

Knowing the Time, Knowing of a Time

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E. C. Bridgman and the Coming of the Millennium: America's First Missionary to China

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Those who have traced the early history of Sino-Western relations are well aware of the important contribution of Jesuit missionaries to Europe's knowledge and understanding of Chinese civilization. The investigations of Jonathan Spence, David Mungello, Sun Shangyang and others have shed much light on the role of Matteo Ricci and his seventeenth century colleagues as pioneering scholars and cultural intermediaries.¹ Until recently, however, relatively little attention has been focused on the sinological scholarship of the first Protestant missionaries who began to arrive in China in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Like the Jesuits before them they added greatly to the West's store of knowledge about the 'Middle Kingdom' and in turn transmitted an abundance of information about their own culture to the Chinese. Among the most prolific and influential of these early Protestant evangelists was Elijah Coleman Bridgman (1801-1861), America's first missionary to China.

I. Early Life

Bridgman was born in Belchertown, Massachusetts on April 22, 1801 "of pious parents whose ancestors were among the Pilgrim Fathers."² Strongly influenced by his deeply religious mother, Bridgman was said to have experienced religious "conversion" at the early age of eleven during one of the extensive revivals that marked the height of the Second Great Awakening. The following year he was admitted to full membership in the Congregational church of his native town and as a youth participated enthusiastically in the religious life of his rural New England community. According to the testimony of his elder brother, during his childhood and youth he "was always kind, obedient, and faithful, diligent in business, assisting his parents, 'fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.'"³

In between the long hours of work on his father's farm, by 1822 Bridgman managed to acquire an education sufficient to qualify him for enrollment in the newly established collegiate institute at

¹See, for example, Jonathan Spence, *Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (1984); David Mungello *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (1985); and Sun Shangyang, *Christianity and Late Ming Confucianism* (1994).

²Quotation from Eliza J. Gillett Bridgman, *The Life and Labors of Elijah Coleman Bridgman* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1864), 1.

³Cited in *ibid.*, 2.

Amherst, Massachusetts (Amherst College). Upon completing his program in religious studies and the classical humanities in 1826, he was accepted as a student at Andover Theological Seminary near Boston to study for the ministry. While at Andover, Bridgman developed an avid interest in the foreign missionary movement through the accounts of overseas missions printed in popular religious periodicals such as the *Missionary Herald* and the *Boston Recorder*. At the time of his graduation, Bridgman himself declared his intention to "preach the gospel to the heathen," accepting an appointment from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to serve as America's first missionary to the Chinese.⁴

II. The Millenarian Impulse

Like many American Evangelicals of the early nineteenth century, Bridgman was deeply influenced by those ideas associated with the Great Awakening theology of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), particularly as it was reformulated by Edward's most renowned disciple, Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803). Among the most inspiring notions to emerge from the theological writings of Hopkins was that of "disinterested benevolence"--understood in the popular mind as the belief that no one will be saved unless he is so disinterested in his own fate, and so concerned for the salvation of others, that he is willing to be damned for the glory of God. This profound conviction has been seen by William Hutchison and Oliver Wendell Elsbree as the primary impetus behind the high-spirited religious commitment and self-righteous devotion of America's first missionaries abroad.⁵

Another important--although much less noted--dimension of Hopkins's theology that also shaped the experience of America's first foreign missionaries was a belief in the imminent fulfillment of the prophecies of the Bible regarding the coming of the Christian Millennium. Jonathan Edwards had earlier described how the Biblical prophecies recorded in places such as the book of *Daniel* and the *Revelation of Saint John* were beginning rapidly to unfold in the world of the eighteenth century. His interpretation of those prophecies suggested that after a period of great social and political upheaval, during which the Christian gospel would be spread with great force and speed among the unconverted peoples and nations, the world would be brought to a condition of unprecedented peace and prosperity; thus heralding the promised return of Jesus Christ, who at the end of this era would personally descend from heaven to preside over the Day of Judgment.⁶

In Hopkins's *A Treatise on the Millennium* (Boston: 1793), the embryonic postmillennialist vision of Edwards was transformed into a comprehensive theological framework for action.⁷ Like his mentor, Hopkins believed that the Millennium would be "a time of universal peace, love

⁴The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was an interdenominational organization formed in 1810 for the purpose of supporting and directing the activities of Christian missions abroad.

⁵See William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 49. Also see Oliver Wendell Elsbree, *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America 1790-1815* (Williamsport, PA: The Williamsport Printing and Binding Co., 1928), 148.

⁶See *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards from His Private Notebooks* (University of Oregon Press, 1955), cited by William R. Hutchison in *Errand to the World*, 41.

