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CHAPTER FOUR: BIBLE-WOMEN

Introduction

The topic of Bible-women (the local female evangelists) has acted as a magnet for the attention of those who study the history of women and Christianity. In the special issue on “Transnational Bible-women” of the *Women’s History Review*, a number of articles pay attention to this subject in the Chinese context.³⁵⁸ R.G. Tiedemann discusses the institution of the Virgins, a group of Chinese Roman Catholic laywomen activists in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. He explores the crucial role of these unmarried laywomen in the expansion of the Chinese church and the preservation of the Christian faith.³⁵⁹ In the same journal, Valerie Griffiths analyses the schooling of Bible-women through the activities of the Baptist and the China Inland Mission women in both North and South China. She demonstrates that Ellen Ranyard’s Bible-women project established in London in 1857 was also appropriated in China.³⁶⁰ Vanessa Wood uses the personal letters of Myfanwy Wood, a woman missionary of the London Missionary Society, to illustrate the role played by Bible-women, mission teachers and YWCA workers in China in the period 1908-1939.³⁶¹ Wood and Griffiths reach similar conclusions: there is a transition “from the evangelism of keen but rudimentarily educated Bible-women to the Christian higher education and professionalization of women converts involved in vital outreach and church growth”.³⁶² They agree that “the significant number of women evangelists in the fast-growing church in China today points to the strength of the Christian female educational and evangelistic legacy first embodied in Chinese Bible-women”.³⁶³ Although these scholars do highlight important aspects of local female agency in the context of the Christian mission in China, the periods on which they have focused are relatively late, mostly the early-twentieth century. Another hindrance is that their research is based mainly on the mission archives and the personal letters of female missionaries, reflecting the missionary perspective.

In this chapter, I shall revisit the topic of Bible-women in the early stages of Christianity in south-east China, by concentrating on the first generation of Bible-women trained by Adela M. Fielde of the ABM from 1873 to 1882,³⁶⁴ supplemented by those trained by Catherine Maria Ricketts of the EPM between 1881 and 1915. Much of it is based on Fielde’s material because she had learned the Chaozhou dialect and lived with these Bible-women. She published several books on the daily lives of

358 Deborah Gaitskell and Wendy Urban-Mead eds, *Transnational Biblewomen: Asian and African Women in Christian Mission*, 2008.

359 Tiedemann, “Controlling the Virgins”, *ibid.*, pp. 501-520.

360 Griffiths, “Biblewomen from London to China: the Transnational Appropriation of a Female Mission Idea”, *ibid.*, pp.521-541.

361 Wood, “The Part played by Chinese Women in the Formation of an Indigenous Church in China: Insights from the Archive of Myfanwy Wood, LMS missionary”, *ibid.*, pp.597-610.

362 *Ibid.*, p.597.

363 Griffiths, “Biblewomen”, p.521.

364 Fielde took a furlough in America in 1883; hence her first stint in Swatow lasted ten years. This can be proved by her words: “These studies (which were collected in her book *Pagoda Shadows*) have been made during a residence of ten years in China.” However, her focus switched to the compilation of a great volume of Swatow dialect dictionary in 1879, this work took her 4 years, from 1879 to 1883. Warren, *Fielde*, p.78.

the local women.³⁶⁵ She also transcribed the autobiographies of sixteen Bible-women from their own dialect into English.³⁶⁶ These autobiographies were published in her book *Pagoda Shadows: Studies from Life in China*, which was so popular in the US and Great Britain it was reprinted several times.³⁶⁷ These autobiographies should be interpreted with caution, a fact which has been pointed out by Lutz in her research on the autobiographies of eight Hakka evangelists: “In most cases we are looking at them through two lenses: the editing of the missionary translator and the retrospective memory of the evangelist.”³⁶⁸ Although in the preface to her book Fielde declares that the autobiographies “...are exact translations of verbal narrations given to the author in the Swatow dialect”,³⁶⁹ even here editing by the translator would have been unavoidable. For instance, Hu says that the word “China”, which appears frequently in these autobiographies, could be a mode of discourse which the Bible-women adopted after receiving Fielde’s training.³⁷⁰ Another possibility is that this was not the original word employed by these illiterate Bible-women, but is instead an example of Fielde’s editing in transcribing the Bible-women’s term for “China” into English. What they used could have been *Tangshan* (唐山)³⁷¹ or some other metaphor. The uncertainties resulting from the translator’s editing can be compensated at least partially by contrasting the information with data from the Chinese archives of the American Baptist Church, using the dictionary of the Chaozhou dialect compiled by Fielde as an indication of how she translated.

Commenting on a lecture on the training of Bible-women Fielde gave at the 1877 Protestant Conference (Shanghai), Griffiths states that, “...the concept of Bible-women reached China before Adele Fielde did, but China is a large country and she was probably the first to organize their systematic training in South China”.³⁷² Many missions in China borrowed this effective evangelistic method from Fielde, among them the EPM, the Church Mission Society, the China Inland Mission, the American Methodist Mission and the American Presbyterian Mission. Curiously, Griffiths does not refer to the chapter in *Pagoda Shadows* in which Fielde discusses her ideas about the training of Bible-women.³⁷³ Hu Weiqing was actually the first to use the autobiographies of Bible-women in Fielde’s book to analyse the conversion experiences of these women and reveal their marginal position in the administration of the Church.³⁷⁴ Lutz and Ling Oi Ki (凌爱基) also quote from these autobiographies in their articles.³⁷⁵

365 Adele Marion Fielde, *Dictionary of Swatow Dialect*, Swatow: 1875; *First Lessons in the Swatow Dialect*, Swatow: Swatow Printing Office, 1878; *Pronouncing and Defining Dictionary of the Swatow Dialect*, Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1883; *Pagoda Shadows*, London: T. Ogilvie Smith, 1887; *Chinese Nights’ Entertainment: Forty Stories Told by Almond-eyed Folk Actors in the Romance of “The Strayed Arrow”*, New York: 1893; *A Corner of Cathay: Studies from Life among the Chinese*, New York, London: Macmillan & Co., 1894. *Chinese Fairy Tales*, New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1912. (re-issue of *Chinese Nights’ Entertainment*)

366 Preface of the fifth edition, written in Boston, September, 1884. Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, 1886.

367 The first edition was published in Boston in 1883, several more editions followed not much later, up to the fifth edition of 1886. In 1887, another edition was published in London.

368 Jessie G. Lutz and Rolland Ray Lutz, *Hakka Chinese Confront Protestant Christianity, 1850-1900*. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1998. p.10.

369 See the prefaces to two editions of *Pagoda Shadows*: the fifth edition (Boston, 1886), and a new edition published in London in 1887.

370 Hu, “The Mode of Misery”, p.301.

371 As shown in the journal of Chen Dui, a Hoklo evangelist who preached in Changzhou island of Hong Kong in May, 1852.

372 Griffiths, “Biblewomen”, p.531.

373 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, “Chapter XVII. Native Female Evangelists”, pp.91-99.

374 Hu & Yao, “Between Sanctity and Secularity”; Hu, “The Mode of Misery”.

On the basis of her research, which included the archives of several Protestant denominations³⁷⁶ in China covering the period of the 1860s to 1911, Ling reconstructs who the Bible-women were, why they were needed, what role they played in the Chinese church in the late Qing period and how they overcame their own limitations.³⁷⁷ However, the vast geographical expanse of her research has prevented her from contextualizing the conversion of the Bible-women in the local societies in which they lived, and from paying full attention to the dynamic interpersonal relationships between male and female Christians at the time. As they are unfamiliar with Chaozhou society, Hu, Lutz and Ling have not been able to contextualize the conversion stories of the sixteen Bible-women satisfactorily against the specific social background of their natal region in the 1860s and 1870s. Nor have they attempted to retrace the original personal names and places of birth from their romanized forms and put these into Chinese characters, thereby verifying their authenticity. This will constitute a crucial part of the evidence which forms the basis of this chapter.³⁷⁸

So far there are four sources which record the names of the Bible-women trained by Fielde. The first is her *Pagoda Shadows*, which includes the autobiographies of sixteen Bible-women (see Appendix A). The second source consists of four photos (see Figures 21-24) in the 1886 edition of *Pagoda Shadows*.³⁷⁹ Figure 21 shows Speed standing on the right, on the feet with which she was born. She is standing on the left or eastern side facing the west (a respectful position in traditional Chinese society) of a seated pupil (an old woman, with bound feet). Figure 22 shows nine Bible-women, with their English names recorded at the bottom. Figure 23 is a portrait of Tolerance and her kin. Figure 24 depicts Treasure and Lily as the pillars of the Church at South Spur. These photos provide the visual images of the protagonists in this chapter.

