MODERNIST PROTESTANTISM TRIUMPHS OVER CHINESE SUPERSTITIONS: SUN YAT-SEN'S RELIGIOUS QUEST TO OVERTHROW THE YELLOW EMPIRE

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Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), the first provisional President of the Republic of China in 1912, spent most of his formative years in what Marie-Claire Bergère called "coastal Blue China" – a dichotomic concept she put in opposition to "continental Yellow China." Bergère's Blue China consisted of the treaty ports in (mainland) China where Western forces enjoyed considerable privileges after the advent of the unequal treaties, as well as overseas areas with Chinese communities under Western control/influence. Around the turn of the twentieth century, the increasingly Modernist teachings of Protestant missionaries in Blue China aligned well with the revolutionary aims of Sun and his followers, allowing for a "window of opportunity" for considerable mutual cooperation to take place. This chapter expands upon Bergère's concept of Blue China by linking Sun and his revolutionary movement to the influence of Protestant modernism in Blue China – this in contradistinction to an often generalized "Western learning" or "Christianity" in (all of) "China." The sequential focus is on the first part of the aforementioned "temporal window," when the goals of the Chinese revolutionaries prominently aligned with those of the Protestant missionaries (i.e., from just before the turn of the twentieth century until Sun's short tenure in office in 1912). To emphasize that Protestant modernism – specifically – has been understated as a formative influence on the Republic of China, this work provides a "zoomed-in" case study of the religion's influence on Sun in inspiring him to change China. This is done through an overview of his educational background and occasional replication of his religious credo.

Keywords: Christianity, Protestantism, Modernism, late Qing China, Republican China

1. Introduction

Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙, 1866–1925), the first provisional President of the Republic of China (中華民國 *Zhonghua Minguo*, ROC) in 1912, spent most of his formative years outside of (mainland) China. Sun, who hailed from South China's coastal Guangdong province, received an Anglo-American education in Hawaii and Hong Kong. As a Christian (Protestant Baptist) and a fluent English speaker, Sun enjoyed many contacts with overseas Chinese (華僑 *huaqiao*) and would visit the West on numerous occasions during his revolutionary quest to overthrow the faltering Qing dynasty. The fact that, in October 1911, Sun had to read about the imminent realization of his republican dream in a newspaper in St. Louis, the United States (Kayloe 2017, 215–216), was emblematic of his outward focus.

Sun was one of the first mainland Chinese to receive a Western education with only a bare minimum of Chinese (elementary school) education as a basis. Therefore, he can probably be seen as a representative of what historian and Sun-specialist Marie-Claire Bergère called "Blue China." According to Bergère, around the turn of the twentieth century, this Blue China, which consisted of the country's coastal regions, treaty ports, and overseas communities, was outward-focused, maritime, Modernist, and revolutionary and stood in opposition to the "Yellow China" found in the country's inward-focused, conservative, traditional, continental hinterlands (Bergère 1998, 20–23). By the second half of the nineteenth century, an antithetical sentiment of admiration and repugnance, present in both Yellow and Blue China vis-à-vis the West, extended itself to the religious field and, more precisely, to the religion that for many Chinese was representative of both the positives and negatives of the West: Christianity. Initially, along with the apparent persistence of disdain for Chinese traditions by both Catholic and Protestant missionaries in Blue China, negative sentiments toward Christianity prevailed. When Protestant evangelization started to contain Modernist teachings around the turn of the twentieth century, however, the teachings were embraced gradually by those Chinese seeking to change the stagnating empire for something better – either by reform or revolution.

While China was rife with movements against "superstition" (i.e., non-mainstream traditional religions) by the turn of the twentieth century, Christianity remained on the "orthodox" side of the debate until the early 1920s, when Marxist-inspired movements would rise to combat what they saw as an imperialist doctrine. In this way, despite the persistence of sporadic friction between the nationalistic slogans of Blue China's revolutionaries – such as Sun Yat-sen – and the evangelist creed of Protestant missionaries, a "temporal window" of several decades (late nineteenth century to early 1920s) emerged where the two groups' ultimate objective of modernizing China through Western teachings allowed for far-reaching cooperation. Sun's revolutionary activities just before and after the

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turn of the twentieth century were centered in the treaty ports and overseas communities (also noted in Schiffrin 1968, 7–9).

This chapter expands upon Marie-Claire Bergère's dichotomic concept of Blue and Yellow China by linking Sun and his revolutionary movement to the influence of Protestant modernism in Blue China – instead of an often generalized "Western learning" or "Christianity" in (all of) "China." While Sun's ideas later in his life deserve a spotlight of their own, such as the clear religious influence on the 1924 version of his Three Principles of the People (三民主義 *San Min Zhuyi*), the sequential focus is on a less studied part of his life: the first part of the aforementioned "temporal window" when the goals of the Chinese revolutionaries prominently aligned with those of the Protestant missionaries (i.e., from just before the turn of the twentieth century until Sun's short tenure in office in 1912). This chapter argues that Protestant modernism specifically has been understated as a formative influence on the ROC.[1] To demonstrate this, the contribution provides a "zoomed-in" case study of the influence the religion had on Sun in inspiring him to change China through his self-identification as the prodigal son. It elucidates his educational background and occasional replication of religious credo.

2. Blue China, Yellow China

The idea of a Greater China (In Chinese usually understood as "大中華 *Da Zhonghua*") with loosely defined borders is by no means a novel concept. With the ascendancy of globalization and increased interaction between mainland China and overseas Chinese communities over the last half century, many have sought to redefine the concept. One such systemized attempt was made in a 1993 special issue on Greater China in the *Chinese Quarterly* (no. 136) based on a conference in Hong Kong earlier that year. Harry Harding (1993, 661–662) noted that although the term "Greater China" is a recent concept, the idea of a China that extends beyond land borders is much older, with distinctions being made in the nineteenth century between China Proper, the territories directly governed by the Qing empire, and Outer China, the territories under a looser form of suzerainty. By the eighteenth century, in South-East Asia and (eventually) the Pacific, groups of Chinese diaspora who were essentially outside of this suzerainty started forming. During the nineteenth century, the definition of "outer China" expanded

[1] This contribution is not intended to depict Sun's revolutionary quest as being solely Protestant Modernist inspired, only that its influence – specifically – has been relatively understated. The author ultimately agrees with Chen Jianming and Xiao Tao (2020, 95) that "[we] should see that a Christian though he was, Sun Yat-sen is renowned mainly as a political leader and revolutionary. His life was not only influenced by Christianity, but also by a good deal of other theories and teachings."

to include Chinese territories such as Hong Kong and Taiwan that had been forcibly removed from the "inner" realm by imperialist forces. Wang Gungwu (1993, 935–936) remarked that this growing idealistic community beyond China's land borders was highly familiar with and adaptable to foreign institutions of authority. Indeed, the community served as the backbone of the revolutionary movement and, after 1911, the impoverished ROC.

While the notion of "overseas China" closely aligns with the concept of "Blue China" which this chapter connects to Sun Yat-sen and his revolutionary movement, one must still include an additional "gray zone" to be able to fully discuss the influence of missionary activity in China around the turn of the twentieth century: the treaty ports – parts of "China Proper" under semi-colonial domination with only nominal Chinese sovereignty after the advent of the unequal treaties between the Qing empire and the imperial powers. In these gray zones, mostly located on China's coastlines and major riverbanks, foreigners enjoyed far-reaching economic, legal and cultural privileges. As will be shown in the next section, these privileges also covered missionary activities.

Unlike the concept of outer China (i.e., everything geographically external to the Chinese mainland), the idea of a "coastal China" or "Blue China" which Marie-Claire Bergère contrasted with "continental China" or "Yellow China" was more abstract.[2] The French scholar prominently included China's treaty ports in her "Blue China" – despite these geographically being part of Inner China. Bergère (1998, 21–23), hailed the coastal Blue China the "cradle of modern Chinese Nationalism:"

> The coastal Chinese were the first to understand that the Western challenge had to be taken up in the same terms as those in which it was presented: with economic development, and with social and political progress. The precocious and vigorous nationalism of the coastal Chinese went hand in hand with their relative cultural alienation and their economic subordination. At the same time, unlike the xenophobia that dominated the anti-Christian and antiforeigner movements of inland China, the Modernist and nationalist ideology that took shape in the treaty ports did not imply any rejection of the West. On the contrary, it stemmed from an attempt to cooperate with the West—regarded as both a model and a threat—and from pragmatic behavior founded upon compromise and reciprocity. (ibid., 21)

[2] Bergère stated that she had been inspired by the terms "Blue China" and "Yellow China" when watching the 1988 CCTV documentary *The River Elegy* (河殇 *Heshang*), which eulogized the Modernist efforts of Blue China after the Mao Zedong Era (1949–1976). The color contrast was inspired by the idea of a blue maritime West against a stagnating conservative Chinese establishment, represented by the mud of the Yellow River (Bergère 1998, 23, 437).

