

## Article

# Competing Loyalties in a Contested Space: The Lutheran Middle School in Hunan Province, 1907–1914

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**Abstract:** This study explores the complexities of mission-state and church-state relations from a micro-level perspective, asking how the missionaries, teachers, and pupils at the Lutheran Middle School in Hunan Province negotiated conflicting claims on church membership and national citizenship. However, Hunan is not a microcosm of modern China. When dealing with nationalism in a Hunanese context, it is sometimes more accurate to speak of Hunanese nationalism rather than Chinese nationalism. This micro-level case study sheds light on the general trends of changing mission-state and church-state encounters, but it also emphasizes unexpected expressions of local Christianity in a context that has not so far been given much scholarly attention.

**Keywords:** Protestant missions; Lutheran missions; the Norwegian Missionary Society; Hunan; revolution; radicalization; mission schools; middle school; education; Taiping

## 1. Introduction

In 1907, the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) established a Lutheran Middle School in Yiyang, Hunan Province, to provide educated workers for the church and its modern institutions. However, driven by patriotic sentiments, the pupils and teachers had agendas of their own, and like other mission schools, the NMS Middle School became a contested space where Christianity encountered Chinese nationalism (Lee 2017). The political scene in early twentieth-century China was chaotic and shifting, often from one extreme to another, and the scope of the article's timeframe, 1907–1914, captures profound political, social, and cultural changes.

When the Middle School opened in 1907, China was ruled by the Qing dynasty. During the Qing, the foreign missions and the late imperial state were in conflict because of the previous official restrictions on the propagation of Christianity. In turn, the missions had allied with the colonial powers, intruding upon the sovereignty of the state by forcing China into a set of so-called “unequal” diplomatic agreements which “opened” China to foreign investments and missions. Five years after the opening of the Middle School, in 1912, the Empire was replaced by a Republic. Whereas the Empire at times perceived Chinese Christians as disloyal and the missionaries as envoys of the colonial powers, the Western-style Republic embraced Christianity as a part of the Western framework through which China needed to advance. The Republic provided freedom of religion, but as the church was still an institution with privileges guarded by the colonial powers, it was unable to escape the paradox on which it was built (Sovik 1952).

This study explores the complexities of mission-state and church-state relations from a micro-level perspective, asking how the missionaries, teachers, and pupils at the Lutheran Middle School in Hunan Province negotiated conflicting claims on church membership and national citizenship. However, as Stephen R. Platt points out, Hunan is not a microcosm of modern China. At the helm of nearly every major popular movement in modern Chinese reform and revolution, we find Hunanese leaders, but as much as they contributed



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to the development of the China that exists today, they also had a vision of Hunan as a modern nation-state (Platt 2007, pp. 1–4). When dealing with nationalism in a Hunanese context, it is sometimes more accurate to speak of Hunanese nationalism rather than Chinese nationalism. This micro-level case study then sheds light on the general trends of changing mission-state and church-state encounters, but it also emphasizes unexpected expressions of local Christianity in a context that has so far not been given much scholarly attention.

## 2. Archival Sources and Reading Strategies

The NMS missionaries were very careful in their recordkeeping, and among the archival materials originating from the NMS enterprise in Hunan are church records, various field reports, correspondence, photos and films, art, literature, and property deeds. Out of fear of the Communist takeover in 1949, the church archives were packed and shipped out of China when the missionaries left Hunan (Aase 2022, p. 36). Today, these archives are preserved in the Mission and Diakonia Archives at VID Specialized University in Stavanger.

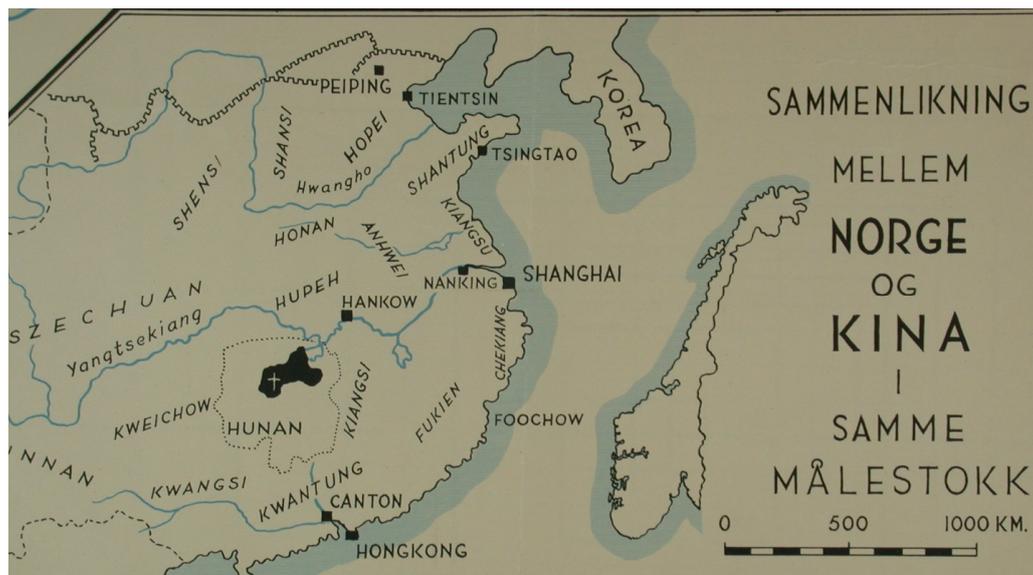
The key sources of this study are the minutes of the annual meetings of the NMS Missionary Conference. The minutes convey detailed discussions on principal and practical matters concerning a broad spectrum of church affairs. Discussions are carefully recorded, with readers able to follow the comments and statements made by individuals. Only the NMS Headboard and the General Assembly in Norway were meant to read these reports at that time, and in contrast to the reports addressing the NMS audience, these internal materials provide a rather unfiltered discussion of important topics. There are nevertheless several methodological issues to consider when working with these sources for research (Aase 2022, pp. 36–41).