375 Lutz, "Introduction", pp.13-25. Idem, "Women in Imperial China", pp.29-47. Ling, "Bible women", pp.246-264. All in Lutz ed., *Pioneer*.

376 The American Baptist Mission, the Church Mission Society, the China Inland Mission, the American Methodist Mission, and the American Presbyterian Mission.

377 Including physical, mental and intellectual, and psychological limitations, see Ling, "Bible women", p.247.

378 See Appendix B.

379 See Appendix A. Note that the photos were not included in the London edition of 1887.



Figure 21: Speed, with a pupil



CRESS, MINUTE, LOVE,
HEBS, SILVER FLOWER, REESE-SAGE,
BULDER, ORCHID, TREASURE.

Figure 22: A group of Bible-women



Figure 23: Tolerance and her kin



Figure 24: Treasure and Lily³⁸⁰

380 Lily and Treasure were the main benefactors of the chapel in their village of Nanlong, which was erected in 1880. Both of them were regarded by Fielde as “the pillars of the church at South Spur”. See the autobiographies of Lily and Treasure, attached in the same chapter with the title “the pillars of the church at South Spur”, Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, pp.167-178. Lily and her husband gave seven pounds for the establishment of this chapel, while Treasure gave five and it was attached to Treasure’s house. See *ibid.*, p.177. However, in the official history of the American Baptist churches which was compiled in 1932, there was no trace of the important roles they had

(All from the fifth edition of *Pagoda Shadows*, 1886)

The third source is Fielde's "Annual Letter to Helpers in America" (ca 1882).³⁸¹ In this letter, Fielde mentions eighteen Bible-women whom she employed at that time (column 3). The fourth source is an article on the history of the American Baptist Church in Chaozhou, published in *Lingdong Good News* (1936).³⁸² It records the Chinese names of ten Bible-women.³⁸³

It is hoped that an examination of the autobiographies of these Bible-women will shed light on various matters. The first point is that it yields a refined prosopography which allows me to draw much more nuanced conclusions about the socio-cultural backgrounds of these women and their later career lines. Secondly, it should help to clarify the reasons these women converted, as well as providing more details about their training and professionalization as these are reflected in the careers of Bible-women in the ABM and EPM in Chaozhou. Thirdly, it makes it possible to find out more about their work, efficacy and their impact on wider South Chinese Christianity.

The main source, *Pagoda Shadows*, will be supplemented by a variety of archival and published sources, such as the membership roll of the American Baptist Congregation from 1844-1897,³⁸⁴ two more papers by Fielde published in Records of two General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China in 1877 and 1890, and two biographies of Fielde by Helen Norton Stevens and Leonard Warren which were published in 1918 and 2002 respectively.³⁸⁵ For research about the EPM, the most important sources have been the *Congregational Rolls for Use in the Swatow Mission*,³⁸⁶ the records of the Swatow Women's Missionary Association Council from 1904 to 1915, the biography of Catherine Maria Ricketts, the first EP woman missionary to train Bible-women which she did for twenty-six years (1881-1907), and a special issue of a journal *A Centennial Anniversary of the Yanqiao Congregation* (盐灶堂会百年纪念刊).³⁸⁷

Socio-cultural Backgrounds of the Bible-women in Chaozhou

Understanding the institution of the "Bible-women" in the Protestant missions requires an investigation into why women, in the specific context of the southern Chinese region of Chaozhou were attracted to the work of spreading the Gospel. Only the Baptist mission, which was very active in this field, provides the right sources for reconstructing some of the socio-cultural background of these

played in the Nanlong Chapel. *A Special Issue*, p.12. The history of Christian women is inclined to be neglected by the traditional patriarchal historiography. This is a very important point and also says something about the Western women missionaries and why they "escaped" to China.

381 Stevens, *Memorial Biography*, p.118.

382 *The Good News of Lingdong*.

383 "女传道则有陈雪花、陆快等" (p.3.) and "(1885-1890年)女布道又加李美凤、蔡晶、纺惜、宝容、墟埠(林锦平)、顺梅(吴瑞兰)、荳姆、潘奶等二十余人"(p.7), *ibid.* See also Column 4 in the attachment.

384 In the appendix of *The Good News of Lingdong*.

385 Stevens, *Memorial Biography*, and Warren, *Fielde*.

386 *Congregational Rolls for use in the Swatow Mission*, Swatow: the English Presbyterian Mission Press, 1885.

387 Mann, *Ricketts*.

women. As indicated, the most important among these sources are the autobiographies collected and translated by Adele Fielde; a rich literary source which allows room for a detailed analysis, despite its confessional and sometimes stereotypical character. Not only can the Chinese and English names of these women be reconstructed but it is also possible to piece together their varied backgrounds (see Appendices A&B). This is a rare opportunity, as Ryan Dunch has pointed out that “many of the Chinese women in missionary accounts were obscure individuals who cannot be identified with any certainty from the dialect or paraphrased name in the English texts.”³⁸⁸

The first Bible-woman, Snow (陈雪花), was trained by Lumina Wakker Johnson. Her story has been discussed by Joseph Tse-Hei Lee and Hu Weiqing.³⁸⁹ Fielde recalls the situation she faced on her arrival: “There were then about one hundred female members in our church, and I resolved that I would teach them, and prepare from among them a class of evangelists who should go out and labor in the villages. Only two of the whole number of female members could read [probably Xu Yuefeng and Chen Xuehua].” She set out with “five old, wrinkled, ignorant women”, who must have been Long (aged 41), Siu Kein (49), Silver Flower (44), Aunt Luck (in her mid-50s) and Keepsake (41). Although the literacy of these female converts was far from satisfactory, Fielde decided to make the best of it.³⁹⁰

After having spent several years training the Bible-women, Fielde reported that she had personally trained about fifty women, of whom about one-third were capable of training others.³⁹¹ Most likely, the sixteen Bible-women recorded in *Pagoda Shadows* were these capable ones. Some years later, Fielde said: “Of a hundred women admitted to my own training-school at Swatow during ten years (1873-1882), about one-third became capable of aptly instructing others.”³⁹² In 1882 and thereafter, Fielde’s supervision of the Bible-women had to be taken over by other woman missionaries because her participation in translating the Bible into the Chaozhou dialect and the compilation of a Swatow dialect dictionary absorbed most of her time.³⁹³

Looking at the list (Appendix A) of almost thirty³⁹⁴ Bible-women, some interesting patterns emerge. First of all the wide variety of regions from which they came. In the late Qing period, the mobility of women was restricted by social custom and by the fact that the Hoklo women had bound feet. The wide regional spread implies that the Gospel must have been transmitted into the various

388 Dunch, “Mothers to Our Country”, p.326.

389 See Lee, *The Bible and the Gun*, p.80, and Hu, “The Mode of Misery”, pp.297-298.

390 Here is what Fielde said: “The women may be old, blind, bound-footed, degraded, stupid, yet if god had stamped them as His, if they show by their lives that they have been called by Him into His church, then take what He has given you and make the best of them, and He will afterward furnish you with better.” Fielde, “The training and work of native female evangelists”, *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China*, 1877, p.156.

391 Fielde, BMM, 1884, p.144. See Warren, *Fielde*, p.66.

392 Fielde, “Native Female Evangelists”, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.95.

393 The training of Bible women was supervised mainly by Mary Thompson (谭马利亚姑娘) and later, assisted by Sophia A. Norwood (娜姑娘). The former came to Swatow in 1876, the latter in 1877. They were joined by Henrietta Partridge (巴师奶) in 1880. In 1882 and thereafter, Fielde was detached to the American Presbyterian Mission Press in Shanghai, focusing on the proofreading of her voluminous dictionary—*Pronouncing and Defining Dictionary of the Swatow Dialect*, which was published in 1883. During Fielde’s absence, M. A. Buzzell (文姑娘) and Clara Hess (夏女士, 何约翰夫人) came successively to assist the training of Bible-women at the end of 1884 and of 1886. Unfortunately, Partridge died in 1887, her work was taken over by Linda Scott Ashmore (耶琳师奶).

394 Sixteen Bible-women with autobiographies in *Pagoda Shadows*; the stories of two Bible-women, Snow and Siu Kein, were mentioned respectively by Joseph Tse-Hei Lee and Ling Oi Ki. See Lee, *The Bible and the Gun*, p.80; Ling, “Bible Women”, pp.246-247. The names of the other 12 are mentioned by Fielde, but their life stories were not known.

home villages of these women; some of which were located in the littoral areas; some in the hinterland of the Chaozhou region.³⁹⁵ No Bible-women came from the north-eastern part of the Chaozhou region until 1883, when Li Meifeng (李美凤) from Kanxia in Chao'an district (潮安坎下) joined their number. The absence of Bible-women from the American Baptist Church in this region before 1884 is explained by the fact that Chenghai-Raoping district border region in the north-east was mainly occupied by the EPM, which had its stronghold in Yanzaio; not wishing to poach, the ABM had very few stations there.