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The border between this Blue and Yellow China was by no means clear-cut. After all, among many of Sun's Chinese contemporaries from both Yellow and Blue China, unrelenting experiences of national humiliation following the unequal treaties had given rise to a somewhat paradoxical sentiment of admiration and loathing – the former for the West's military strength and economic prosperity and the latter for its exploitation of China. While antipathy against the West prevailed in Yellow China – and eventually culminated in the anti-foreigner Boxer Uprising (1899–1901) – those living in Blue China who had witnessed the efficiency of Western institutions firsthand were more inclined, however, to adopt foreign intellectual ideas to revive China. An example of this is Sun Yat-sen's reaction to the aftermath of the Boxer Uprising. Sun was also shocked by the sheer scale of the Qing defeat but stated that a modern republic based on Western institutions built on the empire's ruins could solve China's weakness (Damon 1991, 161–162). Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) also recognized the "coastal" or even "pacific" character of the more radical revolutionary elements during this era of Chinese history. Gramsci (2011, 286) wrote in the early 1930s that Sun's revolutionary dreams had not materialized because the "Chinese historical movement is confined to the Pacific coast and the banks of the great rivers that flow into the Pacific; the great mass of people in the hinterland is more or less passive."

Descriptive efforts of any kind of "Blue/coastal China" standing in contrast to a "Yellow/continental" China in its hinterlands – be they by Bergère or Gramsci, or anyone proposing similar notions – rarely connect the notion to Sun's religious beliefs or the aforementioned "window of missionary opportunity" between the late nineteenth century and early 1920s that helped Western teachings flow into Blue China.

3. Blue China and Protestant Missionaries

Christianity reached China in the second half of the first millennium CE. After roughly 700 years of Nestorianism[3] between the seventh and fourteenth centuries through the old Silk Road, which eventually gradually faded despite mixing with Chinese traditions and enjoying a brief revival under Mongol patronage in the thirteenth century with some Franciscan activity (Chow and Law 2021, 56),[4]

[3] The term *Nestorian* is disputable. Some argue that what the Chinese effectively practiced held so little in common with the teachings of Christian theologue Nestorius (fifth century CE) that an alternative denomination like "(Christian) Church of the East" is more suited.

[4] Nestorianism had essentially ceased to exist by the end of the Tang dynasty (907) in China after it was included in the 845 crackdown on Buddhism under Emperor Wuzong (r. 840–846), but experienced a brief and marginal revival during the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) before fading out again, likely due to the Black Death (Standaert 2000, 97–98). For a concise overview, see Bays (2012, 4–16).

Catholicism firmly took root in China through the arrival of Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century. These missionaries were motivated by the Counter-Reformation in Europe and wanted to compensate for Catholic "losses" on the old Continent by spreading the word overseas (Mungello 2005, 16). After a slow start – and unlike their Nestorian predecessors – Jesuit missionaries such as Matteo Ricci (1552–1610)[5] and Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–1688) used a "top-down" style of evangelization aimed at converting the Beijing elite and before long managed to persuade a considerable number of influential Chinese scholars who were attracted to the missionaries' propagation of Western sciences as well as their familiarity with and accommodation of Chinese culture and practices (Bays 2012, 21–22). In the context of this chapter, the demand for Western missionary teachings in China by the (prospective) elite is worth remembering.

Catholic missionaries' efforts to accommodate Chinese traditions were essentially curbed due to the conclusion of the Rites Controversy in the early eighteenth century in favor of the conservative position of the Vatican.[6] This was followed by a general prohibition of Christianity by the agitated Qing Emperor Yongzheng (r. 1723–1735) in 1724, which effectively reduced missionary activities to Portuguese-run Macao. Despite these setbacks, Catholicism, unlike its Nestorian predecessor, did not disappear entirely in China.[7] It did, however, lose its competitive edge. By the early nineteenth century, Catholicism in China, despite its number of adherents being roughly equal to 100 years prior (Bays 2012, 31), had lost its touch with China's elite due to continuing Papal restraints, and it faced a new competitor that was unconstrained by the Vatican: Protestantism.

Before the nineteenth century, Protestant activity in China had been negligible. Unlike the Catholic missionaries, the Protestant missionary community had not felt the need to convert the "Eastern heathens," and the few who were willing to pursue such an objective had been hampered by the Qing ban similarly to their Catholic contemporaries (Bays 2012, 37). This began to change during

5 See Mungello (2012, 540–543) for a concise overview of writings by and on Ricci.

6 The Rites Controversy refers to a long-standing dispute in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries between the Catholic church and its missionaries in China on the compatibility of Chinese traditions with Christian teachings. The debate was settled in favor of the Vatican: in 1704 (reiterated in 1715 and 1742), the Pope condemned the use of Chinese rites and Confucian rituals among Catholic believers in mass and ancestor reverence and prohibited the use of the Chinese words 天 *tian* and 上帝 *shangdi* – which Matteo Ricci had viewed as proof that the Chinese also venerated a notion similar to a Christian God – to refer to Heaven and God, respectively. See Standaert (2000, 680–688), Bays (2012, 28–32), and Zheng (2017, 171).

7 For a local example of Catholic resilience in post-ban Qing China, see Robert Entenmann's *A Mission Without Missionaries: Chinese Catholic Clergy in Sichuan, 1746–1756* (Zheng 2017, 33–54).

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the early nineteenth century when the Scot Robert Morrison (1782–1834) started to evangelize from Guangzhou. Morrison had been inspired by the Protestant Second Great Awakening in the United States (1790–1840), which had given rise to several new Protestant denominations that sought to provide an alternative for Enlightenment Rationalism and had called for a focus on the conversion of heathens and pagans abroad through evangelical missions (Pruden 2009, 24–25; Tiedemann 2010, 283–284). Morrison, soon joined by British and American colleagues as well as local converts, based himself on translations from vulgar Latin by his Catholic precursors (Chow and Law 2021, 2), and undertook considerable efforts to translate the Bible into simple, understandable tracts to increase the outreach of the Gospel. These were filled with an emphasis on maintaining a personal connection with God.

The effects of these activities cannot be understated. The treatises, for example, induced Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全, 1814–1864), the self-proclaimed brother of Jesus and leader of the ill-fated Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864), as well as many of his followers, to convert to Christianity and embark on an iconoclastic campaign against Chinese traditions (Spence 2012, 168–169). The Protestant beliefs of Hong and his followers have long been regarded, however, as mere "unorthodox sects," while they were in fact emblematic of a successful assimilation process of the religion in China. Hong's messianic visions would also be found in later Protestant movements (Mungello 2012, 545), and the Taiping leader's self-identification as "designated savior," as will be demonstrated below, would be found in Sun Yat-sen, who was also inspired by Hong's biblically inspired utopian ideas (Tiedemann 2010, 894–895). Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer (2011, 38–39) declared that Hong Xiuquan's cause included three themes that would define the troubled Chinese century that followed his demise: "apocalyptic revolution, Christian influence, and communist utopianism." A similar intersection of motives, albeit with a less fundamentalist approach, would later be found in Sun, as both men were able to dispel (at least part of their) Chinese/Confucian background and become revolutionaries through their Christian faith (also suggested by Jen 1973, 4).

Protestant missions were able to grow exponentially when the first series of unequal treaties were instated in 1842. The missionaries not only gained new treaty port bases where they could operate under the security of many privileges but also added a base where they could operate without any restrictions at all: Hong Kong. In these safe havens, they preached to the local population, trained evangelists, offered modern medical services, and established schools (Bays 2012, 48–49). While these increased privileges had by no means been a clear-set preliminary objective of the imperial powers assaulting China, the Protestant missions

effectively became one of the prime benefactors of their exploitative practices.[8] As John Fairbank (1974, 2–3) noted, "gunfire and the unequal treaties initially gave [the Christian missionary] his privileged status and opportunity," or in the words of Rolf Tiedemann (2010, 134), it essentially put the missions under a "protective envelope." A new series of unequal treaties in 1860 further increased the privileges of the foreign missionaries and their Chinese converts. Christian missionaries were able to operate more freely than ever before and could even travel to the Chinese hinterlands under consular protection. The continental Yellow China nevertheless remained relatively inaccessible for the Protestants, who lacked the extensive networks of their Catholic counterparts and were reluctant to take their families out of the coastal cities – a problem the celibate Catholic missionaries did not have (Tiedemann 2010, 411). The Protestant missionaries' bases of operations thus primarily remained centered in Blue China, where before long, blurry "spaces of betweenness," as Nicolas Standaert (2019) called them with regard to those of their Catholic predecessors, formed among the missionaries, their converts, and the local cultural setting.