The minutes focus on the missionary project and the story is told primarily from a missionary point of view. However, as the missionaries aimed for the conversion and transformation of Chinese society according to the Norwegian standards, they found themselves in constant negotiation with existing Chinese social practices and cultural worldviews. It was crucial to understand “the Other”, and the minutes render what seem to be sincere attempts to translate the essence of indigenous self-understanding. Meanwhile, as with other Protestant missionary materials, one does frequently find the stereotypes that the missionaries used to reproduce cultural otherness (Aase 2022, p. 41).

The reading strategy for interpreting these sources is inspired by the fields of post-colonial studies and World Christianity. The conceptual lens focuses on the encounters in the “contact zones” of colonialism (Becker 2015), exploring how different stakeholders negotiated concurrent claims on reality, experience and meaning (Brydon et al. 2017). In the contact zones, or spaces, as Nicolas Standaert calls them, people dealt with their differences in new and often unexpected ways (Standaert 2002, pp. 39–47). Finally, it is relevant to bring in the concept of “transloyalties”, an analytical framework derived from the research project entitled *Connected Histories—Contested Values* at VID Specialized University. The goal is to explore the making of a Lutheran identity in the contact zones of colonialism by asking how Lutherans constructed or reconstructed their values and religious identity at a time when they confronted tension between competing loyalties.<sup>1</sup>

## 3. The Norwegian Missionary Society and the Establishment of the Middle School

The Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) was founded in 1842 as a Lutheran agency with close ties to the state church, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Norway. In 1902, Hunan came to be the third mission field, after Zululand in Southeast Africa and Madagascar (Aase 2022, p. 9) (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Map showing China and Norway at the same scale, with the NMS mission field in Hunan province marked with a black cross. When the missionaries presented the NMS mission field in Hunan to their Norwegian audience, they often talked about its vast area and dense population. Source: The Mission and Diakonia Archives, VID.

By 1912, the NMS had in total 1009 Chinese church members at six central stations and thirty-five satellite stations. The NMS adopted what they called “the general mission principles of the nineteenth century”, under which the establishment of Lutheran schools “went hand in hand” with evangelization. In Changsha, where the NMS installed its first resident missionaries in 1902, a primary school was set up already in 1903. Over the next few years, the NMS established primary schools not only at the central stations, but also at the satellite stations in the interior, and in 1912, the NMS had thirty primary schools with in total 1092 pupils (Aase 2022, pp. 68–69).

At the NMS Missionary Conference in 1906, a missionary wife, Fredrikke Hertzberg (1873–1930), came to be the first to bring up the idea of establishing a middle school to provide education between the level of the primary school and the gymnasium. Being a teacher herself, Hertzberg worried about the future of the talented boys of the station schools. Unless the NMS provided them with a Christian pathway to continue their education, they would surely lose them to the “heathen schools” where they would miss out on both their Christian studies and the regular devotions, she claimed.<sup>2</sup> At the time, the Qing Empire looked to the West to modernize its infrastructure, and in 1905, a Western-style educational system replaced the old Confucian civil service examination. Unlike the NMS schools, the new state schools tended to be boarding schools, and propelled by the fear of falling behind, Hertzberg suggested to use the money reserved for an orphanage to set up a dormitory as soon as possible.<sup>3</sup>

Before turning to the response of the Missionary Conference, it should be noted that most missionary wives came to the mission field to support their husbands, and that their voices are seldom heard at the conferences (Aase 2022, pp. 11–12). Fredrikke Hertzberg was an exception. She had the degree Cand. Philol. from the University of Oslo, which was highly unusual for women at the time, and in Hunan she was entrusted with tasks of her own.<sup>4</sup> Given her academic training and unique status, she was free to speak her mind with confidence and take a leading role among men in a world where most women were confined to the household.

In this case, the Missionary Conference agreed with Hertzberg that there was an urgent need to move towards the opening of a Middle School. Consequently, they decided to postpone the orphanage in favour of a dormitory, and to charge Fredrikke and her husband Arthur Hertzberg (1870–1941) with the task of preparing the establishment of a Mid-

dle School.<sup>5</sup> The NMS enterprise depended heavily on their network of mission schools, and if needed, the Missionary Conference tended to adjust its evangelistic strategy to the recent developments in society (Aase 2022, p. 217).

As Joseph Tse-Hei Lee points out, the 1905 reform program gave a great impetus to the establishment of an extensive network of mission schools in parallel with state schools (Lee 2017, p. 25). For the part of the NMS, the establishment of the Middle School in 1907 was a major step forward, but more developments and challenges were still ahead. In 1913, the NMS opened a Lutheran Theological Seminary in collaboration with other Lutheran mission societies in central China. A college, located next to the NMS Middle School, followed in 1923.

#### 4. A Success Story?

The Lutheran Middle School opened in the autumn of 1907 with 16 pupils.<sup>6</sup> The first class graduated four years later, in 1911. Compared to the Norwegian system, the last year at Middle School equalled the first year at Gymnasium. At the time, the Middle school had in total six teachers, Fredrikke and Arthur Hertzberg, and four Chinese teachers.<sup>7</sup> Arthur became the school's first principal, and he was as well-educated as his wife Fredrikke. Furthermore, being an ordained pastor, Arthur had the university degree of Cand. Real from the University of Oslo.<sup>8</sup> The Middle School came to be known for its high academic standards and continued to grow steadily. In 1913, the school had 70 pupils, which was the number they had originally planned for<sup>9</sup> (See Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The photograph of the Middle School pupils and teachers is not dated but the male hairstyle reveals that the photo was taken before 1911. As Arthur Hertzberg, sitting far right on the front row, still looks rather young and the number of pupils and teachers is modest, one can probably add that it was taken early in the school's history. Source: The Mission and Diakonia Archives, VID.

