

Negotiating between Chinese Religious Beliefs and Christian Faith: Timothy Richard's (1845–1919) Understanding of “Faith”/*xin* 信 and Approach to Comparative Religion

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1 Introduction

Concepts such as “religion,” “faith” or “belief” cannot be taken for granted, they have their own complicated histories. As a result, much scholarly effort has been devoted to analyzing the constructions of “religion” as an anthropological, social, and historical category in China, revealing how the concept has been invented, challenged, modified, or rejected in different historical situations. By comparison, the translation and use of the terms “faith” or “belief” in a Chinese cultural context have received scant attention from scholars working in the areas of Chinese religions, Chinese Christianity, or mission studies.¹ I contend that references to “Chinese Christian faith” or “Chinese folk beliefs” in English-language scholarly or non-scholarly writings are generally employed with an implicit assumption that “belief” or “faith” mean roughly the same things and work in similar ways in Chinese religions as in confessional-based monotheistic religions. This assumption is, of course, highly problematic. The Chinese Lutheran Christian Paulos Huang, for example, describes the paradoxical tensions he experiences in his life between the Protestant doctrine *sola fide, sola gratia* (justification by faith and God’s grace alone), and the Confucian emphasis on self-cultivation:

¹ For a historical exploration of faith in Graeco-Roman antiquity, see Morgan 2015. William Cantwell Smith proposes that faith “shall signify that human quality that has been expressed in, has been elicited, nurtured, and shaped by, the religious traditions of the world. This leaves faith unspecified, while designating its locus. We do not yet say what it is, but indicate where we are to look in order to find out.” Smith 1979, 6.

As a Lutheran Christian, theoretically I understand well that “salvation” is absolutely the work of God rather than the result of human merit. Nonetheless, it has really not been easy to grasp the relationship between justification and sanctification in real life. Confucian self-transcendence seems so natural and normal to me and for many other Chinese Christians. Justification by faith and through grace becomes so easily just a mere theory. Therefore, like so many other Chinese Christians, in practical life, I am afraid of being lazy in fulfilling my own duty, which has been endowed to me by Heaven/God. Every time when I focus on my own deeds, I realize that *sola gratia* is my hope. Once I have peace and certainty with salvation, I will again paradoxically try to self-cultivate.²

Furthermore, as the above quote makes clear, the pair “faith”/“belief” relates primarily to the discursive and scriptural modality of practicing religion which prioritizes the composition and use of texts while downplaying other modalities, such as the personal-cultivational, the liturgical, or immediate-practical.³ Paulos Huang’s difficulty in reconciling these two modalities—one predominantly Christian, the other predominantly Confucian—is therefore no coincidence. The meaning and role of “faith” is likely to be different in a religious culture with a strong ethos of personal cultivation and efficacy-based religiosity compared to a culture that predominantly follows a confession-based understanding of religion.

By exploring “faith” in the Chinese context I by no means intend to downplay or minimize the central role that faith has played in the cross-cultural process of transmitting Christianity to China (and other world regions).⁴ The importance of “faith” as a doctrine, personal attribute, and missionary goal is clearly evident from the number of Christian missionary societies and organizations that carry the word “faith” in their name: “Apostolic Faith Mission,” “Christian Faith Mission,” “Faith Mission,” “Faith Fellowship,” “Faith and Love Mission,” “Hepzibah Faith Mission,” “Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith,” or “Society for the Propagation of the Faith.”⁵ My aim is to problematize the use of a concept that is likely to be understood differently even

2 Huang 2009, x.

3 I use Adam Chau’s model of “five modalities of doing religion.” Chau 2019, 25–33.

4 Andrew F. Walls (2002) has subtitled his influential work *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith*. However, “faith” as used in the title refers to the Christian teachings in general rather than focus on the different meanings the term might have had in different historical and cultural contexts.

5 See the list of acronyms of missionary societies and religious organizations in Tiedemann 2009, xxiii–xxxiv.

by actors in the Western Christian traditions—the shared emphasis on “faith” across many missionary societies should not be mistaken as a total unity of understanding—let alone when it is translated and potentially adapted by individual religious actors in response to the demands of a non-Christian cultural setting. For example: What happens to the Christian concept of “faith” when it is transposed into a Chinese religious context? Does the faith/*xin* lexicon mean the same, or much the same, in English and Chinese sources or not? Does faith/*xin* operate in the same ways in their respective socio-cultural and linguistic contexts?

The writings of the Welsh Baptist missionary Timothy Richard (1845–1919), who spent 45 years in China in the service of the Baptist Missionary Society (1870–1915), provide a good basis to address these questions. In the following pages I will present two related arguments: The first one is that Richard expanded the understanding of “faith” by opening the concept up to non-Christian experiences and understandings, rather than projecting a narrow Christian interpretation of faith onto the Chinese religious landscape. My second argument is that Richard’s interpretation of faith can be traced back to his Welsh upbringing and the influences he received during the Welsh spiritual revival of 1858–60. Richard’s Welsh religious upbringing and experience are important because they shaped his approach to modernization and thus indirectly modernization discourses within the Chinese elite.

Born in Ffaldybrenin, a small Carmarthenshire village near the historic university town of Lampeter, Richard spent most of his adult life in China as a missionary in the service of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS). From 1870 to 1915, Richard first worked as famine relief administrator in Shandong and Shanxi province, then as journalist and newspaper editor in Shanghai. His involvement in the political and social reform movement in the late nineteenth century gained him access to Chinese elite circles, including the imperial court.⁶ As a translator of books and pamphlets on current issues from English into Chinese, he reached large audiences across the country. His innovative and sensitive approach to working in a foreign culture inspires missionaries and charities working in China until this day.⁷

Richard’s life and work in northern China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century offers, as Andrew F. Walls has commented, “a convenient

6 Apart from Richard’s autobiography (Richard 1916), Soothill 1924 is still the most comprehensive overview of Richard’s political involvement, while Kwong 1984 discusses specifically his role in the 1898 reforms.

7 The Shanxi-based Evergreen Service, founded by Norwegian missionary Peter Torjesen (d. 1939), mentioned a Timothy Richard Fund on its website until at least 2014.

paradigm of the experience of the missionary movement as a whole.”⁸ The evolution of Richard’s missionary thought encompasses, and often anticipated, main developments in the Christian transmission of the faith. First-hand encounters with numerous Chinese religionists, including the leaders of sectarian groups who operated on the fringes of the officially tolerated religious spectrum, and the experience of a receptive audience at a temple fair at Huilong Shan (“Returning Dragon Mountain”) in present-day Dengwen, Shandong, in 1872, convinced Richard that the most promising way to the hearts and minds of his Chinese audiences was to frame explanations of the gospels in terms familiar to them and by addressing Chinese concerns, what he called “Chinese difficulties.”⁹ These early-won insights set Richard on the path of intensive study of the cultural and religious milieu of the Chinese people. He learned from Chinese sectarian religions as well as from his fellow missionaries. The absorption of “indigenous impulses” (Kaiser)¹⁰ into his mission practice, in addition to what he had learned from other missionaries and through his first-hand experience of Welsh non-conformity,¹¹ led him “to the conclusion that what God would have was the adaptation of Christian truth to the wants of China, not mere imitation of Christian institutions transplanted from the West.”¹²

I had noticed that the Chinese had a method of their own in carrying on education and the propagation of their religious doctrines. Their [sectarian] societies were self-supporting and self-managing. It occurred to me that the best way to make Christianity indigenous was to adopt Chinese methods for propagation.¹³

