

“Two Small Copper Coins” and Much More Chinese Protestant Women and Their Contributions to the Church – Cases from Past and Present

Fredrik Fällman

Introduction

Observations of Christian congregations around the world, including China, will show that women make up the majority in most given settings. One could say that women have been, and are, the backbone of the Church, from the women around Jesus to the studies today that show how women make up the majority of active church members, in China as much as elsewhere. The comparative lack of male churchgoers has been discussed at length in many Churches and denominations in the West, and there have also been a number of surveys and studies trying to document and analyse this situation. Recent studies also indicate that women are more religious than men in general, especially among Christians.¹ In the first decades after Mao Zedong’s death the tendency towards a majority of older women may have been even stronger in China than in the West, since fewer younger people felt secure enough to state their faith publicly in China, or were willing to suffer the consequences in school or at work. Also, the Chinese government recognises the situation of a majority of women in the Church, especially in the countryside. There is even a typical Chinese phrase for this phenomenon, “lao san duo” 老三多 (three old many), i.e.

Prof. Dr. Fredrik Fällman is Senior Lecturer in Chinese and Associate Head of the Department of Languages & Literatures at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. The following text is an updated version of his contribution to the international Workshop “‘I have called you by name’ – Contribution of Chinese Women to the Church,” Sankt Augustin, Germany, September 25–26, 2014. A conference report was published in *Religions & Christianity in Today’s China V* (2015) 1, pp. 30-38. A publication of the workshop papers in English language by the Steyl Institute of Missiology and the Institute Monumenta Serica in cooperation with the China-Zentrum, all Sankt Augustin, Germany is in preparation. The Monumenta Serica Sinological Research Center, Taipei, Taiwan will publish a volume of the workshop papers in Chinese language. [Editors’ note.]

- 1 For an interesting and in-depth study of the situation in the UK, see Jacintha Ashworth – Ian Farthing, “Church-going in the UK. A Research Report from Tearfund on Church Attendance in the UK,” Tearfund, April 2007, available at BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03_04_07_tearfundchurch.pdf (accessed August 10, 2018); Pew Research Center, *The Gender Gap in Religion Around the World. Women Are Generally More Religious than Men, Particularly among Christians*, 2016, March 22, <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2016/03/Religion-and-Gender-Full-Report.pdf> (accessed August 10, 2018).

“many women, many old, many with low cultural level [education]” (妇女多、老人多、文化程度低者多).²

Research on religion in China in general and Christianity in particular has not taken gender issues particularly into account until fairly recently, and with regard to Christianity there has often been a more historical perspective, for example in the work of the American historian Jessie G. Lutz. Hong Kong theologian Kwok Pui-lan 郭佩蘭 has, among other things, pointed out the importance of including Chinese Christian women in the greater historical perspective of research on modern and contemporary China.³ Another recent contributor to the study of women and religion in China is Kang Xiaofei, who has pointed to the importance of Christian schools and colleges in creating early generations of urban women receiving modern education. Many of these also became professionals and shared the values of the “New Culture” and “May Fourth” movements. Kang argues that these progressive women helped reshape the male dominated project of modernity, also within religious organisations, and may have played a more important role than is commonly recognised. Those Christian women pioneers also questioned complementarian doctrines then prevalent in the Church, i.e. that men and women have different roles to fulfil, thereby justifying the limitations of women in society and Church. Since the early 20th century such complementarian ideas have met increasing resistance in Churches around the World, but in contemporary China they are both actively contested and promoted by different groups.⁴

It can be a negative factor to be openly religious if you are a government employee in China, even if laws and regulations stipulate equal rights for all citizens. However, it is clear that younger generations are less inhibited by this situation and are more public with their faith. This goes for young intellectuals especially, exemplified by a number of high profile “intellectual congregations” in the larger cities of China. One factor in this is the gradually diminishing number of state employees, and the breakdown of the “iron bowl of rice.” Pension, health and unemployment benefit systems are under construction, but are conditional and not general.

It is sometimes very hard to find traces of the impact of Chinese Christian women. One can sense them behind the stories of men in the Church, but as they have been “serving spirits,” wives, widows, unmarried sisters and nurses, they were not in the forefront and are little mentioned in older texts and other material. The plight of women in China in general was much debated already in the 19th century, not least among Western missionaries working in China, and often images of gloom and darkness were spread. Chinese women were depicted as enslaved and enclosed in the family, and this can be traced in

2 Jiang Yiping 姜一平 (ed.), “Bu pingfan zhi nian de zongjiao he zongjiao yanjiu” 不平凡之年的宗教和宗教研究, in: 中国网 China web portal, September 10, 2009, www.china.com.cn/culture/zhuanti/09zongjiao/2009-09/10/content_18497228_6.htm (accessed June 20, 2018).

3 Jessie G. Lutz (ed.), *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity, and Social Mobility*, Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press 2010; and Kwok Pui-lan, “Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in: Daniel H. Bays, *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996, pp. 194-208.

4 Kang Xiaofei, “Women, Gender and Religion in Modern China, 1900s–1950s: An Introduction,” in: *Nan nü* 19 (2017) 1, pp. 1-27. See also Jia Jinhua – Kang Xiaofei – Yao Ping, *Gendering Chinese Religion: Subject, Identity, and Body*, Albany: SUNY Press 2014.

book titles and texts from the previous century. One example is Swedish missionary Eva Sköld who in 1907 published a book called *The Land of Dark Shadows or Something about China and Its People*, implying a terrible situation for not only women, but “China and its people” in general. However, the actual content focuses to a great extent on the life of local women in Hubei. Much of these “dark” images were also true, as we know from other contemporary accounts and also later academic studies. Similar imagery was also used by early Chinese feminists like Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875–1907), who wrote that “China’s women still remain in the dark and gloom, mired in the lowest of all the levels of hell’s prisons” (我的二万万女同胞, 还依然黑暗沉沦在十八层地狱). She also pointed out that women’s misery is not necessarily visible but is still there as subordination and lack of economic and other freedoms.⁵

