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# The Archives on the History of Christianity in China at Hong Kong Baptist University Library: Its Development, Significance, and Future

*Kylie Chan*

The Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) is a regional pioneer in establishing a valuable archives collection on the history of Christianity in China, with the aim of preserving various facets of the Christian heritage in China.<sup>1</sup>

## Archives on the History of Christianity in China

The Archives on the History of Christianity in China (AHC) collection, consisting mainly of materials in either English or Chinese, covers topics of Chinese Christians, missionaries, church history, and the history of Christianity in China. The archives emphasizes the period before 1950. At the end of 2003, there were 3,084 volumes of monographs (2,078 in English and 1,006 in Chinese), and 31,000 microform items, with thirty linear feet of archival records on the history of Christianity in China.

The archives contains over 200 biographies and memoirs detailing prominent missionaries, such as Hudson Taylor, James Outram Fraser, Karl Ludvig Reichelt, David Abeel, and John Leighton Stuart. The archives contains various valuable and scarce materials, including letters and postcards written by Frederick Webb and 219 lantern slides taken by missionaries of the China Inland Mission. These lantern slides, useful in documenting the social and economic activities of the Chinese from the 1900s to the 1930s, were donated to the HKBU Library by the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton, Illinois.

The library also includes later works. For example, of the 183 titles discussed by Jessie G. Lutz in "Chinese Christianity and China Missions: Works Published Since 1970,"<sup>2</sup> 120 titles are held by the various archives in HKBU.

## Importance of the Archives

One of the growing areas of study in Asia is the history of Christian missions in China. Faculty members of the Department of History and the Department of Religion and Philosophy of HKBU have come to recognize that this is a new source of documentation for the study of East-West relations. Besides bringing religious teaching to China, missionaries played an important role in the transfer of knowledge and values between East and West, helping to cross-fertilize the distinctive cultures of Confucianism and Christianity. Missionaries had a long-term impact on Christian education, the adoption of Western medicine, and social services in China as they established Christian schools, hospitals, orphanages, and publishing houses. Christian missions contributed to leaders' training "in the fields of education and medicine; in the introduction of professions such as journalism, nursing and dentistry, library science, physical education, and agriculture; in the fostering of formal education for women; [and] in the inculcation of ideals of civic responsibility

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*Kylie Chan is Associate Librarian (Technical and Collection Services) of the Hong Kong Baptist University Library in Hong Kong. She has been working in academic libraries for nearly two decades and joined the HKBU Library in 2000.*

and mass education."<sup>3</sup> In addition, women missionaries made important contributions as educators, role models, and social service workers.

Archival materials on Christianity in China help to shed light on the anti-Christian movements in the 1920s that were supported by political parties hoping to raise their political profile. Some recently surfaced publications on the Chinese churches under the People's Republic of China will allow more understanding of official churches, that is, the Catholic Patriotic Association and the Three-Self Movement, as well as of their counterparts among the underground churches.

## Development and Mission of the Archives

Although Christianity first spread into China over 1,300 years ago, formal research on the history of Chinese Christianity did not begin before the 1930s and the 1940s.<sup>4</sup> From 1949 to 1976 missionary activities in China were considered to be associated with Western imperialism. With the open-door policy adopted in China in the late 1970s, studies have been undertaken of the history of cultural exchange between China and other nations and have consequently aroused scholars' interest in researching the history of Christianity in China.

The initial search for archival materials on Christianity in China began sporadically in the early 1960s in North America. In the first decade or two, scholars who wished to study the influence of Christianity in China needed to spend most of their time doing research in Europe or the United States, which was where most primary sources were. Things began to change in 1987, when "a new law was passed in China [that] promised a gradual release of historical archives including [those of] Christian colleges in China. Around the same time, many universities and institutions that were formerly related to Christian colleges in China began to write their own histories."<sup>5</sup>

The study of the history of Christian colleges in China was further encouraged by a conference in 1987 at Sichuan University under a project on Sino-Western universities in Chinese society sponsored by the Henry Luce Foundation.<sup>6</sup> In 1993 an international symposium entitled "Historical Archives of Pre-1949 Christian Higher Education in China" was held in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. It demonstrated to scholars the value of Christian archives in exploring the significance of Christian education in the development of modern education in China, East-West relationships, and East-West cultural exchanges in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This topic of interest was further reinforced locally by three symposia held at HKBU: the International Symposium on the History of Christianity in China (1996), the Second Symposium on the History of Christianity in Modern China (2001), and the Third Symposium on the History of Christianity in Modern China—History of Christianity in Hong Kong (2003).

In 1989 Barton Starr, a Southern Baptist missionary educator with the HKBU Department of History, started his research work on Robert Morrison (1782–1834) and, in the same year, estab-

lished the Morrison Research Center in the department. Besides collecting manuscripts of Robert Morrison, Starr also collected a number of journal issues from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as archival records of different mission boards relevant to the history of Christianity in China.

