

[9] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 211.

[10] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 213.

[11] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 212.

[12] For more information on other societies at work in China, see Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 216–22.

[13] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 218.

1823) and made tours along the coast, distributing literature wherever he stopped.[14] Gützlaff recruited scores of native Chinese workers to expand his literature distribution from Hong Kong throughout the country (albeit with questionable success[15]). More than his innovative use of native workers to distribute literature, Gützlaff's primary contribution to mission work in China came from his advocacy for Chinese missions in Europe. This led to the founding of new mission societies as well as the sending of missionaries by the Basel Missionary Society and Rhenish Missionary Society to assist Gützlaff's work in Hong Kong. Because of the inhospitable conditions on the mainland, most early missionaries confined their efforts to Canton, Macao, Hong Kong, and the islands.

All of this changed in the 1840s. The strained relations between China and the European powers, caused by the restrictions the Chinese government placed on trade, led to a war between Great Britain and China that lasted from 1839 to 1842. Following the British victory, Britain, America, and France negotiated treaties with China which opened the country up for trade. The provisions of the treaties included the opening of five "treaty ports" — Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo, and Shanghai — for permanent foreign residence, as well as additional protections for foreigners in China. Although most of the country was still ostensibly off limits to foreign missionaries, the five treaty ports greatly expanded the possibilities for missionary activity in China and offered bases for missionaries to expand into the surrounding regions.[16] Furthermore, the French envoy secured edicts permitting Chinese Christians, first Catholics in 1844 and then

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[14] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 253; Andrew Hsiao, *A Brief History of the Chinese Lutheran Church* (Hong Kong: Taosheng, 1999), 2–3.

[15] See Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 254. Evidently, Gützlaff's native "workers" were really deceiving him by spending their time in opium dens and selling his literature back to the printer, who would then sell it back to Gützlaff. Clearly, Gützlaff's management skills did not live up to his enthusiasm.

[16] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 228–9.

Protestants in 1846, to practice their religion without threat of persecution.[17] Consequently, with seven cities now available for missionary activity (the five treaty ports, Macao, and Hong Kong), many more Protestant missionaries and mission societies began to work in China during the following decade.

Ten years after the first round of treaties, dissatisfaction on the part of both the European powers and China regarding the outcome of the previous war created tension which sparked renewed hostilities when Chinese authorities assaulted a Hong Kong-registered ship.[18] Following this second war, in which Britain and France defeated China in 1856–1860, the western powers (Britain, France, Russia, and the United States) exacted new treaties from China. The treaties of 1858–1860 (followed within the decade by treaties with other European nations) opened eight additional ports to foreigners, allowed missionaries to travel into the interior of the country, allowed missions to purchase property and build churches, and ensured freedom of religion for Chinese Christians.[19] Both the Western governments and Chinese government were hesitant to enforce certain clauses in the treaties, particularly with regard to protecting the rights of missionaries, but the treaties still allowed major expansion of missionary activity in China, primarily by allowing missionaries to travel throughout the country and purchase property.

Many new mission societies were formed and sent missionaries in the second half of the nineteenth century after the treaties of 1858–1860 opened China up to further missionary work. The most influential of these was certainly the China Inland Mission. James Hudson Taylor, a former missionary of the Chinese Evangelization Society, founded the China Inland Mission in 1866 for the express purpose of expanding Protestant mission work in China into all the

[17] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 230.

[18] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 271–3.

[19] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 273–6.

provinces which did not already have Protestant missionaries living in them.[20] Taylor organized the society in a radically-different manner than other mission societies. Instead of a "home board" in England, the China Inland Mission was run by a director and advisory board of experienced missionaries, all of whom were at the time serving in China. Instead of founding distinct Christian communities, the China Inland Mission's stated purpose was simply to preach the Gospel to as many people as possible. Rather than operating under the aegis of a specific denomination, the China Inland Mission acted as an "undenominational" sending board, employing members of many different denominations. The China Inland Mission also avoided competition with denominational societies by opening their mission stations in cities without active Protestant missions and leaving when other mission societies arrived.[21] By the time of Taylor's death in 1905, the China Inland Mission had 828 missionaries living in the country and there were Protestant missionaries in all eighteen Chinese provinces as well as Mongolia and Manchuria.[22]

Scandinavian Lutheran missionaries began to operate in China in 1890, sent by the Swedish Evangelical Missionary Covenant of America, Swedish Missionary Union, and what became known as the American Lutheran Mission (a body of Norwegian Lutheran churches in America). These were followed by the Norwegian Lutheran China Mission Association (of Norway) in 1891. All four Scandinavian Lutheran groups chose to work in Hupeh.[23] By 1907, there were at least twenty different Lutheran missionary groups operating in China.[24] During the

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[20] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 382.

[21] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 385–6.

[22] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 384.

[23] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 400.

[24] Hsiao, *A Brief History of the Chinese Lutheran Church*, 2. For more information on Lutheran missionary activity in China during this period, see Hsiao, *A Brief History of the Chinese Lutheran Church*, 2–7.

1907 Centenary Missionary Conference, all the Lutheran groups then operating in China met to discuss a united effort at mission work in the country. This meeting led to four distinct results: the agreement to use "Xinyi" ("Faith Righteousness") as a translation for "Lutheran," the creation of the Union Lutheran Conference (which would meet in 1908), the founding of a joint theological seminary (the Lutheran Theological Seminary, "Xinyi Shenxueyuan," in Shekou was founded in 1913), and the eventual creation of the Lutheran Church of China in 1920.[25]

Controversial Terms among the Missionaries

As with the Jesuit missionaries before them, the Chinese Term Controversy among the Protestant missionaries also expanded to encompass more than the correct term for God. This time, the Chinese Term Controversy focused on three primary loci, all connected to linguistic questions regarding translation. In the first place, of course, the missionaries disagreed on the correct translation for God. The second area of disagreement, which would be treated together with the first in every compromise attempt, regarded the correct translation of Spirit. The third, and most explicitly doctrinally-driven of the three (though also quickest to be resolved), was how to translate baptism.

Both of the earliest translations of the Bible — Marshman and Morrison — used the term "Shen" for God and "Sheng Feng" for Holy Spirit. Marshman used "Chan" for baptism, which connotes immersion (leading to his translation's continuing usage among Baptist missionaries), while Morrison used "Hsi," a "more neutral" term[26] which means "wash."[27]

The rapid expansion in missionary effort following the opening of the treaty ports created

[25] Hsiao, *A Brief History of the Chinese Lutheran Church*, 9–12.

[26] Marshall Broomhall, *The Bible in China* (London: China Inland Mission, 1934), 59.

[27] Dr. Jeffrey Oschwald, Professor of Exegetical Theology and member of my Committee, provided this translation.

opportunities for cooperation between the various English, American, and Continental mission societies, though the only area in which there was concerted effort at cooperation was in the realm of translation. This joint venture began when several mission societies met in Hong Kong in 1843 to plan and carry out a united translation of the Bible into Chinese. The missionaries present agreed that they needed to use the same term for God and that all their best scholars had to be involved in the translation process.[28] This insistence on term agreement caused the effort at a united Bible translation to stall early on due to disagreements regarding three translation questions. In the first place, the Baptists insisted on a term for baptism that would specify "immersion" (Marshman's "Chan") which the other societies opposed, though in the end the societies agreed to create a single translation which would only differ in that term.[29] When the committee met in Shanghai in 1847, the biggest area of disagreement was over the terms to use for God and Holy Spirit. They were unable to settle on a compromise term, so they left God untranslated and allowed the societies to fill in whichever term they preferred for their own printings.[30]

Some Protestants chose to follow the Catholic example and use "T'ien Chu" for God, such as the American Episcopal Samuel Schereschewsky and the Anglican Burdon. When Burdon became Bishop of Hong Kong, he insisted on the use of "T'ien Chu," leading to an appeal by the Chinese Christians to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who did not reach a good resolution.[31] Other terms proposed include "Chen Shen"[32] ("True Spirit"[33]), "Shang Chu" ("Supreme Lord") and

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[28] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 261.

[29] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 261.

[30] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 262.

[31] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 433.

[32] Broomhall, *The Bible in China*, 84.

"T'ien Shen" ("God of Heaven").[34] A large number of missionaries, including Gützlaff (and Morrison, later in life[35]), preferred "Shang Ti" for the true God and "Shen" for false gods.[36] Although other terms were proposed and used by various Protestant missionaries, by general consensus they finally settled on either "Shen" or "Shang Ti" for the true God. The Americans (American Bible Society) generally preferred "Shen," while the British (British and Foreign Bible Society) generally preferred "Shang Ti."[37]

As we have already seen, many of the arguments in the controversy focused on the translation of "Shang Ti" and "Shen." Some argued that "Shang Ti" was a generic title; others argued that it was a name for an idol like Dagon or Thor, while "Shen" was the generic term for the divine. Others argued that "Shang Ti" conveyed the personal nature of God while "Shen" was too generic to convey anything about God.

In addition to forces within the missionary community, the Chinese Term Controversy was also affected by the political uprising called the T'ai P'ing Rebellion. This rebellion lasted from 1848 until it was finally crushed by imperial troops in 1864, and devastated several southern provinces, even threatening Shanghai before its suppression.

Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, founder and leader of the T'ai P'ing Rebellion, came into contact with a Christian pamphlet, "Good Words Exhorting the Age," which influenced his later spiritual

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[33] Marshall Broomhall, *The Chinese Empire: A General and Missionary Survey* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1907), 386. Broomhall's translation of "Shen" as "spirit" betrays a bias against "Shen" by itself as a translation of "God." Some "Shang Ti" advocates considered "Shen" to only be acceptable as a translation of "spirit" because it could be applied to the "spirit" of people, animals, etc. Based on the later translation of the term, an equally-appropriate translation of "Chen Shen" is "True God."

[34] Lillegard, *A History of the Term Question Controversy in our China Mission and the Chief Documents in the Case*, 36.

[35] Claudia von Collani, "The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 34:1 (2006): 144.

[36] Broomhall, *The Bible in China*, 66.

[37] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 433.

"awakening," and led his supporters to found a semi-Christian religious sect called "The Society of the Worshipers of *Shang Ti*."[38] Early on, some Christian missionaries considered the T'ai P'ing Rebellion to be a positive influence on the country and hoped it would become a Christian Empire which could use imperial might to spread the faith in China. However, the missionaries quickly realized that this was not to be so, as interviews with Hung and his supporters revealed that his belief system went far beyond Christianity, including a belief that he was the younger brother of Jesus and had himself received a special revelation directly from "Shang Ti." Nevertheless, due to the clear — albeit muddled and syncretistic — Christian influences (though it was never truly Christian by nature) on Hung's spiritual awakening, the Rebellion stirred up anti-Christian sentiment among Chinese officials.[39]

With regard to the translation of Holy Spirit, some of the "Shang Ti" advocates proposed the use of "shen" for spirit, though this translation was open to misinterpretation by the native speakers.[40] As noted above, both Marshman and Morrison used "Sheng Feng" for Holy Spirit in their initial translations, but many later translators preferred "Sheng Ling."[41]

Resolution of the Controversy

The initial response of the missionaries involved in the 1843 union Bible translation to the controversy was simply to ignore it. Thanks to the use of moveable type in the printing process, the typesetters could create multiple versions of the same work which only varied by a few

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[38] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 282–5.

[39] See Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 301; Vincent Y. C. Shih, *The Taiping Ideology: Its Sources, Interpretations, and Influences* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1967), 397.

[40] See C. A. Stanley, *The Word for God in Chinese* (Shanghai: Methodist, 1909), 21. When native Christians were asked to write an essay on the statement "Shang Ti is a Shen," all the responses read that phrase as "Shang Ti is a god." However, lack of articles in Chinese may also have contributed to the respondents' confusion and the ambiguity regarding the term.

[41] Broomhall, *The Bible in China*, 69.

characters. Because all of the terms involved in the controversy were only one or two Chinese characters long, the Bibles could be identical in every other respect in terms of printing. Consequently, the Baptists could print their own version of the translation using "Chan" ("immersion") for baptism while the other missionaries used "Hsi."[42] Similarly, in 1850 the controversy over the term for God could be referred to the individual Bible Societies to determine which term each would use, with the original type blocks leaving two spaces in each place so either "Shang Ti" (two characters) or "Shen" (one character) could be utilized.[43] At this time, the American Bible Society chose to use "Shen" for "God," while the British and Foreign Bible Society chose "Shang Ti." Both Bible societies, however, agreed to print however many copies were necessary with any term the missionaries requested.

Because of the Protestant reliance on individual scripture reading over tradition and over the authority of ecclesiastical leaders, compromises reached by one mission could not be expected to automatically be taken up by other missions. Writings by leading missionaries could carry some added weight in the missionaries' conversations, but every missionary relied on his own reading and his own study to answer the Chinese Term Controversy for himself.

With the massive explosion of Protestant mission work in China during the second half of the nineteenth century (following the 1860 treaties), there was a commensurate rise in attempts at inter-missionary cooperation in China. This led to the missionary conferences in Shanghai in 1877 and 1890. The first of these (attended by 142 missionaries) tabled discussion of the Term Question in order to focus on other issues — education, medical work, literature, rites for ancestors, opium, missionary methods, membership standards, and creating self-sufficient

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[42] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 261.

[43] Lillegard, *A History of the Term Question Controversy in our China Mission and the Chief Documents in the Case*, 36.

Chinese churches.[44] The conference in 1890 (attended by 445 missionaries) focused primarily on missionary methods. At this conference, "The harmony is said to have been marked, even on the term question."[45]

According to Latourette,[46] the Chinese Term Controversy "passed into the background" in the early 1900s as the majority of missionaries in the field agreed to the following compromise adopted at the 1904 Missionary Conference:

> That it is the opinion of this Conference that the time has come to unite in the use of — Sheng-Ling for Holy Spirit, — *Shang-Di to designate definitely the Supreme Being, while Shen is used as the generic term for God*, all missionaries to be left free to employ such terms as they see fit in preaching.[47]

"Shen" was used as the generic term for god (both the true God and false gods), while "Shang Ti" was reserved exclusively for the true God.[48] The controversy regarding the translation of Spirit, which was never as divisive as that regarding God, was settled in favor of "Ling." Variations of expressions and terms continued afterward, with a minority of missionaries refusing to use the compromise "Union Term Bibles" and preferring the "Shen Bibles" that were still being printed,[49] but younger missionaries were not interested in continuing the debate.[50]

By the centennial of the mission, the Protestant missionaries and believers had agreed on the interchangeable use of "Shen" and "Shang Ti," which became their distinguishing mark during the nationalization of the Church following the Communist uprising. This resulted in two nationally-sanctioned Christian churches in China: The Catholic Church, which uses "T'ien

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[44] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 413.

