

## **Revival of the Spirit of Christian Higher Education in China**

**Peter Tze Ming NG**

The Chinese University of Hong Kong  
[peterng.cuhk@gmail.com](mailto:peterng.cuhk@gmail.com)

### **Abstract:**

Questions have been raised again in recent years regarding whether Christian Higher Education had totally disappeared from China since 1950s? Scholars have been arguing that since Hong Kong had returned to China in 1997, the Christian higher education in Hong Kong had returned altogether and became part of the Christian presence in the People's Republic of China today. Besides, there were still found activities of the alumni associations of the Christian colleges such as the Yenching Alumni Association in Beijing. The present author was invited in 2014 to attend the celebration of the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Yenching University in Beijing which was one of the marks of the revival of the spirit of Christian Higher Education in China. In this paper, the present author will report some of the activities going on in the past couple of decades in China which signified the reviving spirit of Christian higher education in China, perhaps in a different form of presence in this new era of global transformation.

### **Key Words:**

Christian higher education; China; global transformation; Lesslie Newbigin

# Revival of the Spirit of Christian Higher Education in China

**Peter Tze Ming NG**

The Chinese University of Hong Kong  
[peterng.cuhk@gmail.com](mailto:peterng.cuhk@gmail.com)

Jesus said: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24)

“O how deep is the wealth of the wisdom and knowledge of God! No one is able to make discovery of his decisions, and his ways may not be searched out.” (Romans 11:33)

## Introduction

This paper is a continuation of the one I wrote for *Christian Higher Education: A Global Reconnaissance*, in which I ended with the words of Jesus, who says: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24).<sup>1</sup> I concluded by saying: “The thirteen Christian colleges in China were forced to close down or “die” in the early 1950s, yet the seeds the missionaries had sown in China never “die” and their work could blossom and “bear fruits” even after several decades, as we are now witnessing the revival and blossoming of Christian work in China again in recent years. This was precisely what we can learn from the experiences of Christian higher education in China”.<sup>2</sup> In the present paper, I shall continue by recalling Lesslie Newbigin’s Trinitarian Model of Christian mission<sup>3</sup> and try to explore the work of God and the Holy Spirit in reviving the spirit of Christian higher education in China in the past 30 years. I shall also echo with the words of St. Paul who says: “O how deep is the wealth

---

<sup>1</sup> See Peter Tze Ming Ng, “Rise and Development of Christian Higher Education in China”, in Joel Carpenter, Perry Glanzer & Nicholas Lantinga (eds.) *Christian Higher Education: A Global Reconnaissance*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014, pp. 68-89.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> Newbigin was reminding us of the significance of acknowledging the work of the Trine God- the father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in Christian mission. He said that “Christian mission was the mission of God”, “It was not the Church, but God who is in control of History”. See, e.g. the more recent discussion in Mark T.B. Laing. *From Crisis to Creation: Lesslie Newbigin and the Reinvention of Christian Mission*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012; and Scott Sunquist & Amos Yong (eds.) *The Gospel and Pluralism Today: Re-assessing Leslie Newbigin in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015.

of the wisdom and knowledge of God! No one is able to make discovery of his decisions, and his ways may not be searched out”. (Romans 11:33) It is hoped that the Chinese story would help foster a better understanding of the wisdom and knowledge of God, with special reference to the global transformation of Christian higher education today.

Early this year, I was invited to present two public lectures at Fujian Normal University in Fuzhou, People’s Republic of China. The University had set up a Research Centre on Chinese Christianity in its Faculty of History and Sociology in 2012, and I was honored to be a member of its Academic Advisory Committee. In January, I was asked to give two lectures on Christian higher education in China, with the topics entitled: “The Significance of the Study of Christian Higher Education in China Today” and “Glocalization as a Paradigm for Historical Studies: the Case of Christian Higher Education in China”.<sup>4</sup> Now as we gather together to discuss this theme: “Strengthening Christian Higher Education in an Era of Global Transformation”, I would suggest that the case of China is a good one for our re-imagining the work of God, with special reference to Christian higher education in China. There are several events I can recall regarding this topic: “Revival of the Spirit of Christian Higher Education in China”, and they may suggest some hope for the future study of Christian higher education in China in this exciting era of global transformation.