Enrolment at the Middle School required students to have baptism or status as catechumen. The scrolls by the Middle School entrance, as seen in the photograph above, underscored the school's evangelising purpose. When the pupils and teachers entered the gates, the scroll seen at the right side of the door stated what the NMS expected from them:

信道必篤 [信道必篤, xindao bidu], “The faith must be firm and sincere.” The scroll by the left side of the door was a reminder of what it meant to be a Christian: 義路是中 [义路是中, yilu shiZhong], “The way of righteousness is the essence of Christianity”.<sup>10</sup>

However, as also non-Christian families wanted to enrol their sons, Arthur Hertzberg allowed quite a few exceptions. Out of the 16 pupils who were admitted the first year, only four were baptized and five were catechumens.<sup>11</sup> Even though Hertzberg admitted having some issues with the “heathen” pupils, he was content. In 1908, eleven pupils asked for baptism. If it had not been for the Middle School, these boys would not have come to know Christianity, he argued. Another two ran away from the school, but back home they had visited the chapel, and according to Hertzberg, it meant that they too had been influenced by the Gospel.<sup>12</sup>

Over the next years, graduates from the Middle School became primary school teachers and evangelists in the growing Lutheran churches. With the opening of a Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1913, a few graduates took up theological training to become full-time preachers and ordained pastors. Others continued their education at the Yale University-sponsored Yali School in the provincial capital of Changsha. This mission college was very popular among the Middle School graduates and helped train medical doctors for the NMS hospitals.<sup>13</sup>

The Middle School lived up to Fredrikke Hertzberg’s expectations. Instead of losing the talented Lutheran pupils to the state schools, the NMS kept them within the mission school system. Due to the high teaching standard, the number of pupils kept growing, enabling the school to prepare ever more young Lutherans for service in the church and its institutions. The Middle School was, in many ways, a success story. However, the Middle School was also a contested space where the pupils and the teachers developed their own independent agenda. When things did not turn out the way the missionaries intended, they could not always agree on how to compromise with their Chinese colleagues and pupils.

### 5. The Challenges of “Heathen Influence”

By adopting the curriculum of the state schools, the Middle School bridged the gap between the church and society. However, the precise method of how the missionaries could overcome the challenge of cross-cultural confusion, or even damage, caused by so-called “heathen influence” was intractable.

“The mind of a child is like an uncultivated field”, a missionary stated in a discussion on textbooks at the Missionary Conference in 1910.<sup>14</sup> It was crucial to prevent “the enemy” from sowing “weeds” into the minds of the pupils, and the missionary blamed the Chinese classics for corrupting the young minds. He was anxious to make the pupils understand the concept of original sin when the Chinese classics proclaimed man to be basically good. Another missionary criticized the rejection of the Chinese classics. To him it was necessary for young Chinese Christians to know their literary heritage.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the teachers, the missionaries all agreed that the Middle School needed teachers capable of being Christian models, sowing the seeds of Christ in the easily affected minds of their pupils. Nevertheless, due to the lack of competent Christian teachers, Hertzberg had to employ non-Christian teachers. He worried that the non-Christian staff would bring “heathen culture” into the school and stressed the importance of “controlling the heathen teachers”.

However, when looking at the photograph above, Hertzberg does not necessarily look like a man in control. Instead, his position far right on the front row, with a slightly lax posture, dressed in a white suit with a weary looking face, makes him look rather helpless among his colleagues. Perhaps this is merely a case of Hertzberg disturbing the symmetry of the photograph and having the sun in his eyes, but the visual contrast between the missionary and the assembled local pupils and teachers in terms of body language, attire and colour scheme is nevertheless an interesting reminder of the underlying dynamic defining their relationship. The missionaries controlled the church and its institutions and

left the locals with less influence than they wanted, but what the locals lacked in formal power, they attempted to compensate for. As illustrated in the photograph, the missionaries were by far outnumbered by the locals. Consequently, they often found themselves in less control than they cared to admit (Aase 2022, pp. 114–15). Hertzberg and his fellow missionaries had to choose their strategy. Instead of elaborating on how he intended to control the non-Christian teachers and prevent them from bringing “heathen culture” into the school, Hertzberg made the best of the situation and concluded that the problem was minor as these teachers tended to either leave the school after a brief period or they were converted and asked for baptism.<sup>16</sup>

Underlying the 1910 Conference’s discussion on “heathen” textbooks and “heathen” teachers lies the crucial question of how to exist and practice as a Christian in Chinese society. The missionaries strove to provide certain guidelines, but the pupils’ minds were not as easily affected as initially thought, whereas the teachers could hardly be controlled at all.