An interesting parallel, or possibly deliberate choice of the same imagery, is the story of Christiana Tsai (Cai Sujuan 蔡苏娟, 1890–1984), who grew up in a well-off Qing magistrate family with many children. After being sent to study in Beijing she became a Christian and later moved to the USA. As a rather young woman she fell seriously ill with malaria and was forced to spend literally decades of her life in a darkened room, often in bed. Despite this she kept her Christian faith alive, wrote and continued to evangelise from her “dark room.” In 1953 she published a rather well-known book, translated into many languages, entitled *Queen of the Dark Chamber*. Her book title, and to some extent her whole life, can serve as an interesting and symbolic starting point for further discussion about the contributions of Protestant Chinese women. Christiana Tsai overcame the “darkness” in her mind and became a Christian, and then also overcame the physical darkness to become a missionary and inspirer to many, up until the late 20th century. In her mission and with her actions she also overcame traditional prejudice against women and their abilities.⁶ Interestingly, Tsai in her book possibly inadvertently comments on the issue of women and names in her book, saying that “‘Too Many’ became my baby name.” The Chinese edition gives this so-called “milk name” (*ruming* 乳名) as “Taiduo” (太多).⁷ Many rural Chinese women had no proper given name as adults, the “milk name” or other first name they had as children was no longer used when they reached adulthood, and this practice continued into the 20th century in some areas. Married women were usually called something like “Mrs. Wang nee Li” (王李氏), and if unmarried named in kinship or category terms related to age or position.⁸

A phrase from “The Lesson of the Widow” as told in Mark 12 and Luke 21 is part of the title for this paper, and the inspiration came from a small journal, started by primarily women teachers and pastors-to-be at Zhongnan Theological Seminary (Zhongnan shen-

5 Qiu Jin, quoted in: Louise P. Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage in China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2008, p. 62. Chinese original literally says “My 200 million compatriots still remain in the dark and gloom, mired in the prison of the eighteenth level of hell.” The idea of “eighteen levels of hell” comes from popular religious tradition, mixed with elements of Daoism and Buddhism. Full original text at www.cnthinkers.com/thinkerweb/literature/23462.

6 Christiana Tsai 蔡苏娟, *Queen of the Dark Chamber*, Chicago: Moody Publishers 1953 (Chinese language edition: *An shi zhi hou* 暗室之后, 1957).

7 Tsai, “baby name,” on page one of the first chapter both in the 1953 English edition and the 1957 Chinese edition.

8 Rubie S. Watson, “The Named and the Nameless: Gender and Person in Chinese Society,” in: *American Ethnologist* 13 (Nov. 1986) 4, , pp. 619-631.

xueyuan 中南神學院) in Wuhan in the early 1990s. This journal was called *Liang ge xiao qian* 兩個小錢 (Two Small Coins), and was published by the student union at the seminary. I followed this journal (and the seminary) when I studied at Wuhan University in 1996, and I have maintained relations to the Zhongnan seminary and the Hubei Church since. It seems quite clear that the students starting the magazine mostly thought of the notion “my two pennies’ worth” (or “my two cents”), as showing a humble attitude to what their writings might offer. However, the interpretation of the Bible text is broader than this.

Jesus saw the old widow among the many people in the temple, and noticed her gift. Possibly she had been going there all her life, giving as much as she could. No one had noticed her in the way Jesus did. However, Jesus’ words were also directed towards the powerful religious leaders who tried to get more contributions also from widows and the poor, and who tried to make them believe that their gifts would give them religious benefits. In several ways this widow is a symbol for the plight and role of women in China and elsewhere. The widow was seen as a widow, not in her own right as a woman and an equal, but as someone previously married to a man. At the time, her role and social status was predefined by this fact. She was marginalised and not seen for who she really was and what she had really done and achieved in her own right. Added to Jesus’ criticism against the religious leaders in the passage just before the “Lesson of the Widow,” there is also the aspect of a predominantly male leadership of the religious community seeing women (widows) as “useful” only when it benefits themselves. There are such aspects also when looking at the role of women in the Church generally, and in China as discussed here.

The “Lesson of the Widow” may be a good theological starting point for discussing the role and contribution of Chinese Protestant women, but the text also gives ground for a sociological reflection. What voice did the widow have and what choices did she have? And in the greater perspective of Christian women in China, what agency did they have? There is no doubt about the subordinate role of women in many societies, regardless of religious conviction, but does it always mean lack of independent decisions and free choices? If so, did they not have any agency, or is it so that “women’s agency has been concealed or overlooked, not diminished”?⁹ Such seems to be the case in the context of Christianity in China, where women have continually played important roles throughout history. While there might be a dialectic with factors such as structures, tradition and beliefs, there are many and clear examples of agency among Chinese Christian women despite their relatively subordinate roles in family and society. For this paper I have chosen four spheres or areas to discuss a few selected cases. Many other categories or distinctions could have been chosen instead, but these four relate to issues of agency, subordination and roles that all are relevant in discussing the contribution of Chinese Christian women to the Church. The four areas are “Patriotism and Gender Equality,” “Caretakers,” “Inspirers and Transmitters” and “Preachers and Educators,” and several of these are also areas within which women commonly work. As Chloë Starr writes, Chinese Christian, educated women “went disproportionately into the caring professions and into teaching

9 For more on women and agency see e.g. Diana Tietjens Meyers, *Gender in the Mirror: Cultural Imagery and Women’s Agency, Studies in Feminist Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002, quote from p. 2.

and social work in China, just as elsewhere.” However, there were also early critical voices against gender imbalance, such as Ruth Cheng (Cheng Guanyi 诚冠怡) of Yenching University (Yanjing dayue 燕京大学) who in 1922 argued that the issue of women and men and their places and roles in the Chinese Christian Church was an issue of “sharing with them the responsibility of service”.¹⁰

“Patriotism” and Gender Equality

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 the party-state has been using strong pro-emancipation rhetoric and there has been much progress at least on the surface. However, the party control, the institutionalised All China Women’s Federation (Zhongguo quanguo funü lianhehui 中华全国妇女联合会; abbreviated: ACWF, Fulián 妇联),¹¹ and also the commercialisation of society have contributed to slow the development down. Commercial freedom has reduced other freedoms, and there is less space, or market, for serious debate and struggle. China is still a predominantly male-oriented society, even if women can have most kinds of jobs and have a greater economic freedom. Recent years have also seen the return of “concubines” or “second wives” (*er nai* 二奶, not formally married), sometimes even given a flat and financial support sufficient for not having to work. There is also the issue of *shengnü* 剩女, “leftover women,” meaning well-educated women who are in their late 20s (and older) and still remain unmarried. Both the phenomenon as such and the term in itself are a problem, and even the ACWF has been using this derogatory term without much reflection. The term is hardly mentioned on official Protestant Church web pages or in the national Protestant magazine *Tianfeng* 天风, however, but must have been debated also among Christians.¹²

In the revolutionary jargon of the PRC “women hold up half the sky” 妇女能顶半边天, a phrase commonly attributed to Mao Zedong. This expression found resonance also in the West, and many truly believed that the party-state, and even Mao Zedong himself, cared for the liberation of Chinese women, at least that the party had understood the importance of equality. The phrase as such may on one hand sound liberating, and as an expression of female capacity and agency. On the other hand, it is also a Confucian inspired idea about different gender roles in life and society. It is more like a “complementarian” view which has also been prevalent in many Christian denominations throughout history, however less pronounced in recent decades. “Complementarian” here means that men