The second interesting pattern is that most of the Hoklo Bible-women were widows or grass widows, a point most scholars have already picked up on.³⁹⁶ On account of the tradition of migration in the Chaozhou region, a grass widow was a woman whose husband was abroad for long period (a tradition which continued up to the mid-twentieth century) and this type of family was categorized as a "sojourner family" (华侨家庭), hence a grass widow was called a *Qiaojuan* (侨眷, partner of a sojourner). Among the various reasons for husbands or sons to go abroad, the most important was to earn money. They pursued this quest in Siam (暹罗), Singapore (实叻) and Batavia (噶喇吧, the colloquial for *kelapa*),³⁹⁷ the traditional destinations, or in Deli (日里), a new destination where the Sino-Dutch coolie trade in the 1880s offered plenty of job opportunities. Keepsake's husband, for example, went to Siam with a cargo of goods when she was thirty-four years old. Once there, he became addicted to smoking opium, lost money rapidly and never returned. Keepsake diligently made offerings to the gods, beseeching them to bring her husband back. When her son was eighteen years old, he also went to Siam to search for his father, hoping to induce him to give up opium.³⁹⁸ Similarly, Silver Flower's second and third sons went to Singapore to earn a living. The elder died soon after his arrival and she did not hear from the younger for years.³⁹⁹ Another reason the young male Hoklo left for South-East Asia was to avoid the official punishments meted out in the wake of General Fang Yao's (方耀) pacification campaign in the 1870s. Tapestry's (see Figure 27) husband had been supplying the combatants in clan feuds with powder and shot. He was chosen by his neighbours [why is not known] to be the scapegoat and receive the punishment, which was assigned by this ruthless general to be dealt out to someone in their village. Because he had no money to pay his ransom, he fled to Singapore to avoid the punishment; an exile which lasted for twelve years.⁴⁰⁰ In 1869, General Fang killed Wu Agan

395 Snow, Speed and Keepsake all came from Zhanglin in Chenghai district (澄海樟林), which was located in the estuary of the Han River; Long (Guangtou, Puning district, 普宁光头), Herb (Xunmei, Chaoyang district, 潮阳巡梅), and Cress (Guiyu, Chaoyang district, 潮阳贵屿) came from Lian River Zone; Tolerance (Qiaotou, Chaoyang district, 潮阳桥头), Aunt Luck, Lily and Treasure (Nanlong, Jieyang district, 揭阳南陇), Silver Flower and Love (Kanxia, Jieyang district, 揭阳坎下), Tapestry (Xubu, Jieyang district, 揭阳墟埠) came from the lower Rong River Zone; Gold Getter (Xichang, Jieyang district, 揭阳锡场), Orchid, Minute and Innocence (Baita, Jieyang district, 揭阳白塔) came from the upper Rong River Zone. There are three villages from which at least three Bible-women came: they are Zhanglin in Chenghai district (澄海樟林: Snow, Speed, Keepsake); Nanlong in Jieyang district (揭阳南陇: Aunt Luck, Lily and Treasure), Baita in western Jieyang district (揭阳白塔: Orchid, Minute and Innocent). Kangxia in eastern Jieyang district produced two Bible-women (揭阳坎下: Silver Flower, Fragrant Love). These four stations covered most part of this region.

396 Ling, "Bible women", p.247; Griffiths, "Biblewomen", p.531; Wood, "The Part", p.599.

397 It dated from the period when it was called "Sunda Kelapa". "Kelapa" means coconut in Malay.

398 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.121.

399 Ibid., p.185.

400 Ibid., p.141.

(吴阿干), who had come back to Jieyang after fifteen years exile in South-East Asia, by “offering his liver to the spirits of Wang Jiechun (王皆春) and Zheng Yingjie (郑英杰)”—the first was the former magistrate of Jieyang district; the latter the former company officer (把总)—who had both been murdered by Wu Agan in 1856.⁴⁰¹ General Fang’s cruelty drove many “criminals” into exile abroad. Other reasons had more to do with family matters: Po U(黄宝有), Tolerance’s youngest brother and also a Christian, fled to South-East Asia in order to escape a disastrous marriage. Out of charity, his family had found a mad girl for him and, hoping to cure her, had married her to Po U.⁴⁰² When he saw how insane his “wife” was, he fled.⁴⁰³ Love’s husband, a gambler, stole away secretly to Singapore in order to evade his creditors to whom he owed twelve pounds.⁴⁰⁴ Gold Getter’s husband was injured in a fight in their own clan⁴⁰⁵ and, on consulting a spirit-medium in the hope of curing his wounds, he was told that he would never recover unless he went abroad. Gold Getter never heard from him again.⁴⁰⁶

The status of a widow or grass-widow could be very different depending on all kinds of factors. A woman who became a widow in her youth (in her twenties or even younger) was always considered “unfortunate”. The situation was not the case if her husband died when she was in her forties or older, because this was consider a “normal” age. In the late Qing period, because of the poor living conditions and social unrest caused by uprisings against the central government and the internecine clan struggles, the life of a man was relatively short compared to that of a woman. A grass widow would not necessarily be considered unfortunate. Her relatives and neighbours would even talk about her in admiring tones, if she received news and regular remittances or even perhaps some exotic articles from her husband abroad. Ricketts tells of a woman who received a letter from her son abroad, enclosing three silver dollars. Someone told her that “You are a rich woman today.” She laughed and said, “The letter alone would have made me a rich woman.”⁴⁰⁷ Similar scenes could be expected when a wife received news and remittances from her husband overseas. However, if for years no news came from an absent husband, the grass widow could also become an object of pity and be taken advantage of by the people around her. Whatever the differences might have been, widows and grass-widows belonged to the most vulnerable social group of the time. This vulnerability was reflected in the saying:

401 Anonymous, “Qing Daoguang Xianfeng Tongzhi nianjian jieyang shehui dongluan qingkuang” 《清道光咸丰同治年间揭阳社会动乱情况》 [Social Uprisings in Jieyang in the late Qing, during the Reigns of Emperors Daoguang, Xianfeng, Tongzhi], *Jieyang wenshi*《揭阳文史》, Vol. 1, 1995, p.42, p.45.

402 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.165.

403 Ibid., p.166.

404 Ibid., p.130.

405 Chaozhou was a hotbed of bloody clan struggles. A fact which has been pointed out by Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, see *The Bik*, pp.10-13. It is also attested to in the following Chinese sources: “道光、咸丰年间，揭阳人民在武装起义和抗租抗粮抗官的同时，地方宗派械斗成风，给人民带来巨大灾祸。据《揭阳县续志》载，“古溪陈姓三十余村，械斗成风”，“渔湖都咸丰间械斗成风，动辄仇杀”，“地美都有狠斗之风”，“官溪都有争斗”、“蓝田都于道咸间械斗成风”，“梅岗乡俗多械斗”，“磐溪都道光间习为械斗”。械斗之为害，丁日昌在《善堂序》中有如下概述：“嘉道间始染械斗之习，视人命如草芥，蜂屯蚁杂，撞搪呼号，合郡约计每日夷伤至数十百人，因而田畴废，学校毁，既失其所以为养，更失其所以为教，风俗之弊，于斯为甚。” See Anonymous, “Social Uprisings in Jieyang”, p.42.

406 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, 114.

407 Mann, *Ricketts*, p.31.

“Even with a husband for one day, a woman has a-thousand-days of honour” (一日有夫千日贵).⁴⁰⁸

A third pattern which can be extracted from these autobiographies is the crucial importance of men, either male evangelists or male kinsman, to women’s conversions. In the initial stages of the missions, male evangelists were the main force in bringing the Gospel. Some of the women had been converted by the first group of male evangelists, Chen Dui (陈兑), Chen Sun (陈孙), Li Yuan (李员) and Hu De (胡得), who accompanied John and Lumina Johnson to Swatow in 1860. They were sent by John Johnson to preach in their respective hometowns: Chen Sun was in charge of the coastal area of Chenghai, Li Yuan and Hu De preached in Chaoyang district and Chen Dui in Puning district. Chapels were founded in Dahao (达濠) and Guangnan (光南)—the hometowns of Li Yuan and Chen Dui respectively—in 1870, and two years later, another chapel was built in Zhanglin—an ancient port and market town near Chen Sun’s hometown in Nanyang (南洋) village in the Chenghai district.