## 6. Lack of Discipline and Pupils on Strike

The Middle School education meant personal advancement, and according to teacher Sten Bugge, the pupils were hardworking and eager to learn.<sup>17</sup> Like other mission schools, the NMS took in talented boys for free, broadening their scope of future career opportunities. To be hardworking paid off, but the dedicated pupils did not necessarily respect school authority. The Middle school was troubled by the lack of students’ discipline, and the occurrences of violent strikes on campus. As already mentioned, Hertzberg had disciplinary issues with some “heathen” pupils in the class of 1907, but in the years to come, the lack of discipline became a general problem among both the non-Christian and Christian pupils. If the pupils did not approve of the food service, one of the teachers’ performance, or certain school regulations, they expressed their outrage publicly by breaking the crockery, trying to beat up the teacher, or going on strike. Being a boarding school, they could easily form a critical mass against the administrators on campus.<sup>18</sup>

In explaining this kind of youth misbehaviour to his Norwegian audience, Sten Bugge characterized Chinese students as being very self-conscious. As only five to ten percent of the Chinese population could read and write, the educated youth felt entitled to certain privileges.<sup>19</sup> The breaking of crockery and the strikes were the Chinese way of protesting, and the state schools struggled with the same disciplinary issue. However, Bugge also claimed that some of the campus confrontations arose from acculturating tensions between the missionary teachers and pupils. It was easier for the pupils to take orders from their own countrymen than from foreigners.<sup>20</sup> The tensions that Bugge referred to should be understood as part of the intersection between foreign missions and colonial powers.

## 7. The Inherent Problems of Colonialism

Fredrikke and Arthur Hertzberg arrived in Hunan with their two-year-old son Gerhard in 1903. Only two years had passed since the Boxer Uprising, which ended in the murder of missionaries and Chinese Christians. A joint Western military expedition had crushed the rebellion and the following diplomatic agreements, the Boxer Protocols of 1901, led to the full enforcement of the treaty system, and ultimately to the opening of China’s last closed province, Hunan. (Aase 2022, pp. 44, 55, 66). As the Hertzbergs travelled up the river to the city of Yiyang, they had ten marines and a canonboat for their protection. Upon their arrival, Fredrikke and her son were said to be “the first woman and child of the white race ever to walk in the streets of Yiyang.” Over the next few days, many town leaders came to visit them, but out in the streets, Fredrikke heard people address them as “white devils”.<sup>21</sup> Even though the missionaries soon realized that the people to be won over for Christ were hostile towards outsiders, they nevertheless found a base of people to support their cause as members of the growing congregations and employees in the NMS mission enterprise.<sup>22</sup> By the time the Middle School opened in 1907, many non-Christian families had changed their attitudes towards the foreigners and were keen to enrol their

sons. Some of these pupils were eventually baptised, but the missionaries could not escape the inherited problems of colonialism.

For non-Christian pupils to make their own decision to be baptized in school was a profound statement, but being part of a contact zone of colonialism, these pupils struggled with conflicting loyalties and logics. The Christian faith seemed to be part of the Western modernizing framework that China needed to embrace, but it was also the religion of Western aggressors. While offering a useful education, the missionaries could not separate themselves from the colonial enterprise aimed at tearing the country apart. The Middle School pupils constructed their religious identity while learning to navigate their relationship with the missionaries in a contested space. Their expressions of Christianity did not necessarily live up to the Christian standards of the NMS, but as Arthur Hertzberg said, they still held onto Christianity with deep conviction.<sup>23</sup> They were furthermore hardworking and eager to learn, but as long as the missionaries dominated the administration of the Middle School, the students tried to express their patriotic sentiment by rejecting the missionaries' authority over secular matters. In doing so, they did not necessarily oppose the missionaries as their teachers, but because they wanted to remain loyal to an anti-foreign polity. As the Qing Empire continued to yield concessions to the colonial powers, the state grew more and more unpopular. Many educated youths blamed the incompetent imperial rulers for China's humiliating defeats by the West and Japan. Instead of defending an incapable regime, they called for a revolution to remake the political landscape (Platt 2007). Being a revolutionary was a way of reconciling Christianity with the political needs and concerns of Hunanese society. The following section examines how the NMS came to grips with a revolutionary movement that envisioned a Western-style republican system during the time of regime change.

## 8. Christian Revolutionaries

The Qing dynasty was overthrown by Sun Yat-Sen's Republican Revolution in 1911. On 1 January 1912, the Republic of China was formally established (Fairbank 2006, p. 250). Prior to the overthrow of the Qing, many Protestant mission school students and teachers embraced radical ideas, and some of them even took on leading roles in the revolutionary movement (Sovik 1952, p. 74).

The revolutionary agenda easily appealed to young members of the urban churches partly because of the high number of educated youths in the mission schools, and partly because of a general consensus that Christianity was the spiritual source of Western strength. However, the church had also become a powerful institution, and the revolutionaries hoped to gain practical help from the church in order to reach their political goals. After all, both Christians and revolutionaries thought to have much in common: the Qing state was a mutual enemy and they all hoped for a new, cosmopolitan China. Finally, as Confucianism was associated with the imperial system, it was only logical to associate Christianity with the new revolutionary order. In one of the first public proclamations, the revolutionaries set out to publicize those who had injured foreigners, and to reward those who protected Christian churches (Sovik 1952, pp. 77–81).

In Hunan, the NMS missionaries witnessed a remarkable outcome of the ongoing negotiation between Christianity and the revolutionary movement. Apparently, the revolutionaries considered themselves heirs of the Christian-inspired Taiping Uprising.<sup>24</sup> In 1843, Hong Xiuquan, the Taiping leader, read Christian tracts revealing the Old Testament stories of how a chosen few, with God's help, had rebelled against oppression. Inspired by the tracts and the visions that he had during a period of mental illness, he came to believe that Jesus was his elder brother and that God had called him to save humankind. Hong became a militant evangelist and proclaimed that God had ordered him to destroy the Qing. By 1853, his followers had seized Nanjing and made it their "Heavenly Capital" (Fairbank 2006, pp. 207–9). According to the missionaries, the 20th-century Hunanese revolutionaries found inspiration from the Taiping rebels in the sense that they too wanted to bring down the empire and get rid of "the old yoke".<sup>25</sup> In doing so, they challenged what

we may call Qing-governed Hunan's master narrative, the story of how the Hunan Army defeated the Taipings and restored the Confucian order (Platt 2007, p. 28). The Taiping War broke out in 1851, when Hong Xiuquan declared himself the "Heavenly King" of a new dynasty (Fairbank 2006, p. 208). According to Tobie S. Meyer-Fong, the Taiping War was "the most devastating civil war in human history." In the cities and towns throughout the lower Yangzi region, as much as fifty percent of the population was wiped out (Meyer-Fong 2013, pp. 1–4). The destruction and suffering caused by this devastating war left a strong imprint on the collective memory of the Hunanese people and after the defeat of the Taipings in 1864, they considered the Hunan Army to be China's defenders against Christianity (Platt 2007, pp. 34–36).