[45] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 414.

[46] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 648.

[47] Lillegard, *The Facts with Regard to "Shang-Di" and "Shen"* (Jamaica Plain, Mass.: [s.n.], 1930), 4.

[48] Lillegard, *The Chinese Term Question*, 37.

[49] Lillegard, *The Chinese Term Question*, 38.

[50] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 648.

Chu," and the Protestant Three-Self Church, which uses "Shen" and "Shang Ti." However, because they use different terms for God, the Chinese government and people consider them to be separate religions, an unfortunate consequence of the Chinese Term Controversy which persists to this day.

CHAPTER SIX

THE MISSOURI EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHINA MISSION

History of the Mission[1]

The key figure behind the Missouri Evangelical Lutheran China Mission, MELCM,[2] was Edward Louis Arndt. Arndt was born in 1867 in Germany, but moved to the United States at an early age. He studied for the ministry at Concordia College in Fort Wayne and Concordia

[1] Some of the information in this chapter can also be found in the author's published article "Missions in Missouri: The Story of Frederick Brand," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 87:1 (Spring 2014): 41–65 and 87:2 (Summer 2014): 9–20.

[2] Dr. Roy Arthur Suelflow, a former missionary to China who served in the Missouri Synod mission (1946–1949), wrote his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Wisconsin on the history of the Missouri Synod China mission. He focuses his study on the conditions within China that contributed to the "debacle of the Christian mission enterprise in China" which saw centuries of concerted effort seemingly-erased when the Communist government expelled all foreign missionaries in 1949–1952. These political and cultural conditions, including the demand of "extraterritoriality," the forced opening of the treaty ports, so-called "gunboat diplomacy," and the association of the missionaries with the foreign encroachments of Chinese independence all contributed to a deep seated mistrust of the missionaries by the Chinese.

After providing a brief background of previous Christian missionary efforts in China, specifically of the Jesuits and other Protestants, the majority of Suelflow's paper is devoted to the history of the Missouri Synod mission. He begins with the history of Arndt's founding and the Synod's decision to take over the mission, as well as the ensuing friction between the Board of Foreign Missions in St. Louis and the missionaries on the ground in China, particularly with regard to cooperation with other Lutheran missionaries and societies operating in China. In surveying the history of the mission, Suelflow emphasizes the political, financial, and sociological conditions within which the missionaries operated. Suelflow concludes that the reason the Missouri Synod mission failed was because its leadership was left behind by the tide of modernism at home and abroad and failed to make connections with any other mission bodies for mutual upbuilding and support.

Suelflow does address the Chinese Term Controversy (89–94), placing it within the context of the larger question of how Christianity and the Chinese culture can interact. In Suelflow's opinion, the Jesuit missionaries' elevated view of the Chinese culture, including a belief that the ancient Chinese worshiped the true God, led them to accept many elements of the culture without qualification; their later colleagues held a sharply different view of the Chinese culture. The controversy among the Lutherans, in Suelflow's estimation, did not go to the extremes of the Jesuits with regard to the view of Chinese culture, but instead focused heavily on the question of conversion and the role of God alone in converting people to faith. Consequently, many of the most conservative Lutheran missionaries rejected even the possibility that the Chinese could have had any conception of the true God based on natural knowledge. However, further discussion of the Chinese Term Controversy would only take place within the context of the broader political conditions of China during the 1920s, particularly the various civil wars and infighting among the warlords caused by the lack of strong central authority in Roy Arthur Suelflow, "The Mission Enterprise of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Mainland China 1913–1952" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1971).

Seminary in St. Louis, and was ordained to the ministry in 1885. He served a congregation in Saginaw, Michigan, until he was called to teach science at Concordia College in St. Paul, Minnesota,[3] a position he held until his suspension during the 1908–1909 school year,[4] which resulted in his eventual dismissal in 1911.[5]

While Arndt was coping with the loss of his teaching position, he came into contact with Rev. and Mrs. William Edwins, missionaries serving in China under the auspices of the Augustana Lutheran China Mission while they were on furlough in St. Paul.[6] This encounter ignited a passion in Arndt for mission work in China. Following the Synod's 1911 Convention he petitioned the Missouri Synod's Board of Foreign Missions to open a new mission in China with him as the first missionary. When the Board rejected his proposal, Arndt took the unconventional (for the confessional Lutheran synods in America at the time) step of raising support for an independent mission society by selling two collections of sermons, one each in German and English, and gathering additional pledges of financial support. With funding in place, Arndt began publishing a periodical he called the *Missionsbriefe* in 1912 to bring his message to the full Synodical Conference.[7] Thanks to these efforts, pledges of funding and

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[3] Richard Henry Meyer, "The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran Mission in China" (M.A. diss., Washington University, 1948), 1.

[4] Arndt evidently struggled to maintain discipline in the classroom, which was compounded because he did not teach a required class. Arndt, an overly-strict disciplinarian, tried to expel a couple of unruly boys for their disruptive behavior, but one or two were sons of prominent Synodical officers. Arndt was suspended in part because he insisted on pursuing disciplinary action against them, in spite their fathers' "request" that the matter be dropped. I have not found any sources to indicate who the boys or their fathers were.

[5] F. Dean, Lueking, *Mission in the Making: The Missionary Enterprise Among Missouri Synod Lutherans, 1846–1963* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 236; Albert Herbert Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches* (Marianna: [s.n.], 1981), 1.

[6] Lueking, *Mission in the Making: The Missionary Enterprise Among Missouri Synod Lutherans, 1846–1963*, 236.

[7] The Synodical Conference was a cooperative venture undertaken by confessional Lutheran synods in North America which engaged in shared missions, especially among ex-slaves in the American South.

support came in from members of all the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference.[8]

The result of Arndt's work was the drafting of a constitution and the organization of the "Evangeliche-Lutherische Missionsgesellschaft für Heidenmission in China" ("Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society for Foreign-Missions in China") on May 1, 1912, which called Arndt as its first missionary.[9] Arndt was commissioned on July 14, 1912, but waited the rest of the year for the society to find a second missionary to accompany him. The society extended calls to two other pastors, but neither accepted the call. Rather than wait until a second missionary could be found, Arndt and his family left for China alone, embarking on a steamer from Seattle on January 28, 1913.[10]

Arndt chose to open his first mission station in Hankow, which he reached on March 3, 1913. A second missionary, Ehrhardt Riedel, did not enter the mission field until 1916. The society itself continued to receive strong financial support from the mission society's members during these first four years of its existence.[11] Despite the society's stable financial situation, it still struggled to find another pastor who would accept its call into the mission field.

The question of why pastors were unwilling to accept calls from the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society for Foreign-Missions in China ties closely to the church polity which influenced the resolution of the Chinese Term Controversy within the mission. Richard Henry Meyer, a former Missouri Synod missionary in China, notes that "workers were not forthcoming [for the

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[8] Lueking, *Mission in the Making: The Missionary Enterprise Among Missouri Synod Lutherans, 1846–1963*, 237.

[9] Lueking, *Mission in the Making: The Missionary Enterprise Among Missouri Synod Lutherans, 1846–1963*, 233–4.

[10] Meyer, "The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran Mission in China," 2.

[11] Meyer, "The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran Mission in China," 4.

China mission] *as long as there was no official recognition.*"[12] According to him, pastors were not accepting the call because they did not know whether a call coming from a *missionsgesellschaft* ("mission society") rather than a *kirche* ("church") held authority. They believed that the call would only be valid if it came from the Synod's Board of Foreign Missions, rather than an independent group such as a mission society. This strong reliance on the hierarchy guided the actions of both the missionaries and the Synod members when the missionaries' terms for God were called into question.[13]

The lack of missionaries forced the society to turn over its assets and work to the Synodical Conference at its 1916 meeting. The Synodical Conference deferred on making a decision whether to accept this responsibility until its next meeting, and in the interim referred the matter to the individual synods and districts to seek their recommendations. Prior to the Missouri Synod's 1917 convention, the subcommittee of their Board of Foreign Missions discussed the matter on May 15 and requested that Ludwig Fuerbringer (a professor at Concordia Seminary and member of the Board of Foreign Missions) draft theses regarding the proposal. Fuerbringer presented these theses at the subsequent meeting on May 22:

1. Our committee holds on this matter, that in any case the formation of a new foreign mission should be undertaken not by a private society, but rather by a church body.

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[12] Meyer, "The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran Mission in China," 4, emphasis added.

[13] This question of authority in the China mission betrays a surprising dichotomy within Missouri Synod thought: Although the Synod practices congregationalist polity in America, this does not translate entirely to the mission field. The missionaries are placed in the field by the Synod (under the auspices of a synodical Board), and their movements (with regard to stations) are regulated by the Missionary Conference (which is a body consisting of the missionaries themselves voting on the direction for the mission subject to Board approval). Early in the mission's history there are no congregations in the traditional sense; Chinese believers are organized into "preaching stations" and have little voice in the actions of the mission. For this reason the Board of Foreign Missions takes a much larger role in the governance of the China mission than the Districts and Synod do in the governance of American congregations. See Suelflow, "The Mission Enterprise of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Mainland China 1913–1952," 70.

2. The foreign mission in China has indeed been called into life in another way, but it exists now and is offered by the society which manages it to the Synodical Conference to take it over. Our committee holds in this regard that a church body should take over this mission.

3. Should the body follow the conviction of our committee, the one to take over the foreign mission in China is not the Synodical Conference, but rather one of the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference because:

    a. The assembly of the Synodical Conference consists of relatively small meetings, while it is in the interest of a mission if their affairs can be deliberated and settled in a larger meeting.

    b. The delegates to the Synodical Conference change almost constantly while it is in the interest of a mission if their affairs are managed by a representative and larger number of standing members at the existing meeting.

    c. The experience with the black [ex-slave] mission shows that the management of a mission and the maintenance of the same essentially falls upon one of the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference.

    d. It does not appear advisable that within the Synodical Conference two foreign missions should be standing next to each other, of which the one is maintained and managed by the Synodical Conference and the other by one of their synods.

4. Both the General Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and other States, and the Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States were commended to consider taking over the foreign mission in China. Our committee is fully agreeable with it, if the Synod of Wisconsin, etc. takes over and manages the China mission.

5. Should the Synod of Wisconsin, etc. not be able to or willing to take over the foreign mission in China, then the committee approves of this, that the Synod of Missouri, etc. take it over. It holds for this that in that case two different Boards for Foreign Mission, the one for India and the other for China, should not be used. Instead there should only be one Board in composition by which both mission fields' accounts should be carried.[14]

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[14] "[Versammlung des Kommission für Heidenmission: 20. Juli, 1915 – 21ten April, 1919]," trans. Chris Vossler, 88–9, "Board for World Missions Supp X, Box 13A," Concordia Historical Institute:

1. Unsere Kommission haelt dafuer, dass die Gruendung einer neuen Heidenmission in jedem Falle nicht von einer Privatgesellschaft, sondern von einer kirchlichen Koerperschaft unternommen werden sollte.

2. Die Heidenmission in China ist zwar in anderer Weise ins Leben gerufen worden, aber sie besteht nun

Significantly, Fuerbringer does not offer a justification for the necessity of synodical oversight for foreign missions; he assumes it is essential. Instead of debating that matter, he devotes his effort to demonstrating that it is in the mission's best interests for a single synod to take over, rather than the Synodical Conference as a whole.

Along with Fuerbringer's theses and the Board of Foreign Mission's recommendations, the Synodical Conference resolution was referred to a committee at the Missouri Synod's 1917 convention. Using similar wording to Fuerbringer's theses, this committee proposed that the Missouri Synod take over the China mission. The Synod Convention adopted the proposal as follows:

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und wird von der Gesellschaft, die sie betreibt, der Synodalkonferenz zur Uebernahme angetragen. Unsere Kommission haelt dafuer, das seine kirchliche Koerperschaft diese Mission uebernehmen sollte.

3. Nach der Ueberzeugung unserer Kommission sollte die Koerperschaft, die die Heidenmission in China uebernimmt, nicht die Synodalkonferenz, sondern eine der die Synodalkonferenz bildenden Synoden sein. Denn
    a. Die Versammlung der Synodalkonferenz sind verhaeltnismaessig kleine Versammlungen, waehrend es im Interesse einer Mission ist, wenn ihre Angelegenheiten von einer groesseren Versammlung beraten und erledigt werden.
    b. Die Delegaten zur Synodalkonferenz wechseln fast bestaendig waehrend es im Interesse einer Mission ist, wenn ihre Angelegenheiten von einer repraesantativen und aus einer groesseren Anzahl stehender Glieder bestehenden Versammlung behandelt wird.
    c. Die Erfahrung mit der Negermission zeigt, dass die Leitung einer Mission und die Erhaltung derselben doch hauptsaechlich einer der die Synodalkonferenz bildenden Synoden zufaellt.
    d. Es erscheint nicht geraten, dass innerhalb der Synodalkonferenz zwei Heidenmissionen neben einander bestehen, von denen die eine von der Synodalkonferenz, die andere von einer ihrer Synoden erhalten und betrieben wird.
4. Die beiden fuer die Uebernahme der Heidenmission in China in Betracht kommenden Synoden sind die Allgemeine Synode von Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan u. a. Staaten, oder die Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. Staaten. Unsere Kommission ist vollstaendig damit einverstanden, wenn die Synode von Wisc. etc. die Chinamission uebernimmt und betreibt.
5. Sollte die Synode von Wisconsin etc. die Heidenmission in China nicht uebernehmen koennen oder wollen, so ist die Kommission dafuer, dass die Synode von Missouri etc. sie uebernimmt. Sie haelt dafuer, dass dann nicht zwei verschiedene Kommissionen fuer Heidenmission, die eine fuer Indien, die andere fuer China, eingesetzt werden sollten, sondern nur eine, bei deren Zusammensetzung aber beiden Missionsfeldern Rechnung getragen werden sollte.

> In referring to this matter we cannot refrain from pointing out that in our circles and in our circumstances it is not wise and does not serve the whole matter if a private society begins a new mission to the heathen, as is apparent in the mission referred to, which was activated in this manner.
>
> But since this mission now exists and in our opinion should be taken over by an ecclesiastical body…
>
> therefore we recommend… that the synod declare its willingness to take over the China mission if it is offered to us.[15]

Because the Synod considered the existence of a mission outside the authority of a church body to be unwise, the convention chose to take over the China mission if the mission society presented it to them. The mission society's committee made the offer on August 4, 1917,[16] and the Synod accepted on September 2, 1917.[17] This put an end to the controversy regarding authority over the China mission, although this question of authority would be crucial to the resolution of the later controversy.