⁷Edwards's "postmillennial" interpretation of biblical prophecy differed significantly from the "premillennial" interpretation popularized by late nineteenth century fundamentalists, in which Christ would return and judge the world *prior* to inaugurating the Millennium of peace and prosperity.

and general and cordial friendship," in which "the whole world of mankind will be united as one family" and all "will agree in sentiments respecting the doctrines and truths contained in the Bible."⁸ Hopkins, however, accorded much greater emphasis to those prophesies that seemed to indicate that this glorious new era would be ushered in by an unprecedented expansion of human knowledge and learning. Hopkins therefore affirmed that "there will be a great increase of light and knowledge to a degree vastly beyond what has been before"; and he saw the expansion of the religious spirit and the human quest for understanding as a dynamically integrated process of spiritual and intellectual perfection, in which "knowledge, mental light, and holiness, are inseparably connected: and are, in some respects, the same."⁹

Hopkins likewise maintained that the advent of the Millennium would be accompanied by a vast improvement in the material conditions of life, to such an extent that "there will be for all, a sufficiency and fulness of every thing needed for the body, and for the comfort and convenience of every one."¹⁰ Much of this increase would be due to "great improvement and advances made in all those mechanic arts, by which the earth will be subdued and cultivated, and all the necessary and convenient articles of life, . . . will be formed and made, in a better manner, and with much less labor than they now are."¹¹ As this blessed state of unity and prosperity was realized, all of humanity would be brought into the fold of one common religion, "the truths of which would become increasingly self-evident."¹²

It is not difficult to discern some of the central themes of the European Enlightenment in Hopkins's vision of the Millennium. Take away the predominantly Christian focus of *A Treatise on the Millennium* and what remains is remarkably similar to the secularized utopian vision of the French *philosophe* Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794), whose *Sketch of the Progress of the Human Mind*--published only a year after Hopkins' work--also spoke of the redeeming and unifying power of the progressive expansion of human knowledge.¹³ Unlike Condorcet, however, who believed that such an expansion of knowledge would verify the universal primacy of human reason, Hopkins believed that it would eliminate "all mistakes and errors, contrary to the obvious truths of the Bible," thus bestowing a common religious understanding upon all the peoples of the world, who would then be "united together in the same mind, and the same judgment."¹⁴

III. Arrival in China

Imbued with Hopkins' ideas regarding the redemptive power of human knowledge, E. C. Bridgman arrived at the Chinese port city of Canton in February 1830 with instructions from the American Board of Commissioners to undertake, among other things, "the acquisition of the Chinese language" and to "make as full communications respecting the character, condition,

⁸Samuel Hopkins, *Treatise on the Millennium* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1972), 59-60.

⁹*Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 69.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 71.

¹²*Ibid.*, 62.

¹³Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1955), 184. Originally published in 1795.

¹⁴*Treatise on the Millennium*, 65.

manners, and rites of the people, especially so far as these things are affected by their religion, as your labors and other circumstances will permit."¹⁵ Well suited temperamentally and intellectually to undertake the rigorous demands of this assignment, Bridgman immediately embarked on an intensive program of language study under the tutelage of Robert Morrison, who had been laboring virtually alone since he was sent to Canton in 1807 as a representative of the London Missionary Society.¹⁶

In Bridgman's view, the promise of the Millennium presented "strong inducements to learn the language of this people," for God has made of one blood all the nations of men," and "as surely as the knowledge of him is to fill the whole earth and peace become universal, so surely will China be brought into the family of nations, to associate, to sympathize and to act with them."¹⁷ "So great a change, however," Bridgman continued, "cannot be effected without efforts, and these must be put forth by the men of Christendom."¹⁸ On the basis of these convictions, Bridgman put forth the effort to become the first American to learn the Chinese language well enough to undertake substantive investigations of the country's customs, politics, and classical traditions, and, in turn, to convey a knowledge of the West to the Chinese through the medium of their own language. Thus the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge was securely erected as the chief pillar of Bridgman's missionary strategy in China.

Within a few months, the American Board began to receive letters from Bridgman that described in vivid detail many of the remarkable scenes that surrounded him, from the "huge and ugly" idols of one of the city's "largest and most magnificent [Buddhist] temples" to the gruesome execution of Chinese criminals, in which the executioner "prepared himself for the deadly scene by taking intoxicating drink mixed with gunpowder."¹⁹ Many of these were published in the *Missionary Herald*, providing a great number of American readers with some of their earliest distinct impressions of Chinese society. While Bridgman's early accounts often highlighted what he believed to be the "retrograde" condition of Chinese civilization and the "dreadful indifference, perverseness, deceit, contempt and ignorance of which the native Chinese is composed," they nonetheless also revealed an inquisitive appreciation for the dazzling variety of life to be found in Canton and evinced a genuine, if grudging, respect for the talents and achievements of the Chinese people.²⁰

Near the end of his first year in China, Bridgman also began to write a series of short letters addressed to the children of the Sabbath School in Middletown, Massachusetts. According to Bridgman, these letters were designed "with a desire of spreading before them some of the most

¹⁵Letter of Instructions issued to Bridgman from the Prudential Committee of the ABCFM, signed by Jeremiah Evarts, Clerk, Oct. 7, 1829, cited by Eliza Bridgman in *Life and Labors*, 27.

¹⁶Murray A. Rubinstein has recently provided an excellent survey of Robert Morrison's career in *The Origins of the Anglo-American Missionary Enterprise in China, 1807-1840* (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1996).

¹⁷Bridgman, "The Chinese Language," *Chinese Repository* (May, 1834), 12-13.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Selections from Bridgman's Journal printed in the *Missionary Herald*, March 1832, 67-68; March 1832, 68.

²⁰Quotation from Bridgman to Evarts, Canton, Oct. 20, 1830, *Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, Missions to China (ABC 16.3), reel 233, Yale Divinity School Library.

prominent features and interesting facts concerning China."²¹ Eighteen of these letters were eventually compiled into a single hardcover volume and published for wider distribution by the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, affording children in Sunday schools throughout New England a provocative glimpse at the religion, manners, and customs of the Chinese.