Between the years 1884 and 1898, the Hunanese Confucian scholar Zhou Han called on the local youths to honour the glorious legacy of the Hunan Army in their fights against missionaries and converts. Before the British government put pressure on the provincial authorities to sentence Zhou to life in prison, he had published hundreds of thousands of anti-Christian pamphlets and tracts (Platt 2007, pp. 64–65). A few years later, when the first group of NMS missionaries arrived, they confirmed that Hunan lived up to its reputation as China's most anti-Christian province.<sup>26</sup>

Like Zhou Han and his followers, the Hunanese revolutionaries framed their radical agenda according to the Taiping war. They linked their revolutionary movement to the past, but instead of confirming Hunan's master narrative celebrated by the Confucian scholar-officials, they turned it upside down. Given the fundamental importance of this narrative in Hunan's collective identity, it was an explosive way of breaking with the past.

In the contact zone of colonialism, the revolutionaries assigned new meaning to old concepts in the tension between competing values and interests. By singing Taiping songs, the revolutionaries framed their project as something Christian, but instead of turning to the missionaries, they draw on the Taiping appropriation of Christianity—an indigenous version of Christianity that the missionaries rejected as blasphemous (Fairbank 2006, pp. 207–11).

It was not only the revolutionaries who pointed to the Taiping experience to explain the current situation; the NMS missionaries did it too. After the war, the Taiping rejection of the expressions of traditional Chinese religion in favour of Christianity had created prosperous evangelization opportunities for the missionaries, who strove to fill a perceived cultural vacuum with the Gospel. The missionaries did not succeed, but now, as the revolutionaries wanted to break with the past, the missionaries felt that they had been given a second chance to advance Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

However, the missions did generally not support the idea of revolution. Every moment of unrest in China meant trouble for the church, and due to the recent reforms, especially in education, the missionaries hoped that China might change without a violent revolution. They would not mind seeing the hostile Empire being replaced by a Western friendly Republic, but they wanted the church to stay out of politics (Sovik 1952, pp. 69–70). For the NMS, they had not yet sorted out the complicated relationship between church authority and state authority in the Chinese context.

## 9. Church Authority vs. State Authority

In the Norwegian model, the state had a theological foundation, and the laws of the church were, at least to some extent, the laws of the state (Oftestad et al. 1993, pp. 177–79). In China, on the contrary, the state had no religious foundation. Instead of being a national asset, as was the case in Norway, Christianity was rejected as a threat to Chinese culture and society. In this new context, the NMS needed to rethink the relationship between the authority of the church and the authority of the state.

With reference to Romans 13, 1–7, Christians should be "loyal to the powers that be."<sup>28</sup> Coming to China meant violating the Qing Empire's efforts to forbid the propagation of Christianity. However, being Norwegian citizens and envoys of the Norwegian state church, the NMS missionaries were still answerable to the Norwegian government.

Neither did they feel obliged to respect a Chinese imperial authority that attempted to prevent them from sharing the Gospel. Even though they blamed the colonial powers for being brutal towards native populations, they still believed that God used colonialism to further his kingdom (Rongen 2017, pp. 39–40).

To limit the damage of being part of the colonial enterprise, the NMS Superintendent told his fellow missionaries to respect the secular authorities. “They [the NMS missionaries] were guests in China”, he stated. “Unnecessary provocations should be avoided. Any lawsuit should be settled at the local level. The treaties should never be mentioned to the Mandarin, and the Consul should only be involved in emergency situations.”<sup>29</sup> But when the NMS failed to resolve local church disputes, they admitted that they needed a representative of the Norwegian government to petition the Chinese authorities. As it turned out, they even asked for a Norwegian Consul to be stationed in Changsha in order to take care of their ecclesiastical interests and strengthen their claims in conflicts with the Chinese officials.<sup>30</sup>

Whereas the loyalty of the missionaries still rested with the Norwegian government, the local Christians were told to be loyal to the Chinese government. Even though the missionaries provided support in cases concerning the Hunanese Lutherans’ treaty right to the freedom of religion, they found it important to instruct the converts to contribute to local society and respect the authorities. While some converts claimed that their Christian status placed them outside the law of the Qing Empire, the missionaries had to remind the congregants of their legal status as Chinese imperial subjects. Being a Christian did not mean that they were citizens of another realm, and they had to follow the laws of their native country. For this reason, the NMS did not embrace revolutionary activities, and the missionaries often told the local Christians to be very careful in their contacts with revolutionary elements setting out to subvert the Qing government.

The larger Protestant community reached the same conclusion. In 1907, the Centenary Protestant Missionary Conference in Shanghai, where the NMS delegates also participated, warned the missionary societies to be “vigilant in the present national awakening, and make sure that the Chinese Christians would not be “led into acts of disloyalty to the government.” The missions had instructed the converts about the “duty of loyalty to the powers that be”, but non-Christian revolutionaries came to the churches and mission schools to spread propaganda. The propaganda was sophisticated and hard to resist, and the Conference worried that the converts through “ignorance, confusion of thought, or misdirected zeal”, would make use of the church for revolutionary ends (Sovik 1952, pp. 69–70).