After the mission was placed under the control of the Missouri Synod's Board of Foreign Missions,[18] it experienced immediate expansion as new missionaries entered the field and the number of mission stations increased beyond Hankow. The call which the Society had extended prior to its dissolution to Candidate Lawrence Meyer was "ratified" by the Board of Foreign

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[15] Missouri Synod, *Proceedings*, 1917, 83; in Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 307–8.

[16] Die Kommission der ev.-luth. Missionsgesellschaft fuer Heidenmission in China, New Ulm, Minn., to Friedrich Pfotenhauer, Chicago, 4 Aug. 1917, "(China) Board Correspondence – 1920," "Synodical Mission Boards, Foreign Mission Board, Suppl. III, Box No. 10."

[17] Friedrich Pfotenhauer, "Die Missourisynode übernimmt die Mission der Ev.-Luth. Missionsgesellschaft für Heidenmission in China," [s.n.], 2 September 1917.

[18] The Missouri Synod had multiple missions boards at this time, including (in 1917) separate boards for "Home Missions in North America," military chaplains, immigrant missions, deaf missions, "Foreign-tongue missions" in America, and missions among German immigrants outside North America, Jewish missions in New York City, and American Indian missions. The Board of Foreign Missions was specifically responsible for missions among non-German speakers outside the United States. At this time the only other field in which it operated was the southern part of India, which the Missouri Synod entered in 1879. Since this time the multitude of boards has undergone reorganizations which eventually condensed them down into two offices in 2010.

Missions and accepted by Meyer following the 1917 Synod Convention.[19]

With two missions (in China and India) to oversee, both of which were in need of visitation from the home board, the Synod Convention in 1920 chose to call a fulltime director for the Board of Foreign Missions and instructed him to visit the fields in India and China within the triennium. The Board called Friedrich Brand, former president of the Central Illinois District and a then-current Synod vice president, as its first fulltime director.

Brand toured the two missions in 1921–1922, and while in China led the missionaries to begin preparations for the opening of a seminary in Hankow to train native evangelists and pastors. At the Missionary Conference at the mission's retreat center in Kuling, it was also decided that instead of using the translation of Lutheran chosen by the other Lutheran missions ("Xinyi," "Faith Righteousness"), the Missouri Synod's mission would use "Fuyindao," "Gospel Doctrine," both to distinguish itself from the nascent Lutheran Church — China[20] and because the missionaries believed "Gospel Doctrine" was a better translation of "evangelical."[21] Like the Protestant missionary bodies, the Missouri Synod missionaries focused heavily on publications, including hymnals, newsletters, and translations of the Bible, Luther's works, and the Book of

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[19] *Proceedings of the Thirtieth Convention of the Ev. Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, Assembled as the Fifteenth Delegate Synod at Milwaukee, Wis., June 20 – 29, 1917* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1917), 42.

[20] The Lutheran Church—China was formed by the other Lutheran mission societies operating in China, including several located in Hankow and Shekow which had given Arndt assistance during the early days of his mission in Suelflow, "The Mission Enterprise of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Mainland China 1913–1952," 78.

[21] Hsiao, *A Brief History of the Chinese Lutheran Church*, 101. Arndt himself had originally used the phrase "Xinyi Hui" ("Faith-Righteousness Church") as his Chinese name for the mission as a way to foster the connection between his mission and that of the other Lutheran mission societies operating in China in Suelflow, "The Mission Enterprise of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Mainland China 1913–1952," 81. The decision to stand apart from the other Lutheran mission societies by using a different translation for "Lutheran" is particularly significant given the later assertion by the Concordia Seminary faculty that because both terms are acceptable, the missionaries should conform to the prevailing Protestant compromise with regard to the term for "God."

Concord.[22] Furthermore, like the Protestant missionary bodies, this focus on publication and translation would offer prime ground for exacerbating the Chinese Term Controversy.

During its post-war expansion, the Missouri Synod mission also welcomed support from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod for its China mission, by calling George Lillegard as a missionary. Lillegard had previously served in China as a missionary of the Norwegian Synod from 1912 until 1915. Although he had desired to return to China following his brief furlough, the controversy in the Norwegian Synod over its merger into the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America prevented it. Following the merger, Lillegard left that synod to join the "minority" which formed the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (today known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS)).[23] Because the ELS was not in a position to send its own missionary to China, the ELS and Missouri Synod agreed to partner in the mission. This resulted in ELS mission support going to the Missouri Synod's China mission, Lillegard's call being extended by the Missouri Synod's Board of Foreign Missions, and an ELS representative being added to the board.[24]

The history of the mission shows how all of the pieces, both personnel and structural, were put in place for the Chinese Term Controversy. The two key figures, Arndt and Lillegard, came into the mission from completely different backgrounds and were both more experienced than their fellow missionaries. Because the mission society had dissolved and offered its resources to the Missouri Synod, the mission became subject to the Synod's structural hierarchy, including both its expanded Board of Foreign Missions and triennial Synod Conventions. Both of these

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[22] Frederick Brand, *Foreign Missions of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1929), 13.

[23] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 55; *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (1954), s.v. "Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church."

[24] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 55.

supervisory bodies played important roles in the Chinese Term Controversy.

Terms for God Used by the Mission

Arndt initially chose to use "Shang Ti" and "Shen" to translate God, following the example of the Lutheran missionaries in Hankow who assisted him early in his missionary career.[25] Arndt's usage of the standard Protestant terminology set the precedent for future Missouri Synod missionaries, all of whom (with the exception of Lillegard) entered the mission field after Arndt had already been in China for several years. Due to Arndt's status as senior missionary and the other missionaries' lack of experience both in China and with the language, there was little interest in questioning Arndt's terminology for the first decade of the mission's existence.[26] This practice finally came into question among the missionaries in 1924 at the Kuling General Conference, held annually at the Missouri Synod mission's Kuling Retreat Center. This was one of many built by mission societies to offer their workers an escape from the inhospitable (to foreigners) climate of China. Arndt was asked to write a paper defending the usage of "Shang Ti," but he instead sent a paper about the Chinese word for "hell."[27] Despite Arndt's absence from the conference, Lillegard insisted on moving forward with the debate, resulting in an overwhelming decision (eleven in favor; two opposed) to use "Shen" exclusively. Arndt, one of the minority missionaries, refused to abide by this decision, igniting the controversy in the

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[25] As we have seen before, and as understood by the LCMS missionaries and leadership, "Shang Ti" literally means "Supreme Ruler," and is the traditional name for the chief deity of the Chinese ceremonial religion. "Shen" literally translates as "god" or "spirit," and can be used of anything worshipped as a god. In the missionaries' understanding, Ricci chose to use "Shang Ti" to refer to God "because he believed that 'the ancient Chinese had known the True God and had worshiped Him under that name'" in "Report of the Chinese Term-Question Committee," in *Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at Cleveland, Ohio, as the Twenty-First Delegate Synod, June 19–28, 1935* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1935), 168–9.

[26] "Report of the Chinese Term-Question Committee," 169.

[27] Meyer, "The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran Mission in China," 11.

Missouri Synod mission.[28]

Progress toward Resolution of the Controversy

Because the missionaries in the field met annually to discuss matters of concern to the mission as a whole, the first attempt at resolving the controversy occurred one year later, in 1925 at the following China General Conference. The Conference this year devoted the majority of its time to the Chinese Term Controversy. Prior to the meeting, a missionary from each side was asked to submit a paper explaining his understanding of the controversy. However, the only conclusion they could reach in the discussion was a motion to request that a representative from the Board of Foreign Missions visit the mission and guide them through the dispute.[29]

In June, 1926, the Synod agreed to the request and dispatched Director Brand to mediate the dispute. He came with a set of theses written by the Concordia Seminary faculty in hand regarding the controversy.[30] He met with the missionaries at the 1926 General Conference, which he chaired. During the last week of the conference, Brand presented the faculty's theses and led the missionaries in a discussion of them. Accounts of the discussion differ — either Brand guided the discussion positively to avoid the previous year's arguments,[31] or he used the faculty theses as a bludgeon to force the missionaries into line.[32] The theses concluded that "both terms

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[28] "Report of the Chinese Term-Question Committee," 170. The Committee pins the blame for the Controversy on the minority missionaries (which would include Arndt, although he was not present at the 1924 Missionary Conference).

[29] Meyer, "The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran Mission in China," 11–12.

[30] Meyer, "The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran Mission in China," 13; Frederick Brand, *Foreign Missions in China: Five Lectures* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1927), 3.

[31] Meyer, "The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran Mission in China," 13.

[32] Kohl, *Lutherans on the Yangtze: A Hundred Year History Of the Missouri Synod In China*, 91. Kohl's exact phrase is: "He was not neutral... Brand presented the St. Louis seminary's opinion that the use of Shang-ti should not be prohibited, allowing the use of either term."

could be used without offense."[33] This conclusion was not satisfactory to the missionaries, who felt that they should all use a single term. At the end of the conference it was decided to send a pair of missionaries back to America to consult with the seminary faculty.[34]

On October 8 the missionary conference reconvened to hear the faculty's recommendation, reinforcing their previous theses and stating that both terms were acceptable — noting that the dissenting missionary had concurred with their decision. Based on this recommendation, the missionaries chose to use "Shang Ti." Seeing that the missionaries had come to a decision, Brand returned to America.[35] Unfortunately, the decision that the missionaries reached in 1926 did not settle the dispute.

Lillegard's family was scheduled to return home on furlough during the summer of 1927, but was forced by political disturbances to evacuate that January. Because the Chinese Term Controversy still had not been resolved to his satisfaction, Lillegard chose not to return to the mission field and instead accepted a call from an ELS congregation in Boston.[36] Even after his decision to leave the mission, however, Lillegard continued to write articles and pamphlets regarding the controversy, which were circulated throughout the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference.

On July 26, 1928, under pressure from Lillegard's publications, the Board of Foreign Missions issued yet another decision in the case. Once again, the Board stated that the

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[33] Meyer, "The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran Mission in China," 13.

[34] Meyer, "The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran Mission in China," 13.

[35] Suelflow suggests that the missionaries may have cut this October meeting short due to the uncertain political condition in the region: Wuhan was under attack by the southern army during the conference; Wuchang fell on October 10; Hankow was under southern occupation during the days that the conference met there. For more, see Suelflow, "The Mission Enterprise of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Mainland China 1913–1952," 154–5, 199n169.

[36] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 56.

missionaries should use both "Shang Ti" and "Shen" according to the prevailing Protestant usage. Any missionaries who disagreed with this policy were encouraged to return to America. Around this time, eight missionaries chose to leave the field, either in response to the Board's policy or in disgust over the belligerent attitude which the controversy had created among the missionaries.[37] Because this did not settle the controversy, the 1929 and 1932 Synodical Conventions both entertained overtures requesting a decision by the convention regarding the Chinese Term Controversy because members of the Synod were concerned that their foreign missionaries were using the name of a native false god to refer to the true God. In 1929, the convention endorsed the Board's decision from 1928; in 1932, the convention realized that more serious measures were required and assigned a committee to study the controversy and report back to the 1935 Convention.[38]

Before continuing with the resolution of the Chinese Term Controversy, one key philosophical element needs to be noted. Many of those involved in the controversy — not just with the Missouri Synod but throughout the controversy's history — betray a strong Platonist approach to language, whether they realized it or not. Rather than being flexible and adapting depending on usage, many of the writers arguing the Chinese Term Controversy approached the terms in question as though they have fixed and certain meanings that cannot be changed. These, when considered in realist/nominalist terms, follow the realist understanding of words as having fixed definitions. Similar to Plato's position that there is a "true triangle" which the term "triangle" describes and there is a "perfect round" which the term "circle" accesses, these writers have the same understanding of the term God. "God" is perfect and unmoving, and their task in

[37] "Report of the Chinese Term-Question Committee," 170.

[38] "Report of the Chinese Term-Question Committee," 170–1.

translation is to discover the term in the Chinese language which most closely reaches to the perfect conception of the divine or which already conveys that exact meaning and employ it for "God." This is most evident in the arguments put forward by the "Shen" advocates against the use of "Shang Ti": because the idol "Shang Ti" is distinct from the true God, the term which accesses the concept "Shang Ti" cannot be adapted to refer to the true God. For their part, many "Shang Ti" advocates believed that "Shen" more closely accessed the concept of "spirit" than that of "divine." As such, they viewed it as fitting to reference idols, but not elevated enough to apply to the true God.

This understanding of language also colors the way in which the 1932 Chinese Term Question Committee treats the controversy. Instead of asking how the terms can be applied today and how modern usage had influenced the meaning of the terms, the committee members focused on how the terms had been used historically and whether a term which had been used of a false god could ever be used of the true God.

As noted above, the 1932 Missouri Synod Convention assigned a committee to study the issue and report back to the 1935 convention with its findings. This committee of five consisted of three college professors and two pastors: Professors W. Kruse (a faculty member of Concordia Teachers' College, Seward,[39] and member of the General Relief Board),[40] E. Koehler (a faculty member at Concordia Teachers' College, River Forest),[41] and W. Moenkemoeller (a faculty

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[39] *Proceedings of the Thirty-Fourth Regular Convention of the Ev. Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at River Forest, Illinois June 19–28, 1929* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1929), 43.

[40] *Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at Cleveland, Ohio, as the Twenty-First Delegate Synod, June 19–28, 1935*, 311.

[41] *Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Regular Meeting of the Ev. Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, Assembled at Fort Wayne, Indiana, June 20–29, 1923* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1923), 93.

member at Concordia College, St. Paul),[42] and Revs. William Moll (a member of the Concordia College, Fort Wayne, Board of Control)[43] and Leo Schmidtke (a member of the Board of Missions in South America).[44] Despite their academic credentials and tenure of service on synodical boards, however, none of the committee members had ever served as missionaries in China,[45] and they likely knew nothing about the Chinese language beyond the literature the missionaries had produced regarding the Chinese Term Controversy. Additionally, two members (Moenkemoeller and Schmidtke) died during the triennium, and a third (Moll) was prevented by illness from participating.[46]

The remaining two members (Kruse and Koehler) studied the history of the question, along with the different objections raised against the use of "Shang Ti." In their report, they catalogued five different objections: First, that "Shang Ti" was still an idol (even if it is their highest idol/highest conception of deity); second, that there was a difference linguistically between using "Shang Ti" (which they translate as "Ruler on High") as a title *for* God and using it *as* "God;" third, that "Shen" was the actual word for "god" or "God" in Chinese, while "Shang-Ti" is a specific god; fourth, that there were many disadvantages to using "Shang Ti," while there were not any advantages; fifth, that there were almost as many advantages to the exclusive use of "Shen" as disadvantages to the use of "Shang Ti."[47] Given these objections, the committee

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[42] *Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at Cleveland, Ohio, as the Twenty-First Delegate Synod, June 19–28, 1935*, 60.