People often ask: whether Christian Higher Education had totally disappeared from China since 1950s? Yes, since the Korean War, the Sino-American relationship was broken and the Chinese government had started in 1952 a policy of re-structuring higher education system in China, and as a result, all Christian colleges and universities were disappeared. This was what the Chinese scholars in the Mainland often said, but that was only partly true, because there were still the remnants- the teachers and students who went to Hong Kong and Taiwan and overseas to continue Christian higher education for the Chinese people outside China Mainland. Since Hong Kong returned to China in 1997, the Christian higher education in Hong Kong had returned altogether and became parts of the Christian presence in the People’s Republic of China today.<sup>5</sup> Scholars are suggesting that Christian colleges/ universities in Hong Kong are another good sign of the revival of the spirit of Christian higher education in China. But in this paper, I will draw your attention to the situation in Mainland China, and in response to Laurie Schreiner’s suggestion at this conference<sup>6</sup>, we need to “re-imagine Christian higher education” in China, perhaps differently in different regions and different countries. For instance, can we imagine that God is still working in His own ways in China? Even though the missionaries have left China since 1950s, God is still working there; even though there are no Christian higher education institutions in China, the Holy Spirit can still be working there too. It is only when we can look at China’s Christian higher

---

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘Glocalization’ is a combination of ‘Globalization’ and ‘Localization’. See e.g. “Glocalization and the New Trend in the Study of Christian Higher Education in East Asia”, in Philip Leung & Peter Ng (eds.) *Christian Responses to Asian Challenges: A Glocalization View on Christian Higher Education in East Asia*. Hong Kong: Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society, Chung Chi College, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007, pp. 1-20.

<sup>5</sup> There are three Christian colleges in Hong Kong, namely: Chung Chi College, Hong Kong Baptist University and Lingnan University.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Laurie A. Schreiner, “Re-imagining Christian Higher Education: Hope for the World”, Plenary Lecture 3 presented at the IAPCHE 8<sup>th</sup> Conference on “Strengthening CHE in an Era of Global Transformation”, held at Baekseok University on May 31, 2016.

education from this new perspective, including the hidden work of God and His Holy Spirit that we may see it differently, in this exciting era of global transformation.<sup>7</sup> The following is an attempt to use the China case as illustration.

### Resurgence of Studies of Christian Higher Education in China Since the 1980s

Prof. Zhang Kai Yuan was the pioneer and most influential leader in this emerging field on the history of Christian higher education in China. He was the President of Huazhong Normal University (1985-1991), which was formerly called Huazhong (Central China) University, being a Christian University in Wuchang, China. When Zhang became President in 1985, Prof. James T.C. Liu from Princeton University visited him and suggested to him: “This is perhaps a good time to re-examine the history of China’s Christian colleges and universities... And you are the most suitable person for this job”.<sup>8</sup> Zhang accepted the calling and began by retrieving the archives of Huazhong University from Hubei Provincial Archives in 1988. He also mobilized alumni/ae and scholars to do similar work and encouraged them to launch serious studies of the history of those universities which were related in some ways to the thirteen Pre-1949 Christian Universities. The First International Symposium on the History of Pre-1949 Christian Universities in China was held on June 1-3, 1989 at Huazhong Normal University, Wuhan, China, where Zhang Kai Yuan was the President.<sup>9</sup> As a result, Chinese scholars began to re-tell the stories of Christian colleges as part of the history of the institutions to which they belonged. Examples are found in Ginling Women’s College, the history of which is seen as part of the present Nanjing Normal University; the history of University of Nanking (Ginling) is seen as part of the history of University of Nanjing; the history of Central China (Huazhong) University is integrated into that of Huazhong Normal University; and even Fu Jen Catholic University is portrayed as an integral part of the history of Beijing Normal University.<sup>10</sup>

Zhang not only called for a resurgence for the study of Christian higher education in China, but also suggested a new perspective for the study, i.e. to view Christian colleges in China as a product of Sino-Western cultural exchange. Alongside the study of missionary’s attempt to bring modernization to Chinese education, there were also studies on encounters between East and Western cultures in Christian colleges in China.<sup>11</sup> Since 2003, there was

<sup>7</sup> For example, the Biblical imagery of ‘salt and light’ may suggest another different view of Christian presence and the Spirit of Christian higher education that makes a difference.