Richard supported a two-way model that would combine substantial local organizational autonomy and active participation by local Chinese Christians in the affairs of their local churches with linguistic and cultural acculturation on part of the missionaries.¹⁴ This approach, which clearly conceived

8 Walls 2002, 238.

9 Kaiser 2019, 68.

10 On the various indigenous influences on Richard’s missionary practice see Kaiser 2019, 68–94; Ng 2012, 111–132.

11 See below for a discussion of how Welsh non-conformity shaped Richard’s approach to missionary work.

12 Kaiser 2019, 47.

13 Richard 1916, 55; Kaiser 2019, 79–80.

14 It is worth noting that local self-management and self-support had been practiced by the China Inland Mission and other evangelical missions from early on.

missionary work as a two-way process, required constant interaction between the missionary and local believers as well as the willingness to adjust one's position or views. It is in this context of intercultural engagement that we may hope to gain insights into how an understanding of "faith" evolved between Christian missionaries and Chinese religious communities, Christian or sectarian. Richard's striving for empathetic acculturation as a missionary method was his main motivation for presenting the Christian teaching to Chinese audiences in their own language. Richard's extensive use of the Chinese medium to propagate the Christian faith provides the textual basis that allows us to observe Richard's translation of key Christian terms to a Chinese context. It is these writings to which I will now turn.

2 Explaining Christianity to the Chinese, and China to the West

Timothy Richard's appreciation of Chinese customs was regarded as quixotic by most other missionaries.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, Richard's accommodationist attitude led to tensions with his fellow missionaries in China, particularly those of the China Inland Mission (CIM), founded by Hudson Taylor (1832–1905) in 1865. As one of the earliest "faith missions," the China Inland Mission required of both ministers and converts that "their faith must be in God, their expectation from Him."¹⁶ This requirement described primarily the expected attitude towards missionary finances rather than questions of salvation. Hudson Taylor was instrumental in strengthening the emphasis on "living by the faith" as a guiding concept of the CIM. The fourth principle of the CIM, also known as the "faith principle" stated: "Missionaries receive no salary, but expect that God will supply their every need through the hands of his children ('faith principle')."¹⁷ God hears and answers believing prayer without the help of any humanly contrived means. In other words, strengthening one's faith was a core spiritual demand both for the missionaries themselves and their Chinese converts. Richard's approach to mission work raised concerns both within and outside the BMS. Vocal critics, such as fellow Baptist missionary Arthur Sowerby (1857–1934), were concerned that Richard's emphasis on building schools, orphanages and hospitals (indirect mission) threatened to

15 The theological conflict between Richard and other missionaries is documented most comprehensively in Kaiser 2019, 159–222.

16 "Principles and Practices of the China Inland Mission," quoted from Kaiser 2019, 174. On the early history of the faith mission movement, see Fiedler 1994, 32–69.

17 Fiedler 1994, 33. See Pfister 2003 for a comparison of the missionary approaches of Taylor and Richard.

undermine the central role that faith (direct mission) had, gradually replacing it with a “materio-spiritual” worldview that focused instead on “all the comforts of western civilization, all the triumphs of modern science and engineering, all knowledge, and everything that is profitable, as an essential part of the Kingdom [of God].”¹⁸

The rising tensions within the Protestant missions in China erupted at the second General Missionary Conference in Shanghai in 1890. A paper delivered by the American Presbyterian missionary Gilbert Reid, entitled “The worship of ancestors,” led to a storm of protest and tumultuous scenes at the conference. A resolution was carried to denounce the idolatrous practice of ancestor worship and strike Reid’s paper from the published conference proceedings. Reid’s formal protest was backed by only one person: Timothy Richard. “Accommodation to the customs and religious beliefs of a kingdom in obvious decay was considered both unmanly from the Christian soldiers’ [sic] point of view and unnecessary.”¹⁹ However, the early example set by Reid and Richard had a huge influence on the liberal movement in Protestant missions over the coming three decades, despite the rejection his approach of empathetic acculturation received in some quarters within the missionary community.²⁰ Such differences of opinion within missionary circles led to Richard’s departure from Shanxi. In June 1890, he accepted an invitation to write for and edit *Shibao* 時報 (The Times), a Chinese language newspaper based in Tianjin. This step was the beginning of Timothy’s most productive period and greatest public influence. Among educated Chinese of the late nineteenth century, he was primarily known as contributor to another Chinese language periodical, *Wanguo gongbao* 萬國公報 (A Review of the Times).²¹ This monthly magazine was the flagship publication of the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge Among the Chinese (SDCK; Guangxue hui 廣學會), the head of which Richard became in October 1891.²² Published in the safe and liberal atmosphere of the International Settlement in Shanghai, the monthly magazine carried not only increasing amounts of news, both domestic and international, but a large and comprehensive body of political commentary as well as sources of new knowledge to “inform

18 Quoted from Kaiser 2019, 190–91.

19 Lian 1997, 173.

20 See Lian 1997. The position of Richard’s critics is comprehensively discussed in Kaiser 2019, 159–222.

21 From 1874–83, *Wanguo gongbao* was called *The Chinese Globe Magazine* in English; between 1889–1907, it had the English subtitle *A Review of the Times*. For an introduction to *Wanguo gongbao*, see Zhang 2007, 46–61.

22 The SDCK was founded by Alexander Williamson in 1887.

and enlighten” the Chinese educated readership through the promotion of Western science.²³

Richard was a hugely prolific author and translator. His translation (1913) of the famous Chinese novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西游記), based on a true story of a Buddhist monk traveling to India in search of the “true religious scriptures,” has been re-published in a new edition in 2008.

Richard himself wrote or translated an estimated 100 of the SDCK’s 250 publications, mostly on political and social reform.²⁴ Forty-one of Richard’s essay were published under the auspices of the Chinese imperial court in 1898 in a collection with the title *A New Compilation of Essays on Administrative Statecraft under the Reigning Dynasty* (*Huangchao jingshi wen xinbian* 皇朝經世文新編). Richard’s writings appeared alongside the writings of other key Chinese reformers of the day, men like Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), and Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865–1898). A second, no less important pillar of Richard’s fame was his translation—produced with the help of Chinese editor Cai Erkang 蔡爾康 (1852–1920)—of Robert Mackenzie’s *The Nineteenth Century: A History* (1880). The Chinese abridged translation appeared in serial form between March and September 1894 in *Wanguo gongbao*. The book edition published the following year was circulated in millions of pirated copies throughout China.²⁵

Mackenzie’s book narrates essentially the success story of the main capitalist countries in Europe, depicting the progress of the century from a state of barbarism and ignorance to the victory of science, enlightenment and democracy. In the wake of national crisis, Chinese readers were eager to absorb the lessons from Europe’s “success story.”

The theme of salvation, which is intimately linked to faith, as will be discussed later, also appears in a series of articles entitled “Jiushi jiaoyi” 救世教益 (On the Benefits of the Teaching that Saves the World). The text appeared in the journal *Wanguo gongbao* in several instalments in 1891–92. It was also published in the journal *Zhong Xi jiaohui bao* 中西教會報 (Missionary Review)

23 Writing from Shanghai to BMS Secretary Alfred Baynes in 1892, Richard suggested distributing SDCK literature at the 200 examination centers in China. Richard to Baynes, 8 July 1892, BMSA CH/3.