Bridgman's letters to the children combined his characteristically indignant denunciations of the "abominable" beliefs of the Chinese people with enchantingly detailed descriptions of their lives and customs. The letters addressed a wide variety of topics, including such aspects of Chinese life as "Temples, Priests, Priestesses, and Idols"; "Mechanics"; "Scholars"; "Marriage Ceremony"; "Character and Condition of Females"; and "Ideas of Death, style of Mourning, Funerals." True to his Hopkinsian convictions, Bridgman believed that expanding the children's knowledge of the Chinese would ultimately confirm, not challenge, the superior benefits of Christian civilization. He therefore wished his young readers to "know fully their whole manner of life" and promised to provide them with some acquaintance with "the every day conduct, and peculiar manners and customs of the Chinese" so they might form "correct ideas of their character."²²

IV. The *Chinese Repository*

The letters and publications that Bridgman directed to religious groups and mission supporters in New England actually constituted only a small portion of his lifetime effort to inform Western readers about China. Indeed his most extensive effort to disseminate such knowledge began in May 1832 with his publication of a monthly journal entitled the *Chinese Repository*. Bridgman and Morrison had often spoken of the need for a journal devoted to the language, history, and culture of China and East Asia. But given the largely non-religious nature of the enterprise, the men were reluctant to approach the American Board for support. They were determined, however, to proceed with the project and eventually managed to procure a press and financial backing from D. W. C. Olyphant, a wealthy New York merchant who was widely known for his generous support of Christian missions.

In his introduction to the first issue, Bridgman set forth the guiding philosophy and objectives of the *Chinese Repository*, expressing his astonishment that during "the long intercourse which has existed between the nations of Christendom and eastern Asia, there has been so little commerce in intellectual and moral commodities."²³ According to Bridgman, this was primarily because "thirty years ago, there was not living, more than one individual capable of translating from Chinese into English; and there was not one of the sons of the 'Son of heaven,' who could read, or write, or speak, correctly, the English language."²⁴ For this reason, Bridgman claimed, English-speaking Westerners possessed only a very limited knowledge of Chinese civilization, and the Chinese were even more ignorant of the world outside of their own cultural and political dominion. China was therefore said to "stand in the 'midst of the earth,' a stupendous *anomaly*; and, beyond all controversy, presents the widest, and the most interesting field of research under heaven."²⁵

²¹From Bridgman's Journal, Dec. 26, 1831, cited by Eliza Bridgman in *Life and Labors*, 67.

²²Bridgman, *Letters to Children* (Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1838), 31.

²³Bridgman, *Chinese Repository*, Vol. 1: 1.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.* The phrase "midst of the earth" was an allusion to China's conception of itself as the "Middle Kingdom."

Hoping to inspire scholars in Europe and America to take a greater interest in what he saw as an exciting and largely untapped field of investigation, Bridgman listed some of the subjects that promised to supply an abundance of interesting new facts and insights. On the topic of "natural history," it was suggested that fruitful inquiries might "be directed to the climate, its temperature, changes, winds, rains, healthfulness; to the soil, its mineral, vegetable, and animal productions, its fertility and state of cultivation; and also to the productions of the rivers, lakes and seas."²⁶ In regard to commerce, Bridgman suggested that "it will be interesting to notice its progress from the past to modern times; observing, particularly, the advantages and disadvantages of its present state."²⁷ Inquiries into the "social relations" and "moral character" of the Chinese were also encouraged, aided by investigations of their "literary character," which would naturally include a thorough examination of their "books and their systems of education," inasmuch as "they have a constant and powerful influence on all the grand relations and vital interests of the community."²⁸ Vowing that the *Chinese Repository* would be far more than a missionary journal, Bridgman encouraged contributions from anyone interested in sharing the fruits of their investigations, promising that "we enter our work unbiased," and shall not "be less willing to communicate, than to receive whatever may serve to develop the real character of the 'celestial empire.'"²⁹

During its first few years of publication, the *Chinese Repository* included dozens of major articles on various aspects of East Asian civilization. A large number of these were written by Bridgman himself, such as the "Population of China examined"; "Geography, people, government, intercourse with, and productions of Japan"; "Presses in China, and study of Chinese"; "Life and actions of Wú Tsihtien, empress of the Táng dynasty, A.D. 630"; "Early introduction of Christianity into China"; "Kidnapping of children and suicide"; "Early nations who visited China to trade," and many others.³⁰ Many articles were also contributed by Robert Morrison, including "Trait of the Imperial Clan"; "Themes at the examinations in 1832"; "Worship of ancestors, and at the tombs"; and a variety of selections translated from Chinese literature.³¹ Each month Bridgman also compiled a column entitled the "Journal of Occurrences," which summarized recent newsworthy events, many of which were gleaned from translations that he and Morrison made of the *Peking Gazette*, an official circular of the Chinese government.

Although a large portion of the articles in the *Chinese Repository* were written by missionaries, in time the journal became one of the most widely respected forums for the publication and review of sinological scholarship. Noting the impressive range of talent that was represented in its pages during the two decades of its publication, Roswell S. Britton has observed that "the list of contributors is virtually a list of the British and American scholars of that time in China."³² This included a large number of notable British and American merchants, such as Robert Inglis and C. W. King, and a host of diplomats, consular officials, and naval officers, including such well known figures as John Bowring, John Francis Davis, Thomas F. Wade, and T. T. Meadows.