<sup>8</sup> Liu was a graduate from Yenching University and Zhang was from Nanking University, both were Christian Universities in China in the 1940s. Zhang retold this story in “Zhang’s Preface”, in Peter Tze Ming Ng et al (eds.) *Zhongguo jiaohui Daxue wenxian mulu* (Catalogues Series of China Christian Colleges 《中國教會大學文獻目錄》), vol.1, xiii. See also the English version in Peter Tze Ming Ng et al., *Changing Paradigms of Christian Higher Education in China, 1888-1950* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 13f.

<sup>9</sup> See Zhang Kai-yuan & Arthur Waldron, eds., *Zhongxi wenhua yu Jiaohui Daxue*, (Christian Universities and Chinese-Western Cultures 《中西文化與教會大學》), (Wuhan, Hubei Educational Press), 1991.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, *Nanjing Shifan Daxue Dashiji* (The Chronicle of Events at Nanjing Normal University, 1902-1990) (Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press, 1992); *Nanjing Daxueshi* (The History of Nanjing University, 1902-1992) (Nanjing: University of Nanjing Press, 1992); *Huazhong shifan daxueshi* (The History of Huazhong Normal University) (Wuchang: Huazhong Normal University Press, 1993); and *Beijing shifan daxueshi*. (The History of Beijing Normal University, 1902-1982) (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Shi Jing Huan’s doctoral dissertation at Beijing Normal University which was published as *Dixiaren yu Situ leideng zai hua jiaoyu huodong* (The Educational Activities of Calvin Mateer and John Leighton Stuart in

also the attempt to study the concept of “Glocalization” – a combination of global and local processes in modern society, and to apply it to the study of the history of Christian mission in China, including the history of Christian higher education in China.<sup>12</sup> Hence, attempts were made to a more vivid study of the interplay between globalization and localization processes in the study of the history of Christian higher education in China.<sup>13</sup>

Also in 2003, Huazhong (Central China) Normal University was celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I was most honored to be invited to attend one of its celebration activities and had the chance to chat with Prof. Ma Min at his President’s residence. Prof. Ma told me that he was developing a new College of International Cultural Exchange and was setting up a Division of International Exchange Affairs in his General Office. Why did he do that? Prof. Ma reminded me that he was a student of Zhang and had already written a paper on “The International Character of Christian Colleges in China- A Case Study of Huazhong University” at a conference in 1993.<sup>14</sup> Hence, it was based on the inspiration from his research study that now he launched this new college for the university. This was indeed a very nice way of remembering the contribution of Central China (Huazhong) University by reviving its spirit of internationalism, and the college has become one of the outstanding colleges of Huazhong Normal University today.<sup>15</sup>

On December 18, 2015, while he was already 89, Zhang gave a public lecture on Miner Searle Bates at Huazhong Normal University.<sup>16</sup> To our surprise, Zhang still remembered and honored his former professor as a Missionary educator as well as a great Professor of History in his 30 years of teaching at University of Nanking. It was in 1991 when Zhang secured a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation and he worked as a researcher at Yale Divinity School, New Haven. At the Day Missions Library Special Collection there, he discovered the “M. Searle Bates Papers”. Prof. Bates had not only trained many historians for

---

China) Taiwan: Men Wei Publishing Co., 1991; and Wang Lixin’s doctoral dissertation at Nankai University, Tianjin which was published as *Meiguo chuanjiaoshi yu wanqing zhongguo jindaihua* (American Missionaries and the Modernization of China in the Late Qing Period) Tianjin: The People’s Press, 1997. Also the discussions in Peter Tze Ming Ng et al, *Changing Paradigms of Christian Higher Education in China, 1888-1950* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).