The Protestant Second Great Awakening also spread to the Blue China far outside the (nominal) control of the Qing empire. In the Western colonies/semi-colonies and dependencies over South-East Asia and the Pacific, missions were set up to convert and educate the natives. The massive Chinese immigration to these regions over preceding centuries meant that some of these diaspora would also be exposed to the teachings of the missionaries. One of the places in the Pacific with a considerable Chinese community was Honolulu, under the rule of the increasingly United States-dominated Kingdom of Hawaii. Sun Mei (孫眉, 1854–1915), the elder brother of Sun Yat-sen, found financial success here during the 1870s and before long was able to buy a considerable estate where he would host his younger brother.

4. The Modernist shift in Protestant mission schools

Before shifting the attention to Sun Yat-sen's religious persuasions, it is imperative to first mention the gradual evolution in the mission schools during the second half of the nineteenth century in China. Donald Treadgold (1973, 76–79) explained that as religious fundamentalism, or pietism, had initially dominated the dogma of Protestant missionaries, a great contempt for traditional Chinese culture (something that had disgusted Yellow China's literati) and a general neglect

[8] Although the missionaries had by no means caused any of the events in China that led to said advantages, they did partake in cultural imperialism themselves. Paul Harris (1991, 337–338), for instance, argued that the old academic consensus that the "Christianizing" missions had been less imperialistic than the "civilizing" strategies in China needed to be reversed.

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of secular education at the missions (something that had disappointed the students in Blue China who had sought to learn from the West) were present among the missionary ranks. A gradual evolution occurred during the late nineteenth century, however, and the Protestant missionaries' fundamentalist/pietist focus was exchanged for a Modernist message that put social reform at the center of their evangelization mission. The Protestant self-denomination of being the "new religion" (新教 *xinjiao*) – as opposed to the Catholic "old/outdated religion" (舊教 *jiujiao*) – reflects a strong commitment to being seen as compatible with the modernization of China (Chow and Law 2021, 54–55). This notion of "Christian Modernism," spread by Protestant missionaries, aligned well with revolutionary elements seeking to overthrow the Qing dynasty and – at least in Blue China – managed to overcome the distrust of some Chinese toward foreign intellectual designs. While these Chinese often remained disinterested in Christianity per se, and some were even suspicious of the missionaries' intentions, the prospect of being able to learn about Western sciences was, for most, enticing enough to consider mission schooling (Lutz 1971, 90–91).

The background for this evolution is to be found outside of China: in a development that occurred during the decades after the Protestant Second Great Awakening, namely the gradual advance of the American "social gospel." Donald Treadgold (1973, 72–73) argued that this social gospel essentially constituted a form of German idealism that fixated on the individual and was secular, ethical, and social in emphasis. These ideas spread among the Protestant ministers in China during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Although Catholicism also made a return in the early nineteenth century,[9] and Catholic missionary circles in China shifted toward more secular teachings and acceptance of some aspects of traditional Chinese teachings, their evangelization and proselytization remained constrained by the Papal ban on (tolerating) Chinese rituals in the practice of Christian faith. This was only overturned decades later in 1939,[10] with problems enduring until the present day due to the Vatican's non-recognition of the People's Republic of China, which was founded on the ashes of the ROC in 1949, and its enduring refusal to recognize indigenous Catholic churches (e.g., Mungello 2015, 39–70). As Catholic outreach thus remained

[9] David Mungello (2015) would call this a second *Catholic Invasion of China*, which he perceived to have started with an 1834 petition by Catholic converts to the Pope requesting the return of the Jesuits, which materialized in 1842 after the conclusion of the first Opium War, and ended with the canonization of 120 Catholic Martyrs in China by the Vatican in 2000.

[10] After the ban was finally overturned, a relative revival of Catholic activity did indeed take place, but most of it was – just like Protestant activity for that matter – cut short by the communist victory of 1949. For an example of some spirited Jesuit activity in Shanghai that equally ended in tragedy, see Clark (2017).

largely isolated to the lower strata of Chinese society, Protestants had the freedom and power to convert Blue China's revolutionary youth. The limitations of the Catholic mission in China in the field of education are exemplified by a statistic on the state of mission schooling in 1914: while the Catholics dominated elementary mission schooling (8,034 Catholic and 3,511 Protestant), all 542 Christian high schools and universities were Protestant (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 77–78). Still, the Catholic contributions in fields that were less constrained by the limitations of their day – academic research on China and on Sun Yat-sen in particular – are worth mentioning, such as the efforts by friar Pascal D'Elia (1890–1963) in 1930 on interpreting Sun's ideological persuasions.[11] The Catholic narratives would exert a major influence on later conceptualizations and intellectuals – D'Elia's interpretation of Sun would, for instance, be cited by Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (2011, 308–310) in his *Prison Notebooks*.

In the Protestant mission schools, Christianizing (i.e., Westernizing) the Chinese population increasingly became an area of focus. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the majority of missionaries in China agreed that Western sciences and religious conversion were compatible and that if the Chinese were to import these sciences, they might as well learn them under Christian rather than materialist or secular auspices (Lutz 1971, 21–22). The increasing opposition to "superstition" (迷信 *mixin* – i.e., traditional Chinese religion/thought) and approval of "religion" (宗教 *zongjiao* – i.e., Western ideas about secular relations between religions and the state) among the Chinese further fueled their receptiveness to the Modernist creed (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 50–51).[12] The Modernists' reformist message was even further amplified after the failure of the Boxer Rebellion, which had unsuccessfully sought to eradicate Western influence in China. When a new treaty between the United States and China in 1903 assured religious freedom for Chinese converts – which curbed Boxer-style attacks on Protestant missions – opportunities increased even further (Varg 1958, 125). By the early 1900s, a "Golden Age of Missions and the 'Sino-Foreign Protestant establishment'" had arrived (Bays

[11] In 1930, Pascale D'Elia released a translation of Sun Yat-sen's *Three Principles of the People* and a general study of his theological and religious ideas entitled *The Triple Demism of Sun Yat-sen* (*Le triple démisme de Suen Wen*). In the introduction to his work, D'Elia (1930, XXXII–XXXIII) exhorted the Catholic establishment to study Sun's *Three Principles of the People* if the Catholic church was to survive and thrive in Nationalist China. In his analysis of the doctrines, D'Elia (ibid., 489–566) showed great concern in proving that Sun's doctrines did not contradict the teachings of the Catholic church.

[12] Both terms were neologisms imported from the Japanese language where they had been coined in the late nineteenth century after the influx of Western religious ideas. The distinction in China was first made in 1901 by the philosopher and polemist Liang Qichao (梁啓超, 1873–1929) (Goossaert 2008, 211). The two terms essentially replaced the previously prevalent distinction in China between "orthodoxy" (正 *zheng*) and "heterodoxy" (邪 *xie*).

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2012, 92). When the faltering Qing empire committed to educational reform and announced the cessation of classical Confucian exams in 1905, Christian schools received more applicants than they could handle (Lutz 1971, 97–98).

A "window of Christian opportunity" had been achieved, and the prospects seemed limitless; despite the persistence of occasional cultural misunderstandings, the goals of the Protestant missionaries and Chinese revolutionaries seemed to align (McManners 1990, 507–508). By the turn of the twentieth century, these missionaries had successfully convinced those looking for change in China that modernity could only be found in Western science and the Protestant Church (Duara 2008, 49). The ambitions of American Protestant missionaries even went beyond the religious, as Michael Metallo (1978, 266) stated: "The hope of [American] missionaries was not only for a China that was on the road to Christianity, but also a China that modeled its political, social, and economic institutions after those of the United States."

5. Sun Yat-sen's Christian background

Sun Yat-sen spent his youth primarily in three places: Cuiheng, his birthplace in Guangdong province where he spent his childhood; Hawaii, where he obtained his middle schooling while lodging with his elder brother Sun Mei; and Hong Kong, where he was baptized and obtained a degree in medicine in 1892.

With the exception of Cuiheng, which despite being located in the coastal province of Guangdong was a relatively traditional and isolated village, the other two mentioned locations could be seen as part of Blue China. Sun's Christian story begins in Cuiheng because during his youth, a striking phenomenon occurred in the village indirectly related to religion: the influx of defeated Taiping veterans who had fought for Hong Xiuquan. They, just like their leader, had predominantly been Christians influenced by the aforementioned Protestant tracts. The possibility of some kind of early influence from "Taiping Christianity" is thus probable, because it likely determined Sun's later embrace of an individual-based and "revolutionary Christianity" that embraced Jesus's individual achievements and sought societal renewal, while rejecting eclecticism (Wells 2001, 106–107). While it is considerably less likely that the Taiping veterans or foreign missionaries introduced Sun to actual Christian theology,[13] it is apparent that he was at least taught about their Christian-inspired revolutionary creed by someone who is referred to as an "uncle." Sun manifested a preference, however, to playing the

[13] Paul Linebarger (1925, 105–111), who extensively interviewed Sun for his biography, reported that there were no missions in and around Cuiheng and stated that a religious ceremony involving a sea burial during Sun's first voyage to Hawaii in 1879 was his first direct exposure to Christianity.

part of Hong during games with friends (Kayloe 2017, 22; Schiffrin 1980, 22–23), which indicates that a self-identification with the vanquished rebel had already been established at a young age.