-
- 10 Chloë Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2016, pp. 53-54. Ruth Cheng’s original quote from Ruth Cheng, “Women and the Church,” in: *National Christian Conference: The Chinese Church as Revealed in the National Christian Conference Held in Shanghai, Tuesday, 2 May, to Thursday, 11 May 1922*, Shanghai Oriental Press 1922, pp. 240-242.
- 11 The ACWF is one of many so-called “GONGOs” in the PRC, “Government Organised NGOs.” Such organisations are formally independent, but are *de facto* completely dependent on the “guidance” and good will of the government and the Communist Party of China (CPC).
- 12 For more on the *shengnü* issue see Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China*, New York: Zed Books 2014. A search was done in material available at the official Chinese Protestant website, www.ccctspm.org, and also through the official magazines *Tianfeng* 天风, and *Nanjing Theological Review* 金陵神学志. Magazine search done through China Academic Journals Full-text Database (CNKI) at <http://oversea.cnki.net/kns55/brief/result.aspx?dbPrefix=CJFD>.

and women have different roles, the boundaries of which should not be transgressed. One obvious example is the centuries long prohibition of women from ordination as ministers and priests, lifted within many Protestant denominations only very late in the 20th century or even the early 21st century. Many Churches and denominations have also implemented a number of rules for women’s right to hold positions in Church hierarchies or to vote in Church congregations, not to mention rules for women’s appearance and clothing, well into the 20th century.

While such teachings were prevalent also in China before 1949, the formal policies of gender equality have largely prohibited them in the PRC. However, with the current trend of “New Calvinism” among intellectual Christians in China, complementarian views are coming back, however on a small scale. In the USA “New Calvinists” are sometimes “evangelicals” that have (re)discovered Puritan and Calvinist teachings. Among Christian intellectuals in China “New Calvinism” is possibly a choice of freedom and resistance, with a form that gives clear answers in a confusing and immoral post-modern society. Their complementarian ideas may mean among other things that women should aim to cover their heads, that they cannot be ordained and that they should primarily care for the family. The well-known intellectual, unregistered congregation Shouwang jiaohui 守望教会 in Beijing has adopted a “Calvinist” and complementarian stance, and does not allow for the ordination of women. There are also women who accept these views, even if coming from a different background, as an article by the pen name Shuangyan 双燕 from 2009 shows. Shuangyan describes how she always struggled with the concepts of “authority” (*quanbing* 权柄) and “submission” (*shunfu* 顺服) in her previous 14 years as a preacher and ordained pastor. Her article does have elements of doubt and describes the difficulty of interpreting these concepts, but concludes that she has now found peace in submission to God’s authority, and apparently also to the authority of male leaders in Shouwang congregation.¹³

The framework of so-called “patriotic” religious organisations in China has added political factors that go beyond gender issues, and it is sometimes difficult to determine what factor holds the upper hand in a specific case. However, it is most likely that the “patriotic” structures of the Chinese Church have allowed a certain space for women. One may draw parallels to the developments in state church societies such as Sweden, Denmark and Norway, where the government has to some extent influenced the decisions to ordain women. It should be noted, however, that besides government proposals there was a parallel process of accepting women’s ordination in the Churches in the Nordic countries in the 1950–1960s, and since the 1980s only a very small minority has opposed this decision.¹⁴

13 Shuangyan 双燕, “Jidutu nüxing jiazhi de xunzhao” 基督徒女性价值的寻找, in: *Xinghua* 杏花 2009, No. 4, pp. 39-45 (<https://t3.shwchurch.org/2012/09/25/基督徒女性价值的找寻/>); for more on the “New Calvinist” phenomenon see Fredrik Fällman, “Calvin, Culture and Christ? Developments of Faith among Chinese Intellectuals,” in: Francis Lim Khok Gee (ed.), *Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-cultural Perspectives*, Routledge 2013, pp. 153-168, and Alexander Chow, “Calvinist Public Theology in Urban China Today,” in: *International Journal of Public Theology*, 8 (May 2014) 2, pp. 158-175.

14 Already in 1923 a government commission proposed to allow women ministers in the Church of Sweden, and several proposals were also put forward in the national Church Assembly during the 1950s, before the final decision in 1958.

The lack of open debate on women’s ordination is likely an outcome of the controlled environment of the “patriotic” religious framework in China. Since the 1950s there has been a tug-of-war between the registered Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), since 1980 also the China Christian Council (CCC), and the many unregistered congregations and networks that exist in China. The TSPM/CCC national leadership have often been questioned by the unregistered, sometimes also within their own movement, and very often by Western Churches and mission organisations. There is a legitimate concern that TSPM/CCC leaders come too close to the party-state, which may be corrupting. I would still like to take an example of the contribution of a woman in this environment, and that is Rev. Cao Shengjie 曹圣洁 (b. 1931). She was the first national woman church leader ever in China, and one among still rather few in the World. She was the CCC chairperson 2002–2007, but was seen as a rather controversial figure at least in the West, and was criticised for her political tendencies. Supposedly she was even called “Old Marxist-Leninist Lady” (Ma-Lie lao taitai 马列老太太) by some TSPM colleagues. However, this expression is not directed specifically against Cao Shengjie, but is used against anyone who has worked for a long time in the party-state system and has been stuck in the rhetoric and with the viewpoints that the system has fed them for years. It is often used in the plural, and not for individuals.¹⁵ Despite this, in her role as church leader Rev. Cao was still a sign for the possibility of women, that there was no difference in principle between men and women. For the great majority of Chinese women believers, she may be just a name, and not someone to relate to, but symbolically and on a worldwide scale her role as church leader is still important. Regardless of her affinity with the party-state, and whatever decisions she may have taken in her official roles, the mere fact that the largest organised Chinese Church has had a woman chairperson is a strong statement. For those critical of TSPM/CCC the appointment of a woman, especially Rev. Cao, may have been quite the contrary, merely another example of how corrupt and non-Biblical the TSPM/CCC is in naming a woman to such a position. Notably, I have not been able to find any published statements with such criticism, even if many have criticised Rev. Cao, if not for being a woman in power then more for her party-state affiliation.