In the initial stages, the majority of the male preachers came from Zhanglin (Lu Caiqi, 陆财气), and the market town of Dahao (Yao Long, 姚龙).⁴⁰⁹ Speed’s father, Lu Caiqi, not only brought his family into the church, but also his neighbours, Snow and her son, Huang Baoshan (黄宝山, Po San), who later worked as Bible-woman and an evangelist.⁴¹⁰ Keepsake also came from Zhanglin. She later worked as Bible-woman in Nanlong (南陇) in the lower Rong River Zone. Yao Long was Aunt Luck’s nephew. He was converted by Li Yuan at the age of eighteen in 1861. He was beaten by his family for worshipping God, which caused him to break with them and go to join his relative Aunt Luck in Puning district.⁴¹¹ Mai Hong’an(麦鸿安),⁴¹² a male preacher from Xiazhai (下寨) in Raoping district, founded a chapel in Guiyu (贵屿) in the Lian River Zone and was the person who brought Cress into the church. It was under the joint influence of Cress and Mai Hong-An that Tolerance and her brother, Po Heng (孙宝兴),⁴¹³ became active evangelists. Living in the lower Rong River Zone, Silver Flower initially heard about the doctrine of Christianity from Hu De (胡得).

As Ling Oi Ki has written, “Most of the early Bible-women...became Christians because of the persuasion of their husbands, children, kinsmen, or friends.”⁴¹⁴ This assertion is confirmed by the autobiographies of the Bible-women. These mention numerous male relatives who brought the Gospel to the females: fathers, husbands, brothers, uncles, nephews and other more distant male kinsfolk. In Speed’s case, it was her father, Lu Caiqi (陆财气), who was regarded by Fielde as one of the best preachers the Chinese church had possessed.⁴¹⁵ Long’s husband, Yao Zong (姚宗), was the first to go to the chapel on Sundays and Long later joined him. One day her husband told her that he was going to

408 “丈夫系还在，妇女就有面。俗话讲，一日有夫千日贵。丈夫系唔在，妇女就好唔方便。” Wan Enhong 万恩鸿, 旧约女人有乜嘅好样俾今下嘅女人学 [What virtuous models of the women in the Old Testament that can be learnt by the women nowadays] (short for “Virtuous models”), *Niutu jing*《女徒镜》[The Mirror for the Female Christians], 巴色会藏板 [The Basel Mission Press], 1916.

409 Membership Roll of the ABM, appendix of *The Good News for Lingdong*.

410 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.111.

411 Joseph Tse-Hei Lee also mentioned Yao Long’s story in his research. Lee, *The Bible and the Gun*, pp.82-83.

412 Membership Roll of the ABM, appendix of *The Good News for Lingdong*.

413 When Anna Kay Scott came in March 14, 1891, Po Heng was still a earnest and enthusiastic preacher in Jieyang chapel. Anna Kay Scott, *An Autobiography of Anna Kay Scott, M. D.*, Chicago: 1917. p.148.

414 Ling, “Bible women”, p.247.

415 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.108.

be baptized. Because she did not want to be left behind if her husband was going to Heaven, Long came with him and they were both baptized on the same day in 1868.⁴¹⁶ Keepsake heard the Gospel from her youngest brother. She recalled that, to try to make her believe, her brother would explain Christian doctrines to her until the perspiration poured down his cheeks.⁴¹⁷ Minute heard about the Gospel from her uncle⁴¹⁸ and Aunt Luck and Cress from their nephews.⁴¹⁹

Although male evangelists were the main force in evangelism, female assistants were needed. Ling Oi Ki and Ryan Dunch attribute the demand for Bible-women to the influx of single missionary ladies in the 1870s and 1880s. Their arrival boosted the expansion of woman's work in China. While there is some truth in this assertion, as early as 1852 Chen Dui had asked his wife for help to reach women in the private sphere. Lumina Johnson had already employed Bible-women in the early 1860s, for the simple reason that female evangelists were essential to spread the Gospel in a sex-segregated society. For instance, when Chen Dui preached in the public sphere on Changzhou Island near Hong Kong in 1852, he could only reach men's ears. To reach the private sphere, he would ask his wife for help.⁴²⁰ Fielde states that the work of the female evangelist was indispensable: "Firstly, it enables us to reach a large number of people with a very small outlay of money; Secondly, it enables us to use effectively the very first fruits of our missionary labour, without being compelled to wait for a highly educated class to be raised up. By this plan all available native talent can at once be utilized in the service of the church, and can be increased as rapidly as the church increases; Thirdly, this was the Saviour's own method of evangelization. Carefully chosen, faithfully superintended, His disciples, even when they are but weak Chinese women, may go out at His behest, and teach, and come back saying, 'Even the devils are subject unto us.'"⁴²¹ Ling raises another important point, namely the fact that the Bible-woman had a command of the language or dialect and was familiar with the ethos, life and the mode of thought of her fellow sisters. Therefore, she could present the Christian truth in a more forceful manner than any foreigner ever could. Very importantly, as Ling says, she could go to places where access to foreigners was denied and anti-missionary sentiment was rife. Finally, by mobilizing the Bible-women's own lineage networks or connections missionaries could reach the rural villages, and this opportunity allowed them to cover large swathes of ground.⁴²²

Reasons for Conversion

The question why Chinese women converted to Christianity is a fascinating one. Jane Hunter looks at it in terms of "imperial evangelism", emphasizing the power differential between missionaries and

416 Ibid., p.150.

417 However, it was not until thirty years later that Keepsake embraced the Gospel wholeheartedly. Ibid., p.120.

418 Ibid., p.147.

419 Ibid., p.106, p.157.

420 "命妻出街请妇人明日来拜神", See the 25th of the fourth month, 1852, Chen Dui's Journal. "礼拜堂前, 一妇人来讨眼药。命妻出街, 请妇人明日赴礼拜", the 9th of the fifth month, 1852, *ibid*.

421 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.99.

422 Ling, "Bible women", p.251.

Chinese women. She cites the psychological domination of Chinese women by missionaries, making them dependent and arousing feelings of gratitude rather than religious conviction as the main reasons for Chinese women to adopt Christianity.⁴²³ Her opinion is criticized by Ryan Dunch, who argues that she “generalizes the Christian religious experience of Chinese women as coerced and therefore inauthentic”.⁴²⁴ Dunch suggests that the foremost reason was that women were dissatisfied with their place in the family system and were trying to escape unwanted marriages. Secondly, they hoped for education, leading to independent careers. Thirdly, they were often supported in their decision by male kinsmen.⁴²⁵ It seems to me that the first two reasons for conversion only began to make sense in the early-twentieth century when the Christian idea of equality in marriage gained the upper hand and Christian educational institutes were being increasingly well organized throughout China. Although it has been shown that some Bible-women were converted because of persuasion by their husbands, I believe that both Dunch and Ling Oi Ki, put too much emphasis on male influence on female conversion.⁴²⁶ This is an appropriate moment to see whether the autobiographies of the Bible-women, as recorded by Fielde, might possibly shed more light on this question.

Ling indicates that the first generation of Chinese Christian women “had faced tragedies in their lives”.⁴²⁷ This is affirmed by Ricketts of the EPM. In her diary she records the following question asked by a young Chinese woman: “Why is it that the Gospel came so late to our village, so late that one of my sons died and my husband died without the knowledge of Jesus, the Saviour?”⁴²⁸ I tend to agree that suffering rather than poverty was the main stimulus which moved women to convert, although not ruling out that poverty could also have been the source of their sufferings and their personal tragedies. The Bible-women trained by Fielde were drawn from various social strata, although those from lower strata were in the majority.⁴²⁹ Aunt Luck’s father was a shopkeeper and she was the youngest of seven children in the family.⁴³⁰ Long’s father made salt from sea-water and her brothers tilled their land.⁴³¹ These were not the worst jobs and only Tolerance came from what must have been a really poverty-stricken family. According to her story, her father worked in the fields and her mother, Lotus, spun and wove. Despite their toil, the income they made could not fill the eight mouths in her family. Being the eldest child in the family, Tolerance used to go out begging with her mother. In order to find more means of support for the family, her mother, Lotus, later worked as a spirit-medium⁴³² in

423 Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, p.177.

424 Dunch, “Mothers to Our Country”.

425 Ibid., p.341.

426 Ling, “Bible women”, p.247.

427 Ibid.

428 Mann, *Ricketts*, “Part of a last appeal to the home church”, p.60.

429 Ryan Dunch points out that the Chinese women who joined the Protestant churches were predominantly from low to middling social backgrounds until around the turn of the twentieth century. See Dunch, “Mothers to Our Country”, p.332.

430 Her hometown was in Xitou (Koi Tau, 溪头) in Jieyang district, now called Meilin in Puning district (普宁梅林), near the town Xinheng in the eastern Jieyang district. Aunt Luck, see Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.104.

431 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.149.