Sun was first directly exposed to Protestantism during his stay in Hawaii at the estate of his brother Sun Mei during the early 1880s. Despite his brother and the Hawaiian Chinese community's anti-Christian inclinations,[14] Sun enrolled as a boarding student in the Iolani School, an Anglican missionary institution that catered primarily to Hawaiian and half-Hawaiian boys. This suggests that for Sun Mei, the promise of Western teachings and a promising future for his brother outweighed his distrust of Christianity. The origins of Iolani School could be traced back to the Hawaiian King Kamehameha IV (r. 1855–1863), who had developed an intense dislike of the American Mission where he had been educated and therefore established a British-patterned church and, eventually, a school as a counterbalance to the encroaching Americans (Soong 1997, 158–159). By the time Sun had arrived, these sentiments were still present, as the school supported the anti-American "Hawaii for the Hawaiians" program (Hao 2000, 45).

Many of Sun's teachers during his three years at Iolani were British (Hao 2000, 40). The Anglican student life at the school included mandatory visits to Sunday services at the local cathedral as well as Bible studies held by a Chinese evangelist hired by the Anglican bishop Alfred Willis (1836–1920), who served as headmaster of the school. All of Sun's classmates at Iolani eventually converted to Christianity, which likely sparked his desire to enter the Christian church as well (Restarick 1931, 16–17; Kayloe 2017, 24). As Sun's childhood in Cuiheng had been relatively lonesome, devoid of religious ties that could have knit the community together, the uniting force of Christianity in Iolani School was likely an additional attraction to the religion (Huang 2016, 64).

The education that Sun received at Iolani School cannot be categorized under "Protestant modernism," as the teachings were quite conservative and delivered from a relatively pietist and British angle.[15] They were less influenced by the budding social gospel trend in the US, and it is unlikely that Sun was extensively taught about republicanism at the school due to its anti-American origins. In 1896, one year after Sun's first revolutionary attempt in Guangzhou, headmaster Alfred Willes would feel compelled to counter claims that he had indoctrinated Sun with republicanism and

[14] Irma Tam Soong (2010, 77) noted that "in 1881, only five hundred of the fourteen thousand Chinese in Hawai'i were Christians." Harold Schiffrin (1968, 15) also stated that Sun's brother was "a conservative" in the "religious issue [of Christian conversion] that had split the Chinese community."

[15] "Conservative" here is relative. As Irma Soong (1997, 157–158) stated, the Anglicans in Hawaii should not be mistaken for puritans either, and they should be distinguished from the strictly puritan Congregationalists (Calvinist Protestants) in the United States.

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revolutionary ideals during his school years, stressing that the Hawaiian republic had not yet come into existence during Sun's stay on the island (Sharman 1934, 13; Kayloe 2017, 23–24). This statement was further supported by Henry Bond Restarick (1931, 13–14), the first American bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Hawaii, who refuted the opinion that American influence on the island – and on Sun – had been strong during Sun's days as a student and emphasized that "the whole atmosphere of Iolani School was intensely British."

It nevertheless remains questionable just how 'British' the atmosphere at Iolani was. Paul Linebarger (1925, 175), who had direct access to Sun when compiling his biography, for example, reported that most of the common teachers at the institution had been "American ladies." Furthermore, while the two bishops' accounts of Sun's curriculum being "British" and the observation that the Iolani School officially maintained an anti-American position both hold ground, the Iolani School did not exactly "breed respect for magisterial authority" for the Qing empire either (Schiffrin 1980, 24). Bishop Willis's many tales of English and American struggles for a constitutional government devoid of tyranny, speeches opposing American imperialist aggression toward Hawaii, and championing of Hawaiian independence might very well have done the opposite of what the teacher intended and could have inspired Sun with revolutionary ideals. Even Bishop Restarick seemed to have admitted to this by recounting what he had personally heard from a former classmate of Sun.[16]

Indeed, while the teachers might not have made a case for republicanism or revolution, neutrally imparting their knowledge on Western history to Sun might have convinced him of their use regardless. Equally important in explaining Sun's "republican embrace" was the general atmosphere on the island. Wang Gungwu (2011, 6–7) accentuated that "Hawaii was not New England" – a reference to the stronghold of the Puritan Calvinists – either, and the "culturally pluralistic" state of the kingdom was likely an important factor of influence on Sun, with Europeans, Americans, Hawaiians and Chinese intermingling. Similarly, the missionaries must also have been shaped by interaction with the pluralistic "other" that they encountered in such an intercultural space (see Standaert 2019, 217).

Although Sun performed well academically in Hawaii, Sun Mei grew increasingly dissatisfied by his younger brother's seemingly imminent conversion to Christianity and had Sun shipped back to Cuiheng in 1882. This was a turning point for Sun, who embarked upon an iconoclastic rampage in the village's temple and smashed up a set of religious idols with the help of his childhood friend Lu

[16] Restarick (1931, 15) stated, "If Sun Yat Sen got any idea of the struggle for liberty when at Iolani, he must have obtained it from reading English history, the wresting of the Magna Charta (sic) from King John or the struggle of Cromwell against the autocracy of Charles I, and the development of constitutional government in Great Britain."

Haodong (陸皓東, 1868–1895), who was in the village to bury his father (Sharman 1934, 17–19; Kayloe 2017, 25–26; Linebarger 1925, 152–168; Restarick 1931, 21–26). Lu's role in further initiating Sun into Christianity and revolutionary ideology seems apparent, as he had also enjoyed a "Blue China education" in Shanghai under Christian auspices. Sun allegedly showed his ideological debt to Lu by calling him his "doctrinal friend." Lu in turn confided to Sun that he saw his friend as a potential "Chinese Napoleon" (Sharman 1934, 16–18; Restarick 1931, 24).

While the iconoclastic actions of Sun and Lu in the temple must have undoubtedly been at least partly inspired by their religious and Western education in Blue China, which made them inclined to view the reverence of the idols as "backward" and "superstitious", the prime motivations for their deeds were the aforementioned stories about the Taiping leader Hong Xiuqian (Bergère 1998, 25–26; Sharman 1934, 14–16). Hong had also commenced his revolutionary career by smashing as many local deities in village temples as he could, which Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer (2011, 38) described as "the first case of iconoclasm in modern China." Similarly, Sun and Lu's extreme act in 1883 was meant to be a break with the traditions of the China of old. It closed the door to their hometown, as Cuiheng's conservative elders banished Sun and Lu for their sacrilege. Sun's family sent him to British-controlled Hong Kong to further his education – which was likely an outcome he had aimed for. Lu also left the village and took up employment in Shanghai (Sharman 1934, 19). During this difficult time, Sun took solace in his fate from the Bible's tales of self-sacrifice (Linebarger 1925, 165–166), a theme that would become a major inspiration for him.

Similar to the combination of British or American overtones that had dominated Sun's religious and political persuasions in Hawaii, his stay in Hong Kong was – despite British control of the city – mixed as well. There, in the heartland of Blue China and free haven for Christianity, he and Lu Haodong were baptized in early 1884 by the Swiss-born American Baptist congregational minister Charles Hager (1851–1917). Hager was well connected with American-Chinese Christians, having worked on the American West Coast before being dispatched to Hong Kong (Smith 2005, 92). The choice for Hager shows that, parallel to Sun's dealings in Hawaii, American influence ultimately prevailed despite Sun staying in a British-dominated area. Hager later recounted that he had asked Sun whether he was already a Christian, and Sun confidently replied that he already believed in the doctrine of Christ and was "ready to be baptized at any time" (Hager 1912, 382–383). Evidently, Sun's previous stay on Hawaii had already 'mentally' converted him to the religion (Sharman 1934, 20–22). Bishop Alfred Willis had also remarked that Sun would have converted to Christianity long ago were it not for his "heathen relatives" in Hawaii, a likely reference to Sun Mei's obstruction (Chu 2011, 24).

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Sun, now truly Christian in name and status, continued his studies in Hong Kong. His baptism opened new horizons for him in Blue China, as Carl Smith (2005, 96) stated: "Sun Yat-sen's baptism brought him into a distinct circle of China coast Christians [...] an elite circle of the Chinese Protestant Church." Sun readily used those ties during his revolutionary quest. Between 1884 and 1886, Sun enjoyed two stints at Anglican boarding schools in Hong Kong where English and Chinese education were combined, under a Chinese convert associated with the London Missionary Society (Sharman 1934, 22–23; Hager 1912, 383; Wells 2001, 106). Minister Charles Hager allegedly helped him enter a Medical College in 1886 through a recommendation letter. This was not a smooth process. Hager (1912, 383–384) later recounted that in the summer of that year, Sun had been forced to obey the wishes of his elder brother for a second time and returned to Hawaii to fulfill some administrative tasks related to the property rights. During Sun's visit, Sun Mei once more opposed Christianity and exhorted his younger brother to cease in his faith if he wanted to continue enjoying financial support. Sun Mei also wanted his younger brother to work for him in Hawaii so he could keep an eye on him. This failed, as Sun obtained sufficient funding through an American missionary to return to Hong Kong (Schiffrin 1980, 27–28). Sun's network among Protestant missionaries had become so extensive that he could allow such financial risks to persist in his faith.

