



2007

## In War and Famine: Missionaries in China's Honan Province in the 1940s

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### Recommended Citation

Curran, Thomas D. Ph.D., "In War and Famine: Missionaries in China's Honan Province in the 1940s" (2007). *History Faculty Publications*. Paper 44.

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what Weston terms “a new breed of intellectual celebrity” [186], were capable of catalyzing the political energies of other sectors of society, and in doing so they increased the public perception of Beida as a breeding ground for political activists. Ultimately, Cai Yuanpei’s efforts to secure the boundaries between academic work, government service, and politics could not prevent the growth of political radicalism on Beida’s campus, and by the time Cai broke his ties with the university in 1927 the school was nothing like the world-class institution of higher learning that Cai had hoped it would become. In fact, Weston claims, the very existence of an academic culture such as that which Cai sought to sustain became a political symbol, for as Chinese political forces emerged in the 1920s that were hostile to the values of free inquiry and debate, Beida’s effort to preserve its identity as an academic institution became a powerful symbol of resistance to power. Ordinary university life “acquired a political valence” [229] – it was perceived as threatening to politicians who sought to use the university for their political purposes, and it was self-consciously recognized by Beida’s faculty and students as an expression of resistance to the authority of an increasingly intrusive and oppressive state.

Enough has been said above to indicate that this is a path-breaking study. Rooted in solid archival research and cogently argued, it answers an important question that has arisen in Republican-era scholarship: how it was that an organization that was conceived by its founders as a self-consciously academic and professional institution of higher learning was transformed into a hotbed of political activism? Weston makes an insightful contribution to our understanding of the paradox that was embedded within the Chinese effort to establish a foundation for liberal higher education, and he does much to illuminate the struggle that early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese intellectuals waged to find a social role commensurate with the traditional conception of the place educated elites occupied in the nation’s body politic.

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Christensen, Erleen, J.: *In War and Famine: Missionaries in China’s Honan Province in the 1940s*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), xii + 292 pp., CA\$44.95; US\$37.95. ISBN 0-07735-28523-9.

The author of this piece, Erleen Christensen, is the daughter of Emery Carlson, a missionary and physician who served in the Lutheran Hospital in Xuzhang, Honan Province during World War II and the Chinese Civil War. Part of a contingent of roughly 250 missionaries who were stationed in Honan when the Japanese invaded in 1937, Carlson and his family remained in the province until they were forced to evacuate in the face of the last major Japanese campaign of the war, the Ichigo Offensive of April 1944. Having escaped with his family to India, Carlson himself was recruited by the U. S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS) to serve in its Morale Operations project, an effort to weaken Japanese morale, encourage defections, and inspire popular resistance among Chinese by spreading disinformation and propaganda behind Japanese lines. As chief of an advance base, Carlson returned to Honan in May, 1945, and by early July his operational group, Team Viper, was functioning “in high gear” [p. 197]. The group’s activities had very little

impact on the war effort, but Carlson remained in the province where he witnessed the aftermath of the Japanese surrender, the civil war, and the arrival of the Chinese Communists in 1949.

The book records the experiences of Carlson and other missionaries as they attempted to keep hospitals, schools, and churches operating through the war and civil war years. A substantial part of the book draws upon their private letters, annual reports, and meeting minutes, as well as articles that appeared in mission society publications. As individuals, these people were primarily interested in pursuing their religious and humanitarian work. Inevitably, however, they also paid close attention to the famine and wartime dislocations that they witnessed, and the records they left behind constitute a rich resource for those interested in conditions in the Chinese interior during these turbulent and dangerous times.

The book is not an analytical piece – it does not attempt to place the missionary record within the scholarship concerning either Chinese or missionary history. It does, however, provide details of missionary activities and conditions in China that add flavor and texture to our picture of life in China during the 1940s. Though a child at the time, the author remembers some of the events she describes, and as she takes us through the war and famine years one has the feeling that we are sharing a bit of the excitement she must have felt as she sifted through boxes of faded correspondence, re-establishing contact with parents long gone and images of a vaguely remembered childhood. Some of the pictures that remain with the reader include those of horrific flooding in eastern Honan that was caused by Nationalist bombing of the Yellow River levees; missionary and Chinese Christian efforts to feed peasants and keep hospitals functioning in spite of grossly inadequate funding and the lack of basic supplies; urban officials herding starving families outside city gates so that they might die beyond the city's walls rather than on its streets; the evacuation of missionary families by donkey carts and rented boxcars packed with refugees; the activities of US military authorities who sought to exploit the missionaries' potential for gathering intelligence and disseminating misinformation behind enemy lines; bureaucratic incompetence within the US military intelligence staff as the war drew to a close; and the uncertainties that lay within the hearts and minds of foreigners and Chinese Christians as the Communist conquest of Honan approached.

The tone throughout the text is reverential. It is clear that the author admires the missionaries and their Chinese Christian colleagues, and the scope of the work is limited to their activities and observations. One would not look here first for an assessment of the missionary impact on wartime China. The stories of the Sino-Japanese and civil wars have also been told by others, but rarely have these events been portrayed through the writings of members of the international community of inland missionaries. It is really their story that constitutes the essence of this piece. It is to be hoped that others will follow who are in a position similar to that of Erleen Carlson – able to use a wide variety of first-hand and sometimes quite personal accounts to open a new window into what was both a disastrous and a decisive moment in modern Chinese history.

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