432 According to Jessie Lutz, “As population pressures intensified, political disorder became endemic, and the disruptive influence of imperialism spread during the nineteenth century, the numbers of marginal and disaffected people multiplied. . . . other outlets for women, not always desirable or socially respectable, existed. Shamans, mediums, and fortune tellers were often female. It is difficult to generalize about their backgrounds, as blindness was associated with clairvoyance. Often they lived on the fringes of society.” See Lutz, “Women in Imperial China”, pp.41-42.

a temple in their village of Qiaotou (桥头). At the other end of the scale, Lily came from a wealthy and respected family because her grandfather was a squire/land owner (爷) and her father was known as the young squire (少爷). She was accustomed to being waited on. She also married into a rich and powerful family in South Spur, where she waited on her husband's parents and his grandmother, offering them tea and whatever else they needed kneeling, which was the custom in the families of the higher social strata.⁴³³ Her misfortune was that she could not bear a child.⁴³⁴

Nearly all of these Bible-women had experienced failed marriages in their youths. Most of them had had been married more than once; Silver Follower and Innocent had even married three times. Because of the emphasis of Confucian ethics that “a woman should marry only one man in her life” (从一而终), chastity was considered to be the most important virtue for a woman. With their failed marriages and the gossip these had stirred up, their misery was understandable. Take Silver Flower's marriages: her first husband was very cruel to her, even took a knife to bed with him and declared that he would kill her if he felt the desire to do so during the night. In order to prevent a tragedy, her mother-in-law resolved to marry her off to someone else. Unfortunately, her second husband was a gambler, as were the husbands of Tolerance, Long and Innocent.⁴³⁵ The family of Silver Flower was so poor her gambler husband planned to marry her off again, even after she had given birth to two boys and one girl. He even gambled away the money he had received for selling Silver Flower. Silver Flower's third husband was neither a gambler nor an opium smoker. He was good-tempered and very industrious in tilling the fields but, when they had more children, they were too poor to feed all of them. The situation grew even worse when her husband died several years later from an illness.⁴³⁶ Silver Flower told Fielde that “I did not myself get well until you called me to come here and learn to read three years ago. ... I am now fifty-one. God is good to me, and if I have health, so that [if] I can go on doing His work till the end of my life, I shall be wholly content.”⁴³⁷

Innocent's situation was even more atrocious than that of Silver Flower. Her first husband was shot dead in a clan feud. Seven months later her first son was born. Her mother-in-law wanted more sons and adopted a man to fill her late son's place without consulting Innocent, which made her very angry. During the month this man lived with them, he gambled, lost money, borrowed more on the pretext of going into business and finally ran away. After he left, Innocent gave birth to his son.⁴³⁸ Innocent's third husband was a hard-working farmer. She gave birth to two more sons and one daughter, but her husband fell ill and died very soon after the onset of his illness. Only Speed, Lily and Herb had happy marriages. Their husbands were also Christians.

433 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.169.

434 Ibid., p.171.

435 Tolerance married him at the age of eighteen, but her husband gambled and ruined his family. Tolerance soon went back to her natal family and never returned (p.162). The family Long married into when she was sixteen had land and houses, but her husband and his brothers gambled and lost large amounts of money. Long stayed with this husband only one year and then the latter went to foreign parts with his gambling brother and died there afterwards (p.149). Innocent's second husband was also a gambler (p.144). Love's husband was initially a man of good conduct, but he suddenly took to gambling and was addicted to it for six years (p.129). All in *Pagoda Shadows*.

436 Ibid., p.181.

437 Ibid., p.190.

438 Ibid., p.145.

As was said above, Keepsake's husband left for Siam and never returned. Her son also went to Siam in search of his father, hoping to induce him to give up opium.⁴³⁹ Sadly he died shortly afterwards in a shipwreck on the voyage from Hong Kong to Siam. After suffering all these tragedies, Keepsake said: "I have nothing now to rest my heart upon but the hope of heaven. I have been deeply troubled; but without the trouble I should not have been saved. I am strong, and have perhaps many years to live; and if I can but lead many to believe in the Lord, that will be joy enough for me here."⁴⁴⁰

Cress suffered so much from the abuse of her mother-in-law that she twice planned to commit suicide.⁴⁴¹ She told Fielde: "I thank the Lord for making me so happy. During all my youth, my heart was hopeless and my mind was benighted; but now, when I am old, the Lord has shined upon me, and my path is bright."⁴⁴² Ricketts recorded "a dear old sister with the light of God on her happy old face. She is a living, breathing epistle, and told us how happy she was with so rich a Father and such a strong elder Brother; and how she was never lonely and so happy looking for her home beyond."⁴⁴³ Both confessions are very typical of the standard conversionist narrative. The relationship between the tragic experiences of these women and their conversion can be summed up in Ricketts' words: "Happiness it has been well said, 'is a great love and much service'—there is scope for both in China." "The women have met with so little love in life that it is a new and powerful influence; once introduced among them, it has the great charm of rarity, and wins their esteem and confidence."⁴⁴⁴ The first generation of adult women converted because they were convinced that the new belief could mitigate their mental anguish, caused by their failed marriage and could offer them the promise of a happier life. Some young widows or grass widows might have converted because they hoped to make better marriages in the Christian community, a reason suggested by Dunch. Both Dunch and Ling claim that male relatives played a significant role in women's conversions. However, male authority was a double-edge sword: it did achieve women's conversion, but it could also bar women from conversion. Silver Flower tried to convert her sister, but the latter's husband said that he would kill his wife if she went to the chapel and Silver Flower's sister dared not go.⁴⁴⁵ Similar cases occurred in the English Presbyterian Church. Ricketts records that a woman "was beaten by her husband, and her relations came to the church door to revile her."⁴⁴⁶ Keepsake's son was very upset when he found out that his mother wanted to be a Christian and he opposed her decision.⁴⁴⁷ In another case, "a woman was lamed for life by blows from her own son."⁴⁴⁸ Treasure was beaten by her brother-in-law and driven out of her house and village when she refused his request to relinquish the new religion and remain at home.⁴⁴⁹

439 Ibid., p.121.

440 Ibid., p.123.

441 Ibid., pp.155-156.

442 Ibid., p.159.

443 Mann, *Ricketts*, p.31.

444 Ibid., "Part of a last appeal to the home church", p.60.

445 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.189. Throughout *Pagoda Shadows*, Adele Fielde used "foreign parts" several times to transcribe "番畔", a specific word in Chaoshou dialect referring to the South-East Asia.

446 Mann, *Ricketts*, p.47.

447 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.121.

448 Mann, *Ricketts*, p.47.

449 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.177.

Often, when women decided to join the Church, their male relatives who were working in the South-East Asia would stop sending them remittances. Silver Flower's third son was earning a living in Singapore. He ceased to write or send her money as soon as he heard that his mother had become a Christian.⁴⁵⁰ Similarly, the husband of Silver Flower's sister in South-East Asia heard that his wife went to church constantly after he left and he ceased to send money to support her and her children.⁴⁵¹ Innocent likewise had a dispute about money with her male relatives abroad. Usually her brother-in-law sent her—a widow with a son—five pounds to keep up the worship of their common ancestors. When he heard Innocent had become a Christian and was not allowed to venerate the ancestors, her money dried up.⁴⁵² Yet the absence of male householders also freed women from the men's control and allowed them to make their own decision about whether to convert or not. The relationship between the absence of male kinsman and the speedy conversion of a woman is obvious in the conversion of Silver Flower's sister and that of Keepsake. The former converted as soon as her husband left for South-East Asia; the latter after her son went to Siam.⁴⁵³ Although a mother might have to confront the opposition of her mature children, she could choose to ignore it, for the hierarchical relationship of "elder—younger" surpassed that of "male—female". For instance, when Aunt Luck's sons saw she had taken the soul tablets of the ancestors out of the house, they asked her if she had not been afraid to do so. When she told them: "What I had myself set up I could take down myself", they said no more.⁴⁵⁴ The elderly female converts could even continue to exercise "as much influence over the conversion of the children as the family patriarchs", as Joseph Tse-Hei Lee has argued.⁴⁵⁵ Children's approval also facilitated a mother's conversion. Treasure's autobiography reveals that her son supported her in her decision, making it easier for her to convert.⁴⁵⁶

By now it has emerged that it would be fair to say that women in Chaozhou converted because they expected Christianity to mitigate their mental sufferings and promise them a happier life. These were certainly two of the important reasons for their conversions, but this does not rule out all kinds of other reasons which perhaps are not stated explicitly in the biographies.

The next question is what preconditions were required to be a Bible-woman. In the late Qing period, with the exception of prostitutes, young women were not allowed to go out freely. Therefore, most of the women recorded in the autobiographies were in their forties or fifties. This was the standard age for Bible-women, because in late Imperial China, middle-aged and older women were freed from domestic duties and were often allowed to maintain an active social life in the public sphere.⁴⁵⁷ The youngest among these Bible-women was Speed, who was less than thirty years old when

450 Ibid., p.185.

451 Ibid., p.189.

452 Ibid., p.147.

453 Ibid., p.121.

454 Ibid., p.106.

455 Lee, *The Bible and the Gun*, p.81.

456 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.175.