Rev. Cao has also published a number of articles on the issue of women in the Church, and she was a delegate to the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. At this conference Rev. Cao discussed how Christian women could contribute to the fields of education and development. Interestingly, in her paper she also mentioned the issue of male Chinese pastors adhering to “male chauvinism” (*dananzizhuyi* 大男子主义) and hindering women from being ordained. She also mentioned those who bar already ordained women from working and administering the sacraments on the grounds that it is not biblical. Rev. Cao even mentioned women being influenced to renounce their ordina-

15 David Aikman mentions this epithet for Rev. Cao, quoting unnamed TSPM officials who supposedly called her this. See David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, Washington: Regnery 2003, p. 174. Aikman seems to believe it was aimed specifically towards Rev. Cao, but considering its use and meaning there is good reason to doubt that.

tion on the same grounds, an interesting TSPM/CCC parallel to the case of “Shuangyan” as mentioned above.¹⁶

The public debate on women’s ordination and women church leaders has been rather limited in China, at least compared to some Western countries where ordination issues in some cases have led to the formation of breakaway organisations, *de facto* denominations.¹⁷ There are indications here and there that the issue exists, like for example Rev. Cao’s articles, but letters to the official national Christian magazine *Tianfeng* also show that the issue is alive among ordinary believers. One male believer from Shanxi writes in 2007 asking:

Now there are so many women pastors and elders, can they administer the Eucharist and ordain pastors and elders? Some people say that women cannot do this, and others do not accept that women baptize them. Please explain.

现在的女牧师、女长老很多，她们能主持圣餐礼、参与按立牧师、长老的仪式吗？有人说女人不能主持，有人不接受女长老给他施洗，请解答。

The answer takes its main point from Galatians 3:28 and argues that God made men and women equal, and that God acts in the sacraments, not the person administering them. Therefore, men and women pastors are equally valid as God’s servants. The answer also strongly cautions against such “wrong teachings” (*cuowu de jiaodao* 错误的教导), leading people to question the validity of women pastors and their actions.¹⁸

Besides Rev. Cao, there are of course many more examples, and in another section below I mention Rev. Liu Nianfen 刘年芬 (1920–2002), regional YWCA leader, seminary president and vice chairperson of national TSPM. These women stand for a different kind of contribution as women in the Chinese Church, outwardly close to the official party line, and upholding the “patriotic” line on most issues. Nevertheless, their positions of power and authority have shown that women can do the same as men, and for many they may have served as guiding stars to show the possibilities of women. The TSPM/CCC is actually far ahead of the Chinese party-state system, which still has a long way to go, as only one out of 25 persons in the Communist Party of China (CPC) politburo is currently a woman, and two out of 34 in the State Council.¹⁹

16 Cao Shengjie 曹圣洁, “Zhongguo jidujiao funü zai jiaoyu yu fazhan zhong de zuoyong – zai Lianheguo di si ci funü dahui NGO luntan shang de fayan” 中国基督教妇女在教育与发展中的作用—在联合国第四次妇女大会 NGO论坛上的发言, in: *Zhongguo zongjiao* 中国宗教, 1995, No. 3, pp. 30-32.

17 One example is the Mission Province (Missionsprovinser) in Sweden, formed by ministers from the Church of Sweden that protest against women ordination, the official stance on homosexuality and some other issues. Consequently, the Church of Sweden has since 2005 defrocked those ministers assuming positions in the Mission Province, some also being ordained as bishops. See further Carola Nordbäck, “Tio år med Missionsprovinser” (Ten Years with the Mission Province), in: *Svensk kyrkotidning*, 2013, No. 25, pp. 517-522.

18 Bai Tianmin 白天民 (question) and Jin Wei 金微 (answer), “Nü mushi, nü zhanglao keyi zhuchi shengli ma?” 女牧师、女长老可以主持圣礼吗?, in: *Tianfeng* 天风 2007, No. 4, p. 24.

19 Shui Jingjun 水镜君, “In Search of Sacred Women’s Organizations,” in: Hsiung Ping-Chun – Maria Jaschok – Cecilia Milwertz – Red Chan (eds.), *Chinese Women organizing: Cadres, Feminists, Muslims, Queers*, Oxford: Berg 2001, pp. 101-118; Guowuyuan 国务院, The Central People’s Government of the PRC online, www.gov.cn/guowuyuan (accessed August 10, 2018); and “Di shijiu jie Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhi jiegou tu” 第十九届中共中央组织结构图, in: CPC News online, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/414940/index.html> (accessed August 10, 2018).

While the promotion of women as church leaders after 1949 may be at least partially attributed to the political situation and formal agenda of equality, limited in reality, there are also examples from before 1949. One special example is Rev. Florence Li Tim-Oi 李添媛, the first Anglican women priest in the world, ordained by Bishop Hall of Victoria (Hong Kong) in 1944. Her ordination took place during World War II and in a situation where the Bishop saw her ordination as a solution to the need of several congregations under pressure. He had also seen the good parish work of Li Tim-Oi as a deacon during several years, and wrote the following to a friend in England just after her ordination:

*For four years she has been in sole charge of a congregation, and both spiritually and practically she has been a most successful pastor, both to men and women. ... [she is a] competent, sensible, quiet parish priest.*²⁰

While Bishop Hall's comment is very appreciative, it emphasizes Rev. Li's sensitivity and quietness, which may have been interpreted by some that she would not be much noticed but still do good work, despite being a woman. However, competence, sensitivity, and sometimes also quietness are qualities well fit for a parish priest, man or woman, and Bishop Hall's intentions were quite certainly not in the direction of diminishing Rev. Li. He was also formally criticized for the ordination.

After World War II Li Tim-Oi chose to renounce her licence, however not her ordination and she was later formally recognized as a priest again in the 1970s. Seen in retrospect, her case must have had an impact on the ordination of women in China overall and prepared the way for such decisions in other denominations, and also after 1949. The Anglican Communion worldwide celebrated the 70th anniversary of her ordination in January 2014.²¹ With the ordination of Li Tim-Oi, the Chinese Protestant Church was far ahead of most Churches in the West, but it is interesting that the ordaining bishop was a Westerner, Bishop Hall. The Anglican Communion at large decided to allow women ministers only in 1974, and 2014 was the 20th anniversary of women priests in the Church of England. That same year, 2014, the Church of England decided to allow women bishops.

In a more recent development, China has turned out to be one of few places where Seventh Day Adventists ordain women. As in other denominations the Adventists in the West have been debating this issue for decades, while in China the first ordinations took place already in the 1980s. This is due to the special situation in China with the Adventists existing under the umbrella of the TSPM/CCC, but also the need for Christian leaders with the rapidly expanding Church in China. Women are needed as teachers, preachers, pastors, evangelists and in all other roles, as the Church struggles to cope with the situation. International Adventist leaders have apparently accepted this situation, and according to pub-

20 Letter from Bishop Hall to friends in England, January 27, 1944, quoted in the booklet for the memorial Eucharist in St. Martin-in-the-fields, London, January 25, 2014, available at the Li Tim-Oi Foundation website “It Takes One Woman,” <http://www.ittakesonewoman.org/docs/oosbooklet25114.pdf> (accessed August 20, 2014).