²⁶Ibid., 3.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., 4.

²⁹Ibid., 5.

³⁰*Chinese Repository*, Vol. 1: 347; Vol. III: 145; Vol. II: 1; Vol. III: 543; Vol. I: 447; Vol. I: 364.

³¹*Chinese Repository*, Vol. II: 378; Vol. I: 459; Vol. I: 201.

³²Roswell S. Britton, *The Chinese Periodical Press, 1800-1912* (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Company, 1966), 28-29.

Although much of the responsibility for producing the *Chinese Repository* was assumed by S. Wells Williams after his arrival in Canton in October 1833, Bridgman continued to serve as one of its chief editors and major contributors.³³ The nearly four hundred articles and columns that he wrote or compiled for the *Chinese Repository* covered a broad array of topics and incorporated a wide variety of styles. These ranged from his casual descriptions of life in the streets, as in his "Walks about Canton, and notices of the people and things in it"; to explications of Chinese philosophy, as in his "Cosmology of the Chinese, as given by Ch'ü Hí"; to translations of classical writings, as in his "Translation of the Híáu King [*Xiao Jing*] or Filial Piety"; to regional geographical studies, as in his "Topography of the province of Kiángsu"; to investigations of Chinese history and legend, as in his "Records of the three August Sovereigns"; to angry denunciations of Chinese customs and practices, as in his "Origin and effects of the Chinese custom of compressing the feet of females."³⁴

Throughout the years immediately preceding the Opium War (1839-42), the *Chinese Repository* also served as a venue for the lively debate among the foreigners in China over the increasingly untenable state of Sino-Western relations. There were deep divisions over issues such as the opium trade and considerable disagreement over the wisdom of employing military force against the Qing government. Throughout this tense period, Bridgman consistently maintained his millenarian conviction that, "truth is one, human nature is one," and that "power over mind, as well as over matter, is acquired by knowledge."³⁵ "Foreigners," he claimed, "are without any great influence over the Chinese, because they have but little knowledge of their character."³⁶ In Bridgman's view, the success or failure of Westerners to achieve a more honorable system of relations with China depended upon acquiring an "extensive knowledge, not of the language and country merely, but of the people--not of their sinews, but of their mind."³⁷ Thus the editors of the *Chinese Repository* were convinced that "their endeavors to promote the acquisition and diffusion of truth and knowledge" represented the surest means for resolving the problems that were menacing Western relations with the Chinese.³⁸

V. Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China

In addition to transmitting a knowledge of Chinese civilization to Western readers, Bridgman labored as well to disseminate a knowledge of the West to the Chinese. The "backwardness" of Chinese society, and the country's unfavorable relations with the Western powers, was seen by Bridgman as a result of their utter lack of reliable knowledge about the outside world and their failure to avail themselves of the "advances in knowledge" that were the source of the Western world's progress and achievement. Accordingly, Bridgman argued that "a diffusion of knowledge,

³³Samuel Wells Williams was sent to China by the American Board to assist Bridgman with the management of the printing establishment operated by the Mission in Canton. See *Memorials of the Protestant Missionaries to the Chinese* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1867; repr. Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Company, 1967), 76.

³⁴*Chinese Repository*, Vol. IV: 42; Vol. XVIII: 342; Vol. IV: 344; Vol. XI: 210; Vol. X: 231; Vol. III: 537.

³⁵This does not mean that Bridgman was unequivocally opposed to the use of military coercion; in fact, he has been criticized for his inconsistency on this issue. Quotation from, "Intellectual Character of the Chinese," *CR*, Vol. VII: 7.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*, 8.

³⁸*Ibid.*

which shall effectively reach the morals and the religion of the nation; and purify the sources of authority, . . . would save the empire from destruction, and place it in its proper rank among the nations."³⁹

With this objective in mind, Bridgman and a small group of merchants and missionaries met in Canton in November 1834 to establish the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China. In the formal constitution for their new society, the men affirmed their humanitarian responsibility towards the Chinese by stating that "we are by no means prepared to excuse ourselves from the guilt of indifference and inactivity in not having placed within their reach the means of improvement, and roused their sleeping energies to inquiries after knowledge."⁴⁰ To pursue this aim, the SDUKC was, "by all means in its power, to prepare and publish, in a cheap form, plain and easy treatises in the Chinese language, on such branches of useful knowledge as are suited to the existing state and condition of the Chinese empire."⁴¹

As one of the two "Chinese Secretaries" for the organization, Bridgman was to bear much of the responsibility for producing materials to be printed in Chinese. But this was a burden that he was joyously willing and honored to assume, for he was confident that the transmission of such knowledge would serve as "intellectual artillery," smashing to pieces those cultural barriers that prevented China from being brought "into an alliance with the civilized nations of the earth."⁴² In fact, by shifting the conflict with the Chinese to the cultural and intellectual front, Bridgman believed that the ensuing warfare would be of such that "the victors and the vanquished will meet only to exult and rejoice together."⁴³

VI. *East-West Monthly Examiner*

One of the first projects of the SDUKC was to reissue the *East-West Monthly Examiner* (*Dongxi yangkao meiyue tongzhizhuan*), a periodical in Chinese that was first produced between 1833 and 1835 by the Prussian missionary Karl Gutzlaff.⁴⁴ This publication included a variety of articles on geography, history, elementary astronomy, natural science, and literature, along with moral essays, current price information for traders, and recent news. In the first issue published by the SDUKC in 1837, the editors announced to Chinese readers their intention "to demonstrate the parallel development of the history of the Central Kingdom and the outside states, fully illustrating the beauty of the historical records of ancient and recent times of both China and foreigners, and bringing people to look up to the sages and worthies of all countries."⁴⁵ Promising that the *East-West Monthly Examiner* would serve as "a deep source of reference for a variety of topics," the editors outlined their plans to include, among other things, "essays illustrating the countries of both sides of the world," "basic discussions of astronomy," and articles

³⁹Bridgman, "The Chinese Language," *Chinese Repository*, Vol. III: 10.