[43] *Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at Cleveland, Ohio, as the Twenty-First Delegate Synod, June 19–28, 1935*, 22.

[44] *Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at Cleveland, Ohio, as the Twenty-First Delegate Synod, June 19–28, 1935*, 148.

[45] See Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*.

[46] "Report of the Chinese Term-Question Committee," 171.

[47] "Report of the Chinese Term-Question Committee," 172–6.

recommended that the missionaries discourage the use of "Shang Ti" and gradually implement a change to the exclusive use of "Shen." Rather than approve the recommendations of the floor committee report, the Synod Convention deviated from them by offering its own recommendations:

1. That Synod express its appreciation to the Committee on the Chinese Term Question for having done intensive work during the past three years;
2. That Synod acknowledge with joy that there is no actual theological difference between the two parties, since they agree that an idol name with its idol connotations may not be used of the true God, Scripture forbidding such usage;
3. That Synod thank God that all personal grievances and alleged or real insults have been removed by proper explanation or apologies;
4. *That Synod determine that the linguistic issues involved, with reference to the Chinese term for God, be referred to our missionaries in China for eventual adjustment on the basis of the accepted linguistic usage, without any foreign interference*;
5. That all parties interested in this Term Question be asked to withhold judgment in this matter until the Missionaries' Conference in China has found a satisfactory solution.[48]

Having determined that the Chinese Term Controversy was a linguistic exercise and not a matter of theological disagreement, the floor committee recommendations — which the Convention adopted — gave the responsibility to make a final determination to the missionaries, who were in a better position to understand and act on the "linguistic issues involved." When the missionaries received this recommendation from the Convention, they gratefully acknowledged the committee's trust in them to finally decide the controversy. The missionaries discussed the convention resolution at the 1936 General Conference and adopted the following resolution, which was reported to the 1938 Convention:

[48] "Report of the Chinese Term-Question Committee," 176, emphasis added.

> We herewith respectfully inform Synod that both terms Shen and Shangti are used properly in our mission, in accordance with generally accepted usage, and that we abide by the general use of the term Shangti and busy ourselves with the one thing needful for the salvation of souls.[49]

Although this marked the conclusion of the Chinese Term Controversy in the mission field, it would continue to plague the home efforts of both the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference for the next decade.

In 1936, the Synodical Conference Convention received a memorial requesting that it render a decision on the Chinese Term Controversy. Instead, the Synodical Conference appointed a committee to review the material presented and report back to its 1938 convention. This report was presented to a floor committee which recommended the following:

> Your Committee unanimously recommends to the Synodical Conference to render no judgment concerning the proper designation for God in the Chinese language but to refer the matter back to the Missouri Synod with the expectation that its mission-work in China will be conducted in accordance with the principles laid down in Points III and IV above... III. In translating from the Hebrew and the Greek into another language, the choice of terms to render *Elohim* and *Theos* is *per se* an adiaphoron. As in the case of all adiaphora (cf. Formula Concordiae, Art. X), Scripture here, too, sets certain bounds within which our freedom may be exercised. Our choice of terms must not smirch the glory and honor of God nor becloud the truth of God nor give offense (in the sense of giving occasion for stumbling) to the weak (1 Cor. 10:31 f. and Rom. 14:13–23). IV. Our one and only mission to the Chinese, to the Christians as well as to the heathen among them, is to teach them whatsoever Christ commanded us (Matt. 28:20; 2 Cor. 5:19 f.). We must speak the truth in Christ (1 Tim. 2:7 and 2 Cor. 4:2), and our trumpet must not give forth an uncertain sound that may be misunderstood (1 Cor. 14:8f.).[50]

From a memorial addressed to the Synod Convention in 1941 (to which the Synodical Conference decision was announced), it is clear that the committee's deadlock resulted in this

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[49] *Proceedings of the Thirty-Seventh Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at St. Louis, Mo. as the Twenty-Second Delegate Synod, June 15–24, 1938* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1938), 183.

[50] *Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at Fort Wayne, Ind. As the Twenty-Third Delegate Synod June 18 – 27, 1941* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941), 306.

ambiguous resolution: four members of the Synodical Conference committee rejected the use of "Shang Ti," while three accepted it. Due to the committee's internal division, the Synodical Conference was unable to make a stronger statement regarding the use of "Shang Ti."

Two memorials to the 1938 Synod Convention alleged misconduct on the part of the Board of Foreign Missions with regard to the Chinese Term Controversy and accused the 1929 Synod Convention's committee of "commit[ting] our missionaries in China to a practice of religious syncretism, mixing Christianity and paganism."[51] Of the two memorials, the one accusing the Board of Foreign Missions was referred to the Synod President; the one about the 1929 Convention was rejected because the matter was in the process of being discussed by a Synodical Conference committee.

The 1941 Convention which received the report of the Synodical Conference convention's non-action on the Chinese Term Controversy also received two memorials on the subject. The Floor Committee on Intersynodical and Doctrinal Matters received a memorial requesting that the use of "Shang Ti" be discontinued based on the majority opinion of the Synodical Conference Committee. The committee responded that they did not believe any new evidence to have been presented with regard to the controversy and recommended "That for the welfare of the China Missions and the peace of the mother church this controversy be considered a closed issue." Following the committee's recommendation, the issue was tabled until 1944. Another memorial regarding the Chinese Term Controversy (addressed to the Floor Committee on Lodges) was referred to the Board of Foreign Missions.[52]

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[51] *Proceedings of the Thirty-Seventh Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at St. Louis, Mo. as the Twenty-Second Delegate Synod, June 15–24, 1938*, 238–9.

[52] *Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at Fort Wayne, Ind. As the Twenty-Third Delegate Synod June 18 – 27, 1941*, 307–8.

The 1944 Synod Convention took up the Chinese Term Controversy again based on yet another memorial arguing that "What Hos. 2:16, 17 has been said for the Messianic time about Baal as a Jewish idol applies likewise to any heathen idol in any Christian mission field and therefore also to the heathen idol Shangdi on our China mission field,"[53] and called upon the constituents of the Synodical Conference to petition the Missouri Synod to stop using "Shang Ti." The floor committee responded to this memorial with almost the same resolution tabled in 1941 (with the addition of two "Whereas" statements and other minor changes). Instead of adopting this resolution, however, the Convention resolved "to refer this matter for further study to a committee to be appointed" which would then report to the 1947 Convention.[54]

The Chinese Term Question Committee appointed by the 1944 Convention studied the question again, met with interested parties, and concluded that "the long-discussed Chinese Term Question can be brought to a definite and proper settlement among us,"[55] contingent on the following resolutions:

1. That the proper name of a specific idol in its original pagan sense may not be used in translation of the words *Elohim* and *Theos*;
2. That by their natural knowledge of God the heathen know that there is a God, but do not know who the true God is, so as to be able to identify Him;
3. That the linguistic question regarding the specific meaning and use of disputed terms, principally *Shen* and *Shangti*, be left for further study and eventual determination to the missionary conference in the China field; and

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[53] *Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at Saginaw, Michigan as the Twenty-Fourth Delegate Synod June 21 – 29, 1944* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1944), 254.

[54] *Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at Saginaw, Michigan as the Twenty-Fourth Delegate Synod June 21 – 29, 1944*, 255.

[55] *Proceedings of the Fortieth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at Chicago, Illinois as the Twenty-Fifth Delegate Synod and as the First Centennial Synod July 20 – 29, 1947* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1947), 668–9.

4. That for the welfare of our China missions and the peace of the mother Church the Chinese Term Question be now considered a closed issue as far as the meetings of Synod are concerned.[56]

This resolution is the last reference to the Chinese Term Controversy in Missouri Synod Convention Proceedings, bringing the controversy to a close as far as the institution of Synod was concerned.

The conclusion of the Controversy would be bittersweet, as the Communist government would permit the missionaries to remain in mainland China for less than six years after the 1947 Convention put the Chinese Term Controversy to bed. The Board of Foreign Missions' report to the 1953 Synod Convention notes that the three missionaries who had remained in the country at the time of the 1950 Convention had been forced to leave since then, although the mission's work continued at several stations under the guidance of native workers and members.[57] After less than forty years of work in China, the Missouri Synod mission — along with every other foreign mission then operating in China — was permanently closed down.

The mission's use of both "Shang Ti" and "Shen" placed them squarely in the same camp as the rest of the Protestant missions. Due to their shared term, the Missouri Synod mission was absorbed into the Three Self Church following the Communist revolution when all the other missions were dissolved and nationalized.

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[56] *Proceedings of the Fortieth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at Chicago, Illinois as the Twenty-Fifth Delegate Synod and as the First Centennial Synod July 20 – 29, 1947*, 668-9.

[57] *Proceedings of the Forty-Second Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Assembled at Houston, Texas as the Twenty-Seventh Delegate Synod June 17 – 26, 1953* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), 447.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ROLE OF CHURCH POLITY IN THE CONTROVERSY

In surveying the various iterations of the Chinese Term Controversy, it becomes apparent that the structural systems ("polities") under which the missions operated each in their own way hindered efforts at resolving the controversy by drawing it out and prevented potential resolutions.

The Roman Catholic Mission

Although the Catholic Church follows a strict hierarchical structure, one which was specifically intended to resolve controversies in the most efficient manner possible, this structure only bred confusion during the Chinese Term Controversy. Because the Term/Rites Controversy in the Catholic missions lasted a century, 1643–1742, there were thirteen different popes in office. At least six different religious orders were operating in China before and during the controversy, each of which had its own on-site supervisor and European hierarchy. In addition to the bishops approved and sent by the Portuguese kings to the handful of established dioceses in China, the popes sent dozens of "Vicars Apostolic" (titular bishops of extinct dioceses serving as "bishops" in the mission field who acted on the Pope's authority instead of their own). These supervised clergy in specific regions of the country (even if Portuguese priests refused to acknowledge the Vicars Apostolic on occasion). Although the Portuguese-appointed bishops were under the authority of the Archbishop of Goa, who supervised all Catholic bishops in the Portuguese area of Southeast Asia, Vicars Apostolic did not report to him; they reported directly to the Pope. Consequently, between their order and the ecclesiastical hierarchy the missionaries

reported to as many as six different supervisors.

Because of this multitude of religious orders forming their own overlapping missions, the leadership in Rome had created the "Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith" (*Propaganda*) to oversee and coordinate missionaries from different religious orders around the world. The *Propaganda* would both coordinate the sending of missionaries and issue directives for all the orders to follow in matters which affected all of the missions. Although the *Propaganda*'s directives were considered in theory to be binding, in practice they were not adhered to as faithfully in China, particularly with regard to the Term/Rites Controversy. In addition, the missionaries appealed to the Roman Inquisition to offer rulings on the directives given by the *Propaganda*, which led to new directives from the *Propaganda* to comply with the Inquisition's rulings.

Over the course of the controversy, these overlapping supervisors and congregations issued and imposed numerous decrees on the missionaries, all of which differed in wording and force based on their source. Popes issued contradictory encyclical letters. Within the first few rounds of rulings and appeals, both sides in the controversy had received equally-legitimate support for their positions. When the missionaries requested clarification from the Inquisition regarding the contradictory directives from the *Propaganda*, the Inquisition responded that *all* the rulings must be enforced, despite their contradictions!

Attempts by the Catholic missionaries to resolve the controversy in the field were hindered by their rigid hierarchical structure. For example, when the missionaries in 1693 attempted to resolve the matter for themselves, the Vicar Apostolic of Fujian Province, Bishop Maigrot, reversed the compromise within his jurisdiction.

Because there were multiple religious orders operating in China at the time, each of which

worked in its own region and followed its own hierarchy, both in China and in Europe, decisions reached by a single order — or even by multiple orders — could not be applied to the other orders. Likewise, when the missionaries in the field came to a compromise, it could not be accepted until the European leaders of the orders had accepted it. Even more than Bishop Maigrot's rejection, this might have been what sabotaged the 1693 compromise. Although the Jesuits and Franciscans agreed to this compromise, the Dominicans refused.

The strong, centralized leadership of the Roman Catholic Church, in which all doctrinal matters were settled by the Pope, did facilitate a decisive resolution to the controversy. At the same time, this same centralized structure also allowed the controversy to continue, even after the hierarchy had offered its "decisive resolution." The myriad of conflicting congregations and hierarchies caused little more than confusion in the early years of the controversy when it could have been resolved most efficiently. The ability of the missionaries to appeal decisions by one supervisor or congregation to a different supervisor or congregation also resulted in confusion as conflicting rulings were written and enforced. Although the controversy was finally settled by a binding decree from the supreme head of the church, the Papal Bull "*Ex Quo Singulari*" of 1742, the hierarchy itself had already fueled and lengthened the controversy.

The Protestant Missions

The Protestant missionary groups active in China in the nineteenth century were sent by a multitude of mission societies based in countries around Europe and North America. They adhered to many different confessions, including Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Lutheran,[1] to name a few. These mission societies had varying levels of interaction and communication with

[1] The Lutheran mission societies active in China before 1913 all participated in the Missionary Conferences, and thus their resolution of the Chinese Term Controversy followed that of the general Protestant mission societies.

each other based on confession of faith, country of origin, and region of activity. Consequently, as a group they were not governed by the same rigid structure as the Catholic religious orders. This was both a blessing and a curse in resolving this controversy. Because they did not report to a single central authority, there was no lengthy process of appeals which would offer both sides equally-valid, authoritative statements. At the same time, because there was no central authority, the missionaries could not defer to a single group or person to make the decision for them.

Each mission society had its own structure and its own method for dealing with the controversy. In some cases missionaries and other interested parties published articles, tracts, and books for distribution in the home country among the mission society's constituents. The objective of these writings was to encourage the constituents to pressure the societies' governing boards into issuing policies for the missionaries to follow. Despite this intent, it appears not to have happened in the majority of cases; instead, the missionaries in the field eventually resolved the controversy for themselves.