21 “Anglicans Mark 70 Years since Ordination of First Woman Priest,” in: Anglican Communion News Service, www.anglicannews.org/news/2014/01/anglicans-mark-70-years-since-ordination-of-first-woman-priest.aspx (accessed August 10, 2018); Florence Li Tim-Oi, *Raindrops of My Life: The Memoir of Florence Tim Oi Li*, Toronto: Anglican Book Centre 1996; and Edmund B. Der, “Florence Tim Oi Li: Pioneer & Mentor of the Women Priests’ Movement,” in: The Anglican Church of Canada online, www.anglican.ca/faith/worship/resources/li-tim-oi/li-tim-oi-der/ (accessed September 5, 2014).

licly available reports and articles it seems that it is well tolerated and that the pragmatic Chinese understanding and action in this respect is successful. This is yet another example of where China is ahead of the rest of the world with regard to the role of women in the Church, and where Chinese Christian women contribute beyond their own borders.²²

Caretakers

Becoming a nurse, a midwife or a teacher was often the only way for a woman who wanted to leave her stay-at-home life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the West as well as in China. For Western women mission was also an option. In mission history medical work plays a very important role, and the various missions to China are no exception. There are also a few more well-known Chinese Christian women doctors and nurses who have left a lasting legacy. Among the most well-known is Shi Meiyu 石美玉 (Mary Stone, 1873–1954), among the first Chinese women to receive Western medical training. She was trained together with Kang Cheng 康成 (Ida Kahn, 1873–1931) at the University of Michigan, and they both returned to China as medical doctors in 1896. They were both also active as missionaries, especially Shi who became a leading Methodist preacher. Interestingly their legacy extends not only throughout China, but on an international level. In 1914, Levi Barbour, a Regent of the University of Michigan, met Kang and Shi while travelling in China, and was so impressed that he started to plan for a scholarship for Asian women after coming back to the USA. The first Barbour Scholars arrived in the USA in 1918, and scholarships have since been awarded not only in medicine and science, but also in political science and sociology. Originally known as The Barbour Scholarships for Oriental Women, they are now called the Rackham Barbour Scholarships for Asian Women.²³

Both Kang Cheng (Kahn) and Shi Meiyu (Stone) were supported and promoted, Kang even adopted and educated by American missionary Gertrude Howe of the Woman's Foreign Mission Society, affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal Church in the USA. Howe's close relationship especially with Kang has been questioned as “cultural imperialism,” and that Kang was almost turned into an American. Howe as an unmarried woman missionary in China, and her cultural training and promotion of Kang and Shi caused tensions in a missionary community that while preaching equality still was very male dominated.²⁴ Another more recent example of a Chinese Christian woman medical expert is Dr. Lin Qiaozhi 林巧稚 (Lim Kha T'i, 1901–1983). She was the leading gynaecologist at Peking Union Medical College Hospital from the late 1940s till her death. She was also a dedicated Christian who did not refrain from expressing her faith even during the harsh climate for religion under Mao Zedong. Dr. Lin befriended premier Zhou Enlai, which may explain

22 “Women Serving as Ordained Ministers in the Adventist Church in China,” in: *Advent Life*, <http://adventlife.wordpress.com/2012/06/26/women-serving-as-ordained-ministers-in-the-adventist-church-in-china-by-at-news-team> (accessed August 24, 2014).

23 “A Cosmopolitan Tradition: Barbour Scholarships,” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, <http://bentley.umich.edu/exhibits/cosmo/barbour.php> (accessed August 22, 2014).

24 Barbara Reeves-Ellington – Kathryn Kish Sklar – Connie A. Shemo (eds.), *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812–1960*, Duke University Press 2010.

why she was protected to a certain extent. After her death Lin was commemorated with a stamp in 1990, a TV film (“Endless Love” [Da ai ru tian 大爱如天], by CCTV) in 2007, several biographies and even a bronze statue at the China Women and Children Museum (Zhongguo funü ertong bowuguan 中国妇女儿童博物馆) in Beijing.²⁵

An interesting case of a woman’s contribution in the caring field that I discovered more or less by chance is Liu Baozhen 刘葆真 (1900–1984). Her case shows how difficult it can be to find and become aware of women’s contributions to Church and society in China. She is much less known than her famous husband, Dr. Li Xingjie 李星阶 (Edmund Li, 1896–1989). However, she helped her husband to build up the renowned Kangsheng Hospital (Kangsheng yiyuan 康生医院) in Shashi 沙市, Hubei province (now part of Jingzhou Municipality 荆州市). Kangsheng Hospital was a privately operated hospital founded in 1930, supported financially by the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden (MCCS, Ruidian xingdaohui 瑞典行道会), but merged in 1956 to form the current No. 3 Jingzhou People’s Hospital (Jingzhou shi di san renmin yiyuan 荆州市第三人民医院).²⁶ All material about this hospital that I have seen, in Chinese and in Swedish, only mentions the founder Dr. Li Xingjie, not his wife Liu Baozhen. Li Xingjie’s father, Li Pinsan 李品三, was a famous evangelist, and Li Xingjie’s two brothers Li Qiongjie 李琼阶 and Li Yabo 李亚伯 were both well-known pastors, and perhaps there was no space left for his wife to be seen or heard. Dr. Li also became a church leader and board member in Hubei during the 1930s and 1940s.

Liu Baozhen’s medical specialty was obstetrics, and curiously the Kangsheng Hospital is mentioned in some recollections and historical notes as especially strong in this field, however without mentioning her name.²⁷ Through her dedication and perseverance, along with a passion for care and a passion for faith, Dr. Liu Baozhen apparently made great contributions to the reputation of the hospital. The current medical authorities in Jingzhou proudly tell the legacy of Kangsheng hospital, and they mention the Swedish missionaries, Dr. Li Xingjie’s advanced medical studies, and also Dr. Li’s work after 1949 when the hospital was nationalised. Several articles about Dr. Li Xingjie as well as some files in the MCCS archives in Sweden only mention Dr. Liu Baozhen as Dr. Li Xingjie’s wife, not even mentioning her name. However, in private collections I have found memorials from Li’s and Liu’s children after the passing away of their parents. One Swedish missionary recollection claims that Liu Baozhen was merely a nurse, but her children titled her “doctor”

25 Guowei Wright, “Lin Qiaozhi – the Steady Pulse of a Quiet Faith,” in: Carol Lee Hamrin – Stacy Bieler (eds.), *Salt and Light: Lives of Faith That Shaped Modern China*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock 2009; Ren Wanxia 任万霞, “Lin Qiaozhi: Yisheng de yi ban shi tianshi” 林巧稚: 医生的一半是天使 (Lin Qiaozhi: Half of the Doctor is an Angel), in: Sina Finance Online, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/20140329/024518651652.shtml>; and “China Marks 100th Birthday of Chinese Gynecological Pioneer,” in: *People’s Daily* English online edition, December 22, 2001, http://english.people.com.cn/200112/22/eng20011222_87258.shtml. The stamp can be seen at www.christiantimes.cn/assets/cache/widen_700_watermark/assets/media/post/201304/10602/2013042314351439.jpg, and the film is accessible at <http://v.cdsm.cn/video.php?vid=2939> (all accessed August 10, 2018).

