

The Legacy of Love in China

By Rick Wood

They came with a passion for God and a love for the Chinese people that transformed a nation. They gave up all the wealth and power that the Western world could offer and chose to sacrifice their lives for the cause of the Chinese people. They were the Evangelical missionaries of the 19th and 20th centuries that came to China largely from Britain and America. They did not come just to proclaim the Word of God like good Evangelicals but to live out the Gospel by meeting the needs of the hurting people of China. Like Eric Liddell who came to China to teach science and math, many came to set up hospitals, clinics and universities. These efforts, often misunderstood and sometimes opposed by the very people they came to help, laid the foundation for the medical care and educational system that China enjoys today. The incredible growth of the church in China is also a testimony to the faithfulness and effectiveness of these early pioneers of the faith.

An entry in Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia says, "Medical missions in China by Protestant Christian physicians and surgeons of the 19th and early 20th centuries laid many foundations for modern medicine in China. Western medical missionaries established the first modern clinics and hospitals, provided the first training for nurses and opened the first medical schools in China. Work was also done in opposition to the abuse of opium. Medical treatment and care came to many Chinese who were helplessly addicted and eventually public and official opinion was influenced in favor of bringing an end to the destructive trade. The history of China's current health institutions can be traced to many of the medicines, methods and systems introduced by medical missionaries."

Rick Wood is managing editor of Mission Frontiers.

In addition to providing the first Western medical care, the missionaries also took on social causes such as the cultural malady of footbinding. They could have simply gone to preach the Gospel but unlike some today who continue to separate proclaiming the Gospel from social work, the missionaries to China did both. They lived out the Gospel in both word and deed and transformed a nation in the process.



Robert Morrison



Peter Parker

The first modern medical efforts in China began when Rev. Robert Morrison, D.D. and John Livingstone, who worked for the East India Company, opened a dispensary for the Chinese in Macau in 1820.

The following report from Wikipedia shows that by caring for the needs of the Chinese people they overcame many of the common obstacles to the spread of the Gospel that we face today.

A significant moment occurred in 1828 when Dr. Thomas Richardson Colledge, a Christian surgeon of the East India Company, opened a hospital in Canton. Colledge believed that Christians had a duty to help the sick in China, but he was never able to devote his time fully to medical missionary work. He corresponded with the existing Protestant mission societies and in 1834 Dr. Peter Parker, the first full-time Protestant medical missionary whom Colledge mentored, was able to open a hospital at Canton in connection with the mission of the American Board.

Parker quickly realized the need for trained Chinese help, and trained his first medical student Kwan Ato in 1836. Parker introduced both ether and chloroform anesthesia to China. His medical school is most remembered because of Dr. Sun Yat Sen who studied there in 1886 for one year before returning to resume his studies in Hong Kong.

In 1835-36 Parker, Colledge and a few Christian foreign residents formed the Medical Missionary Society of China. In a little time the news of Parker's mission spread. Public preaching was not permitted in China and foreigners were restricted to residence at the Thirteen Factories at Canton. But the new hospital appealed to



the Chinese in spite of their suspicions. In a Chinese village, married women would sit all night in the streets in order to get a chance in the line of patients which would crowd upon the doctor the next morning. When the First Opium War closed Parker's hospital in 1840, 9000 severe cases had been relieved besides uncounted minor ones.

In 1839 there were only two missionary physicians in China, by 1842 more reinforcements had arrived. 50 years later there were 61 hospitals and 44 dispensaries, 100 male and twenty-six female physicians with a corps of trained native assistants connected to the missionary endeavor. Prior to the spread of Western methods in China, the Chinese generally had had little knowledge of surgery but the demand for surgical treatment was soon far beyond the capacity of the mission hospitals. From the annual reports of the hospitals in 1895, it was reported that annually not fewer than 500,000 individuals were treated and about 70,000 operations performed, of which about 8000 were for serious conditions. At first the Chinese had to learn to have confidence in the surgeons, and submit calmly to the severest operations. A patient's relatives were consulted, and usually there were no resentments expressed if a dangerous operation failed.

The motives that brought physicians to China to work in mission hospitals were often a puzzle to the Chinese in the beginning. But the patients, who were being treated with gentleness and skill that seemed almost miraculous to them, often felt that the religion that had inspired such work must be good. A few showed no gratitude, thinking that they had rendered a service in allowing a foreigner to treat them. Many had no desire to accept the religion of their doctors, but some did. Many patients converted to Christianity after they returned to their distant homes.

Medical literature in the Chinese language was first provided by the medical missionaries, and native physicians were trained in Western methods for the first time by them as well.

Other notable medical missionaries to China during this period was Hudson Taylor MRCS, founder of the China Inland Mission, who was trained at the Royal London Hospital. Although initially the CIM had few trained physicians, it later brought in numbers of highly trained missionaries such as R. Harold, A. Schofield and A. J. Broomhall.

Medical mission work in Taiwan was begun by the Dr. James Laidlaw Maxwell in 1865. Maxwell was the father of two notable medical missionaries to China, Profs. James Preston Maxwell and James Laidlaw Maxwell, Junior. Preston worked as professor of gynecology at the Peking Union Medical College, and James Junior worked in the former China Medical Association and as Far East Secretary of the Mission to Lepers. James Junior finally returned to China early in 1949 to serve as a leprosy specialist at Hangzhou, as well as acting as professor of medicine in the Zhejiang Medical College. He died there in 1951, and had earned the respect of the Government of the Peoples' Republic who were represented at his funeral. The "Maxwell Memorial Centre" at Hay Ling Chau, Hong Kong is named after him.

With time the expansion and growth of hospitals in China during the 1800s became more widely accepted. By 1937 there were 254 mission hospitals in China, but more than half of these were eventually destroyed by Japanese bombing during World War II or otherwise due to the Second Sino-Japanese War or the Chinese Civil War. After World War II most of these hospitals were at least partially rehabilitated, and eventually passed to the control of the Government of the Peoples' Republic of China, but are still functioning as hospitals.

The faithful servants of Christ like Eric Liddell that transformed China by word and deed are a model for our mission efforts today. They went to China because of love and saw it as their natural responsibility to do what they could to alleviate the suffering of the people right before their eyes. Thousands of like-minded people have followed in their footsteps to nations and peoples around the world, transforming the lives of millions in the process. But much more needs to be done.

We need to learn from their example as we seek to serve the peoples of the world. What would God have us do today to meet the needs of hurting people in the neediest parts of the world? Can the love that transformed China also transform the world? World Vision is joining the global effort to defeat the mosquitoes that carry the deadly malaria pathogen. Should we join them in this effort or just stick to preaching the Word as many still advocate today? Or perhaps we could help save the lives of the 6,000 children that die daily from waterborne diseases. Would God have us help provide them with the clean water they need to survive? Is that part of the mission of the church? Would that not be the most effective way to show these hurting people what God is like, that He cares for their needs?

The early pioneers of the faith in China demonstrated convincingly to the Chinese people that God did care for them in real and practical ways and the results have been amazing. I believe people like Eric Liddell have shown us the way to do mission. The sacrificial love shown by Liddell and others has earned the respect of the secular leaders of China who today honor his legacy of love. It is a legacy of love that can change the world if we follow in their footsteps. 🌐

What would God have us do today to meet the needs of hurting people in the neediest parts of the world?