- <sup>12</sup> There was a conference on ‘Glocalization and Christianity’ held in Beijing in December 2003 by the Center for the Study of Christianity of the Research Institute of World Religions, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, where this new term ‘Glocalization’ was used to generate a more creative perspective on the study of Christianity. See, e.g. Peter Tze Ming Ng, “The Glocalization of College Education and Christianity” in Zhuo Xinping, ed., *Jiduzhongjiao yanjiu* 7 (The Study of Christianity, vol.7). (Beijing: Religious Culture Press, 2004), 365-385.
- <sup>13</sup> See, e.g. Philip Yuen Sang Leung and Peter Tze Ming Ng, eds. *Christian Response to Asian Challenges: A Glocalization View on Christian Higher Education in East Asia* (Hong Kong: Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society, Chung Chi College, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007); and Peter Tze Ming Ng, *Quanqiu diyuhua shijiaoxiade Zhongguo Jidujiao Daxue* (Christian Higher Education in China- As Seen from the Perspective of Glocalization). (Taiwan: Cosmic Light Publication Ltd., 2006).
- <sup>14</sup> See Ma, Min, “The International Character of Christian Colleges in China- A Case Study of Huazhong University”, in Zhang Kai Yuan (ed.), *Wenhau Chuanbo yu jiaohui daxue*, (Promotion of Culture and the Christian Colleges in China). Hubei: Hubei Education Publishing House, 1996, pp. 74-110.
- <sup>15</sup> The College is now a special college dedicated to the teaching and research of Teaching Chinese as a Second Language. By the year of 2010, the College has embraced 1604 overseas students coming from 133 countries and regions. See <http://english.ccnu.edu.cn/index.php/index-view-aid-194.html>.
- <sup>16</sup> See <http://www.ccnu.com.cn/xueshu/jiangzuoxinwen/2015/1219/14716.html>.

China, he was also a life witness to the “Rape of Nanjing” in 1937. He was the chairman of the International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone and worked to secure lives and the safety of the people of Nanking. He had opened the University of Nanking campus to be a shelter for the refugees during the Japanese attack. After the war, he was summoned as a witness at the Tokyo Trials and the subsequent trials for war criminals. Since the re-discovery of the “Bates Papers”, Prof. Zhang spent the rest of his life re-telling the story of Bates to the Chinese people. Besides helping Ms Martha Smalley in the production of the Yale Divinity School Library Occasional Paper, number 9: *American Missionary Eyewitnesses to the Nanking Massacre, 1937-1938*,<sup>17</sup> he has also published several books on Bates, such as: *The Historical Witnesses of Nanjing Massacre; Historical Values of Bates Papers; Let the Facts Speak: Nanjing Massacre in the Eyes of M. Searle Bates*.<sup>18</sup> Hence, the recalling of the life of Prof. Bates also helped reviving the spirit of Christian higher education in China, which Zhang Kai-yuan had done it so well.

### The Case of Nanjing Normal University

Ginling Women’s College was the best known Christian College for Women in China. It was merged with University of Nanking and then as part of Nanjing Normal University (NNU) during the re-structuring of Chinese higher education system in 1952. NNU is now ranked as one of the top 5 normal universities (the third) in China, and one of the top 50 national universities in China today. It was because of the continual influence of Wu Yi Fang (1893-1985),<sup>19</sup> the first Chinese President of the College that Ginling Women’s College was still remembered and its name was restored in NNU even in 1980s. When Wu died in 1985, the university set up a memorial hall on campus to commemorate her and Ginling Women’s College was restored as a college in NNU in March 1987. This was indeed a great sign of the revival of the spirit of Ginling College at NNU today.

It is interesting to note that there was a strong research and teaching base on moral education in China at NNU. The Research Institute of Moral Education of NNU was founded in 1994, and it has become one of the key research bases for human and social sciences studies in China. As it was stated at the front of its web-page, moral education at NNU had a long tradition and could be traced back to the early years of Wu Yi Fang who proposed the idea of