457 The Chaozhou region always remained a hotbed of violence until the 1990s. The safety of free travel by senior women was guaranteed by the military campaign of General Fang Yao (方耀), launched in the early 1870s, which cleared up the "bandits" who had

she received Fielde's training.⁴⁵⁸ Fielde has recorded that such an age was too young for her to have done village work as a Bible-woman,⁴⁵⁹ and therefore, as did Lin Phoebe of EP church, in the beginning Speed worked as teacher of the Bible-women. By the onset of old age, usually these women were widows or grass widows. Fielde reported to the 1877 Shanghai Protestant Conference that she preferred to extend an invitation to her training course to women who were free from domestic cares, and who attended class with their husbands' consent or were widows.⁴⁶⁰ The inevitable conclusion is that elderly women had the opportunity to choose this life, so consequently a later age was the precondition for being Bible-women. Even though these Bible-women did not reveal their reasons for attending the training, their choice might have been attributable to the following reasons: they needed money, support and/or companionship.

Fielde attached great importance to what she describes as the competence of the future Bible-woman. Importantly, she should "have that style of speech and character which the Chinese themselves consider worthy of imitation."⁴⁶¹ It was not an easy task to find women with this competence. Even when the allowance given for food was so low as not to tempt the most needy to enter the class for the sake of sustenance, there were still "some, who thought the school house pleasanter than their own houses, or who had domestic troubles that they wished to get away from, or who hoped that their absence from home might bring a obdurate mother-in-law to terms, came as applicants for admission to the school."⁴⁶² Even when good care was taken in the selection of the women to be trained, Fielde found half of them to be unfit for the work for reasons of "physical weakness, or bad temper, or duplicity, or an inability to deliver the gospel message plainly".⁴⁶³

Some statistics might help to give some idea of the strict screening procedure for the Bible-women. Fielde wrote "of a hundred women admitted to my own training school at Swatow during ten years, about one-third became capable of aptly instructing others."⁴⁶⁴ This strict screening procedure was copied by the later missionaries. In 1894, Anna Kay Scott reported: "The Woman's class has been in operation twenty years...212 women have received instruction. Of this number, 175 have been baptized; 53 have served as Bible-women and three others have been employed as teachers in mission work."⁴⁶⁵ The percentage of Bible-women among those attending the training courses in Scott's time was even lower than the earlier period when Miss Fielde was in charge, it had been reduced from 33 to 25 per cent. Therefore, the Bible-women who were supervised by Fielde were outstanding among the local Christian women. They served as catechists and were taken by the non-Christians as typical

joined the Taiping Uprising and brought the bloody clan feuds to an end. Lee, *The Bible and the Gun*, "Chaozhou as a hotbed of violence", pp.10-11, p.83.

458 Speed was baptized at the age of sixteen. She had inherited "a rare aptness to teach" from her father, Lu Caiqi, who was "one of the best preachers", commented Fielde. Her mother, Tang Feng (唐凤), was also a capable helper when the ABM began its work on the Double Island near Swatow in the 1860s.

459 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.108.

460 Fielde, "The training", p.156.

461 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.95.

462 Ibid.

463 Ibid.

464 Ibid.

465 Ashmore, *The South China Mission*, p.93.

examples of a Christian education. It is therefore of the utmost importance that they should be “tolerably true exponents of Christian principles and modes of life.”⁴⁶⁶

Training

In Fielde’s system, the training for Bible-women was a long process. She invited some widows and grass widows to leave their homes and come to lodge in her house for a two-month period to learn to read. This gave her a greater opportunity to study the characters and test the abilities of the trainees. At the end of two months, those who were considered to be unsuited to the task were sent home. Those who thought competent could continue their training as professional Bible-women. In this section, I shall attempt to probe what professional skills and new ideas in terms of personal hygiene, foot-binding, infanticide, suicide and marriage the Bible-women learned from their Western teacher.

Although girls were unwelcome in the late Qing Dynasty, these Bible-women had been lucky enough to survive because they had not been the “extra girls” in their families.⁴⁶⁷ Most of them had not received any education. Although there were two scholars in her family, even Keepsake was never taught to read.⁴⁶⁸ Long’s brothers taught her some characters, but as soon as she began really to master how to read, they stopped teaching her, saying that it was not good for women to be too learned.⁴⁶⁹ In Keepsake’s words, “Girls are not taught to read unless they are the only child, in that case their fathers may teach them for pleasure.”⁴⁷⁰ Only Speed learned to read in a Christian school since she came from a Christian family.⁴⁷¹

Fielde applied an effective method to train these illiterate Bible-women to read. At first, some easy tale, such as one of Aesop’s fables,⁴⁷² was taught to the student orally to train her in the art of speaking clearly and to the point. The efficacy was obvious, for Fielde noted that within a few days, a Chinese woman usually could learn to stand on her feet and tell a short story with its salient points in a resonant voice.⁴⁷³ Much of Fielde’s teaching was purely oral and “an effort is made to have it such as the pupil may well imitate in her future work. The women are called upon to give original illustrations and to make parables out of familiar circumstances.”⁴⁷⁴ It should be pointed out here that in the Chinese traditional pedagogy, learning to recite is the first step to learning to read. Thus, the method employed by Fielde was easily accepted by the women who were brought up in the Chinese society. Norwood recalled that after listening to Fielde’s recital of the entire book of Esther, Speed reproduced the whole

466 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.95.

467 A girl could be allowed to live if she was the eldest or the youngest in the family, but the number of girls in an ordinary family was usually kept to fewer than (and including) three. As Herb mentioned, no one kept more than three girls in a family. *Ibid.*, p.136.

468 *Ibid.*, p.117.

469 *Ibid.*, p.149.

470 *Ibid.*, p.117.

471 *Ibid.*, p.111.

472 “The women need to be taught to use their own language with force and fluency; to read correctly, easily, and agreeably; to speak clearly, truthfully, and attractively; and to pertinently illustrate, by parable, anecdote, and proverb, the truth they communicate.” Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, “Native Female Evangelists”, p.96.

473 Fielde, “The training”, p.245.

474 *Ibid.*

narrative without a mistake and with scarcely any prompting.⁴⁷⁵ Gold Getter, “being forty-two years old and without any knowledge of writing characters before, learned in ten months to read fluently a hundred hymns, the whole of the four Gospels, and the book of Acts, and to tell from memory nearly all she had read.”⁴⁷⁶ In spite of their varying degrees of literacy, the intellectual capacities of the trainees were greatly improved by Fielde’s training. “Some study to deliver the gospel message plainly. Some study a few months and then return to their homes to be more joyous and intelligent Christians all their lives; some study for years, and grow in grace in a wonderful way.”⁴⁷⁷ In a similar vein, also the woman missionaries from the EPM taught the rural Christian women to read romanized texts and to learn the principal facts in Genesis and the Gospels, “they could answer more or less intelligently when questioned on these facts”.⁴⁷⁸

In the previous chapter, it has been mentioned that in its initial stages the Mingdao Woman’s School did not have a continuous training system each year. Later it offered a programme for nine months of the year, attended by an average number of seven students. After learning how to narrate the doctrines and Bible stories by heart, these women were sent out to preach and usually spent nine weeks at the outstations, then one week in their own homes.⁴⁷⁹ Thiam-ti-sim (添弟嬪), the first Bible-woman,⁴⁸⁰ who was to serve the EP Church for over forty years, was sent by Ricketts to preach. She “manifested a wonderful gift in preaching; and her stores of illustrations seemed endless. She shone as a street preacher.” Surrounded by a crowd in the streets, she was totally at ease, furnishing answers to objectors, producing proverbs and apt quotations from the classics without fail. By means of these techniques an angry mob was often turned into more or less good humoured crowd.⁴⁸¹ After finishing their fieldwork, the Bible-women would return to the ABM compound for further instruction, which usually lasted for two weeks. This was a precaution in case the “perpetual contact with the heathen benumbs their consciousness, so they need a quickening influence of a new view of their Lord”.⁴⁸² During these two weeks, they received instruction in how to teach other women at the quarterly conference, how to report about their work at the stations and to confer with the missionaries and with each other about the affairs of the church and the church members. The lessons given to them at the four conferences could be four series of ten lessons each: the first on the Ten Commandments; the second on Cross Bearing; the third on Truthfulness; and the fourth on the Attributes of God.⁴⁸³ Whether Ricketts also employed such a tight discipline in the initial stages of the training of Bible-women is uncertain. In the period 1904-1915, a workers’ class was held in July every

475 Norwood, BMM, 1880, p.358-360. See Warren, *Fielde*, p.65.

476 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.113.