24 Yang 2014, 149.

25 The printing was sponsored by Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837–1909) while Kang Youwei submitted a copy to the Guangxu Emperor who studied it thoroughly (Lai 2012, 57). Six pirated editions were found in Hangzhou and nineteen types of illegal copy in Sichuan (Zhang 2007, 59). The book was required reading for the Changsha literary examination, which is why 4000 copies were sold in two weeks.

between 1891–92.²⁶ In 1907, “Jiushi jiaoyi” made it onto the list of the most popular Christian texts in Chinese between 1812–1907.²⁷ According to Gilbert Reid, Richard’s tract was different from other contemporary Christian texts in that the latter mostly dealt with the “life to come than with the life that now is, talking more about saving a man’s spirit (*jiu linghun* 救靈魂) than saving man or men.” By contrast, “Jiushi jiaoyi” was written to “make the *litterati* more favorably inclined to Christianity. It remains to show to them that God, as well as Mr. Richard, is anxious to save them.”²⁸ Slightly ahead of the Chinese version an English version entitled “Historical Evidences of Christianity for China: On the Benefits of Christianity” had appeared in the missionary journal *The Chinese Recorder* between 1890–91. It had been written in response to Viceroy Li Hongzhang’s 李鴻章 (1823–1901) question: “What good can Christianity do for a nation?”²⁹ The English and the Chinese versions are not exact translations of each other and differ substantially, even though their content is largely the same. This suggests that they were conceived as separate publications written with distinct audiences in mind.³⁰ Comparing both versions shows where Richard adapted his message to his Chinese audience.

The title of the Chinese version uses the descriptive term *jiushi jiao* (teaching that saves the world) for “Christianity” instead of the more common transliteration *Jidujiao* 基督教. Interestingly, in the *Zhong Xi jiaohui bao* edition the name of the author is given as Jiushizi 救世子, the “Master who

26 I only had access to the *Zhong Xi jiaohui bao* version. The individual articles of the seven-part series in English appeared in the *Chinese Recorder* in the following sequence (Chinese titles added for convenience of the reader): “The Material Benefits of Christianity” (Jiushi jiaoyi you yi yu yi 救世教益有益於藝), “The Intellectual Benefits of Christianity” (Jiushi jiaoyi you yi yu wen 救世教益有益於文), “The Political Benefits of Christianity” (Jiushi jiaoyi you yi yu zheng 救世教益有益於政), “The Social Benefits of Christianity” (Jiushi jiaoyi you yi yu su 救世教益有益於俗), “The Moral Benefits of Christianity” (Jiushi jiaoyi you yi yu de 救世教益有益於德), “The Spiritual Benefits of Christianity” (Jiushi jiaoyi you yi yu dao 救世教益有益於道), “The Present Benefits of Christianity” (Jiushi jiaoyi you yi yu jin 救世教益有益於今).

27 Lai 2012, 289–90.

28 Gilbert Reid quoted from Lai 2012, 57. See also Richard 1916, 86. Reeve (1912, 40) quotes Richard: “Instead of using the name Jesus, which to the Chinese would only be the name of one of the uncivilized foreigners, I translated His name and called Him Saviour. I introduced other changes, such as the use of Chinese religious terms, instead of foreign ones, so as to make the Gospel commend itself better to the Chinaman’s conscience.”

29 Richard 1916, 207.

30 In the *Chinese Recorder* version Richard prefaced the later parts with a note saying: “This, like the former articles on the Historical Evidences of Christianity, were written for the Chinese. It is mainly for those who are daily engaged in the presentations of Christian truth to the Chinese that it will have interest. But it is hoped that it is of some interest to the general reader as well.—T.R.”

Saves the World,” whereas the *Wanguo gongbao* edition uses Richard’s Chinese name, Li Timotai 李提摩太. The source for *jiushi jiao* is unclear, but it is possible that the choice of term was inspired by the *jiushi tang* tablet donated to the Taiyuan church in 1878.³¹ Another possibility is that the references to salvation/savior were deliberately chosen to appeal to the popular religious and sectarian milieus and their millenarian expectations regarding the advent of a new age. Whatever the reasons might have been, the choice of *jiushi jiao* and *jiushizi* chimes with Timothy Richard’s program of salvation for China which he had set out in his call for Samaritans for China (see below).

3 Historical Instances of Faith, Hope, and Charity

Section 6 of this lengthy text deals with the “spiritual benefits of Christianity” (*Jiushi jiaoyi you yi yu dao* 救世教益有益於道), specifically with the “growth of faith” (*sheng xin* 生信), the “growth of hope” (*sheng wang* 生望), and the “growth of love” (*sheng ai* 生愛)³² or “charity,” as Richard translates *ai*. The Chinese version is hardly recognizable as a Christian tract at all, as it is cloaked in the garb of traditional Confucian thought. The following quote is from the opening section of the text:

In the past, Mencius said: “I too wish to rectify people’s hearts, put an end to heretical teachings, impede perverse practices, and banish licentious speech in order to carry on the tradition of the three sages.”³³ The Teaching that saves the world (Christianity) wants the same today.

昔孟子有言曰：「我亦欲正人心息邪說距詖行放淫辭以承三聖者。」今救世教亦然。³⁴

The text goes on to explain that while people’s hearts are originally the same, “heretical ideas and wild behavior” are being transmitted because of the limitations imposed by geographical location and local customs (*ren xin sui tong er xian yu di you yu su yizhi xieshuo hengxing zhuanxiang shoushou* 人心雖同而限於地囿於俗以至邪說橫行轉相授受). Having subsequently listed erroneous

31 Kaiser 2019, 220, n. 166. Donation of the tablet is mentioned in Williamson 1957, 41.

32 Alternatively, *sheng ren* 生仁 is used.

33 *Mengzi*, Teng Wen Gong II, 14.

34 “*Jiushi jiaoyi: you yi yu dao*,” vol. 1, no. 10, 6.

beliefs in different world regions, Richard states the salvational promise to those who place their faith in Christianity:

[...] These heterodox beliefs (*yiduan zhi xinjing*)³⁵ are therefore greatly damaging for the people, the state, and the entire world. The Christian beliefs are different. If people were able to follow them, they would not have to worry about how many evil spirits there are, how many taboos, how many fetishes, or how much evil *qi*. Instead, by giving themselves over to the almighty and all-powerful god, all these threats can be completely wiped out and myriad good things will emerge by themselves. Therefore, reverting to the great source of the Dao starts from Heaven. This is why all Christians believe that God (*shangdi*) has created heaven, earth, and all things; that God has given birth and nourished all countries and generations, and that he has established the means to rescue the whole world (*pushi wanguo*).

此異端之心經所以大有害於人與國與世也而救世之心經則不然人苟能遵奉救世心經則不懼有多少邪神多少塔部多少非提西多少邪氣但奉全權全能之上帝俱能掃除無遺而萬善自生也故溯道之大原本出於天所以救世教人皆以爲上帝創造天地萬物生養萬國萬代又設法救普世萬國。³⁶

Xin is used thirty-five times in “Spiritual Benefits of Christianity,” mostly in the binomen *xin zhu* 信主, which appears twenty-eight times in a relatively short piece of text. According to the English version of the text *xin zhu* means “faith in God,” but the phrase could equally be understood as “faith/trust in the ruler,” thus hiding any obvious Christian associations. The second binomen that occurs frequently is *xin xin* 信心, a “faithful heart.”

One of Richard’s strategies to illustrate and evidence the indispensability and ubiquity of faith is to overwhelm the reader with a list of what he called “instances of faith.” Richard uses historical examples ranging from ancient China to the Roman empire, from ancient Egypt to Napoleonic France to make his case for the role of Faith in God across the entire temporal and geographical span of human history.