<sup>17</sup> See Martha Smalley: *American Missionary Eyewitnesses to the Nanking Massacre, 1937-1938*. (Yale Divinity School Library Occasional Paper, no. 9), New Haven: Yale Divinity School, 1997.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g. Zhang Kai-yuan (章開沅): *The Historical Witnesses of Nanjing Massacre* (in Chinese: 《南京大屠殺的歷史見證》), Wuhan: Hebei People’s Publishing House, 1995. Also Zhang Kai-yuan, translated and re-edited, in Chinese: 《“天理難容” - 美國傳教士眼中的南京大屠殺(1937 - 1938)》, Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Wu Yi-fang was a former graduate of Ginling Women’s College. She received her Ph.D. in biology and philosophy from University of Michigan in 1928. Then she became the President of Ginling for 23 years, from 1928- 1951. She was praised by the U.S. President Roosevelt as 'a woman of wisdom' in 1943. She was appointed as a Chinese delegate to sign the United Nations Charter on behalf of China after attending the United Nations Conference in 1945. Her apparently close relationship with Kuomintang government, however, did not result in her departure for Taiwan after the victory of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949. Wu served as a delegate to the first five National People's Congress (NPC) and on the Standing Committee of the Third National People's Congress (1965), as well as a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and served on the Standing Committee of the Fifth Session (1978). See, e.g. Lily Xiao Hong Lee et al (eds.) *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: The Twentieth Century, 1912-2000*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003, pp. 562-564.

“emphasis on caring for the students” at Ginling. Other pioneers were Tao Xingzhi and Chen Heqin who proposed the progressive educational ideals of "life education" and "living education", after their return to China from their study at Columbia University, USA in the 1910s.<sup>20</sup> Again, it was since 1981 when Prof. Lu Jie<sup>21</sup> became Head of the Department of Education, and in 1982 Head of Institute of Educational Research at NNU that she began to treasure much of this cultural heritage and started to promote moral education as a key study at NNU. Being impressed by the progressive education she had seen from her father, and scholars like Tao Xinzhi and Chen Heqin, Lu turned to develop her vision for education to nurture a new sense of moral consciousness that included the concern for “the study of man”, “back to life”, “learning for living”, focusing on the “relational” as well as “self-transcendence” aspects of moral education.<sup>22</sup> Such humanistic trend of moral education could also be seen as signs of the revival of the Christian ideals of education handed down from the early years of Ginling Women’s College.

Another significant sign was the statue of Wilhelmina (Minnie) Vautrin in the campus of NNU. Who was Minnie Vautrin? Vautrin (1886– 1941) was an American missionary from Illinois, who taught at Ginling College from 1912- 1940. She had been Head of the Department of Education since 1918. She was well-known, not only for her teaching of humanistic ideals of education at Ginling Women’s College, but also for her intensive care and protection of the Nanjing people during the Nanking Massacre in 1937. During the Sino-Japanese War, Vautrin stayed at Ginling and she opened the campus as a refugee haven for more than 10,000 women in the city. After the war, Vautrin was awarded the Emblem of the Blue Jade by the Chinese government for her heroic sacrifices during the “Rape of Nanjing”.<sup>23</sup> She was still remembered and honored by the Chinese people as a “Goddess of Mercy”, for her love to the Chinese people, and when NNU restored the Ginling College inside its campus, there was a statue of Vautrin erected alongside Wu Yi Fang’s memorial hall.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.nsddys.cn/second1.asp?lb=About%20RIME&article=8>. As we know, Wu Yi-fang was the President of Ginling Women’s College, Tao Xingzhi (陶行知) graduated from University of Nanking and Chen Heqin (陳鶴琴) from Qinghua Univeristy. Both Tao and Chen were devoted Christians who studied at Teachers College, Columbia University in the 1910s. See, for reference, <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/coce/about-us/teachers-college-and-modern-chinese-education/>

<sup>21</sup> Lu Jie (魯潔 1930- ) entered into Ginling College when she was 17 and she was student of Wu Yi-fang. It is interesting to note that her father was a classmate of Tao Xingzhi at Columbia University in USA, her mother was a graduate from St. Mary’s College and her brother, Lu Ping (魯平) was a graduate from St. John’s College, both were Christian colleges in Shanghai. See, e.g. Ruth Hayhoe, *Portraits of Influential Chinese Educators*, pp. 304-323.

<sup>22</sup> When Lu Jie was reaching 79 in 2009, her students published a book for her, entitled: *Seeing the Scene in depth with calm waters: The Thoughts and Feelings of Lu Jie on Education*. Beijing: Educational Science Publishing House, 2009. See also my remarks on Lu Jie in Peter Tze Ming Ng, “Aims of Education Restated: A Proposal of Care for Spirituality Education”, in *Moral Education Review*, 2013, Beijing: Educational Science Publishing House, February 2014, pp. 15- 27.