⁴⁰See minutes of the organizational meeting of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China, *Chinese Repository*, Vol. III: 380. This report was also published in the *Missionary Herald* (July 1835): 268.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 383.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 380.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴Karl Gutzlaff arrived in China in 1831, having served as a missionary among the Chinese of Southeast Asia since 1827. See *Memorials of the Protestant Missionaries to the Chinese*.

⁴⁵*East-West Monthly Examiner, Dong Xi Yang Kao Meiyue Tongjizhuan*, 1/1837: 1.

concerning "birds and animals, plant life, and minerals--the knowledge of which will bring great benefit."⁴⁶

Bridgman and the others hoped to dispel the cultural pride that they believed blinded the Chinese to the accomplishments of foreigners by proving to their readers that Westerners are "clever and ingenious people who unceasingly devise new methods for doing things."⁴⁷ The editors emphasized how the people of the West were "very rich in literature and informative periodicals which are circulated widely in innumerable quantities" and promised their readers that they would select what was most interesting and important from these works for translation into Chinese.⁴⁸ Their only fear, so they claimed, was that in "the passing of such facts, the promotion of virtue may lose place to an overemphasis on the things of this world"; therefore, they also planned to include a variety of "moral essays (*shanyan*)," urging people to accept the "teachings of heaven (*tianzhijiao*)," and to thus "safeguard their wills and take pleasure in the Way (*shouzhi ledao ye*)."⁴⁹ Citing Confucius' injunction to "study widely, investigate carefully, think deeply, distinguish clearly, and carry out earnestly," the editors attempted to break down the cultural prejudices of the Chinese and prod them into investigating the knowledge and practices of foreign peoples.⁵⁰

Although the publication of the *East-West Monthly Examiner* was cut short by the onset of the Opium War, during its two years of existence the editors did their best to fulfill the promises made to their Chinese readers. Sections devoted to geography, for example, provided an abundance of information about the land and resources of the various countries of Europe, Africa, and the Americas. These accounts described the people and government as well, particularly extolling those social and political institutions that the editors hoped the Chinese would consider emulating, such as England's "Joint Assembly (*zhenggonghui*)," or Parliament.⁵¹

There were also discussions of the West's classical literary heritage, which, readers were told in one article, began in ancient Greece as early as the Zhou dynasty reign of King Gong (946-943 B.C.) and King Yi (943-909 B.C.) and afterwards was carried on by the poets of Rome, such as Vergil (*Weierzhi*) and Horace (*Helashi*), and by the great Roman historians, such as Livy (*Liwei*) and Tacitus (*Daxiduo*).⁵² Articles on natural science offered simple explanations of such phenomena as seasonal changes in the length of the day, volcanos, or earthquakes.⁵³ Others touched upon topics in botany or zoology, discussing such things as African lions, or ventured into the field of human anatomy, such as "A Look at the Study of Bones and Joints (*chashi gujie zhixue*)," or orthopedics.⁵⁴ Accounts of Western technology described an assortment of such marvels as underwater diving gear and steam engines.⁵⁵ By presenting such a wide variety of subjects, the editors hoped to inspire awe for the accomplishments of Western civilization and to

⁴⁶Ibid., 2.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., 4/1838.

⁵²Ibid., 20.

⁵³Ibid., 1/1837; 6/1837; 3/1838.

⁵⁴Ibid., 3/1837; 7/1838.

⁵⁵Ibid., 6/1837; 3/1837.

instill respect for the refined achievements of European culture.

Although it is impossible to determine the exact circulation figures for the *East-West Monthly Examiner*, there is evidence that it was read by many prominent Chinese who appeared to have been favorably impressed with its contents. It comprised an important part of the materials gathered by Commissioner Lin Zexu in his *Account of the Four Continents (Sizhouzhi)*, and Suzanne Barnett has shown how Wei Yuan's famous work, *Illustrated Treatise on the Sea Kingdoms (Haiguo tuzhi)* had drawn upon it as a key source of information.⁵⁶ It was also included among the materials examined by Xu Jiyu, the governor of Fujian Province, prior to the compilation of his well-known *A Short Account of the Maritime Circuit (Yinghuan zhilue)* printed in 1848.⁵⁷

VII. *Brief Account of the United States of America*

Another work published by the SDUKC was E. C. Bridgman's *Brief Account of the United States of America (Meilige heshengguo zhilue)*. Describing his plans for the book to the American Board in September 1836, Bridgman wrote:

. . . the work is to be in two volumes--say 75 leaves each: its leading topics are the discovery, situation, & extent of the country; & the character, manners, customs, & the various political, literary, religious and benevolent institutions of the people--arranged into 56 chapters. I have undertaken it as an exercise in learning the language, and because such a work is greatly needed, & its execution, by a beginner, more easy than the standard tracts.⁵⁸

There was little question that the work was "greatly needed," for never before had anyone written an account of the United States of America in Chinese; and at a time when mounting tensions in Canton were drawing Americans and Chinese into closer contact, such information could prove of vital importance in promoting mutual understanding. In Bridgman's mind, moreover, of all the countries of the West, the United States was in the position to provide the most shining example of the religious and political principles underlying Christian civilization.