As the main title “Historical Evidences of Christianity for China” indicates, the purpose of this series of articles is to provide proof of the efficacy of the

35 *Xinjing* 心經, literally “the norms of the heart-mind,” referring to the central tenets of a faith that a believer is supposed to know by heart.

36 “Jiushi jiaoyi: you yi yu dao,” vol. 1, no. 10: 7.

Christian faith for a Chinese readership. The use of what he called “moral evidences” was one of Richard’s innovations in missionary practice designed to convince Chinese audiences of the truthfulness of the Christian faith. Richard was deeply influenced by the eighteenth-century religious philosopher Joseph Butler (1692–1752)³⁷ who had conceived of nature and common life as a self-evident moral system established by God. All human beings had the ability to recognize the moral nature of this system by virtue of their own divinely given moral faculties. Consequently, Butler insisted that the truthfulness of Christianity can be demonstrated through “the moral experience of the individual man” and “the facts of the experience of society.”³⁸ Richard later found Butler’s views confirmed by his own experience that concrete examples of superior Christian ethics and practical merit carried far more weight with Chinese religionists than references to the *Bible* or to miracles and prophecies:

When I learnt that the Confucianists asserted that their *Book of Changes* was also the word of God, it was necessary to find something more convincing than the mere assertion that the *Bible* was the word of God. Then it was clearer than ever to me that our Lord Jesus Christ’s method was not on these lines, but lay in appeals to conscience and reason [...] as evidenced in the Sermon on the Mount and the final judgment described in Matthew 25. [...] *If we could excel the Chinese in charity to the sick, the poor, the suffering, and in giving education*, then we should possess evidences which the Chinaman’s conscience would approve and follow.³⁹

Contrary to his theological training, revelation in the *Bible* became a supplement to natural knowledge, at least in his missionary practice: “I avoided the ordinary evidences of miracles and prophecy which I was taught to rely on in my theological training at home, ... [and] so I proceeded to dwell on the moral evidences.”⁴⁰

The focus on providing “moral evidences,” on historically verifiable examples (“proof”) of Christian moral achievements explains the peculiar style in which “Historical Evidences for Christianity” were written, both in the English and Chinese versions. They are essentially a collection of historical events grouped together according to world regions (Africa, Polynesia, Europe,

37 See Kaiser 2019, 32, 85.

38 From Ronald Bayne’s introduction to Joseph Butler’s *The Analogy of Religion Natural and Revealed* (1906, xviii). Quoted from Kaiser 2019, 32.

39 Richard 1907, vol. 1, 85. Quoted from Kaiser 2019, 86. Emphasis added.

40 Reeve 1912, 44; Kaiser 2019, 97–125.

America, Asia—although in varying sequence). Not coincidentally a map of the world is shown in the second volume of *Wanguo gongbao* to underscore the global dimension of Christianity's impact on humanity. While the English version uses Christian chronology ("in AD 51," "in BC 334"), the Chinese text refers to imperial reign dates, e.g., "in the time of Han Wudi" (Han Wudi *nian jian* 漢武帝年間), thus grounding the text firmly in a traditional historical framework familiar to a Chinese reader. Interestingly, Richard occasionally uses Chinese reign dates to refer to events in other world parts, for example: "The Germans were another great people. During the Han dynasty they had no literature."⁴¹ Or, "The early missionaries in Britain, during the Tang dynasty (618–905), taught the people how to make nets for better fishing."⁴² Comparable phrases in the Chinese version are: "During the Warring States period in China, the Greek king Alexander the Great" (*Zhonghua zhanguo shi Xila wang Da Yalishan* 中華戰國時希臘王大亞力山) or "During the Jiaqing period the French emperor Napoleon ..." (*Jiaqing nianjian Faguo huang Nabolun* 嘉慶年間法國皇拿破倫). It is possible—perhaps even likely? (see below)—that Richard used this mixing of timelines deliberately. One aim might have been to familiarize his readers with parallel eras or events in different world regions (similar to the use of parallel timelines today), another to suggest to his startled readers in East and West that regional and chronological differences are merely conventional, exchangeable markers in an essentially unified moral cosmos instituted by God. Whatever the reasons, the core argument presented throughout the series of articles is that Christianity excels in all areas of life—material, intellectual, political, social, moral, and spiritual—as is evidenced by numerous historical examples covering most of the known world. "Where the Holy Spirit is there must be growth,—*progress on all lines*."⁴³

What Chinese religionists are encouraged to have faith in or put their trust in is not primarily the transcendent God whose divine grace is revealed through the life of Jesus Christ as narrated in the Holy Scripture.⁴⁴ The objects of faith are first and foremost the historically verifiable, practical this-worldly effects Christians have been able to produce through their deeds over the course of many generations, including numerous instances where Christian prayers for

41 Richard 1890b, 229. "We will not describe the Christian schools in Syria and Asia Minor, which were so celebrated in the later Han dynasty." Richard 1890b, 232.

42 Richard 1890a, 145.

43 Richard 1891c, 498. Emphasis in the original.

44 Regarding the evangelical usefulness of the Bible, Francis H. James commented: "Taking into consideration the condition of the Chinese and the nature of the contents of the Bible there seems to be no reason to expect the circulation of such a book without explanations to produce a beneficial effect." James 1890, 152.

divine assistance have been answered. The figure of Jesus hardly plays any role in the text, nor does Richard in his apologetic appeal “to miracles and fulfilled prophecy to confirm the uniqueness of God’s revelation in the Bible and thus the truthfulness of Christianity,” unlike Butler’s *Analogy of Religion* (1736).⁴⁵ What this example shows is the extent to which “faith” has become part of, to use Adam Chau’s terminology, both the discursive-scriptural and the efficacy-based modalities of practicing religion. A good example of how “faith in God” worked in an efficacy-based context is provided in the following story:

In Tokyo, Japan, there is a man belonging to the Japanese Christian Church who felt he had a call from God to do a great work for the [benefit] of his fellow-countrymen. But before doing much, he felt he must first learn more, and decided to go to the United States. He remained in one of the best Christian colleges for several years, then visited the most important places in Europe, Palestine, Egypt and India, and finally returned to Japan, having found that God had supplied his needs everywhere; his Lectures on Japan being well received wherever he went. He now wanted to build the biggest place of worship in the capital of Japan, but had not sufficient money. He prayed to God and sought subscriptions from good men. A fine church was put up, but a great storm came and blew it down. He was not disheartened, but put up another, promising the builders that he would pay them on a certain day. He begged for money in all directions, but when the morning for payment came, he still lacked 500 dollars. He prayed to God, saying that it was in obedience to His call he left home travelled to foreign lands; it was in obedience to Him he had put up the Church, in order to do good to his countrymen; now he prayed Him to come to his rescue, as he had done his very best. He then went to breakfast. When at breakfast the post came in with a letter for him. In it was a cheque for 500 dollars! All this was done by *Faith in God*.⁴⁶

The story is reminiscent of *zhiguai* 志怪 (records of strange events) stories in which the plight of the main protagonist is often resolved through divine intervention in response to a prayer or act of worship. Witness the *do-ut-des* attitude that pervades the narrative: The supplicant had responded to God’s command, spreading the Christian message diligently while having the interests of his fellow humans at heart. Now that he faces a difficult situation as a result of his commitment he can reasonably expect to be rescued by divine intervention,

45 Kaiser 2019, 85.

46 Richard 1891b, 199. Emphasis in the original.

which promptly arrives. The story confirms to the Chinese reader in familiar terms that the Christian moral universe, like the Chinese one, is governed by a causal mechanism between deed and reward, and that this mechanism operates reliably. Simultaneously, the idea of the efficacy of faithful prayer can be traced back to the Welsh revivals in the middle of the nineteenth century.