26 Jingzhou shi di san renmin yiyuan 荆州市第三人民医院 (No. 3 Jingzhou People’s Hospital), official web page, www.jz3y.com (accessed August 24, 2014).

27 “Hbjzslscg 的博客,” Hubei Jingzhou minjian shiliaoguan 湖北荆州民间史料官 (Hubei Jingzhou Popular History Data Office), <http://hbjzslscg.blog.163.com/blog/static/5376699220089165118465> (accessed August 18, 2014) (This page is now closed but partially archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20170915000000*/http://hbjzslscg.blog.163.com).

in their memorial at her funeral in 1984. Only one local Jingzhou article that I have found includes Liu Baozhen among the “qualified doctors in all specialties” (各科医生具备) at the Kangsheng hospital, her having graduated from “a famous medical school” (出自著名医校). Liu’s husband Li Xingjie studied at the Datong Medical School in Wuhan, affiliated with Renji Hospital (Renji yiyuan 仁济医院), now the Union Hospital of Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology. It is not yet clear where Liu Baozhen studied.²⁸

Liu Baozhen worked at the Kangsheng Hospital from 1924 to 1965, when she retired for health reasons. She is only one of many examples of the women who in their daily lives and in their contemporary time are taken for granted, at best honoured and seen as natural authorities, but after retirement and later pass slowly into oblivion. Dr. Liu served and focused on her work, on practicalities, while her more well-known husband became a church board member and was promoted as a medical authority who is still spoken of. This reminds us again that “women’s agency has been concealed or overlooked, not diminished” (Diana Tietjens Meyers).²⁹

In their recollections of their parents, Dr. Li’s and Dr. Liu’s children specifically mention their mother’s Christian devotion, how she always wore a cross around her neck, while at work or at home, in health and sickness. According to her children, her dedication went far beyond the responsibility of an ordinary doctor, and she would give reduced fees or even free care for people with special needs. She is an interesting example of a Chinese Christian woman making an important contribution locally, but being taken for granted and later forgotten. Reading further between the lines in historical material may reveal more of her story, and contribute to local Christian history.

Besides these more or less famous names, there are many Christian women who have served as nurses, nursing assistants and home carers, as well as medical doctors, and who may have contributed as much as their male counterparts but were never seen. Such contributions rarely catch the attention of academia, but recently Professor Yu Jianrong 于建嵘, well-known scholar of Chinese rural society at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS, Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan 中国社会科学院) in Beijing, has made some interesting comments in this respect. He has argued that today Christian women in the Chinese countryside often achieve respect and understanding in the long run through their unceasing “good work,” caring for elderly and sick, breaking (others’) bad habits such as smoking and drinking, keeping the household and so on. They also often endure hardships from relatives, sometimes with non-Christian husbands beating them and scolding them for their Christian convictions. The mere fact that Yu Jianrong mentions Christian women in rural China in one of his articles is a step forward. His observations show that

28 Feng Yiran 冯毅然, “Youlian yaofang yu Kangsheng yiyuan” 友联药房与康生医院 (Youlian Pharmacy and Kangsheng Hospital), Jingzhou jiyi 荆州记忆 (Jingzhou Memories), Tencent, March 19, 2018, <https://new.qq.com/omn/20180319/20180319B17QM4.html> (accessed July 17, 2018).

29 Personal files for Dr. Li Xingjie, MCCS Archives, Stockholm; Li Xingjie’s children, “To the Memory of Dr. Edmund Li,” speech at memorial service in Shashi Church, July 30, 1989 (translated by former missionaries Nils Ahlgren and Gertrud Trädgårdh) (private missionary collection, Stockholm); Liu Baozhen’s children, “Consecration – Mother’s Life-long Desire,” memorial account of Dr. Liu Baozhen, Shashi Church, December 4, 1984 (translated by friends of the family) (private missionary collection, Stockholm); Gösta Stenström, *Kyrkorna vid Yangtsefloden* (The Churches along the Yangtse River), Stockholm: Svenska missionsförbundet 1990, p. 70.

the image of women in rural China, while still painted in dark colours, is changing slowly, and spread rays of light in academic works.³⁰

Transmitters and Inspirers

Transmission of the basics of Christian faith in the family is a very important task often carried out by the women in the family, grandmother, mother, aunt or among siblings. There may also be the case of a wife converting a husband, and possibly also other family members. Women have also done tremendous work as Sunday school teachers, sowing seeds that may grow to something more later in life. Such contributions can sometimes be critical for the continuation of Christian faith in the family, in the local area or the region, but the legacy will often also live on through other means.

Research about Christianity in China often focuses on the larger cities and the more populated Eastern parts of the country. However, Christianity most likely came to China first through Central Asia, even if there are only few believers in this area today. I would like to mention here a very special case of a Protestant woman leaving a legacy on several levels, as medical worker, as educator and as transmitter of the Gospel in and outside her family. Her witness of faith may have had an impact for Christianity in the whole of southern Xinjiang.

This woman was called Tornisa, an Uyghur woman born in the early 1920s who died in 1991. For part of her youth she lived with the Swedish M CCS missionaries in Yarkand 莎车, at their “girls’ home.” The “girls’ home” was not really an orphanage, and Tornisa spent some time with her family, but she was influenced for the rest of her life by her upbringing with the Swedes. After attending the local mission school, Tornisa was trained as a midwife by the missionaries and later also worked as such. In her teens she became a Christian and was baptised. Tornisa told her children and grandchildren Bible stories while they were growing up, all through the 1950–60s as well as into the cultural revolutionary 1970s and the early 1980s. Several of Tornisa’s family members are Christians also today, despite the hardships of being Christian among Muslims, and also in the generally hostile atmosphere towards religion that prevails in contemporary Xinjiang. Some female family members continue to be open about their Christian faith, and talk openly with friends and colleagues, continuing Tornisa’s legacy also today.³¹

In the special environment of Xinjiang, and with the stigma of being an ethnic minority that is officially categorised as “Muslim,” it is remarkable that Christian faith was kept alive through Tornisa and a few other women. The special case of Tornisa perhaps says less about the contribution of Protestant women than about her personally, but under the circumstances only a woman could have accomplished what she did. Most of the Uyghur

30 Yu Jianrong 于建嵘, “Zhongguo jidujiao jiating jiaohui hefahua yanjiu” 中国基督教家庭教会合法化研究, in: Aisixiang 爱思想, December 18, 2013, www.aisixiang.com/data/70584.html (accessed August 20, 2014).