According to Charles Hager (1912, 384), by this point, Sun had become convinced that he should become a preacher of the Christian gospel and even received money from fellow Chinese Christians in Hawaii to study for the ministry after his brother severed financial ties with him.[17] No suitable theological seminar existed in Hong Kong, however, and Sun opted for medicine instead. The choice to pursue Western medicine was likely a pragmatic one and not likely his preferred choice. This was also suggested by Sun (1920, 64) personally in a later treatise that would form part of his *General Plan for National Reconstruction* (建國方略 *Jian Guo Fanglüe*), where he listed propagandistic opportunities and the people-to-people nature of medicine as motivations.[18]

James Cantlie (1851–1926), the British co-founder of the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese that Sun attended, stated that Sun must also have been attracted by the practical and scientific knowledge that was taught in the medical school. This teaching was starkly different from the endlessly repetitive learning

17 Hager stated that Sun personally recounted this to him after Sun's return from Hawaii. It should therefore be treated with some degree of suspicion, as Sun might have been attempting to curry favor with Hager by stating his intention to become a fellow minister.

18 Sun stated that he, "decided to take the classroom as a place to propagate, using medicine as a medium to involve myself in human affairs [...]." Original text: "由是以學堂為鼓吹之地，借 醫術為入世之媒[...]."

of the classics, which constituted the sole "advanced" education in Qing China (Cantlie and Jones 1912, 202–203; Sharman 1934, 26–27). The school once again held Anglo-American tenets and was founded under missionary auspices. Sun was its first graduate in 1892 (Cantlie and Jones 1912, 27–28; Sharman 1934, 29–30; Jansen 1967, 60). During his education in Hong Kong, Sun continued to connect his Christian faith with revolution during discussions with Protestant friends and ministers, and increasingly linked the image of the ideal revolutionary with Jesus's selfless sacrifice for the common good (Chen and Xiao 2020, 96–97).

To summarize Sun's Western-inspired educational years in the words of Wang Gungwu (2011, 4), "Sun Yat-sen's understanding of what the West represented came to him in three parts: by listening to stories of the Taipings, reading the textbooks in his schools in Honolulu taught by his missionary teachers and in the schools in Hong Kong, and through the tutelage of British medical scientists at the [Hong Kong] College." Western learning under Protestant auspices had evidently shaped Sun to a great extent by the time he abandoned reformism. This would become especially apparent in Sun's first revolutionary organization, the Revive China Society (興中會 *Xingzhonghui*), founded in Hawaii during November of 1894.

6. A Christ- or Christian-based revolutionary quest

The Revive China Society was largely comprised of Christians educated in Blue China, in particular Hong Kong (Ng 1983, 153). This was reflected in the society's oath, "Overthrow the Manchus, restore China, establish a Republic; if one harbors disloyalty, God[19] will see to it" (Sun 1989, vol. 9, 239), to which prospective members had to swear in the American presidential manner "under the method of placing one's left hand on the open [Bible] and raising one's right hand upwards"

[19] Note that the Chinese term for "God" in Protestantism has been debated in what is known as the "Term Question" (see Tiedemann 2010, 361–370). Sun's references to "God" in Chinese were also highly dependent on his audience. The "divinity/deity" (神明 *shenming*) that Sun uses here is not specifically a Christian term; it can also be used in reference to the "one that created the myriad things" (such as the mythical Pangu 盤古 and Nüwa 女媧) – also in Daoism and/or Buddhism. This term, just like "Lord-on-High" (上帝 *Shangdi*) that was preferred by some in the nineteenth century Protestant sphere (Chow and Law 2021, 2), which Sun sometimes used before similar audiences, would – especially in 1894 – be much better understood by his diverse membership than the more biblical "Heavenly Father" (天父 *tianfu*), which Sun used with Christian audiences and in private communication with fellow believers. The Catholic-imbued "Heavenly Lord" (天主 *Tianzhu*) that had been prevalent in Christian Chinese texts prior to the nineteenth century remained unused by Sun, although it is used in a few translations of English speeches and texts published in his name. For further reading, see Monica Romano's *Translating and Transplanting the Word of God in Chinese* (Zheng 2017, 167–194).

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(Sun 1994, vol. 1, 78–81).[20] The fact that Sun would – and could – demand such a religious commitment is unsurprising. While the goal to "establish a republic" felt alien to some – only a handful of republics existed in 1894 – most members were familiar with the religious part as products of Protestant mission schooling (Schiffrin 1980, 37–41). By 1894, the Protestant window of opportunity had arrived, and a significant portion of the Society's Blue China-based membership had either been baptized or was at least willing to play along with the Christian overtones for the sake of its Modernist prospects (Bergère 1998, 50–55; Chen 2012, 115). Of the fifteen members who made up the core group around Sun and would join him in his anti-Qing rebellions, eight were Christian (Chen and Xiao 2020, 90).

After the failure of the Revive China Society's first attempt at revolution in Guangzhou in October 1895, which led to the demise of Sun's childhood friend Lu Haodong, Sun went into exile in Japan. The high casualties suffered among Christian Chinese riled missionary circles, who tried to mediate on behalf of the imprisoned survivors with varying degrees of success (Sharman 1934, 37–43). While in exile, Sun's efforts became even more reliant on Protestant Chinese and the church in Blue China. During a visit to Hawaii in 1896 to rally support for his organization, Sun bumped into his former headmaster James Cantlie, who invited Sun to visit him in London. Sun arrived in London on October 1 of that year. Ten days later, while passing the Chinese legislation in London on his way to the Cantlies from his lodging, Sun was promptly captured by Qing officials (Wells 2001, 10).

In a treatise written shortly after his eventual release from captivity, which was secured after Sun's capture became a media sensation in England after the Cantlies involved the British press, Sun repeatedly stated how his Christian persuasions helped him survive this ordeal. When negotiating with one of his captors, he likened himself to the Armenian Christians in the Ottoman Empire (Sun 1897, 56), and when he eventually received positive news about his forthcoming release, Sun saw this as a sign that God had answered his prayers and expressed his relief that the British government had not opted for a similarly pro-Qing role in putting down the "great national and Christian revolution" (i.e., the Taiping Rebellion) half a century prior (Sun 1897, 59–60). While the considerable stress put on his Christian beliefs in the treatise can be explained by the intended Western audience, Sun's (strengthened) belief that God had decided he had a personal revolutionary task to fulfill on earth seems genuine. This can also be seen in the fact that he likened himself to the "prodigal son" when communicating privately

[20] Original text: "驅除韃虜，恢復中華，創立合眾政府；倘有貳心，神明鑒察" and "其法在開卷聖經上置其左手，右手向上高舉." Harold Schiffrin (1968, 42–43) noted, however, that it remains unclear just how much of this oath was really applied at the time and how much can be considered a "retroactive attempt" by later historians. Bergère (1998, 52) also remarked upon the existing ambiguity surrounding the original charter and oath.

with a Chinese minister in Hong Kong shortly after the London incident: "[I] suffered a great calamity, like the prodigal son and the lost sheep; I owe everything to the grace of God" (Sun 1989, vol. 4, 14–15).[21] The German idealism of the Protestant Second Great Awakening, advocating for a personal connection with God, had clearly impacted Sun by this point.

Sun spent a few more months in England – capitalizing on his celebrity status – before returning to Asia. Wandering through Blue China, he started preparing another revolutionary attempt. During this time, Sun's competition with his reformist rival from Yellow China, Kang Youwei (康有為, 1858–1927), who had been attempting to influence the Qing Emperor to carry out reform by proposing a secular reinterpretation of Confucianism and the idea of "Chinese Learning as Substance, Western Learning for Application" (中體西用 *zhongtixiyong*), reached a climax. Sun and Kang competed for the support of the Chinese communities abroad, but while both men were heavily inspired by Christianity and rode the wave of the anti-superstition sentiment in China during their respective quests to strengthen the country, Sun's followers were decidedly more Christian than Kang's Confucian supporters (Rhoads 1975, 49).[22] Kang's gradualism toward a constitutional monarchy and inclination to maintain a Chinese core in partly Westernizing did, however, appeal to the established and (traditionally) well-educated Chinese elite abroad, while Blue China's Christians and followers with a lower level of education tended to support Sun and his republican ideals (Wilbur 1976, 45–47). Kang was eventually also forced into exile after Qing conservatives stopped the Hundred Day reforms (戊戌變法 *Wuxu Bianfa*) he had initiated in June–September 1898. But his disdain for Sun's Western overtures and, especially, lack of traditional intellectual grounding prevented collaboration between the two exiles.