Completed in November 1837, Bridgman's *Brief Account of the United States of America* demonstrated once again his remarkable ability to appeal to the cultural sensibilities of his Chinese readers. In the preface, he wrote that he had always regarded the world as one family, and China as one person within that family; and "like the limbs, bones, skin, and sinew of one great cosmic body, none can be regarded as apart from the whole."⁵⁹ Drawing skillfully upon such traditional metaphors, Bridgman expresses his regret that although in ancient times there was an openness among neighboring states, they eventually became estranged from one another and, "like patches of duckweed floating upon the waters, neglected to communicate."⁶⁰

Bridgman then explains that he was born in the state of Massachusetts (*Mashazhuxie*) in the United States of America, located far from China on the opposite side of the world. Informing his readers that he was now thirty seven years old, he recalls how since arriving in China he has met

⁵⁶See "Suzanne Barnett on Wei Yuan's Sources," *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i*, Vol. II, No. 4, Nov. 1970, 8.

⁵⁷Fred Drake provides an excellent study of this work in, *China Charts the World: Hsu Chi-yü and His Geography of 1848* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

⁵⁸Bridgman to Anderson, Canton, Sept. 7, 1836, *ABCFM*, reel 256.

⁵⁹*A Brief Account of the United States of America, Meilige Heshengguo Zhilue*, Preface, 1.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 1. Bridgman's rosy portrayal of the ancient world was based primarily on his belief in the literal veracity of the "Tower of Babel" story in the book of *Genesis*.

learned people from such countries as England, France, Holland, Spain, Africa, Siam, Japan, and China; and "never failing to become their friends, has had delightful and memorable experiences sampling their arts and literature."⁶¹ One could hardly imagine a more appropriate or compelling opening for Bridgman's book than this subtle allusion to friends from distant quarters and the pleasures of learning, such as that mentioned in the opening verse of the Confucian Analects.⁶² Now that he has lived among the Chinese, Bridgman continues, and has perused their books for seven or eight years, he is "humbled by the breadth of their learning"; he nevertheless realizes that "they yet know nothing of the geography, products, people, laws, or anything else about the United States."⁶³

Bridgman's idealized portrayal of American society and government emphasized those things that he felt would be of the greatest interest and value to the Chinese. He was convinced, of course, that the power of such knowledge itself would help propel the Chinese along the pathway of political reform, social transformation, and spiritual salvation. He pointed out, for example, that in establishing principles for foreign relations, the Americans regarded it important to "see all within the four seas as the members of one family, and that no nation should act dictatorially."⁶⁴ Listing some of the nations of Europe and Asia who maintained relations with one another, Bridgman explained how they frequently exchanged diplomats, asserting that only after establishing such forms of official communication can a nation increase its strength and be at peace among the other nations of the world. Ironically, Bridgman also told of the wars between the British and the French for control of the American continent and the battle for political independence fought by the American colonists.

Intent on informing his readers of the high state of culture and the arts in America, Bridgman's book included chapters entitled "Educational Institutions," "Literature," and "Various Arts and Crafts." The topics selected for discussion in these sections were also of the sort that would have been most likely to pique the curiosity of his Chinese readers or would have suggested improvements in their own customs and practices. In his discussion of education, for example, Bridgman noted how both girls and boys were expected to learn, beginning their schooling together at a very early age.⁶⁵ In his chapter on literature, he described the broad range of newspapers, almanacs, periodicals, classical works and other books that were produced in vast quantities, without any government restrictions, through the use of modern presses.⁶⁶ The chapter on arts and crafts described the manufacture of ships and weapons, the construction of buildings and houses, the playing of musical instruments, singing, painting, and drawing.⁶⁷

Naturally, the subject of religion and morality also received a great deal of attention in Bridgman's account, and here again he emphasized those things deemed most important to convey to the Chinese. In one chapter entitled "Distinguishing Heresy and Orthodoxy (*bianjiao*)

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²"The Master said, 'Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application? Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?' From *Confucian Analects* 1:1-2, included in *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 1, trans. by James Legge (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1893), 137.

⁶³*Meilige Heshengguo Zhilue*, 3.

⁶⁴Ibid., 16.

⁶⁵Ibid., 56.

⁶⁶Ibid., 58-59.