As noted previously, the first and most important area of collaboration between the various mission societies was in the realm of translation — which is also where the Chinese Term Controversy came to the fore. Although Morrison's translation of the Bible was primarily his own work (with some assistance from other missionaries sent by his own society), his translation was hampered by his lack of experience with Chinese and required updating once Protestant mission work expanded. As the missionaries were given access to greater portions of the country in the 1830s–1840s, the number of missionaries with strong language skills increased, but no single mission society possessed enough capable translators to by itself complete a good Bible translation. Because of the importance of the project and the missionaries' agreement that it was important to distribute the same Bible text in China, all the missionaries agreed in 1842 to

collaborate on a single translation.

During this translation process, the Bible societies (American and London) offered the most concrete "unifying force" in resolving the controversy due to their role in publishing the finished translation, but they also allowed the compromise which prolonged the controversy. Because their typesetting process allowed them to produce multiple printing blocks of the same text and alter single characters, they could produce multiple versions, each of which used a different term for God. By agreeing to this "compromise," the Bible societies allowed the work to continue and allowed the Bible to be translated and printed. At the same time, this also prevented a speedy resolution to the controversy by allowing multiple terms to remain in use, even after the Union Bible's completion and publication. Consequently, the missionaries' different positions with regard to the proper terms became entrenched through longtime use.

As the number of missionaries in China continued to increase, they began organizing conferences to share experiences and offer guidelines for the prosecution of the mission. These missionary conferences provided an avenue for resolving the controversy in a manner that could affect all the missionaries operating in China, but they rarely attempted to do so. Instead, the vast majority of these conferences studiously avoided the controversy beyond a handful of resolutions and discussion sessions. This allowed the conferences to focus on other matters instead of becoming bogged down in the Chinese Term Controversy (which would inevitably have happened). However, this also permitted the controversy to drag on until 1904.

The missionaries in the field (the Westerners with the best understanding of the Chinese language) were the ones who finally resolved the Chinese Term Controversy within the Protestant mission societies. The missionary conference in 1904 finally adopted an official resolution which put the controversy to rest once and for all among the Protestant mission

societies operating in China at that time. This resolution set a single term, "Sheng Ling," for Holy Spirit and allowed compromise between "Shen" and "Shang Ti" for God. The controversy between the Baptist missionaries and others regarding the proper term for baptism had already been resolved by the 1842 compromise of allowing the societies to use different terms based on their theological position.

The Protestant missionaries' lack of central leadership permitted the controversy to continue much longer than a single decisive statement from a strong leader in the 1840s would have allowed. Likewise, this also allowed it to spill over into the governing boards and constituent church bodies in their home countries. In this sense the controversy became much more problematic than it otherwise would have been. Lack of centralized leadership was not entirely a negative influence, however. The lack of centralized leadership also allowed for minor compromises which permitted mission work to continue despite the raging controversy. Furthermore, this also resulted in a much more natural resolution to the controversy, one which appears to have been much closer to the linguistic understanding of the native Chinese believers.

The Missouri Synod Mission

Although it embraced a congregational structure — in which the congregations themselves are responsible for their own governance and the Synod could only offer guidance — the Missouri Synod paired this decentralized structure with a strong respect for and adherence to centralized authority. This was less evident in the day-to-day affairs of congregations located in the United States, but it became crystal clear in the mission field. The Synod itself (acting at its conventions) chose when and where to open missions, even as the missionaries themselves were responsible for the day-to-day decisions of where to open stations and how to allocate their resources.

This strong reliance on central authority and specifically the authority of the Synod[2] guided many of the mission's actions, particularly in the decision of the original mission society to cede operational control of the mission to the Missouri Synod's Board of Foreign Missions. Because the mission society was outside the synodical structure, pastors who received calls from the mission society questioned the society's authority to issue calls. As a result, the mission society offered its assets to the synod itself.

The reliance on central authority in this mission involved no less than three different tiers of supervision over the missionaries in the field. The missionaries convened a China General Conference (which all missionaries were required to attend) at their Kuling Retreat Center every summer. The decisions of these conferences were reported to the Board of Foreign Missions in St. Louis for adjustment and action. The Board itself also had the ability to issue directives to the missionaries. The Board of Foreign Missions reported to the triennial Synod Conventions at which delegates would take action for the entire church body. All actions undertaken by the Synod, including those of the Board of Foreign Missions and its missionaries, were under the oversight of the Synod Convention.

The Synod also operated with an additional (implicit) structural element which came into play during this controversy. The faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, was viewed by the Synod as its primary source of insight into theological matters. Whenever a disagreement arose between members of the Synod, the Concordia Seminary faculty, as the body responsible for training the Synod's new pastors and themselves possessing the most advanced theological training, was asked to offer their opinions on the theological questions involved. As a result, the

[2] This might in part have been connected to the Synod's German heritage, as well as the changing role of centralized authority they experienced following the American Civil War.

Seminary faculty was frequently asked to offer its opinion on the Chinese Term Controversy.

In addition to its own hierarchical structure, the Missouri Synod mission was — in a way — beholden to additional structural concerns based on the presence of Lillegard, a missionary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). As part of this fellowship, the ELS received a representative on the Board of Foreign Missions, giving this Synod some authority to make decisions for the mission. Both the Missouri Synod and the ELS participated in the Synodical Conference, an inter-synodical organization consisting of four confessional Lutheran church bodies in America. The Synodical Conference itself had a strong interest in missions, having several years earlier begun its own mission in the American Deep South. Its biennial meetings discussed matters of importance to all its constituent synods, which included the activities of the Missouri Synod's China mission.

Because of these various overlapping organizations, the Chinese Term Controversy was studied by no less than fifteen different committees and boards: the Missouri Synod's Board of Foreign Missions; the Faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis; floor committees at seven consecutive Missouri Synod conventions (two different floor committees at one convention); two special committees appointed by Missouri Synod Conventions; floor committees at two Synodical Conference meetings, and one special committee appointed by the Synodical Conference. Those seven Synod Conventions and two Synodical Conference meetings received memorials and resolutions on the controversy and were asked to act on recommendations from these committees. Of those involved in these different committees and boards, few had ever visited China (Frederick Brand, Director of the Board of Foreign Missions, one of the only exceptions, only spent about two months in the country on his visitation tours), and none had any understanding of Chinese. The committee members based their decisions and recommendations

on information gleaned from the missionaries' published papers as well as interviews with missionaries home on furlough (including Lillegard, whose return to America from the mission brought the controversy to the attention of the synods in the United States), and not on firsthand knowledge of the controversy or the terms in question. Were these committee members in a position to offer recommendations on the use of specific Chinese terms? According to the structural system within which they operated, they were; according to their linguistic qualifications, they were not.

Every attempt by the missionaries to settle the controversy themselves before 1936 failed when missionaries in the minority refused to abide the decision of the majority. Following the 1924 decision in favor of "Shen," Arndt and the other dissenting missionaries refused to stop using "Shang Ti." Following the 1926 decision (based on the recommendation of the Concordia Seminar faculty) in favor of "Shang Ti," Lillegard refused to condone the use of "Shang Ti" and on his return to the United States began publishing papers denouncing the use of "Shang Ti." He circulated these throughout both the Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, as well as the Synodical Conference as a whole. This, more than anything else, stirred up the controversy among the American synods at a time when the matter had (ostensibly, at least) been settled in the field.

To its credit, the Missouri Synod's structural process for resolving controversial issues did eventually authorize the missionaries to study the question themselves and reach their own conclusions on it. This would be a mixed result, however, as the initial Board decision mandated that dissenting missionaries should leave the field. Following this decision, the Synod did continue to place the authority in the missionaries' hands to determine their own conclusion to the Chinese Term Controversy. Although the special committee appointed at the 1932 Synod

Convention reported back in 1935 that it found "Shang Ti" to be objectionable and recommended that the missionaries use "Shen," the convention itself overruled the committee and resolved to allow the missionary conference to settle the dispute. Following this decision, further appeals and convention memorials all eventually reached the same verdict: the matter was settled.

Although the Missouri Synod's structure initially removed responsibility for resolving the controversy from the missionaries, the Synod's structure also returned that authority to them. This gave the missionaries the opportunity to settle the controversy themselves and reach a conclusion that might have been better than one mandated by non-Chinese-speaking American church leaders.

Conclusion

Each of the church structures involved in the Chinese Term Controversy reached its own resolution. In the case of the Catholics, the controversy lasted a century because the church's structure lent itself to a repeated process of appeals and altered directives issued by supervisors without sufficient understanding of the Chinese language and culture. This appeals process might have been fueled by the missionaries' newfound ability to question the absolute authority of the church leadership following the Lutheran Reformation's refocus on the authority of Scripture over bishops in all matters. The Protestants' lack of centralized leadership both allowed mission work to continue during the height of the controversy and facilitated the controversy's continuation. The same was true of their reliance on individual knowledge and experience over knowledge transmitted from those in authority. As with the Roman Catholics, the Missouri Synod mission's structure placed the responsibility for resolving the dispute in the hands of people without the proper experience and linguistic training to understand the terms. In each of

these cases, the structure itself prolonged the controversy, either by allowing decisions to be appealed to different bodies or by avoiding conflict all together.

In terms of effectiveness, the Missouri Synod and Protestant iterations of the controversy were both resolved in less time than the Catholic. Likewise, both of the former iterations were finally resolved by the missionaries in the field, rather than by people without firsthand knowledge of the language and culture of China. The missionaries' experience in this regard may have given them greater insight into the linguistic issues than their non-missionary superiors. Consequently, the missionaries were in a better position to settle the dispute for themselves than their superiors.

This might be the greatest flaw in the Catholic Church's efforts to solve the controversy: those placed in positions of authority who issued the decrees that settled the matter did not understand Chinese. Even Bishop Maigrot, the Vicar Apostolic whom the Papal Legate Maillard trusted to be his "Chinese expert" during his time in the court of the Kangxi Emperor, did not stand up to questioning by the Emperor on his credentials. Instead he proved himself to be ignorant both with respect to Chinese culture and the Chinese language. This left not only Maillard, as the official papal representative, but also Maigrot himself, as one of the on-site supervisors of the missionaries, in a poor position to fulfill their responsibility of properly resolving the conflict.

It would be tempting to look at the number of years the controversy lasted in each of these missions (100 years in the Catholic missions, sixty-two years in the Protestant missions, and twenty-three years in the Missouri Synod mission) and conclude that the Missouri Synod's structure enabled it to resolve the controversy better than the others. However, such a conclusion ignores the multitude of other factors which affected the controversy's resolution in each

mission. In reality, none of these missions truly resolved the controversy well; each of their structures had its drawbacks.

CHAPTER EIGHT

OTHER CONDITIONS IMPACTING THE TERM CONTROVERSY

Although in all cases the ecclesiastical polity within which the missionaries operated hindered their ability to resolve the Chinese Term Controversy and prolonged its duration, this was not the only factor influencing the Chinese Term Controversy in its various manifestations. In reality, many other factors worked together both to extend the controversy's life and to aid in its resolution. By delaying communications, the distance between the missionaries in China and their sending bodies in Europe and America created major difficulties and confusion for both the missionaries and their supervisors. Turnover among the missionaries also created confusion as experienced missionaries were replaced by inexperienced missionaries who were ill-equipped to work through the controversy. Some missionaries and many of their supervisors suffered from a negligible understanding of the Chinese language and culture, hindering their ability to fully grasp the complexities of the controversy. Because some of the missionaries and their supervisors did not fully trust the converts to wrestle with these theological problems, they rarely solicited opinions from Chinese scholars and believers, and when they were provided, the missionaries paid them little heed unless they conformed to their own preconceived opinions. Rivalries between different mission groups, countries, and individual missionaries prolonged the controversy. The differing contexts within which the missionaries operated also gave them different perspectives on the terms in question.

Distance and Travel

Distance and travel played an important role in the Chinese Term Controversy every time it

appeared. The first Nestorian missionaries arrived in China from Syria by following the overland Silk Road. This route was dangerous, likely leading to numerous casualties among the missionaries before they could begin their service. The early Catholic missionaries also traveled the overland route to reach China. By this time the Muslim empire had seized control of Palestine and the Silk Road, making it dangerous for any Christian to travel to China. Many of the missionaries disguised themselves by hiding their Christian clothing until they reached China, but even with this precaution a significant number of missionaries were captured, imprisoned, and eventually returned to Europe. For this reason one newly-appointed bishop never reached China, leading to his diocese remaining vacant for a further decade before the Pope knew to send a replacement. The difficulty of travel also prevented news from the mission field from reaching Europe in a timely fashion. In part this accounts for the collapse of the early Dominican mission in China. After the death of John of Montecorvino, it took many years for word to reach Europe, and then many more years before a delegation from Europe could arrive in China with new missionaries. Because of the danger of travel, few missionaries in these early missions ever returned to Europe after leaving for mission service. Considering these difficulties, it is unsurprising that word of a controversy in China over terms or rites never reached Europe during this time.

The Jesuit and later Catholic missionaries reached China primarily by sea, accompanying Portuguese, Spanish, and French explorers and merchants. Although this route was much safer than the overland route (which was still controlled by the Muslims), seafaring was still extremely slow and hazardous at this time. Even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many missionaries died en route to China and their positions went unfilled for years. This accounts for some of the Term and Rites Controversy's prolonged duration within the Roman Catholic

Church, as travel extended the appeals process by several years on every occasion. This lengthened period allowed for turnover both within the mission and within the supervising bodies, resulting in different responses by different supervisors to each appeal.

By the time the Protestants and Lutherans began working in China in the nineteenth century, travel had become much easier, allowing for an expedited appeals process when messages were sent home. Because the Chinese Term Controversy was primarily settled in the field by the missionaries themselves at the Missionary Conferences, however, travel time did not factor into the Protestant resolution as significantly as it did for either the Catholics or the Missouri Synod.

During the Missouri Synod's iteration of the Chinese Term Controversy, communication and travel played a significant role in its resolution. By this time technology had advanced so greatly that the missionaries at their China General Conference could send a message to St. Louis during their two-week-long meeting and receive a response before the meeting's conclusion. This allowed the missionaries to solve a number of issues quickly, including requests for medical furloughs and advice on mission programs. During the 1926 China General Conference at which the Chinese Term Controversy was addressed, the Director of the Board of Foreign Missions was able to travel to China and lead the discussion himself (which was impossible for the Catholic missionaries centuries earlier). When the missionaries requested clarification from the Concordia Seminary faculty at this Conference, two missionaries returned to America and presented their positions to the Seminary faculty, which then cabled an answer back to the missionaries in China within a matter of weeks. This same process took a decade or more for the Roman Catholic missionaries. Expedited communication, more than any other single factor, shaved years off the duration of the Missouri Synod's Chinese Term Controversy.