<sup>23</sup> Her work was recounted in the biographical book written by Hu Hua-ling, *American Goddess at the Rape of Nanking: The Courage of Minnie Vautrin*, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Inside the campus of NNU, the department of education is on the hilltop, with a statue of Tao Xingzhi on its side and down the slope is the memorial hall of Ginling College and on its side laid the statue of Minnie Vautrin. While I was there, I reminded the faculty and students of this wonderful story of NNU, saying: “On the top of the hill, they were reminded of their noble educational philosophy of love taught by Tao Xingzhi and down the slope they could remember the honorable act of Minnie Vautrin who was a Goddess of Mercy, demonstrating to them the true love of God”.

## The Case of Yenching University

The best known of the thirteen Christian universities in China was Yenching University in Beijing which was incorporated into Peking University during the re-structuring of Chinese higher education system in 1952. But in 2008, there was a new Research Institute of Advanced Humanistic Studies (IAHS) set up at Peking University in Beijing. A world-known Harvard scholar, Prof. Tu Wei-ming was invited to be the Dean of this new Research Institute. Why was he invited to be the new dean? Prof. Tu told us that he had been serving as the Director of Harvard-Yenching Institute at Harvard University for 18 years, and was a world-known scholar who built bridges between Western and Chinese cultures.<sup>25</sup> As soon as Prof. Tu resumed the post in 2009, he set up a Yenching Center (*Yanjing zhongxin*) in Peking University, as a symbol of reviving the “Yenching spirit” inside Peking University. And in the year 2014, when Yenching University Beijing Alumni Association (YUBAA) was celebrating the 95th anniversary of the founding of Yenching University in Beijing, the Research Institute of Advanced Humanistic Studies co-organized an International Conference with YUBAA.<sup>26</sup>

The theme of the conference was: “Yenching University and Liberal Education in Modern China” which was another explicit sign of the revival of the spirit of Yenching education in China. Yenching was remembered for its enriching the tradition of liberal education in modern China which was a liberal arts education that combined general education with professional competence, emphasize critical thinking and openness to new ideas, and the concern for personal individual and character development.<sup>27</sup> The YUBAA has already published much recollections and memoirs to testify the kind of education they had received from Yenching which combined the best of Chinese tradition with an openness to liberal values. Yenching model of education has become an attractive system of higher education in the minds of the Chinese. Hence, on May 5, 2014, a week after the conference, Peking University announced the establishment of Yenching Academy (*Yanjing xue tang*) as a new residential college of the University. As it was stated in its mission statement, the Yenching Academy of Peking University builds bridges between China and the world through an interdisciplinary master’s program in China Studies for outstanding graduates from all over the globe.<sup>28</sup> Yenching Academy was the university’s ‘most ambitious academic initiative’ since the start of the new century. It aimed to provide “the Elite China experience for future global leaders”. It was hoped that the Yenching Academy would improve the academic reputation of the university and make it a world-class university, like what Yenching University had contributed to China in the last century. The choice of its name ‘Yenching’ signifies the university’s recognition of the historical contribution of Yenching University to

---

<sup>25</sup> See, “The International Conference on ‘Yenching University and Liberal Education in Modern China’, organized by the Research Institute of Advanced Humanistic Studies”, in *Yenching Alumni Newsletter*, Beijing: Yenching University Beijing Alumni Association, No. 70, June 2014, p. 48.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, Peter Ng & Dennis Ng, “The Liberal Education of Yenching University As We See it”, in *Yenching Alumni Newsletter*, Beijing: Yenching University Beijing Alumni Association, No. 70, June 2014, pp. 49-58.

<sup>28</sup> See the webpage of “Yenching Academy” – [yenchingacademy.org](http://yenchingacademy.org).