## 10. The Revolution at the Middle School

In analysing the radicalization of mission school students in the 1920s, Joseph Tse-Hei Lee points to the entanglements between the mission schools and the revolutionary movement, arguing that the tutoring at the mission schools advanced the secular ideas that produced the revolution. On one side, the mission schools promoted new ideas in politics and economics. On the other side, they provided young men with rhetorical and organizational skills essential for the success of their revolutionary activities (Lee 2017, pp. 25–32). The same can probably be said about the NMS Middle School. By the time the new Republic of China was formally established in 1912, half of the pupils had left the Middle School to join the Republican Army. When the new Republic replaced the Empire in 1912, all the teachers went to Changsha to serve the new government.<sup>31</sup>

To the Norwegian staff at the Middle School, the radicalization on campus came hardly as a surprise. The Hunanese Lutherans were said to be “very political”, and especially so the teachers. Johan Gotteberg wrote that people in Hunan possessed a uniquely independent character which distinguished them from other Chinese.<sup>32</sup> In Platt’s words, this phenomenon is called Hunanese nationalism, coming from a belief that the residents of Hunan shared certain characteristics that set them apart from the rest of China, as well as a unique sense of history and a shared destiny. The Hunanese reformers and revolu-

tionaries believed in a common destiny to save China from a weak Empire, and as Platt points out, the Hunanese were the largest provincial group within the Revolutionary Alliance that led the 1911 Revolution (Platt 2007, pp. 1–3) As Joseph Tse-Hei Lee points out, a “good Christian should also be a good citizen” (Lee 2017, p. 28). When the state did not deserve their loyalty, being a good citizen was being a revolutionary. At the Middle School, being a revolutionary was a way of negotiating Lutheran Christianity in response to the emerging political needs and concerns of Hunanese society.

In addition, there was a personal relationship between one of the Lutheran teachers, Liang Shi-sheng and the new provincial governor. They were old friends, and Liang was appointed as the governor’s secretary.<sup>33</sup> The culture of *guanxi* entailed personal loyalties between friends, peasants from the same village, and teachers and students, and such generated reciprocities were crucial in Hunanese politics (Platt 2007, pp. 23–29). If the governor recruited his staff through familiar networks, he would most likely turn to people personally loyal to him such as Liang. Along the same reasoning, Liang chose his own subordinates from the Lutheran Middle School. From top to bottom, the new provincial administration was to be held together by an interlocking network of personal loyalties. The governor would be on top of a pyramid with people whom he trusted, including the teachers at the Middle School. In return, Liang and his friends had been rewarded with advancement in the new political order.

When exploring the Revolution and the establishment of the Republic from the Middle School’s perspective, the bonds between teachers and students are also of great interest. According to Sten Bugge, teachers and students often shared “a heart-to-heart relationship.” This special bond led to lifelong friendships between teachers and students.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps this bond also explained why half of the students joined the Republican Army to support their teachers.

Anyhow, when exploring these social mechanisms, we should consider the strong bonds between the pupils and missionaries. One of the pupils was Liang Gao Hsiao, a fine young man, according to the missionaries, from a good Christian family with strong bonds to the mission.<sup>35</sup> Whereas Liang’s family paid his tuition fee, other pupils were sponsored by the NMS or mission patrons in Norway. The close linkage between a beneficiary and a recipient was relevant in relations between missionary teachers and pupils, as well as missionary teachers and local teachers. The case of Chen Ren-an, who was the “main teacher” and a close associate of Arthur Hertzberg, is an example.

Being one of the first converts, Chen was baptized in 1903, and stayed close to the NMS.<sup>36</sup> However, back in 1910, Hertzberg was afraid of losing Chen Ren-an. Apparently, Chen wanted something the NMS could not give him, namely education. Unlike mission societies with more resources, the NMS did not have the necessary means to send their talented young men to universities abroad. To keep him motivated, Hertzberg asked the Missionary Conference if he could bring Chen to Norway during his furlough next year. The plan was for Chen to participate in the NMS summer events for young people.<sup>37</sup> Chen was said to be overwhelmed with joy by the proposal.<sup>38</sup> However, Chen changed his mind and asked for more professional education. As it turned out, the 1911 Conference asked the Head Board for permission to send Chen to a Chinese university for three years as long as he was committed to being a Lutheran teacher for the next eight years.<sup>39</sup> However, after the Conference, Hertzberg learned that Chen had been a secret member of the revolutionary group. Because the NMS instructed the employees to stay away from revolutionary activity, Chen had no choice but to lie about his own political involvement. When Hertzberg told the Home Board about Chen’s revolutionary ties upon his return to Norway, the request for sponsoring Chen’s university education was rejected.<sup>40</sup> In the meantime, Chen left the Middle School to take service in the new administration. After a while, he was even called to Beijing to serve in the new government.<sup>41</sup>

Being loyal to a revolutionary teacher meant being disloyal to the missionary teachers, and being a teacher loyal to the Revolution meant being disloyal to the Mission. Perhaps the pupils and the teachers felt torn between their conflicting loyalties to the missionaries

and the Revolution. This dilemma hardened Chen's decision to leave the Middle School. But perhaps the belief by Chen and his comrades that serving China at this critical point was the only right thing to do facilitated their decision.