4 Revival, Faith and Prayer

Growing up in rural southwest Wales during the time of the great spiritual revivals of 1858–60, the sense of spiritual urgency and a fervent conviction that salvation was attainable by faith took hold of all age groups but particularly young people and children, including the fourteen-year-old Richard. Following attendance of a church service by an itinerant preacher in March 1859, young Timothy was baptized with fifty-one others on April 10, 1859. An extraordinary spirit of prayer, a spirit of union among all Christians, and a strong missionary impulse were the three main hallmarks of the revival.⁴⁷ As for the importance of prayer, one contemporary report states:⁴⁸

The great fruit of this revival is prayer. It was preceded by prayer, and it issues in prayer, which remains its chief agent. In previous awakenings, the ministry of the Word was the chief means ... but the particular means of this present movement is “the prayer”; everyone is coming to believe in the efficacy of prayer.

The importance of prayer received a theoretical foundation through the work of Charles Finney (1792–1875), an American Presbyterian minister, revivalist, and second president of Oberlin College. Finney’s *Lectures on Revival* (orig. publ. 1835) were extremely popular in Wales after a Welsh translation appeared as early as 1839. Finney had argued that a spiritual revival is not reliant on a spontaneous and unexpected outpouring of the divine spirit in the community. It can instead be staged, provided the correct techniques are being used.

47 One Presbyterian convention in Philadelphia identified the following shared indispensable characteristics of a revival: “[...] self-examination; repentance for sin; a vital faith in God’s plan to save sinners and in His willingness so to do; persistent and importunate prayer for an outpouring of the Spirit; education in the truths of the Bible; direct effort on the part of the Christians to bring others under the influence of the gospel; the faithful and practical preaching of the truth; together with complete dependence on the sovereignty of free grace for every success.” Evans 1967, 30.

48 Quoted from Evans 1967, 109.

Lectures on Revival are essentially a handbook on how to successfully launch a religious revival. In his fifth lecture, entitled “The Prayer of Faith,” Finney—referring to a passage in Mark 11:24⁴⁹—elaborates on four main aspects of prayer:

- I. That faith is an indispensable condition of “prevailing prayer” (faith does not only relate to miracles; but to any effectual prayer that ensures the blessing);
- II. What it is that we are to believe when we pray (we believe for what we have evidence);
- III. When we are bound to exercise this faith, or to believe that we shall receive the thing we ask for;
- IV. That this kind of faith in prayer always does obtain the blessing sought.⁵⁰

According to Finney, faith is indispensable in any prayer seeking to secure a response (“prevailing prayer”); it relates to any situation (e.g., China will rise again), not only biblical miracles. Such faith must be based on rational, observable evidence (e.g., Christianity has helped many nations to prosper, so why not China too). Faithful prayer is always efficacious, meaning it always yields the desired results, provided the two essential conditions (faith, evidence) are met and the seeker of benefits pursues his or her goal actively:

You must first obtain evidence that God will bestow the blessing. How did Daniel make out to offer the prayer of faith? He searched the Scriptures. Now, you need not let your Bible lie on a shelf, and expect God to reveal His promises to you. “Search the Scriptures,” and see where you can get either a general or special promise, or a prophecy, on which you can plant your feet. Go through your Bible, and you will find it full of such precious promises, which you may plead in faith.⁵¹

Richard did not explicitly acknowledge Charles Finney as an intellectual influence, making it difficult to know whether he consciously applied the lessons from *Lectures on Revival* in his own missionary practice. However, Richard praised Finney’s spectacular success as a preacher in his “Moral Benefits of Christianity.”⁵² It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the nexus between

49 Therefore I say unto you, What things so ever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. (Mark 11:24)

50 Finney 1835, 30.

51 Finney 1835, 30. Emphasis added.

52 Richard 1891a, 27.

faith, “historical evidences,” and national revitalization in Richard’s writings owes at least some intellectual debt to Charles Finney. Richard’s approach to China’s modernization is essentially an attempt to implement Finney’s strategy to generate a spiritual revival. Richard’s faith-language is deeply influenced by and consistent with the ideology and practice of spiritual revivalism. Modernization for Richard is to a large extent dependent on moral reinvigoration, a matter of faith and a nation’s confidence in her own ability. The “instances of faith” discussed above aimed at convincing Chinese audiences of the possibility of salvation, both personal and as a nation: Other nations have transformed their fate with the help of faith in God, and so can China, even though the road is long and arduous.

Faith is part of a triad whose other elements are hope and charity or love. Following the evidence for the “growth of faith” (*shengxin* 生信), the text provides similar moral instances demonstrating the “growth of hope” (*shengwang* 生望) and the “growth of charity/love” (*sheng ren/ai* 生仁/愛). Richard describes the relationship between the three as follows:

Their *Faith* gives Divine strength to weak men, and confidence and joy instead of fear. *Hope* looks to the promises of God for the salvation of the world, which the Christian knows will never fail, and this gives him perseverance; in spite of apparent failure he expects consummation. *Charity* makes God’s unspeakable love in Christ Jesus the pattern, therefore abounds in goodwill and kindnesses to all. In addition to ordinary knowledge and virtue, the Christian has the spirit of God in his heart, and through meditation and prayer has communion with God. Christians serve God in the kingdom of heaven as Ministers of States serve earthly monarchs. Christians may truly be called the nobility of heaven.⁵³

The corresponding passage in the Chinese text reads as follows:

These are the beliefs (*xinjing*) with which the Teaching that Saves the World teaches people about the right path of Jesus. If people store these beliefs in their hearts, they themselves can develop faith, hope, and charity. Faith (*xin xin*) is like a branch from another tree grafted onto this tree, but it may not immediately live. Hope is like a tree that has already received a graft, and, protected by a cotton bag, the root and the [new] branch will join to become one tree. Charity is like a tree onto which a new branch has been grafted and which has already come alive and

53 Richard 1891b, 174. Emphasis in the original.

produced ripe fruit, thereby growing faith, hope, and charity. In the following [I] attach a record of such instances.