31 John Hultvall, *Mission and Revolution in Central Asia*, PDF book 2004, part VII, chapters 6-7, <http://equumeniakyrkan.se/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Hultvall-ENG.pdf> (accessed August 23, 2014) (original Swedish edition *Mission och revolution i Centralasien*, Stockholm: Gummessons 1981); and interviews with Tornisa’s family, April 1998; April 4–7, 2006; and October 18–20, 2010.

Christian men in Kashgar 喀什, Yarkand and Yengisar 英吉沙 were deliberately killed after the Swedish missionaries were forced to leave in 1938.

Tornisa was always an outspoken and strong woman, telling her views to anyone and not being afraid of authorities. Local authorities in Yarkand arrested her for some time in her teens, and she spent a number of days sitting alone in a dark room. This experience frightened her tremendously according to her own telling, but apparently also shaped her determination even more. She was openly Christian from her teenage years and all through the rest of her life, and was under scrutiny and surveillance by the authorities from time to time until her death. She gathered other survivors of the mission already during the late 1960s and early 1970s when the Cultural Revolution was still rolling over China. In 1967 Tornisa wrote a letter to Sweden that eventually reached the MCCS and the ageing missionaries. The letter told how much she longed for them, and how her life had been since they met for the last time, 30 years earlier. Throughout the late 1960s and all through the 1970s and 1980s Tornisa communicated with MCCS in Sweden, and slowly the MCCS learned that not only had parts of the Christian community in southern Xinjiang survived all the chaos in the decades past, but the Christian message had also been passed on to the younger generation. While most of the Christian men had been killed rather early on after the missionaries left, the women had in many cases been married to Muslims or atheists and forced to denounce their Christian faith. In 1986 Tornisa was able to visit Sweden, and she travelled around the country to tell her story and to let people know that there were still Christians in Yarkand and Kashgar. A TV film was made during her visit, and she had a great impact also in Swedish congregations and even outside the Church with her life story.³²

Tornisa is one extreme example of Christian women as everyday transmitters of faith, as everyday missionaries. This everyday work is one of the greatest contributions of Christian women in China, but also elsewhere in the world. It goes along with the traditional role of women as mothers and household caretakers but should not be neglected in the discussion of how to spread the Gospel in contemporary society. Everyday dialogue with neighbours, friends and colleagues is possibly as effective as large-scale meetings and campaigns. The development of the Chinese Church, in a country where street preaching and large-scale revival meetings are not possible, gives ample evidence that such is the case.

Besides transmission on the family level, there are also a number of interesting Christian women “inspirers of faith,” witnesses, evangelists and revivalists who have made a great impact but are somehow still less known and appreciated for their work. One case worth mentioning is Yu Cidu 余慈度 (Dora Yu, 1873–1931), an evangelist and revivalist who was a great inspiration of Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng 倪柝声, 1903–1972), even called by some Nee’s “spiritual mother.” Watchman Nee is a name well-known to anyone taking an interest in Chinese Christian history and recent developments. But how many know of Dora Yu? Yu was originally a medical doctor, trained at Soochow Hospital (Boxi yiyuan 博习医院) in Suzhou. After graduating she was sent to Korea as a medical mis-

32 *Ibid.*; “Tornisa – kvinnan som skrev” (Tornisa – The Woman Who Wrote), TV film produced by Magnus Ekman and Christer Ernehall, Kaggeholm MTV 1986; Tornisa files in “Östturkestanansamlingen” (East Turkestan Collection/Samuel Fränne Collection), Swedish National Archive, Stockholm (archive reference code SE/RA/720860).

sionary for the Methodist Episcopal Church (Jianlihui 監理會). After a few years in Seoul she returned to China and started her own independent mission in Shanghai. Yu Cidu later became a well-known evangelist who travelled around China. At a revival meeting in Fuzhou in 1920 the young Ni Tuosheng was in attendance and had a strong experience that made him convinced of his own mission. Ni also studied briefly at the Bible school Yu Cidu had started in Shanghai, before starting his own preaching, and the work that was to become the movement of Local Churches (Difang zhaohui 地方召會).³³

Yu Cidu, Shi Meiyu, Kang Cheng and Lin Qiaozhi all remained unmarried, and committed their whole lives to their mission. By making this choice they came to exist a little outside the traditional framework, since the norm for women was to be married and relate to a man, a husband. The Church has a long tradition of men and women taking vows and living a communal life in a religious order, but these women were instead outstanding professionals and/or preachers who inspired men and women through their caring and missionary work. They have all been lauded for their contributions, but are still much less known than male counterparts. They certainly gave their “two copper coins,” and so much more.

Preachers and Educators

One of my inspirations for this article is Rev. Ge Baojuan 葛宝娟 (b. 1952) in Wuhan. Rev. Ge is a retired chaplain and Bible teacher at Zhongnan Theological Seminary, one of the regional seminaries affiliated with the TSPM/CCC. The seminary is commissioned to provide theological education for the six provinces and autonomous regions Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan. Since its start in 1985 the Zhongnan Seminary has always had a significant number of women in leading positions, exemplifying the role and contribution of Protestant women as preachers and educators in the Chinese Church. The founding president of Zhongnan Seminary was also a woman, Rev. Liu Nianfen 刘年芬 (1920–2002), and it is clear that she actively promoted other women to leading positions. Rev. Liu was also an early “patriotic” woman church leader, among the first to sign the so-called “Three-Self manifesto” (Sanzi gexin xuanyan 三自革新宣言) in 1950, and later a vice chairperson of the national TSPM. Through her work in YWCA she also became an important inspirer for young women in Wuhan and Hubei, and through the seminary also women from several central Chinese provinces. According to estimates up to one third of the faculty of TSPM/CCC seminaries are now women.³⁴

Rev. Ge Baojuan was born in 1952, grew up in a Catholic family, and has a brother who is a Catholic priest in their native Jiangsu province. After finishing school, she studied at a local teachers’ college and started working as a teacher. For some time during the Cultural Revolution she, like so many others, had to do manual farm work. When Chinese society