477 *Ibid.*, p.94.

478 Records of the WMA Council, 7th Meeting, Chaochow fu, 1st March, 1907.

479 Stevens, *Memorial Biography*, p.117.

480 Her complete name was Xiao Thiam-ti (萧添弟), also called Thiam-ti-so (添弟嫂). She came from Huanggang (黄岗) in Raoping district and was baptized in 1870 at the age of 44. See the *Congregational Rolls for use in the Swatow Mission*, “Jeng Jip” (另集), p.2. Also see Appendix C.

481 Miss Black’s account, in Mann, *Ricketts*, pp.40-41.

482 Stevens, *Memorial Biography*, p.116.

483 *Ibid.*, p.117.

year for the intensive training of teachers, Bible-women and potential workers with the purpose of strengthening their belief and improving their professional skills.⁴⁸⁴

Their training centered on the Bible, but they also learned a little geography from maps and they were taught personal hygiene. By using a microscope to show the foes to life lurking in dirty air and water, Fielde made it easier for the Bible-women to understand the basics of modern hygiene and gave them the chance to understand the unhealthy sanitary habits they followed without noticing.⁴⁸⁵ This greatly helped to improve these Bible-women's personal hygiene. In Miss Fielde's own words: "The microscope had assisted in the difficult work of persuading Chinese women that cleanliness has a relationship to Godliness."⁴⁸⁶ They took baths and washed their clothes more frequently than before. Nevertheless, the improvement in personal hygiene did not mean that the Bible-women changed their appearance completely. "They eat and dress as poorly as the women to whom they go."⁴⁸⁷ Fielde said: "We need to be careful that our course of training does not practically unfit these women for living in the narrow and uncleanly quarters in which the masses of the people dwell. Even tastes and habits which may not in themselves be admirable, are better left unchanged if the changing of them will in any degree separate the woman from those among whom she is to work."⁴⁸⁸

Fielde's discipline offered them new perspectives on the traditional customs of foot-binding, infanticide, suicide and marriage. Most of these Bible-women had had their feet bound in their teens. Keepsake had been subjected to this treatment at the age of thirteen. She remembered that when her feet ached at night, her mother would tell her to loosen the bandages but, if she did so, the ache worsened.⁴⁸⁹ Long also had had her feet bound at thirteen. When she was a child, she used to go to the salt-pans with her father, helping him by carrying the lighter tools or she would follow her brothers to the rice-fields. After her feet were bound, she "could no longer go out in the pleasant fields, nor do any active work".⁴⁹⁰ There were three Bible-women who did not have bound feet. One of these was Speed, because she came from a Christian family. Ironically, in her autobiography she said that she had wished to have her feet bound before she went to school. Her father, Lu Caiqi, opposed her desire, saying that: "If you insist on having your feet bound, your hands should be bound also."⁴⁹¹ The other two who had natural feet were Minute and Gold Getter. Minute was a Hakka who came from Baita in Jieyang district. Hakka women were supposed to work in the fields, and consequently did not have their feet bound,⁴⁹² but the custom of foot-binding was very popular among the Hoklo females at that time. This observation is confirmed by Lida Ashmore when she writes: "From 1873, when the Woman's School was first opened by Miss Fielde, to 1904, a period of thirty-one years, there have been 335 pupils with

484 Records of the WMA Council.

485 Stevens, *Memorial Biography*, p.117.

486 *Ibid.*, p.117.

487 Edwin Munsell Bliss writes under the caption "Women's Work for Women" in the Encyclopedia of Missions, see Stevens, *Memorial Biography*, p.116.

488 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.96.

489 *Ibid.*, p.118.

490 *Ibid.*, p.149.

491 *Ibid.*, p.111.

492 *Ibid.*, p.132.

an average age of 40 years. They were all Christians when taken into the school and nearly all were bound footed.”⁴⁹³ Gold Getter was a Hoklo but she did not have her feet bound because her village, Xichang in Jieyang district, was located in the border zone of the Hoklo and Hakka. She and her family might have been influenced by the customs of the Hakka.

Fielde taught the Bible-women that foot-binding was not only uncivilized but sinful, because it tried to improve on God’s creation. The connection between these customs and the True Doctrine is stated by Herb as follows:

Now that I have come to know the True Doctrine, I know that foot-binding is a very wicked and injurious custom. God gave us our eyes and hands and feet as implements with which to do His work, and we are very wicked when we destroy any of them. In remodeling our feet, we declare that the pattern by which He makes feet does not suit us, and that we ourselves can improve His handiwork. But women cannot be natural-footed, unless men are taught that such women are desirable for wives.⁴⁹⁴

Herb not only regretted the earlier binding her own feet, but also stressed that the change in this “wicked” custom lay in the education of men. Unbinding women’s feet also became a symbol of their spiritual rebirth. Lily was one of the six or seven women in the Swatow church who had had their feet unbound. After a long and painful effort, the toes of her feet were forced back into their natural positions and she could wear shoes like those whose feet had never been bound.⁴⁹⁵

The Bible-women also transmitted this natural feet policy to the next generations. The case of Lu Caiqi and Speed is a good example. Love said she should never have the feet of her daughter, who was then twelve years old and studied in the Christian school, bound.⁴⁹⁶ It was only in 1899, one year after the Hundred Days’ Reform, launched by modernizing scholars like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, that the idea of natural feet really began to impinge on public consciousness in China. And it was not until 1900 that the first natural feet association came into existence in the district city of Chenghai.⁴⁹⁷ By then, the idea of natural feet had already been prevalent among the Christian congregation in Chaozhou for forty years since the 1860s.

Most of these Bible-women had committed infanticide before their conversion. Aunt Luck had borne a little girl when she was sixteen, and then two more baby girls. She strangled the third at birth because she was frightened that she would be despised for bearing so many girls.⁴⁹⁸ Treasure had three daughters, followed by a son who died when he was ten days old, later followed by another daughter.

493 Ashmore, *The South China Mission*, p.96.

494 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.135.

495 *Ibid.*, p.173.

496 *Ibid.*, p.130.

497 《岭东日报》，光绪三十年五月初十日(1898):“咄咄贱种之辱国：旧金山报云差拿船抵埔，有上海茶店陈新礼者带来缠足女二名，往圣路易赛会当侍茶之役。寓美华人闻此消息，即致函中国正监督伦贝子，副监督黄开甲，恳其查明截止，以免辱国体而长蛮风云。噫！缠足为中国最野蛮之俗，历史上之大耻。国弱种辱，半由于此，各省志士创不缠足会，逐渐推广，日益有功，何物贱种，乃敢于万邦注目之会场而陈此弱国辱种之丑态，惹外人之耻笑？辱国体而不顾，虽食其肉、寝其皮，岂能蔽其辜哉。”

See also 光绪三十一年八月初九日(1900):潮郡不缠足会之起点：女子缠足，流毒颇盛。开通之士咸知之。故近日多天足会。彼此婚配，不许缠足。潮州各属，多行之者。然郡城未之前闻也。近有澄海籍杜茂才纘尧之兄绍尧，其子与郡人陈君惠珊之女结婚。则相约不缠足。此诚为我潮郡城天足会之起点。诚能扩而张之，则风气大开，亦凤城女子之幸福也。

498 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.104.

She kept the eldest daughter (who died when she was nine years old) and all the other daughters were put in a bucket⁴⁹⁹ and thrown into the river alive; one each year. When her husband ordered a chair-bearer to carry them off and have them drowned, she did not feel distraught nor did she cry. She was simply annoyed because they had not been boys.⁵⁰⁰ Silver Flower had four more sons and five daughters with her third husband. They considered the girls a burden heavier than they could bear and destroyed four of them. After suffocating them, her husband threw the little baby girls into the river.⁵⁰¹ Herb had three sons and six daughters, and she cast three of them away so as to reduce the number of girls in her family.⁵⁰² The practice of infanticide originated in the fact that boys were considered more valuable than girls because they could help to build up the wealth of a family; girls could only drain it off, because when they were married the girls would take away part of the wealth as a dowry when they left their natal families. Despite other reasons, poverty was the most important reason for the practice of infanticide.