In 1995, while Starr's collection was increasing, he and Lauren Pfister of the Department of Religion and Philosophy recommended establishing an "Archive for the Study of Christian Missions in China."<sup>7</sup> They sought to (1) make research materials readily available locally in Hong Kong for the increasing number of scholars, researchers, pastors, and seminary students from Asia interested in the study of Christian missions in China, where the history occurred; (2) preserve the records of the multidimensional Christian heritage in Asia for the sake of scholarly research; and (3) enhance the distinctive image of the university. With the approval of HKBU and the support given by the university library, the Archives on the History of Christianity in China (AHC) was officially established in the library building in October 1996. Hong Kong is the ideal location for this archive because of its connection with Protestant missionaries in China. And HKBU is an appropriate place, given its Christian heritage and ethos, as well as the research already being undertaken by its academic personnel.

According to its 1997 mission statement, "The Archives pursues the collection of materials relevant to the study of Christianity in China, regardless of denomination or nationality. These concern Chinese Christians, or missionaries, and will include materials such as biographies, letters, diaries, church histories, and periodicals in English, or Chinese. The Archives has aimed at collecting both primary and secondary source materials, majoring on (but not exclusively) pre-1950."

The University Library and Teaching Development Grant of the University funded the acquisition of materials during the early phase of establishment. The archives concurrently applied for funds and endowments from various foundations and was subsequently awarded a three-year grant of US\$120,000 by the prestigious Henry Luce Foundation in 1997. This grant has affirmed the importance of and need for further research into the history of Christianity in China and can also be seen as a sign of confidence in the establishment of archives in HKBU.

The collection has a focus on the period before 1950, with materials after 1950 being selectively collected. The archives began actively soliciting records of Chinese Christians, Protestant missionary activities, churches, and related institutions in China. The materials collected have been mainly in Chinese and English, with Japanese, Korean, German, French, and other languages also represented.

Major archives acquisitions have included the following in microform:

- *The Archives of the Council for World Mission, 1775–1940* (Zug, Switzerland), incorporating the archives of the London Missionary Society, selected sub-series including Committee Minutes, Candidates Papers, Home, China General, Fukien, South China, North China, and Central China;
- *Bulletin of the East China Christian Educational Association* (Shanghai, China);
- *Church Missionary Society Archive* (Marlborough, England), including selected files in East Asia Missions pertaining to the China Mission (1834–1914), South China Mission (1885–1934 and 1935–51), Western China Mission (1898–1934 and 1935–51), Fukien Mission (1911–34

and 1935–51), and Kwangsi-Hunan Mission (1911–34 and 1935–51), selected files in Missions to Women, and selected files in Central Records;

- *Conference of British Missionary Societies Archives* (Zug, Switzerland), containing area files of China;
- *International Missionary Council Archives, 1910–1961* (Zug, Switzerland), holding selected country files including China and Hong Kong;
- *Presbyterian Church of England Foreign Missions Archives, 1847–1950* (Zug, Switzerland);
- *Religious Education Fellowship Bulletin* (Shanghai, China);
- *Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (London) Archive* (Zug, Switzerland), holding subseries of Home and General, China, Special Series, Women's Work Collection: Minutes, Reports, Correspondence China, and Overseas Schedules.

Generous donations from well-known local researchers on the history of Christianity in Hong Kong, including social activists Rev. Carl T. Smith and Elsie Tu, have further enriched the collections in recent years.

## Some Current Activities and Goals

The collections of the archives are constantly growing. We are gratefully accepting items from Christian charitable organizations. Despite the current level of openness in China, it is often not an easy task to acquire Chinese materials, especially rare or out-of-print books. It has been very time-consuming to identify relevant titles held in the universities and libraries in China. Nevertheless, the AHC has so far managed to obtain microfilm copies of out-of-print Chinese books on the history of Christianity from a few universities in China. In addition, the AHC has

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recently acquired a significant collection of over two hundred rare out-of-print books in English on missions or Christianity in China. They had been in the library of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in London.

Because of the growing demand to access archival materials in full text online, HKBU has developed an AHC Web page (<http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/lib/collections/sca-christian.html>) linked to the library home page and the UNESCO Archives Portal. Useful related links on the study of Christianity, missionaries, and churches, as well as a link to the *Journal of the History of Christianity in Modern China*, published by the Department of History of HKBU, have been established. This journal, published since 1998, is indexed in *Historical Abstracts*; currently its table of contents and abstracts of papers can be viewed online.

*Future acquisitions.* We will continue to develop the AHC collection, adding both English- and Chinese-language materials. The major online bookstores are important places to search for rare books relating to the history of Christianity in China. In addition,

it is possible to find missionary manuscripts, letters, or rare books through stamp auctions or auction sites on the Web.