While improvements in travel and communication allowed the Chinese Term Controversy to be resolved much more quickly in the twentieth century than it had been in the sixteenth, these same advancements also enabled the controversy to spread more rapidly among members of the sending bodies. This happened in the case of Lillegard, who published and distributed numerous tracts on the Chinese Term Controversy following his return to America from China. This ability to communicate ideas and opinions around the country in a short period of time kept the controversy in the forefront of people's minds during five different Synod Conference cycles, long after it might otherwise have disappeared from the church body's consciousness.

Missionary Turnover

In many cases, high rates of missionary turnover made it difficult to settle the controversy because few missionaries stayed in the country long enough to become expert in the Chinese language and culture. When the most experienced missionaries found themselves on opposite sides of the controversy (as with Ricci and Longobardo and with Arndt and Lillegard), the remaining missionaries did not have the experience — linguistic or otherwise — to mediate. In this way both the Roman Catholic and Missouri Synod missions took parallel paths, as the missionaries' only recourse was to appeal to their supervisors based in Europe and America, respectively.

In all of the missions, an extended period of language study preceded the missionaries' entrance into full-time service, although they did participate in some part-time work while studying the language. This period of study could last anywhere from six months to a year up to two or three years until the missionary in question had a sufficient grasp of the language to be qualified to begin serving fulltime. Even at this stage few missionaries possessed a sufficient level of proficiency to analyze their understanding of the language critically. To become fluent in

the language (in a missionary context) required at least a decade or more of experience, as was the case with the founding missionaries — Ricci, Morrison, and Arndt, all of whom grew and developed in their understanding of the language over the course of their long terms of service. Turnover rate among later missionaries was extremely high due to a number of factors, including burnout, failure to return to the field after furlough, illness, and death. In addition, the atmosphere within the missions — particularly during the heat of the Chinese Term Controversy — probably contributed to the reluctance of furloughed missionaries to return to service.

When experienced missionaries left the missions, the remaining missionaries were left with less collective experience. This hindered their ability to continue and improve their mission's activities, and also left them with less language experience for translation work. As a result, without experienced missionaries present, the less-experienced missionaries, whose language studies happened under the guidance of experienced missionaries with their own preconceived ideas regarding the Chinese Term Controversy, did not possess sufficient experience in Chinese to settle the controversy for themselves.

Misunderstanding Chinese Language and Culture

A minority of missionaries (and a majority of their supervisors in Europe and America) did not understand the Chinese language and culture well enough to pass judgment on matters of ritual and terminology. In some cases this was related to the aforementioned lack of experience. In others there was a lack of desire or ability to learn, and in some cases trust, particularly on the part of those in supervisory positions within the sending bodies.

Among the Catholics attempting to determine whether the Confucian rites had a religious character, few took the time to study them in-depth. Those missionaries that did study them wrote treatises on the religious or civil nature of the rites, and the supervising bodies which

received their treatises rendered judgments in line with the treatises they had read, each of which had its own bias. Likewise, only a handful read the Confucian works to learn how they used "T'ien" before passing judgment that "heaven" cannot mean "God."

Bishop Maigrot exemplified this problem in his interview with the Kangxi Emperor, when he betrayed a European attitude toward learning (reading over memorization) and lack of understanding of the use of metaphor in the Chinese language. According to the Emperor himself in the interview, "T'ien" literally means "the heavens" but figuratively means "that which stands behind the heavens as their creator;" Maigrot refused to accept this. His hubris in believing that he was in a better position to define Chinese terms than the Chinese Emperor not only hampered his ability to resolve the controversy among the missionaries but also ruined his credibility with the court as an "expert" on the Chinese language and culture.

Although each mission appointed its own in-country supervising agency, either a supervising missionary or conference, all Catholic and Missouri Synod missionaries, as well as the majority of Protestant mission agencies, ultimately reported to supervising bodies outside the country.[1] Of these supervising bodies, few placed in leadership positions were former missionaries to China. Due to travel expenses and other issues, few visited China (and it is unlikely that any knew Chinese). For these reasons, their understanding of Chinese language and culture was based on secondhand knowledge passed along by the missionaries, all of whom, based on their own usage, betrayed some bias on the subject of the Chinese Term Controversy.

Even the longest-tenured missionaries only studied the language and culture for twenty to thirty years and were only moderately capable of analyzing the meaning of either the Confucian

[1] The China Inland Mission is the only exception I have found to this rule.

rites or the various terms for God.[2] In comparison to the native Chinese who grew up in the culture and spoke the language, all of the missionaries were in a poor position to judge this still-unfamiliar language and culture.

Ambivalent Trust of Native Believers' Ideas

Basic Western feelings of superiority prevented the vast majority of missionaries from soliciting opinions from native believers on any of the specific subjects involved in these controversies. This was despite many of the missionaries themselves having learned the Chinese language from the natives. A majority of missionaries (and of their supervising agencies) considered the Chinese to be incapable of guiding and governing their own church, at least during the period when the controversy was being settled by each of these missions. Although by this time they had trained native workers as evangelists, catechists, teachers, and even pastors — the Catholic mission consecrated its first native Chinese bishop during the long appeals process of its controversy — many of the European and American missionaries preferred to rely on their own theological abilities to resolve the issue.

In none of these iterations of the Chinese Term Controversy was there more than a passing interest in referring the matter to the native believers, regardless of their status or rank in society, to determine how best to speak of the true God in their native language. The Kangxi Emperor's testimony was rejected and ignored by the Roman Inquisition as improper interference by civil authority in a religious matter. The various papers presented by Gregory Lopez, the first (modern) Chinese bishop, in defense of the rites are little more than a footnote in the controversy

[2] Notable examples include Robert Morrison, who spent 27 years in China and completed his translation of the Bible after 12 years' experience in the country, and James Legge, who after 33 years of missionary service was regarded as a "renowned sinologist" in Europe. See Lauren F. Pfister, "The Legacy of James Legge," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22, no. 2 (April 1998): 77–82.

as they were not given any special weight by either the missionaries in the field or the congregations in Rome who finally settled the controversy. In fact, the only "testimony" by a native Chinese believer that was given any credence during the Chinese Term Controversy was that of the catechumen who worshiped at the Jesuits' altar under the inscription "T'ien Chu."

During the later controversy among Protestant missionaries, while the missionaries may have consulted natives on the meanings of Chinese words in general, they did not tend to solicit their opinions regarding the specific elements of the Chinese Term Controversy. The essay contest referenced by Stanley[3] is one of the few exceptions. He also mentions an anecdotal account of missionaries preaching using the name of "Shang Ti" and being misunderstood by those who conflated their "Shang Ti" with the idol by that name. Stanley finally cited writings by Chinese scholars who supported his opinion that "Shen" was the correct term. Beyond this, there is little evidence that any of the missionaries writing on the controversy truly consulted the native believers in order to formulate their own opinion. It appears far more likely that the missionaries only gave credence to those native believers who agreed with them. Furthermore, they might have considered natives who disagreed with them to have still retained elements of their old belief system and to have been in need of further teaching.

This same issue appears to have been the case during the Missouri Synod mission. Although the missionaries established a conference of native Christians from their missions to assist in some of the governance of the mission's properties and the like, there was no mention that the missionaries ever requested an opinion from the native believers' conference regarding the Chinese Term Controversy. In fact, during this same period there was a proposal from the Missouri Synod's China General Conference to establish a self-governing Chinese Lutheran

[3] Stanley, *The Word for God in Chinese*, 21.

Church, but this proposal was rejected by the Synodical Board of Foreign Missions as being "premature." If they considered the Chinese believers to be incapable of self-governance, it is unlikely that the Missouri Synod would have given much weight to their opinions on this subject. Max C. E. Zschiegner, son of a former Missouri Synod missionary, finally asked a native Chinese pastor (long after the controversy had been settled) for his take on the Chinese Term Controversy, to which he replied, "The Chinese pastors and members had no problem with either term."[4] It appears, however, that this question was rarely asked while the controversy was being settled; the few references to native believers' thoughts on the matter in writings on the controversy were only ever used as support for the author's pre-existing opinion.

The missionaries' reasons for hesitating to allow the native believers to determine their own proper term for God are, if only in part, understandable. That the same would apply with regard to the Confucian rites is also, in part, understandable. In both these cases, the missionaries feared that the native believers' opinions on the subject of their own culture were clouded by the false religion in which they were raised rather than informed by the knowledge that the missionaries had been imparting to them. Despite their hesitations, however, at a certain point the missionaries needed to put their faith in the native believers. Eventually the Chinese Christians needed to be able to work through theological questions themselves.

Rivalries

The Catholic controversy in particular was affected by several additional factors that also played a role in the other instances. Because there were so many religious orders operating in China at any given time, not only was there a broad range of structural problems, but their

[4] Max C.E. Zschiegner, *Ambassador on the Yangtse: Max H. Zschiegner, My Father 1897–1940* ([s.n.], 1995), 10.

rivalries and competition in Europe translated into the mission field when missionaries from different orders came into contact with each other. Clashes of personality between missionaries might also have fed their rivalry in the controversy.

When the Jesuits first began working in China, they were the only Catholic religious order present. Before the end of the seventeenth century there were at least six different orders working in China in addition to the Jesuits. Because these orders competed against each other for funding and support in Europe, these rivalries impacted the mission field. Nowhere is this more evident than between the Dominicans and Jesuits. Because the Society of Jesus was of relatively-recent foundation, their missions were considered to be in competition with those of the Dominican Order.[5] This rivalry between the Jesuits and Dominicans was responsible in part for the failure of the missionaries' compromise in 1693: of the missionaries involved in the discussion, all but the Dominicans agreed to abide by a compromise which would permit Chinese Christians to participate in the Confucian rites. The Dominicans refused.[6]

Within and between the missions, national loyalties also fostered and exacerbated rivalries. The Portuguese and Spanish empires both claimed exclusive rights of trade with portions of China; in addition, Portugal also claimed exclusive right of "patronage" in China — the right to appoint and send bishops — by virtue of the "Padroado." When religious orders began sending missionaries from other nations into China, the Portuguese authorities refused to support them and assist them; in some cases the Portuguese even reported non-Portuguese missionaries to the Chinese authorities, which then deported them to Macao. As the mission work in the country

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[5] For one example of this rivalry in Europe, see Georg Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times*, vol. 4, *Japan and China, 1549–1552* (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1982), 349.

[6] The Dominicans, as the "hounds of the Lord" ("*Domini canes*") during the Middle Ages, resisted any so-called compromise which might threaten the purity of the Church.

expanded and further supervision was required, the Pope chose to send Vicars Apostolic to oversee regions of China, rather than create new dioceses to which the King of Portugal could appoint bishops. This created tension between the Portuguese missionaries and the Vicars Apostolic. Some Portuguese missionaries refused on the basis of their nationality to accept the Vicars' authority when the Vicars advocated positions contrary to their own.

Because the Protestant mission societies had little interaction with those of differing confessions outside their cooperative translation projects, there was little overt competition between them.[7] In fact, the China Inland Mission offered a powerful example of positive cooperation between mission societies, as its policy specifically committed to work only in areas without a Protestant missionary presence. As soon as a new (Protestant) mission arrived in the region where they were working, their missionaries would leave and move to a new area. Not all mission societies emulated this policy, but most societies agreed to cooperate when necessary and avoid interfering with each other when possible.

The Missouri Synod mission did not interfere with other mission societies and avoided most forms of cooperation. When Arndt contributed to a hymnal translation project for another mission, he received censures both from his fellow missionaries and from the Board of Foreign Missions. When he arrived in China Arndt adopted the same term for "Lutheran" ("Xinyi") as the other Lutheran societies that eventually formed the Lutheran Church — China. The Missouri Synod missionaries later adopted a new translation ("Fuyindao"), partly as a way to differentiate their mission from the Lutheran Church — China. This commitment to separation did not extend to the Chinese Term Controversy, however. Initially the Board of Foreign Missions and

[7] However, there were still substantial divisions along national lines between the American and British missionaries, as the American Bible Society used "Shen" and the British Bible Society used "Shang Ti" in their published Chinese-language material. See p.48 above.

Seminary faculty specifically instructed the missionaries to conform to the prevailing Protestant practice with regard to their translation of God.

Within the Missouri Synod mission a clash of personalities between Arndt and Lillegard intensified and prolonged the controversy. This rivalry between them is evident from numerous incidents during their shared tenure with the mission, particularly Arndt's prioritization of other writing and educational projects over attending the 1924 China General Conference and his refusal to send the requested paper ("The Chinese Term for God").[8] This rivalry became so problematic that the 1926 China General Conference requested that they form a special committee with four other missionaries for the purpose of resolving their differences.[9] Although this "Confidential Committee" reported that "the two brethren after prayerfully considering the matter have adjusted all their personal differences in a true Christian manner,"[10] the Chinese Term Controversy settlement reached at this same Conference failed to resolve the matter.

Missionary Contexts

The different contexts in which the missions operated also played a role in the controversy. Because the Jesuit missionaries worked primarily among the educated Mandarins of Beijing, who were steeped in Confucian philosophy, they were forced to wrestle with the Rites Controversy to a greater extent, and were in a better position to observe them and understand

[8] The bad blood between Arndt and Lillegard is quite well documented; the 1924 incident is just the most obvious example. If Arndt had just refused to attend the conference, well and good; Lillegard as secretary pushing the missionaries to censure Arndt is just one more shot across Arndt's bow from Lillegard. That Arndt sent a paper on "hell" instead of "God" puts a little more of the bad blood on him. It is unclear where this conflict began, but I suspect that it began as a clash of personalities between the two most experienced missionaries—and Lillegard is in the unenviable position of being an experienced missionary who is simultaneously a rookie among rookies living in the shadow of the founding missionary who shaped all the early aspects of this mission.

[9] "Digest of the Minutes of the Sixth Annual General Conference" (1926), 3.

[10] "Digest of the Minutes of the Sixth Annual General Conference" (1926), 3.

their religious or civil character. In addition, their greater experience with the Confucian writings allowed them a clearer understanding of what "T'ien" meant in the context of the Confucian corpus. The other orders worked primarily among the illiterate peasants around the rest of the country, who had a completely different understanding of the Confucian use of "T'ien."