此救世教以耶穌正道教人之心經也。人果存心經於心中自可生信心望心仁心然。信心如同人將他樹枝接於此樹而未必立時即活。望心如同樹已接畢外用棉包護日久根枝合而為一樹。仁心如所接之樹既活已經結果成熟而所以生信生望生仁者爰附錄其事於左。

The list of examples that makes up the rest of the text provides the evidence for the causal relationship between faith in God and success of the nation. In his preface to the Chinese translation of Robert Mackenzie's *The Nineteenth Century*, Richard writes:

China refused to intermingle with other countries, going against God's intention of equal treatment of every member [in the international community], and caused the inflicting of revenge on itself.... China's lack of understanding of God's will, and its refusal to befriend other nations and to show respect to good people [missionaries?], was the main reason for its successive defeats in recent history.⁵⁴

Richard's main motivation in translating Mackenzie's book is to support his core proposition: because they had faith, the European nations were able to secure victory over China. The choice of his pen name "the savior" (Jiushizi 救世子) leaves no doubt that Richard considered it his mission to turn China's fate around, with Christianity as his salvational tool. In the pamphlet "Wanted: Good Samaritans for China" (1885) Richard writes candidly about the need to save China from the oppression by the modern West:⁵⁵

When the work of raising the uncivilised to the state of the civilised is accomplished, there will remain another world of so-called law and order to be circumnavigated mentally, not to discover clubs and spears, arrows and poison, iron chains and earthly dungeons locked up by fetish creeds, but infinitely more diabolical and barbarous implements of modern warfare, causing violent and terrible deaths; and to discover a slower and silent, but not less sure, working of so-called law and order—modern treaties—gradually draining people of the life-blood of their prosperity, backed up by the modern creed of selfishness. We have to re-study the

54 Translation from Kuo 2013, 244.

55 Richard 1885, 1–2.

principle of the kingdom of God, and come once more among the civilised nations to defend the sufferers against their oppressors, and point them to an ideal kingdom which all must uphold and reverence, until the kingdoms of this world shall have adopted as their international code that which declares that there shall be war no more. The work of civilising and saving savage lands was comparatively easy, for these were only a small part of the world, and the distance between them and modern civilisation is more in outward form than in difference of moral principles, though that difference was considerable in some instances. In this higher work, which by the swift march of God's providence now opens before us, we have the whole world—political, commercial, and much that is religious—to elevate to a new platform; to change its principles so as to compel all sincere reformers to leave their Socialism, Feminism, Nihilism, Unions, Leagues, and such like pet schemes, aye, and even their diplomatic intrigue, and join us. For we have not only the promise, but also a long list of historical proof of possessing and enjoying the life that now is and that which is to come. The following remarks about China will show how sadly she needs godly men, with the spirit of Salvation in them, to come and be her best friend in her present time of helplessness.

It is worth noting that Richard's understanding of faith did not necessarily imply belief or acceptance of specific Christian doctrinal positions. When he lists what Christians "believe" in, Richard (or the person who edited Richard's Chinese) does not use the verb *xin* but the verb *yiwei* 以為, "to hold that" or "to think that." In other words, by using the word *yiwei* he emphasized the cognitive aspect of adhering to central Christian tenets of belief, including the possibility of imperfect understanding, while linking emotional commitment, inner attitude, and trust in a positive response to the words *xin* 心 or *xin xin* 信心.

5 Faith as a Generically Human Religious Experience: towards a Comparison of Religions

Some of Richard's pronouncements seem rather bizarre from today's perspective. His tendency to compare wholly unconnected events from different time periods, to find similarities over vast geographical distances, and his indiscriminate use of important concepts for phenomena in different cultures has led to raised eyebrows among some of his contemporaries. Today, we would also be much less confident than Timothy Richard in holding up Europe as a shining

beacon of historical progress, effective governance, and economic success to be admired and emulated by the rest of the world.

The criticism that Richard interpreted things through the lens of Christianity and did not try hard enough to understand Chinese culture on its own terms has a point. I would agree that Timothy Richard's treatment of Chinese material can or indeed does give the impression that he focused on what fitted his Christian bill, often conveniently ignoring local interpretations that did not seem to support his missionary agenda. For example, in his preface to a recent edition of Richard's translation of *Journey to the West*, Daniel Kane notes that Richard "often translates the Jade Emperor as God, The Taoist Celestial Palace and the Buddhist Paradise as Heaven and Maitreya, the Buddha-to-come, as the Messiah. Messengers are angels, Taoist immortals and Buddhist bodhisattvas are all saints, and the Buddhist/Taoist paradise is populated with such Old Testament figures as cherubim and seraphim."⁵⁶ Richard's chapter "outlines" deal with what is advertised on the title page: "The Origin of the Universe, The Evolution of Monkey to Man, The Evolution of Man to the Immortal, and Revealing the Religion, Science, and Magic, which moulded the Life of the Middle Ages of Central Asia and which underlie the civilization of the Far East to this day." The vocabulary of modern scientific investigation (laboratory, experiments, trials, elements, fundamental laws, forces) is woven into the traditional religious-philosophical discourse of the original story (demon, evil spirit, pill of immortality, mind, matter, life). This is what creates almost comical effects, for instance when Richard comments on Monkey's ability to travel vast distances in a flash: "The speed of electricity anticipated."⁵⁷

It is worth pondering how these comments should be understood. Is the reader asked to believe that the monkey king had discovered the speed of electricity (300 meters/second)? Or that the distance of 18,000 Chinese miles is a scientifically accurate calculation of the speed of lightning? These literal readings are not likely in the case of someone who had promoted and introduced science education in China and lectured on science topics. Richard was very conscious—he said it in the subtitle of his translation—that the novel was an "epic and allegory." The issue at stake here is obviously not scientific knowledge but the problem of translation and translatability of new concepts and terms. Translation and comparison were two key methods to establish historical

⁵⁶ See Kane's introduction to Wu 2008, xxii.

⁵⁷ Richard 1913, 267. In the first chapter, the celestial Jade Emperor is said to have used a sort of telescope to look down onto earth after having been alerted by light emanating from the eyes of Stone Monkey. Richard commented: "The telescope was invented by Galileo only in 1609 AD, therefore the Chinese must have had some kind of telescope before we in Europe had it." Richard 1913, 3.

connections between China and the rest of the world. The publication of a co-authored Chinese-English *Dictionary of Philosophical Terms* in 1913,⁵⁸ the same year that the translation of *Journey to the West* appeared, is further evidence for the key role that translations between English and Chinese played in Richard's work. "Translation" for Timothy Richard was not limited to finding the correct lexical equivalent in the target language. Translation meant "cultural translation," bringing one culture closer to the other by interpreting it, by finding correspondences that are intelligible and resonate with target audiences on a spiritual level. On several occasions Richard considered novels to be the best medium for achieving his goal. In his foreword to the translation of *Journey to the West*, Richard writes:

It is not a textbook of science, but it is a great collection of rare experiments in human experience on the working hypothesis of the wisest philosophers of the mediaeval East. It describes creation in seven days, or periods, or kalpas. When first written it matched in interest those experiments made with ether and radium in our days. The author regards whirlwinds, blizzards and cyclones as the highways, or express trains, of spiritual forces, carrying terrible destruction to all who oppose them, but of unfailing help to those who are to be saved.⁵⁹

In his search for a common human experience Richard cuts across geographical boundaries as well as chronological divisions. He makes reference to people and events in East and West, in the past and in the present. He compares the writing of a medieval Chinese Buddhist novel with scientific experiments in the twentieth century. He frequently uses phrases from different linguistic contexts to express one and the same thing—"in seven days, or periods, or kalpas"—emphasizing commonality and shared experience across cultures and historical periods. In his writing style Richard was indeed guilty of repetition and redundancy.⁶⁰ However, these stylistic idiosyncrasies are not due to inability or eccentricity, but instead pursue a clear goal: the search for a universal religion that is able to reflect and represent the shared experiences and concerns of all humanity. Richard is a religious universalist, a global thinker before the invention of the term.

⁵⁸ Richard and MacGillivray 1913.

⁵⁹ Richard 1913, vii.

⁶⁰ "Unsystematic, undisciplined thinker and rambling writer that he was ..." See Walls 2002, 258.