Many Christian archival materials available in the Western world about Christianity in China are mission oriented, but very few of them are about local churches in China. Archival materials from organizations in China other than university libraries, such as Christian schools, hospitals, and social service institutions, which are commonly neglected, are as important as the conventional university archival materials and will be targets of collection.

The archives is making plans to develop a collection of relevant dissertations and theses, in both English and Chinese, on the history of Christianity in China. Also, the history of all local churches in Hong Kong will be an important area of research.

*Digitization projects.* The archives has been at work on two digitization projects. (In the summer of 2002 the library acquired a system that incorporates special thesauri of Chinese phrases,

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synonyms, and subject headings, which facilitate searching and indexing, with an added capability of URL linkage to the records.) The first project was to digitize the lantern slides held by the AHC, which was accomplished in the summer of 2003. Information regarding the collection of lantern slides, entitled "China Through the Eyes of China Inland Mission Missionaries," can be accessed at <http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/lib/electronic/lantern.html>.

The second project is to digitize a small subset of the library's large holdings of Chinese newspaper clippings covering the period from 1950 to 1976. This project contains more than 1600 clippings pertaining to the development of churches and Christianity in China during this period. These newspaper clippings are major components of the Contemporary China Research Collection, which were purchased from the former Union Research Institute (Hong Kong) in the 1980s and are kept at the Special Collections and Archives in the library. A subset was selected to be digitized because the cost of digitizing all the

newspaper clippings in the collection is prohibitive. The project was completed in June 2004. This "Christianity in Contemporary China Clippings Database" is available at [http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/lib/electronic/christian\\_c.html](http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/lib/electronic/christian_c.html).

*Regional cooperation.* The archives sees the importance of cooperation and of developing projects with other Christian organizations. The university library is an active member of the Hong Kong Archives Society, a local organization of archives and archivists.

As Peter Ng has noted, "There are huge collections of archival materials from Christian colleges in China. The estimate is more than 13,000 volumes."<sup>8</sup> They are widely spread over China, as well as in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and several Western countries, in university libraries and institutions associated with former Christian colleges. Many valuable personal archives that belonged to missionary educators in China can be located in national, provincial, and municipal archives throughout the country. Shanghai Municipal Archives and the Second Historical Archives in Nanjing are the two most dominant. A series of catalogs of Christian university archives in China was published by Ng and others in 1996–98.<sup>9</sup> It is hoped that a network of regional and international scholars, researchers, and archivists can be formed. Every opportunity will be explored to facilitate the exchange of documentation and archival materials between cooperative institutions for the common goal of returning the history to the people of China, for the preservation of memories of our past, so that they can help shape our present and our future.

## Conclusion

By establishing its Archives on the History of Christianity in China, HKBU has become a regional pioneer. Many primary source materials and records of local churches are at risk if appropriate preservation measures are not adopted. The HKBU Archives on the History of Christianity in China recognizes the value of such a collection and has developed a vision of rescuing and preserving the memory.

If we lose our way to the past, we lose our way to the future. Although the challenges and tasks we are facing in the HKBU archives can be daunting, I believe they will only motivate our library staff to remain dedicated and active in maintaining functional archives that will indeed preserve a part of China's living memory.

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## Notes

1. I am grateful to J. Barton Starr, Lauren F. Pfister, Shirley Leung, and Irene Wong for their help in the preparation of this article.
2. Jessie G. Lutz, "Chinese Christianity and China Missions: Works Published Since 1970," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20, no. 3 (1996): 98–106.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
4. Zhang Kaiyuan, "Chinese Perspective—a Brief Review of the Historical Research on Christianity in China," in *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, ed. Stephen Uhalley, Jr., and Xiaoxin Wu (Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 2001).
5. Peter Tze Ming Ng, "Historical Archives of Pre-1949 China Christian Colleges and Recent Development of Research on Education in the People's Republic of China (Abstract)" in *Essays on Historical Archives of Christian Higher Education in China* (in Chinese), ed. Peter Tze Ming Ng (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. Press, 1995), p. 18.

6. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
7. J. Barton Starr and Lauren F. Pfister, "A Proposal for the Senate to Consider Concerning the Establishment of an 'Archive for the Study of Christian Missions in China'" (unpublished proposal addressed to the president and vice-chancellor of the Hong Kong Baptist University, April 5, 1995).
8. Peter Tze Ming Ng, "Historical Archives in Chinese Christian Colleges from Before 1949," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20, no. 3 (1996): 106–8.
9. Peter Tze Ming Ng et al., *Zhongguo jiaohui daxue wenxian mulu* (Catalogs of documents on Christian colleges in China), 5 vols. (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. of Hong Kong, Chung Chi College, 1996–98).