In 1900, the Revive China Society again attempted to spark a revolution in Huizhou. This attempt can be hailed as the peak of Christian and Blue Chinese influences on Sun's revolutionary quest, as it took place in a region highly affected by Protestant missions, and as it was supported by Christians from Blue China

[21] Original text: "弟遭此大故，如蕩子還家，亡羊復獲，此皆天父大恩." See footnote on Sun's usage of "God". Note that Sun also used 上帝施恩 (*Shangdishien*) earlier in the letter to refer to the "grace by God" in a less biblical context.

[22] Kang also was, for instance, a proponent of the Christian Modernist-inspired "convert temples to schools" movement, which sought to secularize the temples of China's traditional religions to educate China's youth in a Western fashion (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 45–46). Unlike Sun, Kang's interest in the religion did not, extend beyond its organizational tenets and secular features. Song Huichang (2011, 22–23) noted that while Kang had also been inspired by Christianity, his understanding of the religion was not as complete as Sun's, as Kang led himself astray by Buddhist teachings and a superiority complex toward the West. According to Song, Kang's proposed 孔教 (*Kongjiao*), a systematically Christianized form of Confucianism inspired by secular Christianity as present in the West, was too inflexible to achieve any actual implementation. This was similarly contended by Tian Hailin (1992, 35).

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(Kayloe 2017, 97–98; Schiffrin 1968, 214–215 and 227–229). An estimated 30% of participants were Christian (Chen and Xiao 2020, 91), a striking statistic considering that the estimated proportion of Protestants in mainland China was just over 0.02% (85,000 among 400 million Chinese) at the time (Metallo 1984, 154). The revolutionary attempt, however, failed again, and Sun returned into exile. While the Revive China Society's activities and organizational coherence diminished after this second fiasco, "Prodigal Son" Sun continued to carve an individual revolutionary path during the first few years of the twentieth century. This seems in line with an utterance by Sun during this part of his life, as reported by Lyon Sharman (1934, 310), daughter of two American missionaries who had worked and lived in China: "I do not belong to the Christianity of the churches, but to the Christianity of Jesus who was a revolutionary." While the exact date of this often-cited sentence cannot be traced back with the materials available today, it most certainly aligns with Sun's self-identification with Jesus and Hong Xiuquan's brand of individualistic revolution.

A string of visits to Blue China followed over the five years after the Huizhou uprising. Sun once again tried to outdo Kang Youwei's reformist organization for funding. Harold Schiffrin (1968, 320) noted that Kang's men had also attempted an uprising in Hankou (part of present-day Wuhan), but the continental-based/supported plot had felt alien to many overseas Chinese, who increasingly flocked to Sun. Across all segments of society, Sun's call for revolution was steadily becoming more persuasive than Kang's gradualism (Spence 2012, 230). Despite this increase in support, Sun eventually realized that his increasingly soloist revolutionary quest was not going according to plan, and he planned to reestablish a coherent organization, which would culminate in the founding of the Chinese Revolutionary League (中國同盟會 Zhongguo Tongmenghui) in 1905, a merger of several revolutionary groups including the faltering Revive China Society. During this period, Sun once again emphasized the importance of striving for a government based on the Protestant Modernist education and values he had witnessed in Hawaii, Hong Kong and the United States. On a visit to Hawaii in May 1904, Sun (1989, vol. 3, 2–3) stated, "Our greatest hope is to use the Bible and Christian education (as we know it in America) as a means of transmitting to our fellow citizens the possibility of obtaining happiness through righteous law."[23] In an English pamphlet released in the United States during the fall of the same year, Sun (1989, vol. 10, 95–96) also connected on the expelling of Christian missionaries and massacring of converts that started under Emperor Yongzheng to the stagnation of the Qing empire, and he ended his revolutionary plea by repeating his approval of the United States'

[23] Original text: "我們的最大希望是，把聖經和基督教教育（正如我們在美國所認識的）作為一種傳遞手段，向我們的同胞轉送通過正義的法律所可能得到幸福."

Protestant Modernist ideals: "To work out the salvation of China is exclusively a duty of our own, but as the problem has recently involved a worldwide interest, we [...] must appeal to the people of the civilized world in general and the people of the United States in particular for your sympathy and support [...] because you are a Christian nation; because we intend to model our new government after yours [...]" Sun had found a middle ground: the salvation of China was the exclusive duty of the Chinese – with himself as the prodigal vanguard – but the model for this would be foreign. The distinction between 'substance' and 'application' was becoming increasingly blurry.

Despite Sun's continuing Protestant Modernist rhetoric, the Chinese Revolutionary League would hold less Christian and Blue Chinese overtones than the Revive China Society. During the first years of the twentieth century, an increasing number of students from Yellow China were sent to Japan on government scholarships. These students, while also dissatisfied with the Qing dynasty, held higher (traditional) educational credentials than the members of the Revive China Society, and many were related to established families from the interior. To cater to his new audience, Sun tried to establish himself as an intellectual by elaborating on his political ideas. While some doubts remained about certain parts of Sun's philosophy, most students, who understood the goal of establishing a 'republic' better than their predecessors, were – for the time being – won over by his rousing speeches and rhetorical skills (Schiffrin 1968, 7–9; Kayloe 2017, 125–130). The disappearance of the Bible and Christian references from the organization's oath was emblematic of the shifting membership in the Chinese Revolutionary League.

Abroad, however, Sun persisted in his Protestant Modernist quest, in line with his 1904 call, and attempted to find willing benefactors in the United States in particular. His focus, however, grew increasingly secular and included American bankers, adventurers and speculators. For religious or secular reasons, Sun continued to perceive the United States as a Modernist beacon in the world; a beacon indispensable for furthering China's fate.

7. A Christian president

Sun and the Chinese Revolutionary League ultimately succeeded in overthrowing the Qing dynasty during the Wuchang Uprising of October 1911. While Christian overtones in Sun's organization had, as stated, slightly decreased, at least six of the 86 known casualties of the Wuchang Uprising were Christian (Chen and Xiao 2020, 91) – which still constituted a disproportionate number compared to the total Christian population in China.

Sun, the ideal compromise figure for the factionally divided revolutionaries, with his almost two decades of revolutionary experience, was installed as

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provisional president of the Republic of China on 1 January 1912. In his cabinet, men educated in Blue China were once again overrepresented, with at least three ministers having been schooled in Hong Kong (Ng 1983, 158–159). Sun's presidency only lasted six weeks, as he announced his resignation in mid-February in favor of the military leader Yuan Shikai (袁世凱, 1859–1916) – a strongman from Yellow China – who took over the presidency on 10 March and seized absolute autocratic powers a year later by gradually outlawing all political parties. Sun was subsequently forced into another period of exile in Japan. While the fascinating political machinations underlying Sun's short tenure in office – arguably "the zenith of his career" (Bergère 1998, 213) – are beyond the scope of this chapter, two points are worth discussing in the context of his religious beliefs: (1) the reactions of the Protestant missionaries and (2) some Modernist discourse and decisions by President Sun.

Despite Sun continuing to keep his distance from ecclesiastic Christianity, rarely visiting Protestant churches, and strictly abiding by the idea of separation of state and church (Tan 2011, 31–32), he still upheld his personal identification as "messianic savior." Just as Sun's idol Hong Xiuquan's fundamentalist Protestant interpretation of being Jesus's brother was maintained until his demise, despite disagreements with the ecclesiastic church, Sun's Protestant modernism remained equally faithfully reflected in his thought (Treadgold 1973, 79–80). Maintaining his distance from Christian ecclesiasticism did not imply, however, maintaining distance from Protestant missionaries. Christian missionaries had played an important role in mediating between the opposing factions in 1911 (Tiedemann 2010, 654–655). While American diplomats and journalists initially adopted a cautious approach to the unfolding revolution, the country's missionaries were among the loudest supporters of Sun and his acolytes from Blue China (Metallo 1978, 262).

Sun in turn paid his respects to the Modernist teachings he had received from them by decreeing freedom of religion (信教自由 *xinjiao ziyou*). This clause was included in the Provisional Constitution of the Republic of China promulgated on 11 March 1912. Although the clause was enacted the day after Yuan Shikai took up the presidency, it had been created during Sun's provisional government and carried his seal (Sun 1989, vol. 9, 280–285).[24] A day later, Sun sent a telegram to the wife of his old teacher James Cantlie in which he stated, "I am glad to tell you that we

[24] The fifth article, part of the second chapter of the provisional constitution, stated, "The people of the Republic of China are all equal, without distinction as to race, class, or religion." Original text: "中華民國人民一律平等，無種族、階級、宗教之區別." The freedom of religion clause was the last of seven items describing "rights to freedoms" (自由權 *ziyouquan*), which were mentioned in the sixth article, also part of the second chapter of the provisional constitution, and it stated, "The people have freedom of religion." Original text: "人民有信教之自由."

are going to have religious toleration in China, and I am certain Christianity will flourish under the new regime" (Cantlie and Jones 1912, 65; Sun 1989, vol. 4, 246).