The German-Canadian sociologist of religion Peter Beyer, who works on the religious system of global society, has postulated the existence of a distinctive religious function system of global society equivalent to the global political or economic system. He writes: "The variable and contested understanding that we have of the word 'religion' and its various cognates (sometimes neologisms) in other languages are all significantly conditioned by the historical emergence of a particular social structure, an institutional domain, which is the religious system of global society."⁶¹ Timothy Richard anticipated the emergence of this "religious system of global society" more than a hundred years ago. His overarching vision and desire was to contribute to the development of such a universal religion. Being a missionary and man of action, Richard would have approached the task less from a systemic perspective but rather from a perspective of practical experience. But the goal remains the same. "To secure permanent peace and progress it is not enough to have unparalleled armaments to fight each other, we must have also world federation, unprecedented parliaments to legislate laws for all classes, and one great modern religion on which to build universal contentment in love of God and man."⁶²

Timothy Richard's "comparative religion"—he uses this term himself⁶³—falls short of genuine comparison between religions in an academic sense because Richard neglects what is different between the religions and the cultural traditions of East and West. Richard's intellectual starting point was a strong belief in the unity of the world. His method of selecting random examples from different texts as well as from historical and political events from across the globe was to evidence the guiding hand of God behind the myriad phenomena in the world. His concern was not to lose sight of the forest for the trees. Universal religion, unity of religions, co-operation between religions, religious comparison, these were the cornerstones of Richard's intellectual world from about 1890 onward, when he moved to Shanghai.

What is this ideal religion that Richard called the "Great Religion," the "True Religion," or the "universal religion"? It is not simply a universalized form of Christianity. Richard states that "true Religion comes not to destroy but to fulfil, that no religion has a monopoly of all truth, and that the best in all religions is Divine and eternal, and must be honoured."⁶⁴ The true religion comes into being through the mutual and sympathetic recognition of the best

61 Beyer 2006, 3.

62 Richard 1913, xx.

63 Richard 1913, viii, xii; Richard 1916, 336.

64 Richard 1913, xii.

traditions of East and West. In one single revealing note Richard gave it the name: “Mahayana Christianity.”⁶⁵

Richard’s understanding of faith was embedded in his “vision of a common genealogy for all religious truth and a utopian future of global peace and religious unity.”⁶⁶ It was furthermore shaped by practical missionary concerns, namely to introduce Christianity to a Chinese audience and to thereby contribute towards spiritual, political and social progress in China. Beginning in the early 1880s, Buddhism came to play a key part in all of these endeavors. In addition to providing a heuristic method for how to introduce Christianity to China and improve missionary work—Buddhism itself used to be a foreign religion that had successfully integrated itself into China’s intellectual and social life—Buddhism also became the centerpiece of Richard’s ideas on the common root of all religions as well as religious development through global history.⁶⁷ One might even go as far as to argue that “Historical Evidences of Christianity,” published in 1890, was influenced by Richard’s encounter with Buddhism, even though his translations of Buddhist texts were only published much later, in 1907 and 1910 respectively. In this light “Historical Evidences of Christianity” would appear less to be an attempt to demonstrate and thus justify Christianity’s expansion across the globe. Rather it could be read as an attempt to define Christianity’s place within global religious history. The difference lies in the multi-directionality of the latter approach compared to the one-directionality of the former.

Timothy Richard’s engagement with the question of faith in Buddhism was based in his creative interpretation of two key Buddhist scriptures: the first is *Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論 (Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna), said to have been written by Āśvaghoṣa in Sanskrit and translated into Chinese by Paramārtha in 550 CE, but very likely composed in China itself.⁶⁸ Richard’s translation of the text was published under the title *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana Doctrine—The New Buddhism* in 1907. He was assisted in this task by Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911), an influential Buddhist layman who praised the *Dasheng qixin lun* as a text capable of integrating and thus unifying the different teachings within Buddhism.⁶⁹ Richard’s encounter with Yang in Nanjing in 1884, and particularly Yang’s admission that *Awakening of Faith* had

65 Richard 1913, xx.

66 Scott 2012, 55.

67 Gregory Scott has demonstrated that Richard’s theories, rather than being the radical views of an outsider, were in fact “firmly based in certain scholarly trends that enjoyed considerable popularity at the time.” Scott 2012, 72–74.

68 The most current translation of the text is Hakeda 1967. Williams 2009, 110.

69 Gong 2017, 30. On Yang Wenhui, see Goldfuss 2001.

caused him to convert from Confucianism to Buddhism, strongly influenced Richard's decision to translate the text.⁷⁰

The *Dasheng qixin lun* is a summary of the essentials of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Part 3 of the text contains a discussion of the three “aspirations for enlightenment,” one of them being the perfection of faith. Part 4, entitled “Faith and Practice,” analyzes four kinds of faith as well as five practices through which the religious adept might perfect her faith: charity, observance of precepts, patience, zeal, and cessation of illusions and clear observation. In other words, the *Dasheng qixin lun* is a guidebook for “those who have not yet joined the group of beings who are determined to attain enlightenment.”⁷¹

The second key text is the *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 or *Lotus Sūtra of the Wonderful Dharma* (Skt. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*), according to Paul Williams considered by many East Asian Buddhists to be the final teaching of the Buddha, imbued with extraordinary potency attesting to the efficacy of faith in the power of Amitābha.⁷² Richard did not produce a translation of the whole *sūtra*. Instead, he translated the Chinese synopsis of the text which had been included alongside the Japanese translation by K.S. Fukagawa and published by the Nichiren Sect in 1904.⁷³ For the Japanese monk Nichiren (1222–1282), the *Lotus Sūtra* was not only sufficient to lead those who put their faith in it to salvation through rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitabha; it was the only *sūtra* adequate to the task of spiritual renewal during a period of declining *dharma* (*mappō/mofa* 末法).⁷⁴

Faith was accorded a central place in Richard's theory of global religious development. He did not elaborate on the roles of faith in Christianity and Buddhism, but a careful reading of Richard's writings on the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity confirms key aspects of faith discussed above: First, faith is a generic human religious experience and as such part of the common genealogical heritage of all of the world's religions. Instances of the efficacy of faith can be traced historically across civilizations around the

70 Richard 1907, ix–x; Richard 1910, 44–45. A second factor in the decision to produce a translation of *Dasheng qixin lun* was, according to Gong Jun (2017, 31), the fact that Samuel Beal (1825–1889) in his book on Buddhism described *Awakening of Faith* as a “pseudo-Christian book.”

71 Hakeda 1967, 88.

72 Williams 2009, 149.

73 Richard 1910, 129. Richard's book *The New Testament of Higher Buddhism*, published in 1910, contains the translations of both the *Dasheng qixin lun* and the *Miaofa lianhua jing* as well as *The Great Physician's Twelve Vows* and the *Heart Sūtra* (*Xinjing* 心經). In 1907, Richard had already published another book on Buddhism, the *Guide to Buddhahood, Being a Standard Manual of Chinese Buddhism* (Shanghai: Christian Literature Society).