⁶⁷Ibid., 60-61.

xiezheng)," for example, Bridgman maintained that Americans know, esteem, and worship only the one August God (*Huangshangdi*"), and other than this they pray to no one.⁶⁸ The teachings of this religion, he claimed, are confirmed by scriptural texts that were compiled over many years between the end of the Xia and the beginning of the Han dynasties. Since God cannot be seen, Bridgman explained, he has made his will known through holy men such as Moses (*Moxi*), whose records have been handed down through the ages. Bridgman also affirmed the immortality of the human soul, noting how those who believe in God are rewarded with an eternal place in heaven (*tiantang*) and those who oppose God are punished with eternal damnation in hell (*diyu*).⁶⁹

First published in 1838 at the American Board's printing establishment in Singapore, Bridgman's *Brief Account of the United States of America* was distributed widely among the Chinese communities along the coast. Bridgman himself presented a copy to Commissioner Lin Zexu, and many other copies were handed out along with the religious tracts and other materials printed by the missionaries. Like the *East-West Monthly Examiner*, Bridgman's book became a major source of information for that first generation of Chinese scholars who, under the pressure of Western imperialism, began to investigate more seriously the unfamiliar lands and peoples far outside of China. It was the mainstay of Wei Yuan's sections on the United States in his *Illustrated Treatise on the Sea Kingdoms*.⁷⁰ And according to Fred Drake, Xu Jiyu used the bulk of Bridgman's original, but in the Chinese author's own wording and pattern of organization, in his *Short Account of the Maritime Circuit*.⁷¹

VIII. Chinese Chrestomathy in the Canton Dialect

Another work produced by Bridgman for the SDUKC was the *Chinese Chrestomathy in the Canton Dialect*.⁷² A large volume of nearly seven hundred pages, it was compiled "to aid foreigners in learning the Chinese language," and "to assist native youth in acquiring the English tongue, and to show how far this language can be expressed and acquired through the medium of the Roman letters."⁷³ Most sections of the *Chinese Chrestomathy* used a three column format that listed a series of thematically related phrases by their English translation, Chinese characters, and a system of orthography designed to convey their Cantonese pronunciation. This format enabled both Chinese and English-speaking readers to use the text with equal facility. It is clear, however, that the *Chinese Chrestomathy* was intended to serve a much larger purpose than mere language learning, for Bridgman had carefully designed its twenty-two chapters to serve as a conduit for the exchange of a wide variety of intercultural information.

In a chapter entitled "Classes of Men," for example, Bridgman included sections which attempted to illustrate the Chinese conception of sages (*sheng*) and worthies (*xian*) through the selection of key passages from the Confucian canon. In a chapter on "Commercial Relations," there were sections on "Different kinds of Teas," "National Coins," and "Varieties of Silk." In

⁶⁸Ibid., 51.

⁶⁹Ibid., 51-52.

⁷⁰See "Suzanne Barnett on Wei Yuan's Sources," *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i*, Vol. II, No. 4, Nov. 1970, 10.

⁷¹Fred Drake, *Christianity in China*, 101.

⁷²This work was not published until 1841, in Macao. The word "chrestomathy" comes from the Greek *chrestomatheia* (fr. *chrestos* useful + *manthanein* to learn), and according to *Webster's Dictionary* refers to a selection of passages compiled as an aid to learning a language.

⁷³E. C. Bridgman, *Chinese Chrestomathy in the Canton Dialect* (Macao: S. Wells Williams, 1841), Intro., i.

"Government Affairs" there were passages that discussed the "Imperial Family," the "Inner Council," the "Penal Code," and the "Six Supreme Boards." The chapter "Liberal Arts" included sections on "Ceremonial Rites," "Musical Instruments," and "Rules of Archery." And in a chapter on "Domestic Affairs," Bridgman addressed subjects such as "Articles of Dress," "Of the Toilet," and "Rules of Visiting." All of these sections introduced words and expressions associated with each particular topic and provided examples of the sort of sentences that one might expect to encounter in each context. For the Western reader, the *Chrestomathy* was not merely a useful guide to Chinese vocabulary and grammar but also a remarkably comprehensive introduction to the lives, customs, beliefs, and history of the Chinese people--a distillation of the knowledge included in the dozens of major articles that Bridgman had contributed to the pages of the *Chinese Repository*.

Those sections of the *Chinese Chrestomathy* written for the benefit of Chinese readers often borrowed directly from articles published in the *East-West Monthly Examiner* or other works produced by Bridgman and the others for the SDUKC. A chapter entitled "Geography," for example, reprinted excerpts on such topics as the "Nations of Europe," the "Nations of Africa," "Islands of the Sea," and the "Nations of America." Like some earlier materials, sentences used here to introduce new vocabulary and expressions also informed the reader of the basic geography, history, and politics of these regions, including such particulars as the names of capital cities and rulers.⁷⁴ Chapters dealing with topics in natural science, mathematics, and astronomy provided a range of key concepts and vocabulary in these fields as well. In this manner, the *Chinese Chrestomathy in the Cantonese Dialect* was the very epitome of the information strategy that Bridgman had promoted through the publication of the *Chinese Repository* and the establishment of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China.

IX. Shanghai Literary and Scientific Society

By the time the *Chinese Repository* had ceased publication in 1851, Bridgman had become deeply involved in translating a more suitable version of the Bible into Chinese and in establishing a "North China" mission for the American Board at his new residence in Shanghai. He nevertheless continued to promote the study of Chinese civilization by Westerners and in 1858 had established the "Shanghai Literary and Scientific Society"--an organization consciously modeled upon the China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society established in 1847 in Hong Kong. As chief editor of its monthly journal, Bridgman declared that the primary purpose of the new society was to avail itself of its "access to the land and people of China" to "investigate, at the fountainhead, all that bears upon the physical, intellectual, and moral condition of this countless population."⁷⁵ Just as he had in 1832, when he launched the *Chinese Repository* from his small office in the Factories of Canton, Bridgman had emphasized the "advantages which must accrue to the interests of religion, of science, of commerce, and of civilization in general, from an increased knowledge of the nation where we dwell."⁷⁶

In his "Inaugural Address" as the president of the Shanghai Literary and Scientific Society, Bridgman pointed out that because China was deprived of the "hallowed influences of revealed truth" its literature and science was "far inferior to the nations of Christendom." He nevertheless

⁷⁴Ibid., 410.