Because many of the Jesuits' native converts were among the Mandarins, their belief that the Confucian rites were civil in nature and not religious took on a deeply personal nature. It was important to the success of their mission that the native believers be permitted to participate in the rites. If they could not participate in the rites, their standing in society would be at risk, and their refusal to participate could bring censure against the church. This was one reason that the Jesuits insisted that the rites were not religious throughout the controversy.

The uneducated peasants might not have had the same understanding of the Confucian rites as the Mandarins who participated in them. Thus the other orders might have been justified based on their context in concluding that the Confucian rites had a religious character. The Catholic hierarchy did take this into account in some attempts to settle the controversy by allowing the Christians to attend the rites if they could not absent themselves. Some missionaries operating in contexts apart from the Mandarins refused to accept this compromise, while the Jesuits for their part also refused to accept a verdict which did not permit their Mandarin converts to participate in the rites.

The Protestant and Lutheran missionaries also operated in different contexts, which might have given them completely different perspectives on the proper term to use for God based on the people's understanding of the term "Shang Ti." Some unbelievers evidently misunderstood the missionaries' use of "Shang Ti" and conflated it with the "Shang Ti" of the Chinese civil

religion.[11] Missionaries who had witnessed such a misunderstanding were inclined to prefer the exclusive use of "Shen."

As previously noted, both groups of missionaries — "Shen" advocates and "Shang Ti" advocates — suffered from a Platonist understanding of language and believed that the meaning inherent in the term could not be altered through usage. This understanding of language, however, ignores the example of the Early Church, which took Greek and Latin terms ("θεος," "theos," and "*deus*," respectively) with a long history of polytheistic use and gave them biblical meaning through biblical usage and teaching. Those missionaries (typically "Shen" advocates) who acknowledged this history did so only in order to support their own term; they did not recognize that the same process could be used for other terms, including "Shang Ti." In reality, the later history of the Chinese Term Controversy has shown that through teaching and usage all the terms involved in the controversy may now be used to refer to the true God.

Conclusion

Although the structures within which the missionaries operated played a role in both prolonging and resolving the Chinese Term Controversy, many other factors conspired to extend its duration. The dangerous conditions of travel and communication during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made it virtually impossible for the Roman Catholic Church to settle the controversy expeditiously; the time required for communication allowed major turnover among those who were to mediate. By contrast, the improvements in technology for communication and travel permitted the Missouri Synod's hierarchical structure to study and mediate the controversy in a fraction of the time, cutting down the duration of their Chinese Term Controversy from a

[11] Stanley, *The Word for God in Chinese*, 32–33.

century to twenty years.

Turnover among the missionaries also made it difficult for the controversy to be settled promptly when those with experience left the mission in the hands of those with less experience. As missionaries entered the mission's service, they needed a significant period of training and experience before they could work through the controversy for themselves; until then they were expected to only follow the opinions of the experienced missionaries. Unfortunately, few missionaries achieved enough experience to assist in settling the controversy within their respective missions.

Although the missionaries in the field lived and worked directly with the Chinese language and culture, their superiors in Europe and America did not. As they attempted to resolve the controversy for the missionaries in the field, the superiors relied on information from those same missionaries to understand the Chinese culture. Even among the missionaries in China, some failed to grasp the Chinese culture properly during their term of service. This lack of experience on the part of some missionaries and all of their supervisors hindered their ability to resolve the controversy in a manner faithful to the Chinese culture.

One of the most striking aspects of this controversy was the lack of references to the opinions of the native believers regarding the proper term for God. Although some of the missionaries did ask Chinese scholars and believers for their thoughts on the subject, the vast majority of writings during the controversy were by foreign missionaries. Even when the natives offered their opinions, these were rarely taken into account by the missions' superiors outside of China.

The controversy was also prolonged by a number of fierce rivalries between the missionaries, their sending bodies, and their countries of origin. Competition between the Jesuits

and Dominicans sabotaged any hope of a compromise between them. Portuguese authorities hindered the work of the Spanish Catholic missions and created confusion within their hierarchy. Personal grievances between Lillegard and Arndt turned the Chinese Term Controversy from a linguistic exercise into a personal matter.

Because the missionaries operated in different contexts, they had completely different perspectives pertaining to the matters in the controversy. As the Jesuits worked among Mandarins, they were in a perfect position to observe the rites and interview participants on the rites' character. However, the same was not true of the other orders which worked in areas with few Mandarins. The different personal experiences of the Protestant missionaries fostered in them different perspectives on the efficacy of preaching using the different possible terms for God.

Ultimately, all of these factors worked together to prolong the controversy in the mission field and to exacerbate its effects on both the missionaries and the native believers.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

Throughout the nearly two-thousand-year history of Christian mission work in China, the controversy over the correct term for God, and the associated controversy over the appropriateness of Christians participating in the Confucian rites, caused numerous problems for the missionaries. There is no recorded information about the controversy having occurred during the first three missions, but their lack of lasting impact and the absence of surviving records do not preclude the possibility that it might still have occurred in some form.[1]

The first recorded instance of this controversy affected the second Catholic mission in China, started by the Jesuits in the sixteenth century. This controversy, between "T'ien" (heaven) and "T'ien Chu" ("lord of heaven"), lasted over a century before it was finally settled by papal decree in favor of "T'ien Chu." Although this resolved the controversy among the Catholics, over a century later it would rear its head again among the Protestant missionaries. The first Protestant missionaries chose to use "Shen" (the generic term for the divine) to translate "God" before later missionaries decided to translate it with "Shang Ti" ("supreme ruler"). This led to several other terms being proposed and used in various Bible translations. After over sixty years of controversy, the missionaries themselves finally settled on a compromise between "Shen" and "Shang Ti," with "Shen" serving as the generic term for a god of some sort and being used with adjectives to refer to the true God, and "Shang Ti" being reserved exclusively for the true God.

[1] Lueking dates the earliest iteration of the Chinese Term Controversy to "the earliest days of the Nestorians in China", but does not provide any references for the assertion. Lueking, *Mission in the Making: The Missionary Enterprise Among Missouri Synod Lutherans, 1846–1963*, 269.

After a twenty-year process of writings and appeals, the Missouri Synod mission agreed to that same compromise, bringing the Chinese Term Controversy to a final conclusion in 1947. This was just two years before the Communist revolution brought the period of foreign mission work in China to an end for the next forty to fifty years.

The missionaries involved in these controversies operated under drastically different structures. In the case of the Catholic missions, they operated with a strict hierarchy which reported to superiors in Europe — both the individual superiors of the various religious orders and superiors the missionaries all shared, namely the Roman congregations and the Pope. For their part, the Protestant missionaries operated within separate (unconnected) structures based on denominational associations. Although the mission societies cooperated in translation projects — the primary area affected by the Chinese Term Controversy — their diversity, as well as the number of different Bible societies involved in publishing the translated Bibles, allowed them to continue their work without resolving the controversy. Eventually it took a resolution by the Missionary Conference — representing every Protestant mission society then operating in China — to settle the controversy among the Protestant missionaries. The Missouri Synod mission operated under a similar hierarchical structure to that of the Catholic mission. For this reason, the Chinese Term Controversy took a similar course among the Missouri Synod missionaries to the Catholics: disagreements in the field were appealed to the hierarchy in America. Unlike the Catholics, the Missouri Synod's hierarchy referred the controversy back to the missionaries.

Even beyond the structural issues which both prolonged and resolved the controversy, several other factors worked together to extend it. Rivalries between missionary bodies and nations hindered the operations of their respective structures in mediating the controversy. Rivalries between individual missionaries hardened opinions and prevented efforts at

compromise. Lack of understanding of Chinese language and culture prevented many of those placed in positions to mediate the controversy from offering helpful directives. This affected both the supervisors outside the country and some of the missionaries themselves.

Each iteration of the Chinese Term Controversy was resolved more quickly — not because the structures of the Protestant and Missouri Synod missions operated more efficiently, but largely due to improvements in communication. During the Catholic Term/Rites Controversy, the missionaries in the field had to wait several years to hear a response from Rome. The Protestant missionaries had only to wait a fraction of that time to hear responses from their European and American superiors. By the 1920s, the Missouri Synod missionaries could request clarification from St. Louis in August, send missionaries home to consult with their theological advisors, and receive a response within a matter of weeks. This, more than anything else, sped the resolution of the Chinese Term Controversy among the Missourians.

Still more important than improved communication was the attitude taken in each mission. When the Catholic missionaries finally heard back from Rome for the last time in 1742, they chose not to request another appeal. Part of the sentiment behind the Protestant compromise in 1904 was a desire by the younger missionaries to stop fighting about terms and focus on the work of the mission. The Missouri Synod missionaries in 1936 chose to abide by that same compromise; the Missouri Synod's Conventions elected to accept the missionaries' decision and consider the controversy concluded for the next ten years, despite repeated memorials asking that it be reconsidered. Although the 1941 Convention requested that a special committee revisit the controversy, this special committee recommended that it be dropped for the sake of the mission. This conscious decision by the majority of missionaries and their superiors allowed them to reach this compromise and move forward with the mission's work.

Today the Christian churches in China have moved past the Chinese Term Controversy. The Roman Catholic Church in 1971 declared the Confucian rites to be permissible as simply civil ceremonies. Following the Communist revolution, the Christian churches were nationalized under the supervision of the Administration for Religious Affairs and required to join the "Three-Self Patriotic Movement." The Protestant churches and missions were united under the banner of a single "Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China," which uses the Protestant compromise of 1904 ("Shen" and "Shang Ti") for its terms for God. The Roman Catholic Church is a separate organization called the "Patriotic Association of Catholics" which continues to use "T'ien Chu" as its term for God.[2] For administrative purposes these two bodies are considered by the Chinese government to be entirely different religions.

Although the controversy itself is institutionally considered to be settled, there are three major lessons the Chinese Term Controversy can teach the church today. Support from the home church, especially from those in supervisory positions, is vitally important for the success of a mission, although sometimes, however well intentioned, it can be perceived as and might amount to interference. The priorities of polity within which the mission operates must be enforced and applied flexibly based on the needs of the mission. Finally, those in positions of authority within the structure must practice humility.

Although the applications of polity within which the missions operated primarily prolonged the controversy, this was not the fault of the polity itself but of those in the positions of authority. When the supervisors supported the missionaries and their activities, the mission was enabled to flourish, as when the Pope sent additional suffragan bishops to aid John of Montecorvino. When the supervisors actively opposed the actions of the missionaries, as happened with Maigrot's

[2] For further information, see Appendix 2.

overturning of the 1693 compromise, the mission was hindered. This same pattern played out in every iteration of the controversy — indeed in every mission to China. When those in positions of authority exercised that authority to support the missionaries and their work, the missions thrived; when those in the same positions exercised their authority to hinder the missionaries, the missions suffered. Just as this was true in China, it is still true today. The following points demonstrate how those in supervisory positions used their authority to support the mission.

The controversy was resolved most expeditiously and positively when the structure was applied flexibly. This is one of the few elements that set the Missouri Synod mission apart from the others: while the structure had the capacity to resolve the controversy from afar, this was not applied. Instead, as those with the proper expertise and the most motivation to see it resolved correctly, the Synod chose to give the missionaries in the field the opportunity to resolve the controversy for themselves. In the Roman Catholic controversy, those in authority positions invariably used their power to attempt a resolution, despite their lack of ability to understand the controversy. This more than anything else prolonged the controversy in their mission.

Finally, it is always wise for Christian people in all levels to practice humility. When the Roman Catholic structure arrogantly imposed its own will on the Chinese believers from afar, this prolonged the controversy. When the missionaries' pride caused them to butt heads in the Missouri Synod mission, the mission suffered. When the missionaries and their superiors showed humility in choosing to compromise and walk together as fellow believers and fellow servants, they were able to put personal differences aside for the sake of their shared ministry. This, more than any other factor, truly resolved the Chinese Term Controversy in each of its iterations.

Although the Chinese Term Controversy has been settled at the institutional, official level for over seventy years (there may still be individuals who dissent), it still has much to teach the

Church. Hierarchy and structure are both necessary in any joint endeavor, particularly in the church, but they also bring an inherent danger. Those involved in the hierarchy can work together for a common purpose, or they can work against each other. When they work together, the mission of the church can thrive beyond anyone's expectations; when they work against each other, the mission of the church may be harmed irreparably. While the difference is sometimes lack of understanding (despite good intentions), too often hubris has played a major role in setting those within a hierarchy against one another and leading to the potential for ruin of the joint venture. Unfortunately this has not changed in the intervening years, but when those within the Church set aside petty differences and behave toward one another with humility for the sake of the Gospel, the Church's mission can flourish and many have the opportunity to hear and believe God's Word.

APPENDIX ONE

THE EFFECT OF THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION ON MISSIONS TO CHINA

Although the Chinese Term Controversy was largely settled among the missionaries working in China when mission work resumed following the interruption of World War II, the history of the Christian Church in China during this period is a fascinating example of how God uses all circumstances to His glory. Further, as stated previously, the different resolutions to the Chinese Term Controversy adopted by the Catholic and Protestant missionaries played a significant role in their treatment by the Communist government.

When Mao Zedong and his Red Army conquered China and founded the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, the Church in China was never going to be the same. Communism is diametrically opposed to religion in all forms (considering it "the opiate of the masses" and in need of eliminating in order to form a proper society). However, it is especially opposed to Christianity, as Christianity establishes an alternative loyalty for believers. Although Communist China did not outlaw religion *per se* (as was the case in Russia), Christianity came under strict governmental regulation as the government attempted to reorient all religions (especially Christianity) away from God and toward faith in the Party as supreme.[1] This state of affairs has remained in force in the People's Republic of China to varying degrees up to the present.

Overnight foreign missionaries became subject to onerous governmental regulations in an

[1] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 426–7.

effort to drive them (peacefully) from the country. Before the Communist takeover, there were approximately 6000 missionaries in China (5,000 Catholic; 1,000 Protestant);[2] by 1955 they had all been forced to leave. According to Charbonnier, the process was consistent for the majority of missionaries:

> Their departure was prepared and hastened by an oft-repeated process: they were subjected to heavy taxes, which compelled them to sell houses, land, and sometimes churches; to manual labor, so that they could be classified as producers and thus obtain the right to survive; to a ban on travel, followed by arrests, interrogations, signed confessions, sometimes to trial by the people; and to death sentences that were usually commuted to expulsion.[3]

Native believers were compelled to participate in these trials under threat of reprisals from the government.[4] Once the missionaries had been expelled from the country, the native workers and believers had to take over the bulk of the mission work. As they continued the mission work, however, they themselves suffered from threats of reprisals from the government if they did not dissociate themselves enough from the "imperialist" missionaries.