74 Williams 2009, 149.

world. Second, faith is a means of global spiritual, social, political, and material progress. The practice and perfection of faith as promoted by both Buddhism and Christianity creates an aspiration and confidence in the possibility of a better world, both for the individual (individual salvation) and the collective (social progress). Where faith is absent decline sets in. The potency of faith is, to some extent at least, independent from its object, whom or what one has faith in or places one's trust in, as long as there is a "divine helper." The idea of faith as a driver of progress is reinforced through the link between faith and social action. Richard's use of a *Lotus Sūtra* edition prepared by the Japanese Nichiren Sect is significant in this regard. Having visited Japan in 1903, Richard was fully aware of the centrality of this *sūtra* for Nichiren followers as well as the political and social implications of Nichiren's teachings.⁷⁵ Whether he realized the extent to which contemporary Nichirenists instrumentalized Buddhism in the name of Japanese patriotism and anti-western imperial expansion is a moot point.⁷⁶ Third, faith that is expressed in sincere prayer addressing spiritual as well as material needs will elicit a response. Niwano Nikkyō 庭野日敬 (1906–1999), a twentieth-century Buddhist, put it this way: "[T]here is nothing odd about a person who has through faith undergone a change of heart, a change in his or her way of thinking, having the blessing of money or other material things come his or her way.... [I]mprovement and change for the better are natural consequences."⁷⁷ Fourth, faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* and its magical potency can serve as an expedient means (*upāya*; *fang-bian* 方便) for attainment of salvation for all those who are not yet ready to explore the depth of Christian theology. The use of allegory in religious scriptures chimed with a missionary who was searching for skillful means to explain Christianity in China and Buddhism at home. The following statement on the Christian Gospel, written in defense against his critics within the Baptist Missionary Society, contains some of the ideas Richard believed to have found in Mahāyāna Buddhism: "one soul immanent for good in all the universe, of one Divine helper of men, of individual immortality and growth in the likeness

75 "[...] Nichiren, not satisfied with relegating salvation to the inner life of the individual, taught that it was imperative to engage oneself in active efforts to objectively transform the land, toward the realization of an ideal society wherein people would be able to attain happiness." See Satō 1999, 320; Iguchi 2006; Williams 2009, 171.

76 Richard (1916, 337) wrote: "After Dengyo Daishi had taken the 'Lotus Scripture' to Japan, it became the chief sacred book of the Nichiren [sic] sect, one of the most popular in Japan to-day. Thus we see that the religion of the Far East is not merely the growth of one native religion or sect, but a development of a religion which has ramifications throughout all the Far East, if not all Asia."

77 Quoted from Williams 2009, 171.

of God, of the importance of faith in God to produce good works, and of the willingness of the best spirits to make sacrifices to save others.”⁷⁸

An explanation of what I understand to be the aim and scope of the Gospel. I regard the Gospel of Christ as remedial—undoing the work of the fall—destroying the works of the devil—a Salvation from sin and suffering wherever found, so that where sin has abounded grace shall much more abound. It begins by the conversion of individual souls through belief in the incarnation, the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then proceeds to lead these individuals to benefit their fellow men by the bearing of the various fruits of the Spirit, and as conversions multiply the converts will ultimately become a blessing to all the world. I also note this, that belief in Christ’s death for us is not the end of our religious life, but a means. It is difficult to find a passage anywhere in scripture which tells the object of Christ’s death to be other than Holiness. E.G. Our Lord “gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all our iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.[”] I hold also that our personal complete salvation is indissolubly connected with saving others. Turner agrees with me that Christ saves the soul and gives immortality, and so far destroys the works of the devil; but I believe that as sin brings a whole train of misery into the present world as well as into the next, often involving numberless other people, spiritually, morally, materially, socially and politically, Christ’s salvation is not a half salvation, but will deliver the world in the long run, and is now delivering it, from all sin and misery of the present life, whether brought on us by ourselves or by others.⁷⁹

6 Conclusion

In his introduction to *Faith and Belief*, William Cantwell Smith made the following comment on the relationship between faith and belief:

Two considerations stand out, as one views the situation globally. First is the obvious point that in the world-wide range of mankind’s history, religious beliefs have of course differed radically, whereas religious faith

⁷⁸ Richard 1910, 37–38.

⁷⁹ Richard to BMS Committee, 17 October 1888, 3, BMSA CH/4. Quoted from Kaiser 2019, 192.

would appear to have been, not constant certainly, yet more approximative to constancy.⁸⁰

Timothy Richard's discussion of faith in the published writings discussed in this essay has to be seen in the context of both his theory of a common genealogical heritage of all religions as well as the search for a future global "True Religion." As a universal expression of the human capacity for religious experience faith is a central concept with which to establish not only historical connections between Christianity and other forms of religiosity, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the future global religion of all humankind. Richard's conception of the salvific power of faith has a strong utopian element. In the present, faith has the powerful role of being one of the main drivers of human progress, both spiritual and material.

Scholarly reviews of Timothy Richard's published works have often been critical. Andrew F. Walls described Richard as an "unsystematic, undisciplined thinker and rambling writer" who "never produced a convincing synthesis of his experiences, and [whose] attempt to do so were manifestly flawed and sometimes alarming."⁸¹ While such critique is not entirely unjustified it fails to recognize the underlying coherence of Richard's writings. These writings may not satisfy modern scholarly standards—he was no scholar, after all—but they are certainly not devoid of a larger plan.

Richard's comparison of religions and search for a world religion begs the question of his entanglement in orientalist discourses and modes of thinking. Richard's translations of Buddhist texts have been described by Gong Jun as "a Christian 'construction' of East Asian Buddhism":⁸²

[W]hen reorganizing its [Mahayānā Buddhism's, TJ] philosophical discourse, he completely ignored East Asian Buddhism's very own philosophical and historical contexts, and did not adhere to the principles of historical exegesis when handling the translation of Buddhist text. Rather, he placed himself in the context of the Western tradition, particularly that of the Christian tradition, to interpret the classical texts of East Asian Buddhism.

80 Smith 1979, 10–11.

81 Walls 2002, 258.

82 Gong 2017, 41. I have benefitted from the work by Tarocco 2008, Lai 2009, Scott 2012, and Gong 2017.

One could add to this assessment that Richard's idea of progress through scientific innovation utilizes what Marius Meinhof has called "colonial temporality": a discourse of linear progress based on unequal power relations that "revolve around discourses of deficiency that compel Chinese institutional discourses to constantly undertake comparisons with the West."⁸³ The relationship between the European nations and China is conceptualized as one between advanced nations and a China that requires tutelage in order to progress.

However, Timothy Richard's encounter with Chinese religions provides an opportunity to further complicate his relationship to orientalist discourses. Gregory Scott noted that Richard's narrative of humankind differed in important points from that usually associated with missionaries or orientalists in general.⁸⁴ In the context of this paper it is, first, important to note that faith in Richard's understanding was not a parochial concept on which Christianity had an exclusive claim. Faith is therefore not a hegemonic concept on which Christian superiority could be based. The undeniable influences from sectarian religions on the salvational aspects of faith undermined any narrative that was designed to project the status quo of foreign political and religious dominance into the future. Second, rather than projecting preformed ideas onto the Chinese religious landscape, Richard developed his concept of faith by amalgamating experiences as a young man during the great Welsh revival (1858–60) with first-hand experiences of Chinese religiosity at temple fairs and local religious groups. It was a work in progress. The analysis of faith-related sources revealed significant adaptations in response to Chinese religious expectations, for instance by focusing on the non-scriptural, material benefits of faith. In other words, Richard opened up the scripture-based discourse to a more efficacy-based understanding of faith.

The exchange of faith-related ideas was a two-way process. Richard certainly was involved in the construction of East Asian Buddhism. However, by the same token one could argue that he was also involved in the construction of a future global religion designed to ultimately replace Christianity. Both constructions led to a certain degree of decontextualization of religious practice. Yet it is important to acknowledge that Richard's ideas were rooted in the highly complex interactions between the worlds of Christianity and lived Chinese religiosity. Faith was for Richard a key mechanism that linked these two worlds.

83 Meinhof 2017, 53.

84 Scott 2012, 75.

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