⁷⁵From the Preface of the *Journal of the Shanghai Literary and Scientific Society*, June 1858 (Shanghai: Printed at the Office of the *North China Herald*, 1858)

⁷⁶Ibid.

maintained that the Chinese people "exhibit the most complete specimen, which the generations of past ages, or we ourselves, have ever had of what the human mind can attain to without the aids of true religion," a place where "great advances have been made without the aid of revealed truth."⁷⁷ In other words, as Bridgman declared, "Jehovah has been pleased, for reasons unknown to us, to allow the experiment here to be tried, that all men might see and know just how far human intellect, unaided by wisdom from above, can go, to what height it can attain, and to what limits it can expand."⁷⁸ Just as he had in his introduction to the *Chinese Repository* twenty-five years earlier, Bridgman attempted to stimulate an interest in China from the perspective of all the major fields of knowledge, promising that "in the three great departments of natural history: the mineral, the vegetable, and animal kingdoms, there are thousands and thousands of objects, great and small, wooing the lovers of nature's forms and of her ever-changing drapery."⁷⁹

The first issue of the *Journal of the Shanghai Literary and Scientific Society* included articles entitled, "Coins of the Ta-ts'ing, or present Dynasty of China"; "Contributions to the Ethnology of East Asia"; "A Buddhist Shastra, Translated from the Chinese"; and "Visit to Simoda and Hakodadi in Japan." Each issue also included a "Record of Occurrences in China," which, like the "Journal of Occurrences" in the *Chinese Repository*, presented a summary of important current events, including translations from the *Peking Gazette* and other Chinese sources.

X. North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society

Within a year, the Shanghai Literary and Scientific Society was transformed into the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, a step that had been planned by Bridgman from the beginning.⁸⁰ The newly named society met each month at the Shanghai Library, where members and guests were asked to present papers or provide updates on the progress of their various investigations.⁸¹ Public interest in the new organization grew quickly, and scholarly contributions to its journal poured in steadily. Fully living up to Bridgman's promise to "give variety of subject," in selecting items for publication, the first issue of the *Journal of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* included: "Narrative of a visit to the Island of Formosa"; "Notices of the character and writings of Meh tsi"; "Chinese Bibliography"; "On the Study of Natural Sciences in Japan"; "Memorandum on the present state of some of the Magnetic Elements in China"; "Sailing Directions for the Yang-tsze Kiang, from Woosung to Hankow"; "On the Musical Notation of the Chinese;" and, as always, a summary of recent newsworthy events in the "Record of Occurrences."⁸²

Bridgman's personal contributions to the journal included his "Sketches of the Miao-tsze," which was a translation of brief descriptions of twenty distinct minority peoples in China that "were written many years ago by a native scholar who had travelled in the province of Kwei-chau."⁸³ As chief editor of the journal, Bridgman also provided his usual share of editorial

⁷⁷"Inaugural Address," *ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁰On the formation of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, see the Preface of the *Journal of the North-China Asiatic Society* (Dec. 1959).

⁸¹The proceedings of these meeting were reported regularly in the *North China Herald*.

⁸²*Journal of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Dec. 1859).

⁸³*Ibid.*

commentary. Naturally, this continued to reflect his opinion that the powers of the West were the standard bearers of political enlightenment and true religion and that the current political struggle between China and the West was a decisive moral contest between the forces of reason and superstition, faith and hopelessness, liberty and oppression.

Bridgman's role in alerting the world to the ongoing Armageddon in East Asia was quickly drawing to a close however, for in October 1861 he was conspicuously absent from his chair for the Fourth Annual Meeting of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. In the month of September, Bridgman was "attacked with the symptoms of dysentery," from which he would never recover, dying in November in the company of his wife and a few close colleagues. Nevertheless, his presence was still felt at the October meeting, for among the decisions made by the Society's officers that evening was a resolution that he had proposed several months earlier of making "the publication of historical, scientific, and other treatises, *in the Chinese language . . .* one of the leading objects of this Society."⁸⁴

XI. Conclusion

Bridgman's lifetime contribution as a scholar and publisher helped to establish the foundations of American sinology, and his publications in Chinese opened a door to the West for many of China's most progressive intellectuals. However, the great expansion of knowledge that Bridgman helped to facilitate failed to bring about that "unity of mind and judgment," that "common religious understanding," that constituted the essential promise of his Hopkinsian millenarian vision.

If anything, an expanded knowledge of East Asian culture had weakened the Christian claim of religious exclusivity by bringing a range of alternative beliefs and perspectives before the eyes of the world. Many Westerners had, in fact, developed a greater respect and appreciation for the religious and philosophical traditions of East Asia through the studies and translations of the Protestant missionaries, simply ignoring the vitriolic religious rhetoric that often tainted their writings. Thus, in ways that far transcended his personal expectations, E. C. Bridgman indeed helped to bring about, in Hopkins's words, "a great increase of light and knowledge to a degree vastly beyond what has been before."⁸⁵

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⁸⁴North China Herald (Oct. 19, 1861).

⁸⁵Samuel Hopkins, *Treatise on the Millennium*, 57.

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