The "Three-Self Patriotic Movement" officially began in July 1950 when a group of Christian leaders signed the "Christian Manifesto." This Manifesto committed the Christians "to supporting the 'common program' of the government, to purging the Church of imperialist influences, to supporting the agrarian reform, to cultivating a patriotic spirit, and to promoting triple autonomy."[5] This was ratified by China's National Christian Council that October, and half the Protestant churches in the country had committed to the "Christian Manifesto" within two years.

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[2] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 429.

[3] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 429.

[4] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 429.

[5] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 430–1.

The experience of the Lutheran Church of China was typical of that experienced by other Protestant groups during this period. The LCC called a special council meeting attended by government representatives on January 25, 1951. At this meeting the church was restructured, changed the name (to "The Lutheran Church in China"), committed "to carry out the Three-Self Movement with determination," "to join the National Council of Churches in China," and to cut off ties with Hong Kong missionaries and organizations. A few years after making these decisions, TLCC and most other churches disappeared as they were absorbed into the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.[6]

The Catholic Church in China had its own experience with the "Three-Self Patriotic Movement" beginning in December 1950 with the "Guangyuan Manifesto."[7] Originally, this Manifesto committed the Catholic Church to severing its connection with the Vatican. However, during consultation in January 1951 between Chinese Catholic leaders and the government's State Administration for Religious Affairs, this stipulation was amended to allow the Catholics to maintain their spiritual connection to the Vatican.[8] By 1957, the Administration for Religious Affairs insisted that the Chinese Catholics appoint and consecrate their own bishops without consultation with the Vatican. This began happening in 1958 despite censure from the Vatican.[9] In July 1957 a National Assembly of Chinese Catholics met and created the Patriotic Association of Catholics as the official state-authorized organization of the Roman Catholic Church in

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[6] Hsiao, *A Brief History of the Chinese Lutheran Church*, 26–27.

[7] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 431–2.

[8] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 432–3.

[9] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 441–2.

China.[10] This organization is considered by both the government and the people to be a separate religion from the Three-Self Patriotic Movement due to the two organizations' use of different terms for God.

The small Orthodox Church in China formed through mission work carried out by the Russian Orthodox Church was also required to participate in the Three-Self Movement. Unlike the other missions, the Orthodox Church was able to comply with the Three-Self Movement much more easily. The first Chinese Orthodox bishop was consecrated on July 30, 1950, and the Chinese archimandrite of Beijing was promoted to Archbishop of Beijing in 1957, at which time the Orthodox Chinese Church was declared independent. This meant the Chinese Orthodox Church would not have political ties to Moscow, although it remained under the spiritual care of the Patriarch of Moscow.[11]

Chinese Christian leaders who resisted the Administration for Religious Affairs' directives in forming the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and severing international connections were arrested, brainwashed, forced to sign confessions, and even killed.[12] Churches were forced to close, and native believers were prohibited from worshiping with foreigners. Those believers who refused to accept government interference in religious matters went underground and formed networks of house churches which met in secret. When discovered, believers and leaders in these house churches risked imprisonment and death.

Despite this government-imposed pressure, however, the Chinese Church continued to grow and expand under Communist rule. In fact, the government's requirement that the Chinese

[10] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 434.

[11] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 434.

[12] Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, 435–41.

Church become autonomous was the original intent of the Protestant missionaries. The "Three-Self" concept of autonomy in governance, support, and propagation which the Communists adopted for the "Three-Self Patriotic Movement" was originally created by the missionaries to lay a framework for building a fully-native Church in a mission field. The Communist government's expulsion of foreign missionaries helped the Chinese Church to gain its independence and build itself up, apart from interference and support from outside. As a result, the Church in China may be stronger today because of its years of suffering under Communism than it would otherwise have become.

APPENDIX TWO

THE CHURCH IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA TODAY

While the Chinese Term Controversy itself is no longer debated in the Christian Churches of China today, its resolution has factored into the makeup of the modern Chinese church. Consequently, a brief survey of the state of Christianity in China today will help place the previous millennia of history in their proper context and demonstrate that the missionaries' efforts in that country were not in vain.

The two primary (official) Christian bodies in the People's Republic of China today are the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China (which is guided by the China Christian Council) and the Patriotic Association of Catholics. These two are divided not just by their different denominational origins (Protestant and Catholic) but by their terminology. The members of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement originally came from the missions that adopted the "Shen"/"Shang Ti" compromise on the Chinese Term Controversy; the Patriotic Association of Catholics uses "T'ien Chu." For this reason, the two bodies are considered separate religions by both the State Administration for Religious Affairs and the general public.[1]

When the Red Army conquered China and founded the People's Republic of China in 1949, there were approximately one million Protestant Christians in China. In the sixty-eight years since then, the number of Christians has multiplied exponentially, although the actual

[1] This state of affairs holds true exclusively in the People's Republic of China. There are other Chinas and other areas largely outside the direct control of the People's Republic of China where this reduction to Catholic and Protestant as two separate religions has not taken place.

figures are disputed. According to an article published in *First Things*, in 2011 there were anywhere from sixteen million to 200 million Christians living in China, with 130 million as the "most widely accepted claim."[2] This number includes not only the sixteen million members of churches which have registered with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, but also educated guesses of the number of believers who attend the thousands of secret house churches. The article narrows the range further using a comprehensive 2007 survey that indicates a total of 64.3 million Christians in 2007. From this number the article extrapolates that there were around seventy million in 2011. Even this relatively-conservative number would make the Christian population of China about as large as the membership of the Chinese Communist Party.[3]

In part this may be attributed to the strength of the faith instilled in the native believers, faith which enabled them to endure decades of suppression and persecution under Mao. Even when religion was entirely suppressed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), Christianity did not disappear. Although the Church was allowed to come out of hiding after the death of Chairman Mao and end of the Cultural Revolution in 1979, it had already been flourishing in secret before then.[4]

According to the organization Voice of the Martyrs, which tracks the Persecuted Church around the world, China was considered a "Restricted Nation" in 1999,[5] placing it among the most dangerous countries for Christians. Even today the leaders and members of underground

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[2] Rodney Stark, Byron Johnson, and Carson Mencken, "Counting China's Christians" in *First Things* 213 (May 2011), 14.

[3] Stark, "Counting China's Christians," 14.

[4] Ryan Dunch, "Worshiping under the Communist Eye: The Birth of an 'Official' Chinese Church Helped Christianity Thrive in Public under Political Constraints," in *Christian History and Biography* 98 (Spring 2008), 16–17.

[5] DC Talk, *Jesus Freaks: Stories of Those Who Stood for Jesus: The Ultimate Jesus Freaks* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999), 324.

house churches can be arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and executed for their faith. Many of these are viewed by the officially-sanctioned Three-Self Patriotic Movement and China Christian Council as traitors to the nation and infiltrators for hostile foreign powers.[6]

Despite the Communist government's best efforts, the Christian Church in China has not only survived but flourished since foreign missionaries were expelled from the country.

[6] Shen Yifan, "The Second (Enlarged) Plenary Session of the Joint Standing Committees of the National Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council: Work Report," trans. Claudia Wahrisch-Oblau and Janice Wickeri, in *The Chinese Theological Review* 6 (1990), 11–12.

APPENDIX THREE

SURVEY OF THE HISTORY OF THE MISSOURI EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHINA MISSION AFTER 1948

After the Communist government expelled foreign missionaries from China, the missionary bodies which had been operating in the country did not dissolve and disappear. Instead, they expanded their focus, leading to rapid expansions of missionary effort throughout Southeast Asia. The history of the Missouri Evangelical Lutheran China Mission is included here as a single example of how the expulsion of foreign missionaries served to further the spread of Christianity in Southeast Asia.

Hankow, the center of the Missouri Evangelical Lutheran China Mission and location of its seminary, fell to the Communist Army in 1949.[1] Although foreign missionaries were permitted to remain in the country for a further eighteen months after the Communist takeover, many missionaries had already evacuated. The majority of those still in the country fled to Hong Kong by the end of 1949. By the autumn of 1949 all the stations except Shanghai and Hankow had been evacuated by the foreign mission staffs.[2] Only three missionaries (Thode, Mueller, and Schalow) remained in the country in 1950. Mueller and Schalow left in 1951,[3] while Thode, who

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[1] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 110.

[2] Suelflow, "The Mission Enterprise of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Mainland China 1913–1952," 338.

[3] *Proceedings of the Forty-First Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Assembled at Milwaukee, Wisconsin as the Twenty-Sixth Delegate Synod June 21-30, 1950* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 465.

had been held up by court proceedings, left in 1952.[4] By the end of 1949, the bulk of the mission's work in the People's Republic of China was in the hands of the native workers. At least one of these, Mr. Li Yen San (who had attended Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, for a semester) is known to have been martyred by the Communists for his missionary involvement.[5] In 1951, the remainder of the work in the country passed into the hands of native workers. The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran China Mission was officially dissolved, but its work continued.

The majority of the former missionaries to China continued to serve the Board of Foreign Missions in other Southeast Asian mission fields. Their work directly resulted in the opening of mission stations in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan, and helped to bolster nascent missions in the Philippines, Korea, and New Guinea. As of today, all of these missions have become self-governing partner churches[6] of the LCMS.

The majority of the missionaries evacuated from China to Hong Kong with Chinese refugees. Four missionaries — Rev. Wilbert Holt, Teacher Lorraine Behling, Deaconess/Nurse Martha Boss, and Nurse Gertrude Simon — began working with the refugees independently before petitioning the Board of Foreign Missions to support their work. The work of these four was augmented temporarily by other evacuating missionaries and on a long-term basis after the Board of Foreign Missions agreed to their work. The work of these missionaries resulted in the founding of Hong Kong Concordia Seminary in 1959,[7] and the eventual formation of The Lutheran Church — Hong Kong Synod.

Because a large number of Chinese refugees fled to Taiwan, the Board of Foreign Missions

[4] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 111.

[5] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 71, 74.

[6] This is the terminology used by the Missouri Synod to denote a missionary church body which has become self-governing and is no longer under the supervision of the Missouri Synod.

[7] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 42.

sent Teacher Olive Gruen (who had been the first female missionary in the Missouri Synod's China mission) to begin working with them in 1951.[8] From this beginning a number of additional missionaries (including several China missionaries) were assigned to Taiwan, including Rev. Dr. Roy Suelflow, who opened a seminary there in 1952.[9] This mission work resulted in the formation of the China Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Mission work in Japan was started unofficially by Rev. and Mrs. Ralph Egolf after their evacuation there from China in 1948.[10] The Egolfs arrived in Japan a few weeks after William Danker (commissioned as the first Missouri Synod missionary to Japan) arrived in the country to begin surveying mission opportunities. The Egolfs unofficially began doing mission work while officially working with the American occupation army.[11] After the Board of Foreign Missions formalized this work by issuing a call, additional missionaries, including several others evacuated from China, were assigned to Japan. One of these, Richard Meyer, served as Chairman of the mission (1965–1969), and after his term the Japan Lutheran Church became an autonomous partner church.[12]

The Missouri Synod mission in the Philippines had already been established following the 1947 convention when Alvaro Carino, a Filipino pastor trained at Concordia Seminary, was sent with Herman Mayer to open a mission in his home country. Shortly thereafter, the closing of the China mission provided an immediate increase in the missionary staff as four former China

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[8] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 33–34.

[9] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 104.

[10] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 24–25.

[11] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 24; *Proceedings* (1950), 468–9.

[12] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 71–72.

missionaries were reassigned there in 1949 and 1950.[13] These missionaries helped to establish a seminary in the Philippines, and their work eventually led to the formation of The Lutheran Church in the Philippines.

The LCMS received a request in 1947 to assist the Australian Lutheran Church in opening a mission in New Guinea.[14] Following the 1947 Synod Convention, the Board of Foreign Missions began partnership work in New Guinea, which included (in 1955), sending a former China missionary, Nurse Norma Lenschow, to work in a hospital there.[15] Since then, the mission work has succeeding in forming the Gutnius Lutheran Church, an autonomous partner church in Papua New Guinea.

The Missouri Synod's mission in Korea did not begin until nearly ten years after the China mission was closed. Nevertheless, a former China missionary, Kurt Voss, was called to lead the group of three missionaries who accompanied Rev. Dr. Won Yong Ji (a native Korean who attended Concordia Seminary, St. Louis) to begin the mission there.[16] The result of their efforts was the eventual formation of the Lutheran Church in Korea.

The mission's impact was also felt in the United States, as several missionaries entered parish ministry in American congregations. In 1963, the California and Nevada District called Wilbert Holt as a missionary-at-large to serve the Chinese-speaking population of San Francisco. His efforts led to the founding of the Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit in San Francisco in

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[13] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 17, 49–50, 59, 120.

[14] *Proceedings of the Forty-First Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Assembled at Milwaukee, Wisconsin as the Twenty-Sixth Delegate Synod June 21-30, 1950*, 468.

[15] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 54.

[16] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 114; Lueking, *Mission in the Making: The Missionary Enterprise Among Missouri Synod Lutherans, 1846–1963*, 301.

1964.[17] Paul Chang, one of the native evangelists who had attended the Seminary in Hankow and had worked with the mission in Hong Kong, entered the ministry in America. He was called to serve the True Light Mission in New York City among Chinese immigrants.[18]

Although the Communists expelled the foreign missionaries from their country, they could not prevent the Gospel's spread. In fact, by their efforts they expanded Christian mission work much further and more quickly than it would have otherwise.

There are many other fascinating elements to the saga of Christian mission work in China and the Chinese Term Controversy which fall outside the scope of this survey. One particularly interesting element is the degree to which this is a purely *Chinese* issue. Although the missionaries involved in the controversy were operating in mainland China, their decisions had a far reaching impact on work in the Chinese language around the world. A fascinating avenue for further exploration is the ways in which the Chinese Term Controversy affected Chinese-language missions in other countries, particularly in America.

Because the inception of Christian mission work in Korea and Japan was linked to the missions in China, another area for further study is the effect that the linguistic and theological issues in the Chinese Term Controversy had on work in those two languages.

Finally, the effect of the use of different terms (and thereby the treatment of Catholics and Protestants in China as separate religions) on the cause of Christian unity in that country would be an interesting topic for further research. This is particularly relevant now that the People's Republic of China has permitted greater dialogue with the Chinese Churches.

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[17] Ziegler, *Biographical Sketches*, 42.

[18] *Proceedings of the Forty-Second Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Assembled at Houston, Texas as the Twenty-Seventh Delegate Synod June 17 – 26, 1953*, 447.

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