What likely satisfied the missionaries even more than Sun's direct – constitutional – tribute to their teachings, was his indirect acknowledgment that Christianity was an enlightened and Modernist religion – in contrast to Chinese superstition. Sun's implementation of the Gregorian calendar over the millennia-old lunar–solar calendar on his first day in office already attested to that view, but the constitution's freedom of religion clause did so even more. Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer (2011, 57) aptly stated that the passage in the constitution was wholly based on the Western religion–superstition paradigm imparted by the missionaries. The Protestant window of opportunity was evidently nearing its apex; Sun's ideas on the role of religion and those of the Modernist missionaries almost completely aligned. Sun's selfless resignation in February in favor of Yuan Shikai, often seen as originating in his Christian beliefs (e.g., Chen 2014, 142), was also bestowed with considerable praise by the missionaries, who viewed this as a selfless deed worthy of a "patriotic, earnest Christian" (Metallo 1978, 271–273). As Yuan had also been relatively favorable to the missions, the prospects still seemed bright for the missions (Metallo 1984, 160–161). Among those praising Sun's selfless resignation was Charles Hager (1912, 386), who suddenly stood at the center of media attention as the minister who had baptized the Chinese president. Hager, however, also expressed his regret that the political situation – Yuan had significant military might at his disposal – forced Sun to resign.[25]

Sun, who was subsequently appointed minister of railroads, continued to pay respect to his Modernist Protestant inspirations and the role the missionaries had played by stating the following at one of his stops during what resembled a preacher-like tour through China in 1912: "Today, I am fortunate to have Western priests at the vanguard to enlighten our country. I only hope that in the future, the whole country will worship the supreme and almighty religion, so as to make up for the inadequacy of the decrees of the Republic of China" (Sun 1989, vol. 3, 132–133).[26] In August and September 1912, Sun visited Beijing, where he was entertained by Yuan

[25] Sun (1920, 45; 1989, vol. 1, 387–396) would later also attest to more pragmatic reasons for his resignation in favor of Yuan, denying that he had been afraid of his military might and instead claiming that the hopeless state of the country made it irrelevant who was President at the time.

[26] Original text: "今幸有西方教士為先覺，以開導吾國。惟願將來全國皆欽崇至尊全能之宗教，以補民國政令之不逮." This passage is not received well by most scholars from the People's Republic of China working on Sun who tend to view the Christian influence (and all religious influence, for that matter) on him as negative. Dong (1998, 133), for instance, stated that this passage showed that "Sun lacked sufficient understanding of the true intentions of the Western imperial powers who were using 'evangelism' as a means of aggression." Original text: "孫中山對西方列強把“傳教”作為一種侵略手段的真情也缺乏足夠的認識."

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Shikai, and on 5 September, he delivered a speech before large crowds of Chinese Protestants on the grounds of the American Congregational Church, where he attested to the important role the Protestant Church had played in founding the Republic of China.[27] Even as late as February 1913, shortly before being forced into exile again due to Yuan's power grab, Sun emphasized the importance of a Bible-inspired Protestant Modernist education – again linking this to his own republican dream – to students of a Christian university in Shanghai.[28]

8. Epilogue: The end of the Protestant window of opportunity

While the ascendancy of Yellow China's Yuan Shikai implied that the influence of Protestant missionaries on Chinese affairs decreased after Sun's short presidency, Yuan tolerated the missions, which remained active during the early 1910s. After Yuan's demise in 1916 and the onset of the Warlord Era (1916–1928), Protestant missionaries increasingly hedged their bets between (potentially) sympathetic warlords and the Christian cause, instead of going "all in" with Sun as they did a decade earlier. By the 1920s, Sun's power and influence over Chinese affairs had declined to the level where he was perceived merely as one of the many contenders to reunite China, which also made the missionaries less enthusiastic about supporting him (Metallo 1978, 282). Sun's increasingly pragmatic behavior as "one of the many contenders" did not please the missionaries either. This had already become clear before Yuan's demise: while the missionaries had praised Sun's resignation for the greater good in 1912, in the summer of 1913, they asked themselves how 'their' man had strayed from the path of peace when Sun started calling for a second revolution against Yuan (Sharman 1934, 173–174). This suspicion persisted as Sun tried to regain influence in China over the next decade through many different – often unethical – channels, and, in what the missionaries perceived as a sacrilegious episode, Sun even remarried – ironically, a Protestant – without formally divorcing his first wife.[29]

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27 Lyon Sharman (1934, 147–148) reported, "Men say that the revolution originated with me. I do not deny the charge. But where did the idea of the revolution come from? It came because from my youth I have had intercourse with foreign missionaries […] Now I call upon the church to help in the establishment of the new government." The speech – although with slightly different nuances compared with Sharman's account – can also be found in Sun (1989, vol. 4, 75).

28 "The Bible tells us to shine your light on others, so that everyone can know the way to go. The same is true of learning; once you have been educated yourself, you must also try to impart it on others. A republican political entity takes education as its core." Original text: "《聖經》告訴我們，你們的光要照亮別人，使大家能知道應走的路。學問亦然，自己得了教育，也要設法去傳授別人。共和政體，以教育爲根基." (Tan 2011, 33).

29 This would be denied in Paul Linebarger's (1925, 353–363) biography under Sun's input, although it was likely a lie to placate the distinctly foreign – thus Christian – readership. The

The Protestant window of opportunity did not last forever either. Chinese students became increasingly aware that religion itself was also under attack in the West, with many intellectuals viewing it as archaic and having been superseded by science (Lutz 1971, 217–218). Furthermore, Western religion, ideology, and philosophy in general also lost much of its credibility as "civilized" or "modern" with the influx of stories of the First World War (1914–1918) into China (Bays 2012, 106–107). The final nail in the coffin of the Protestant window of opportunity came around the onset of the 1920s, when Marxist-inspired movements combating all religions arose in the wake of the 1919 May Fourth Movement (五四運動 *Wu si yundong*)[30] and Christianity, in particular, was more prominently connected to imperialist excesses (e.g., Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 51; Fairbank 1974, 3; Lutz 1976, 407). This then gave rise to an "anti-Christian movement" (非基督教運動 *Fei jidujiao yundong*, 1922–1927) several years later. Interestingly, this anti-Christian movement seemed to have originated around an acquaintance of Sun, namely Zhu Zhixin (朱执信, 1885–1920), who had become increasingly influenced by Marxism and published a newspaper article on Christmas day 1919 called *What is Jesus?* (耶稣是什麼東西 *Yesu shi shenme dongxi*). Citing Western criticism of the Bible and the role of the church in society, the article attacked the absurdity of the Christian gospel and depicted Jesus as an illegitimate low-born child who became the leader of a band of mystical lunatics (Zhu 1919; Lutz 1976, 396). The ideas spread by Zhu became more organized in early 1922, when anti-Christian demands were formalized by Shanghai-based students who wanted to stop the World's Student Christian Federation from holding a congress in Beijing (Yamamoto and Yamamoto 1953, 133–134). The core of the movement's message can be summarized as Christianity being equal to capitalism and exploitation by the West. Thus, Christianity needed to be permanently banished from China (Hodous 1930, 487–488). The fact that the seeds of the movement can be found in a Sun-affiliated representative of Blue China, Zhu Zhixin, and the movement was carried by progressive students from Shanghai – part of Blue China – who had previously willingly flocked to mission schools, shows that the Blue/Yellow spectrum might also have run its course by the 1920s.

struggle in the Protestant community with Sun's decision to remarry is exemplified through the biography by Bishop Henry Bond Restarick (1931, 125–131), who stated that no one – Confucian or Christian – would be able to approve of what Sun had done, yet he also provided a mitigating footnote that divorce was becoming increasingly common in the United States.

30 While the May Fourth Movement, and the broader New Culture Movement (新文化運動 *Xin wenhua yundong*, 1915–1921) that it is often categorized under, did embrace Modernist Western teachings such as "mister democracy" (德先生 *dexiansheng*) and "mister science" (賽先生 *saixiansheng*), the influx of Marxist thought in the late 1910s meant that this embrace would become increasingly detached from Christian teachings.