33 Silas Wu (Wu Xiuliang 吴秀良), *Yu Cidu zhuan* 余慈度传, Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe 2012.

34 Tian Yu 田雨, “Xi yang hong – Liu Nianfen mushi fangtan lu” 夕阳红—刘年芬牧师访谈录, in: *Tianfeng* 天风 1995, No. 7, pp. 18-19; Wang Zhenren 汪振仁, “Yinwei Yehehua bi zai nimen qiantou xing – zhuisi Liu Nianfen mushi” 因为耶和华必在你们前头行—追思刘年芬牧师, in: *Tianfeng* 2003, No. 2, pp. 50-51; and Kwok Pui Lan 郭佩兰, “Christianity and Women in China,” unpublished paper of the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting 2008, available at <http://wenku.baidu.com/view/ff895a24bcd126fff7050b09> (accessed August 10, 2018).

gradually went back to a normal state again after Mao Zedong's death, Ge Baojuan wanted to realise the calling she had felt to study theology and preach, and therefore decided to go to the Protestant seminary in Nanjing, Jinling Union Theological Seminary (Jinling xiehe shenxueyuan 金陵协和神学院), that opened for new students again in 1981. She was in the first class after reopening. Coming from a Catholic family, where she is still the only Protestant, her choice of becoming a minister is quite extraordinary. Besides being a charismatic preacher and enthusiastic teacher, Rev. Ge Baojuan has also continuously promoted women's issues, as can be seen to some extent in several articles published in the national Christian magazine *Tianfeng*. She was a founding member of the Hubei Christian Council women's committee and has also worked for women's issues nationally. Besides a direct involvement in women's issues, she has a strong passion for social work that has achieved both local and national attention, for example her work with orphans and handicapped, as well as the Ark School (Fangzhou xuexiao 方舟学校) in Gedian 葛店 near Ezhou 鄂州 (outside Wuhan) where school dropouts are given a second chance at education.³⁵

Besides her work at the Zhongnan Seminary, Rev. Ge was also the senior pastor of the Thanksgiving Church (Gan'en tang 感恩堂) near the seminary, one of Wuhan's major churches with several thousand members. Among her students, many have become local church leaders, both men and women, and several of her former women students are now also national level church representatives. The proportion of female staff at Zhongnan Seminary is also high, and many posts in the Hubei TSPM and Christian Council are held by women, however not the chair positions.³⁶

Conclusion

Many years ago Rev. Ge gave me an article, published in the magazine called *Liang ge xiao qian* 两个小钱 (Two Small Coins) mentioned above. The article dealt with her relation to and inspiration from an old Swedish woman missionary.³⁷ In the late 1980s the missionary Naemi Petersson (Bi Duzhen 毕笃珍, 1912–1997) came to visit Hubei, where she had spent a number of years in the 1930–1940s. Ms. Petersson made a great impression on Ge Baojuan and many others in Wuhan. According to Rev. Ge Baojuan, Ms. Petersson had really given her “two copper coins” and much more, by giving her youth to the mission, and choosing not to marry. Ms. Petersson was in charge of a girl's home in Huangzhou, and the orphaned children became “her children.” Many of them also looked to her as their

35 Interviews and conversations with Ge Baojuan, October 1996 (several occasions); May 2006 (several occasions); June 2, 2014; Ge Baojuan 葛宝娟, “Er shi zhenli, zhenli shi er” 尔识真理、真理释尔, in: *Tianfeng* 1997, No. 6, p. 21; *idem*, “Muzhe de zilü” 牧者的自律, in: *Tianfeng* 2011, No. 3, pp. 52-53; Zhang Shuilian 张水莲, “Funü zai jiaohui jianshe zhong yao fahui geng da zuoyong – ji Hubei sheng jidujiao di si ci funü shigonghui” 妇女在教会建设中要发挥更大作用—记湖北省基督教第四次妇女事工会, in: *Tianfeng* 2005, No. 6, pp. 20-21.

36 *Ibid.*; Ge Baojuan 葛宝娟, “Shi Jidu de ming de rongyao – ji Hubei jiaohui de shehui guanhuai shigong” 使基督的名得荣耀—记湖北教会的社会关怀事工, in: *Tianfeng* 2002, No. 8, pp. 46-47; Hubei Christian Council and TSPM website, www.hubeichurch.com (accessed September 10, 2014).

37 Ge Baojuan 葛宝娟, “Yong wu zhixi de ai” 永无止境的爱 (Ever Unceasing Love), in: *Liang ge xiao qian* 两个小钱 (Two Small Coins), ed. by Zhongnan shenxueyuan xueshenghui 中南神学院学生会, 1993, No 3 (internal publication 内部), pp. 17-19.

“mother.” A number of them kept contact with Ms. Petersson until her death in 1997, and some also visited Sweden several times to meet their “mother.” Several of these orphans continued to work in the spirit of their “mother” and turned out to be strong supporters of the weak and elderly in their neighbourhoods and hometowns. One “daughter” started an old people’s home, first privately, later to be taken over by the Church, showing an inspiration not only to the church but to the whole local community and the authorities. Another “daughter” became a medical doctor, serving her community in that way. Rev. Ge Baojuan was deeply inspired by Ms. Petersson to continue her involvement with orphans, school dropouts and other needy persons in society, and their contact is an example of the legacy of women’s contribution to Church and society in China.³⁸

Many examples here show the contribution of women in a caring role, as is often presumed or taken for granted or “natural” with women, reaffirming their “traditional” role as caretakers in family and society. I believe that we can apply some aspect of the “Lesson of the Widow’s Offering” also here. Caring for the weak and elderly, doing supportive work, cooking and cleaning is, of course, appreciated and supported, but often taken for granted and often expected of women. This goes for all of society and not only the Church, in China as well as in the West. But is not this unseen work as important as preaching and teaching? The “two copper coins” put in by a serving person, man or woman, should be of equal worth compared to sermons delivered at church, or teaching hours given at the seminary. Again we may consider the notion that “women’s agency has been concealed or overlooked, not diminished” (Tietjens Meyers).

In 2012 I had the privilege of visiting the 10th anniversary of the Thanksgiving Church in Wuhan, and then I interviewed three students from the Zhongnan Seminary. They were all intent on becoming pastors, and told how their dreams of university studies and finding good jobs turned into theological studies after they felt their calling. Interestingly, it had not occurred to them that being a woman and a pastor could even be an issue. However, they had been questioned and ridiculed for being Christians, and for choosing the seminary before other higher education, but not on gender grounds. This is an interesting indication that something may be changing. At the occasion, Rev. Ge Baojuan also commented on their choice and the general situation for women in the Church briefly in the following words: “women are part of society, and they are also part of the Church.”³⁹

38 Ge Baojuan, “Yong wu zhixi de ai.”

39 Fredrik Fällman, “Martyrer i Kina” (Martyrs in China), in: *Uppdraget* (The Mission) 2012, No. 1, Equmeniakyrkan (Uniting Church in Sweden), Stockholm, pp. 20-21.