### 11. The Return to the Middle School

Once the Revolution had succeeded, the missionaries enthusiastically proclaimed that the end of the Empire had initiated a new era for Christianity.<sup>42</sup> The very same missionaries who told the local Christians to stay away from the Republican Party concluded that it was mostly Christian values that gained traction with the Revolution,<sup>43</sup> thus interestingly taking a certain credit for it. According to Andreas Fleischer, Arthur Hertzberg's successor, the Revolution constituted no less than the first genuine progress that China had experienced during its four-thousand-year-long history and the greatest and most crucial victory that the Christian mission had won in China. Even though the Revolution was damaging for the Middle School in the short term, in the sense that all the teachers left and half of the students, the missionaries believed that the Revolution would bring them better working conditions in the long run.<sup>44</sup> A state with a framework to support Christianity, instead of hindering Christianity, would help the NMS to advance their work.

Furthermore, all the teachers came back to the Middle School. The new Republic proved to be unstable, and Hunan's new governor ended up being assassinated. The governor's secretary, Liang Shi-sheng, barely survived and decided to return to the Middle School<sup>45</sup>. Chen Ren-an came back as a headteacher after 1.5 years in public service. According to Hertzberg, he came back because he was serious about his faith<sup>46</sup>. A few years later, Chen attended the Lutheran Theological Seminary, aspiring to be a pastor.<sup>47</sup> Liang, the pupil who left school to join the Republican Army, came back to the Middle School with a plan to enrol in the Seminary to become a pastor.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to references to faith, the missionaries also pointed to political reasons in their attempt to explain the return of the Middle School teachers. Even though the new governor was an outstanding man and a friend of Christianity, the Middle School teachers returned because they did not consider the new governor to be sufficiently revolutionary, it was claimed<sup>49</sup>. Little is known about what that meant, but the importance of personal loyalties in politics was at work here. If the teachers took service in the provincial administration because of the friendship between Liang and the governor, the reason for being in politics was gone when the governor was murdered. However, the Middle School teachers were also sought after for leadership in the local administration, and after a while, they were summoned to serve in the new district administration. Again, several of the teachers left the Middle School. Besides ideological reasons, the terms provided by the missionaries were not very good. In 1914, an English teacher at the Middle School earned twenty dollars a month. A state school in Changsha offered him one hundred.<sup>50</sup>

The founding of the Republic in 1912 established a new social and political order, in which the Hunanese perceived a changing socio-political status from being "aliens to citizens", to borrow a phrase from Liu Yi's study of the national identity of Chinese Christians (Liu 2010). The Hunanese Lutherans found a place for themselves in both society and church. This was what the NMS expected from them. As much as the NMS wanted the Hunanese Christians to focus on their "relation to Christ", they expected them to contribute to the transformation of society. Christians should be "the light and the salt of the world", one of the missionaries claimed, arguing that the Hunanese Lutherans should spread throughout Chinese society to do God's work. Positions in the new provincial administration were mentioned as evidence of a good Christian character.<sup>51</sup>

### 12. Concluding Comments

This article has explored how the missionaries, teachers, and pupils at the Lutheran Middle School in Hunan negotiated conflicting claims on church membership and national citizenship. The NMS Middle School provides examples of the general trends in mission-state and church-state relations in the early years of the Republic, but it also reveals some

unexpected outcomes of the intense encounter between Christianity and Hunanese nationalism. As with other mission schools during the same period, the NMS Middle School was a contested space. In the contact zone of the Middle School, Chinese nationalistic sentiments underscored the problems inherent in Christianity and colonialism. Pupils and teachers negotiated the competing loyalties of their church membership and republican civic duty by rejecting the NMS's administrative supremacy in the educational sphere. Meanwhile, the missionaries navigated the boundaries between church and state in asserting ecclesiastical authority in a new sociopolitical context of China, and they seldom spoke with one voice. The future Chinese Lutheran pastors were just as rebellious as the so-called "heathen" pupils, opposing missionary teachers, as well as the Christian and non-Christian teachers. In the politicized space of the Lutheran school, there were no easily delineated categories, but multiple stakeholders coexisted and pursued different interests and agendas.

What is clear is that the Hunanese pupils and teachers actively constructed their religious identity as they adapted and adjusted to the needs and concerns of Hunanese society. Being a Christian was being a revolutionary. The Hunanese revolutionaries framed their state- and nation-building programs in light of the Taiping war, establishing a link between their radicalism and the past, but they subverted the Confucian-inspired Hunan's master narrative and proclaimed to liberate Hunan from the yoke of the Confucian imperial system. Given the fundamental importance of this narrative to Hunan's collective identity, it was an explosive break from the past. When they succeeded, the same Norwegian missionaries who had forbidden "their Christians" to interfere with revolutionaries enthusiastically proclaimed that the end of the Qing Empire initiated a new era for Christianity. By associating the 1911 Revolution with the advent of Christian values, the missionaries even claimed some of the credits for the wider sociopolitical changes for themselves. In an effort to assert the presence of the church in the post-1911 era, the Norwegians aligned with and praised the Hunanese Lutherans for finding a place for themselves in the social, political, and religious spheres.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vid.no/en/research/vids-fremragende-forskningsmiljoer/connected-histories-contested-values/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Referat fra konferentsen i Changsha, fra fredag den 27de april til onsdag den 9de Mai 1906* (Mission- and Diakonia Archives, VID Specialized University A-1065/Db/L-0002): pp. 3–4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.vid.no/historisk-arkiv/ressurser/nms-people-places/fredrikke-mariane-johanne-hertzberg/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Referat fra konferentsen i Changsha, fra fredag den 27de april til onsdag den 9de mai 1906*: p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Referat for konferentsen 1908 paa Kuling* (Mission- and Diakonia Archives, VID Specialized University. A-1065/Db/L-0002/04): p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Årsmelding 1908* (Mission- and Diakonia Archives, VID Specialized University. A-1065/Dp/L-0001/02): p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.vid.no/historisk-arkiv/ressurser/nms-people-places/arthur-johan-hertzberg/>.