China's higher education in the past century. Hence, the establishment of Yenching Academy signifies also the reviving spirit of Yenching University inside Peking University.<sup>29</sup>

### The Story of Timothy Richard

Timothy Richard was a British missionary sent to China by the Baptist Missionary Society in 1880. He served in China for 45 years (1880-1910). Among the significant things he did in China, Richard was the founder of the Imperial University of Shansi (now Shanxi University) in 1902. In 2002, there was a celebration of the centenary anniversary of the founding of Shanxi University in China, and surprisingly the name "Timothy Richard" was still remembered and honored as its founder and a great pioneer of modern education in the province of Shanxi, China. A copy of a doctoral dissertation which was just completed by Eunice Johnson at the University of Florida a year ago and Eunice was bold enough to present it to the officials of Shanxi University during the celebration on May 8, 2002.<sup>30</sup> Despite of the fact that it was already the People's Republic of China in the twenty-first century, Chinese people still respected and remembered the name "Li ti-mo tai" as a Western missionary who had great passion and faith in the promotion of modern education in China a century ago.<sup>31</sup>

I may recall a recent experience of a Chinese scholar, Ms Aisi Li who was graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Business Management from Sichuan University, Chengdu, China. She then studied Master of Science in Comparative and International Education at the University of Oxford, England. She received her D. Phil. in Educational Studies from the University of Oxford in 2012. Her doctoral dissertation was focused on the study of a missionary's contribution to Chinese higher education in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which turned out to be on Timothy Richard, a British missionary who had founded Shanxi University in China; and her PhD dissertation entitled: "Competition and Compromise between British missionaries and Chinese Officials: the Founding of Shanxi University in 1902". It was really exciting to know about the experience of Aisi Li, that during her research, she had come across Dr. Ruth Hayhoe, a Canadian scholar who did similar research in 1980s and completed her book: *China's Universities, 1895-1995- A Century of Cultural Conflicts* (1996); and Hayhoe introduced her to get in touch with Dr. Eunice Johnson, an American scholar who had spent three years (1985-1988) teaching English in Shanxi and ended up working on Timothy Richard for her dissertation at University of Florida in 2001. The three of them - one Chinese, one Canadian and one US American, had shown their respect to this British missionary by attempting a joint pilgrimage to Timothy Richard's grave at Golder's Green Crematorium in London in the year 2011. Li then remarked: "I hope, one day, when Chinese students think about China's higher education, they will remember that Christian missionaries had an important role in the creation of modern China and its universities. I also hope that the

---

<sup>29</sup> For interested readers, see also a most recent publication by Rosenbaum, Arthur Lewis. *New Perspectives on Yenching University, 1916-1952: A Liberal Education for a New China*. Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> The Thesis was: Johnson, Eunice V. "Educational Reform in China, 1880-1910: Timothy Richard and his vision of Higher Education", Ph.D. University of Florida, 2001. See also Eunice V. Johnson, *Timothy Richard's Vision: Education and Reform in China, 1880-1910*. (edited by Carol Lee Hamrin), Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publishing Co., 2014, p. 153.

<sup>31</sup> See also discussion in Peter Tze Ming Ng, "Timothy Richard: Christian Attitude Towards Other Religions and Cultures", in Ng, P. T. M., *Chinese Christianity: An Interplay between Global and Local Perspectives*, Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2012, pp. 111- 132.

enthusiasm, perseverance, and faith the missionaries had in their work will inspire the Chinese youth to overcome any obstacle and to pursue their dreams”.<sup>32</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

As I have reported in this paper, there have been traces of the revival of the spirit of Christian higher education in different forms by the work of the Holy Spirit in China in the past decades. Though the missionaries were no longer welcome on the Chinese soil since the 1950s, the Spirit of God has not left the country. Though there were no longer any institutions of Christian higher education survived in China after 1952, the Almighty God is still working there. When I was reading the Book of Isaiah, chapter 43, verse 19 which says: “See, I am doing a new thing; now it is starting; will you not take note of it? I will even make a way in the waste land, and rivers in the dry country”, I was reminded of what I have seen in the past decades in China, especially regarding this revival of the spirit of Christian higher education in China. Yes, God is still working actively in China, perhaps in His own peculiar ways, and I have to repeat what St. Paul and Christ Jesus had said, namely: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! No one is able to make discovery of his decisions, and his ways may not be searched out!” (Romans 11:33); and “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24)

---

<sup>32</sup> See Aisi Li, “Afterword”, in Eunice V. Johnson, *Timothy Richard’s Vision: Education and Reform in China, 1880-1910*. (edited by Carol Lee Hamrin), Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publishing Co., 2014, p. 131.