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The "religion–superstition" spectrum, which had positioned Modernist Protestantism at the right side of the debate, was also nearing its end. While the Modernist thirst by the Chinese had allowed for the conversion of many traditionalist – 'superstitious' – temples into missionary institutions of Western learning in the late nineteenth century, the perceived imperialism behind these conversions now made them demand those temples back. Indeed, imperialism, not the religion–superstition spectrum, would from then on define whether a religion or ideology could be embraced by the Chinese. Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer (2011, 69) explained that the love for China as a nation, which had caused many of its revolutionaries to resent its traditions, could be just as easily fueled by Protestant Modernism (during the window of opportunity) or secular radicalism (which dominated the early 1920s) as it could by Marxism (which ultimately prevailed as the communists emerged victorious in 1949). Finally, two important external effects should also be mentioned in the context of the ending of the "Protestant window of opportunity," namely (1) the crumbling of evangelical unity as new fundamentalist–Modernist debates emerged (Bays 2012, 106)[31] and (2) the fact that American missionaries – who had been the backbone of Sun's network – also grew increasingly restrained due to diminishing governmental backing for their efforts in China.[32]

9. Conclusion

While Sun Yat-sen pragmatically decreased his "Christian rhetoric" under the above-described turbulent circumstances of the last decade of his life, a discussion of his wavering political and religious standpoints during this time – from 1921 onward Sun opted for an alliance with the Soviet Union – deserves an article on its own. With death looming, however, he reaffirmed the individualist kind of Christianity that we saw in his younger years, reportedly speaking to a Christian friend: "You are a Christian, and so am I. I wish to tell you something I have always felt, which you will understand. Just as Christ was sent by God to the world, so also did God send me" (Wilbur 1976, 280–281). Some days later, he supplemented that statement, saying, "I am a messenger of God to help men to obtain equality and freedom," and begged his leftist-inclined followers to "not make trouble for the Christians"

[31] Some missionaries had become dissatisfied by the Modernist message in the mission schools and formed fundamentalist counter groups. This was part of a worldwide trend toward a new "Modernist-fundamentalist" controversy during the 1920s.

[32] American President Woodrow Wilson (r. 1913–1921), an ordained Presbyterian elder, had actively supported missionary activities in China during the first part of his term. The missionaries served as his "ears" when it came to China-related policies, but as his term progressed, the missionaries' religious goals increasingly interfered with his vision for post-Versailles China (Trani 1971, 342–343; Metallo 1984, 162–163; Varg 1958, 146).

(Sharman 1934, 310). On his deathbed, Sun also informed the American Episcopal Church that he "wanted it to be known that [he] died a Christian" (Restarick 1931, 153). In the end, despite objections from some of his non-Christian followers, he did receive the Christian funeral he desired – with the addition of a grand, non-religious mourning ceremony open to the public. A Christian friend spoke on Sun's behalf at the funeral: "It is because the organized Church has been so divided and divisive that I have long given up my membership in the church, but I believe in Christ and his teachings and have endeavored to make them my own" (Soong 2010, 84–85). A few weeks after his demise, multiple identical articles were sent to English-language newspapers signed by "The Family of Dr Sun Yat sen," which reaffirmed that the friend who had delivered the funeral address had spoken the truth on Sun's religious beliefs and his view that Christ was a revolutionary (Huang 2016, 376–378). The mausoleum in Nanjing where Sun was ultimately laid to rest in 1929 exemplifies the architectural style of "modern Chineseness" (Zheng 2017, 208) and can probably be considered somewhat emblematic of his quest.

From such passages – which ostensibly served no other political purpose than to testify to his faith – one can see that Sun's Christian persuasions had endured at a personal level.[33] His faith was a personal, customized form of Christianity, or to cite Wang Gungwu (2011, 14), "[Sun's] eclectic ideas were not profound, his Christian faith not dogmatic, but they provided him with an alternative vision of China's future and triggered his decision to lead." One might slightly alter the final part of that statement: his Christian faith made him believe in an iconoclastic task to fulfill on earth. Just like his models Jesus Christ and Hong Xiuquan, it was this faith that gave him the confidence – despite countless defeats – to persist in his Christian-inspired revolutionary quest to establish a republic (also suggested by Kayloe 2017, 328–329). The missionaries' doubts about his religious sincerity during his later life were thus arguably unfounded: Sun's views were unique but definitely not insincere.[34] The missionaries seem to have "mistaken"

[33] This also could be seen during the height of his alliance with the USSR in 1924, when Sun paid respect to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Sun (1989, vol. 9, 626–627) attested to the positive role the church had played as an inspiration to the Chinese and likened its role to Moses (note that 'alien' here refers to the Qing dynasty): "The introduction of the Church into China not only opened up the atmosphere of China, enlightened the people's feelings, and enabled our soldiers to break free from alien autocratic tyranny, just like Moses's liberation of the Israelites." Original text: "夫教會之入中國，既開闢中國之風氣，啟發人民之感覺，使吾人卒能脫異族專制之羈厄，如摩西之解放以色列人於唉及者然." From a pragmatic political standpoint, such rhetoric is nonsensical, as it could have jeopardized the budding alliance with the USSR.

[34] This has also been suggested by Audrey Wells (2001, 112): "If some missionaries in China did cast doubt on Sun Yat-sen's sincerity as a Christian in order to safeguard their own community, they themselves were not acting as true Christians. Sun Yat-sen's Christianity may have been unconventional: for that reason it may have been the more sincere."

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Sun's repugnance of imperialist practices – including the church – for religious insincerity; Sun instead proved that religiosity and patriotism could be combined. After his death, Sun and his Three Principles of the People were venerated by his political successors in ritual and education, and another discussion emerged on the religious suitability of this nationalist deification. Setting aside any misgivings, the Protestants were soothed by the idea that Sun's successor Chiang Kai-Shek (蔣介石, 1887–1975) was also an ardent believer of their creed; the Catholics were conciliated by the Papal legate in China that the reverence of Sun did not constitute deification (D'Elia 1930, CLVIII and 530) – a notion which Antonio Gramsci (2011, 309–310) also agreed with.

If any discussion is warranted about the genuineness of Sun's faith, it should be about when he chose *not* to express this devout Christian faith. His political pragmatic side was reflected in his decision not to position himself as a Christian – such as during the final decade of his life. This choice was based not only on the circumstances in China and Sun's own fortunes but also, as demonstrated in this chapter, on the number of fellow – Protestant – Blue Chinese in his organizations and the coming and going of the Protestant window of opportunity. Still, both directly and indirectly,[35] as also demonstrated by friar Pascal D'Elia in 1930, Christian influence was still visible by the time Sun embarked on his sixteen speeches on the Three Principles of the People in 1924.[36] That he also pragmatically combined many non-religious theories in his designs should be emphasized, but it should not be seen as a reason to disregard his persuasions.

Setting aside an in-depth discussion regarding the sincerity of Sun's faith for another work, this chapter aims to have at least served as testament to the role of Protestant modernism in Blue China, specifically in *inspiring* Sun Yat-sen to embark on a quest to change China – as opposed to the often overgeneralized notions

35 When proving that communism was indigenous to China, for example, Sun (1989, vol. 3, 416–418) referred to his model Hong Xiuquan once again: "The practice of communism did not originate in Russia, but was already practiced in our country decades ago by Hong Xiuquan in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, and it was more effective than in Russia." Original text: "至共產主義之實行，並非創自俄國，我國數十年前，洪秀全在太平天國已經實行，且其功效較俄國尤大."

36 In particular, D'Elia (1930, 526–559) attested to this in his analysis of Sun's third principle of "People's Livelihood" (民生 *minsheng*) – sometimes also translated as "socialism" – which he calls the "economic Demism" (*Démisme économique*). D'Elia argues at great lengths that the "socialism" and "communism" understood by Sun are different from Western conceptualizations of the terms and that they should be understood in a similar vein to the middle position of "social Pope" Leo XIII (1810–1903) between communism and capitalism. D'Elia (ibid., 563) thus concludes that "[...]if we disregard certain equivocal formulas, and under the benefit of the restrictions we have set, [Sun's ideas] are reconcilable with the Catholic doctrine." Original text: "*Dégagé de certaines formules équivoques et sous le bénéfice des restrictions que nous avons faites, est conciliable avec la doctrine catholique*."

of "Western learning" or "Christianity." As this chapter has shown, Sun's physical stays in the region and direct affiliation with certain Protestant institutions led to a different understanding of other persons who were said to be influenced by a more generalized "Western learning," such as Kang Youwei, whose designs seldom extended beyond the idea of "Chinese Learning as Substance, Western Learning for Application" that was popular during the late Qing dynasty. While Sun also adopted many Chinese designs during his life, the distinction between 'substance' and 'application' cannot be made along the same lines. The presented dichotomy between "Blue China" and "Yellow China" as well as the notion of an abstract coastal China, as opposed to a generalized Greater China, being decisive in shaping Sun might assist in overcoming some of these issues.

The educational fruits that Sun bore from his many stays in the coastal Blue China dominated by Anglo-American tenets – and especially the "American" in Anglo-American – cannot be understated as a formative influence. While Sun decided to disavow eclecticism after his youth, China would not have been the same in 1912 – and beyond – if no contact had occurred between him and the Protestant missions and missionaries. Furthermore, his conduct during and immediately following his short tenure as President showed that the country could – secularly and religiously – have evolved in a starkly different way had China's "prodigal son" somehow managed to remain President for a lengthier period of time.

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