<sup>9</sup> *Referat fra konferentsen i Sinhwa 8-20de februar 1914* (Mission- and Diakonia Archives, VID Specialized University. A-1065/Db/L-0003/03): p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> The text on the banner to the left of the door behind the students and teachers has this text: 湖南信義中學堂 [湖南信义中学堂, Hunan Xinyi Zhongxue Tang], "The hall of Hunan Lutheran middle school". There are two small signs by the door. The right has this text: 學堂重地 [学堂重地, xuetang zhongdi], "This is a school property". The left has this text: 毋許擅入 [毋许擅入, wuxu shanru], "No entry without permission". Translations: Gustav Steensland.

<sup>11</sup> *Referat for konferentsen 1908 paa Kuling*: p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

- 13 Referat fra konferentesen paa Taohwalun 15de til 26de mai 1915 (Mission- and Diakonia Archives, VID Specialized University. A-1065/Db/L-0003/04): p. 50. Read about a Middle School graduate at the Yali School in Feng-Shan Ho, *My Forty Years as a Diplomat* ed. Monto Ho (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Dorrance Publishing Co, 2010).
- 14 Referat fra konferantsen paa Taohwalun 27de febr. til 10de mars 1910 (Mission- and Diakonia Archives, VID Specialized University. A-1065/Db/L-0002/06): p. 55.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid., p. 50.
- 17 Sten Bugge, "China", in *Det Norske Misjonsselskaps historie i Hundre År: B. 3: Det Norske Misjonsselskaps historie: Sør-Afrika, China, Sudan*. ed. Olav Guttorm Myklebust et al. (Stavanger: Det Norske Misjonsselskap, 1949): p. 223.
- 18 Bugge, in *Det Norske Misjonsselskaps historie i hundre År: B. 3: Det Norske Misjonsselskaps historie: Sør-Afrika, China, Sudan*: pp. 223–24.
- 19 Ibid., p. 224.
- 20 Ibid., pp. 223–24.
- 21 Fredrikke Hertzberg, "Bryte nyland." *Ved den første milepæl. Fra Det Norske Missionsselskaps Kinamission gjennom 25 aar*. (Stavanger: Det Norske Missionsselskaps trykkeri, 1927): pp. 79, 81–82.
- 22 Ibid., p. 82.
- 23 Referat for konferentsen 1908 paa Kuling: p. 9.
- 24 Referat fra konferentsen i Changsha i 1912 (Mission- and Diakonia Archives, VID Specialized University. A-1065/Db/L-0003/02): p. 16.
- 25 Ibid., p. 16.
- 26 Gotteberg, Johan Arthur. *Jernporten aabnet*. (Mission and Diakonia Archives, VID Specialized University. A-1350): pp. 21–22.
- 27 Referat fra konferentsen i Sinhwa 8-20de februar 1914: p. 27.
- 28 Konferentsen i Ningxiang 21de februar til 3die marts 1909 (Mission- and Diaconia Archive, VID Specialized University): p. 10.
- 29 Ibid., p. 9.
- 30 Referat fra konferantsen paa Taohwalun 27de febr. Til 10de mars 1910: p. 2.
- 31 Bugge, in *Det Norske Misjonsselskaps Historie I Hundre År: B. 3: Det Norske Misjonsselskaps Historie: Sør-Afrika, China, Sudan*. Gotteberg. p. 23.
- 32 Andreas Fleisher. «Fra Yiyang og Taohwalun—Revolutionen». *Norsk Missionstidende*, no 9 (1912): p. 208.
- 34 Bugge. In *Det Norske Misjonsselskaps historie i hundre År: B. 3: Det Norske Misjonsselskaps historie: Sør-Afrika, China, Sudan*: p. 224.
- 35 Referat fra konferentsen i Sinhwa 8-20de februar 1914: pp. 41–43.
- 36 Bugge, in *Det Norske Misjonsselskaps historie i hundre år: B. 3: Det Norske Misjonsselskaps historie: Sør-Afrika, China, Sudan*: p. 205.
- 37 Referat fra konferantsen paa Taohwalun 27de febr. til 10de mars 1910: p. 63.
- 38 Ibid., p. 63.
- 39 Referat fra konferentsen i Yiyang 1911: p. 20.
- 40 Referat fra konferentsen i Sinhwa 8-20de februar 1914: p. 48.
- 41 Andreas Fleisher, *Tillæg til Fleishers aarsberetning: Siste halvoar paa Toawhalun*, 1911 (Mission- and Diakonia Archives, VID Specialized University A-1065/Dp/L-0001/02): p. 2.
- 42 Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China, Blackwell Guides to Global Christianity* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): p. 95.
- 43 Referat fra konferentsen i Changsha i 1912: p. 15.
- 44 Andreas Fleisher, «Fra Yiyang og Taohwalun—Revolutionen». *Norsk Missionstidende*, no 9 (1912): p. 205.
- 45 Fleisher 1912, p. 208
- 46 Referat 1914, pp. 48-49
- 47 Referat fra konferansen paa Taohwalun 20de februar til 2den mars 1916 (Mission- and Diakonia Archives, VID Specialized University. A-1065/Db/L-0003/05): p. 41.
- 48 Referat fra konferentsen i Sinhwa 8-20de februar 1914: p. 42.
- 49 Fleischer 1912, p. 208
- 50 Ibid., pp. 49–50.
- 51 Referat fra konferensen i Changsha 7-17 februar 1917 (Mission- and Diakonia Archives, VID Specialized University. A-1065/Db/L-0004/01): pp. 49–50.

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