Infanticide was regarded by the missionaries as the most inhuman evil in China. The missionaries tried to instil this idea in the minds of the male and female students in the Christian schools, and distributed relevant leaflets to the passers-by on street in their efforts to eradicate this social evil. Silver Flower, who killed four of her baby girls, confessed:

I am a great sinner; no less a Saviour than Jesus could save one who has sinned so deeply as I. Now, when I think of these children, my heart is full of anguish. I lie awake at night and wonder that such a sin can really be blotted out; but then I did not know God's commandments, and only thought how unprofitable girls were.⁵⁰³

Herb, who had cast three of her baby girls away, showed her remorse: "I did not then know, as I now do, that infanticide is a great sin."⁵⁰⁴ Not only did these early converts confess to the sin of infanticide in the past, they also taught young women not to practise it any longer. Ricketts recorded that one woman who had killed five girls with her own hands trembled with fear when she heard that it was wicked to do so and begged to know if she could be forgiven.⁵⁰⁵

Social unrest caused by the collective struggles between clans and the uprisings against Qing government in the Chaozhou region between 1821 and 1875⁵⁰⁶ drove many families into abject poverty; the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) was a especially dire period as was the ruthless pacification campaign launched by General Fang Yao in 1870s. Not a few women committed suicide during these periods to escape the misery. Unhappy marriages or family disputes were also reasons for suicide.⁵⁰⁷ Tapestry had

499 This bucket, usually painted red, was an essential article in a girl's dowry. It is horrible to realize that the use of this bucket was for the committing of infanticide, as was pointed out to me by Professor Cai Hongsheng (蔡鸿生).

500 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.173.

501 Ibid., pp.182-183.

502 Ibid., p.136.

503 Ibid., pp.182-183.

504 Ibid., p.136.

505 Mann, *Ricketts*, pp.44-45.

506 Anonymous, "Social Uprisings in Jieyang", pp.37-48.

507 《岭东日报》，“潮嘉新闻”，光绪三十年正月十九日(1898)：“妇女轻生之离奇：澄邑南洋乡杜姓有甲乙二妇同室而家，俱清贫。日前以细故口角，乙妇愤不已，入夜竟投缳毕命。甲妇闻之，慎祸及己，亦自缢。越日乡之某姓复有二妇不知因何起

the painful experience of marrying an invisible husband, had a hateful mother-in-law and had witnessed the suicide of her sister-in-law in her first marriage. She had wanted to commit suicide herself at the time. She confessed:

Chinese women do not know that it is wicked to kill themselves. It is only we who have been taught that we are God's property, that dare not destroy what is His. It is only we that value our lives aright, who know that we have a heaven to go to, and need time to get ready.⁵⁰⁸

In the traditional marriage, the relationship between husbands and wives was unequal. They could not have dinner together: males had the right to eat first, while females could only consume what they left; or men ate the better quality food, women had to make do with what was over, according to Zeng Derong's witness in the 1930s.⁵⁰⁹ Husband and wife could not address each other by name nor could not walk together in public. After the introduction of the idea of the Christian Home, Long, Speed and Treasure recognized the value of companionship between husband and wife, and the significant role played by a wife in the Christian Home. This topic will be discussed extensively in the next chapter. Companionship in marriage seems to be one of the reasons for conversion for those who wished to rid themselves of the unequal relationship in a traditional marriage.

The purpose of missionary training was to strengthen the faith of the students and to instil in them proper Christian ideas as well as professional skills in public preaching. Those who met all these requirements could be employed as Bible-women. In Field's time, the Bible-women received \$2 plus travelling expenses per month as a salary.⁵¹⁰ In 1912, the salary of the Bible-women of the EP Church was \$4 to \$5.⁵¹¹ Competent and experienced Bible-women received higher salaries than those who had just begun. For instance, Tsu-mui sim's salary was raised from \$3.50 per month to \$4 in 1910; five years later, her salary was raised to \$5 per month.⁵¹² In practice, employment as a Bible-woman offered competent Christian women a better way to earn a living than their former occupations had done. For instance, Snow used to be a ballad singer and Cress made and sold mock money for religious purposes, but most of these women were housewives and did not have any professional job at all. Now they worked in the public sphere and with their labour was paid, these Bible-women can be regarded as the first generation of modern professional women in Chaozhou. It also cannot be ruled out that some of them were eager to work as Bible-women because of the guarantee of a regular income.

衅，亦先后自缢死。潮属愚妇女每因细故便以一死了其生涯，未有一乡之间，四妇轻生如此者也。” See also 《岭东日报》癸卯年（1903）六月廿二日：“二女轻生：嘉俗妇女不惜身命往往因事轻生可叹亦复可怜……”。 Ste. Croix, a Ursuline sister, wrote to Standstead in 1924 that, “Recently very near our convent a woman between thirty and forty years old drowned herself in despair. Her husband had no work and she could not get enough money to nourish her three little children.” Mahorney, *Snatow*, p.76.

508 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.142.

509 “那时候非常封建，桌上摆两碗粥，一碗是‘妈人粥’（方言，妇女），一碗是‘爹人粥’，‘爹人粥’比较稠，‘妈人粥’就稀稀的。——你们看多凄惨，要吃点粥还要分稠和稀。当时整个社会都这样。” Zeng Derong's oral account, see appendix in Du Shimin, *The Christian Girls School*, p.64.

510 Stevens, *Memorial Biography*, 119.

511 The 17th Meeting, Far East House, 29th April, 1912

512 The 14th Meeting, 26th September, 1910; the 27th Meeting, Far East House, 30th Sept., 1915.

The Widespread Influence of the Bible-women

From the opening of Fielde's Mingdao Women's School in 1874, Bible-women became an important force in evangelism. At first, their main task was itinerant preaching among women in rural areas. Besides this propagation, they also brought their family, relatives, friends and neighbours into the church. In the early twentieth century, they preached in various Christian institutions, such as the Church compound, the Girls' Schools, hospitals for women and children, and the Red Cross and YMCA and so forth.⁵¹³

Joseph Tse-Lei Lee indicates that, as already mentioned, the elderly women exercised as much influence over the conversion of the children as the family patriarchs.⁵¹⁴ Going through the autobiographies of these Bible-women, I found that their influence was not confined just to their teenage relatives but also reached their mature relatives in the family hierarchy, such as their husbands and their own parents and in-laws. For instance, after Silver Flower's conversion, her mother, sister, one of her sons, her daughter-in-law, and some other relatives all became Christians.⁵¹⁵ Treasure also successfully converted her brother. Even her brother-in-law, who used to beat her because of her conversion, also sometimes went to hear her preach.⁵¹⁶ Lily brought her own mother and some other relatives into the church.⁵¹⁷ The most impressive achievement is that of Tolerance. Through the endeavours of her and her brother, Po Heng, every member of the household, twelve in total (see Figure 23), became Christian, including her mother, Lotus, who used to be a spirit-medium in the temple. The spirit which was constantly lodged in her body and had caused a series of family tragedies, no longer troubled her.⁵¹⁸ Several of her neighbours attended Sunday worship in Tolerance's house.⁵¹⁹ In October 25, 1889, the missionary doctor, Anna Kay Scott, came to visit forty descendants of this family in Qiaotou.

There are also cases in which husbands followed their wives into Christianity. One example is Lily's husband, Zheng Meizheng (郑美正), and Moonlight's husband, Qiu Ling (邱廩). Love and Tapestry wrote to their husbands who earned a living abroad, asking them to come back and join the church, so that their family might all be Christians.⁵²⁰ These facts contradict Ling Oi Ki's assertion that the Bible-women "became Christians because of the persuasion of their husbands, children, kinsmen, or friends"; "they might be wives, or mothers of preachers or catechists."⁵²¹ The circumstance that some

513 Records of WMA Council, 25th Meeting, Far East House, 8th Oct. 1914.

514 Lee, *The Bible and the Gun*, p.81.

515 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.190.

516 Ibid., p.177.

517 Ibid., p.173.

518 According to Tolerance, her father died when she was twenty-two. Shortly afterwards the two young women whom her mother (Lotus) had taken as wives for two of her brothers both died within twenty days of each other. Her brothers then said that the familiar spirit was a malevolent one and that they would no longer live in the same house as it did. The two elder boys went away and became the sons of a wealthy kinsman (they were Bao-Shun, Po Heng, and the surname of this wealthy kinsman was "Sun", see Tolerance's family in Appendix 3). The third (Bao-Xi) set up housekeeping apart from his mother and the youngest (Po U) hired himself out to a petty official. Their mother, Lotus, was greatly distressed by all this and thought she would try to rid herself of her tormentor; but the demon told her that, if she tried to evict him, she would be the worse for it. Therefore she dared not do anything for her own salvation. Ibid., p.162.

519 Ibid., p.166.

520 Ibid., p.142.

521 Ling, "Bible Women", p.247.

male evangelists and Bible-women came from the same family was also found in Chaozhou. Examples are father and daughter (Lu Caiqi and Speed); mother and son (Snow and Po San, Silver Flower and Lin Tingyi,⁵²² Cress and Li Jinju,⁵²³ Li Meifeng and Chen Renshan); sister and brother (Tolerance and Po Heng); or husband and wife (Hong Ming'an and Orchid, Po San and Zheng Yingjiao). It is obvious that women played an important role in the conversion of their families, which is formulated in the missiological concept of “evangelical motherhood”.

Not a few examples in the autobiographies show that the Bible-women's itinerant preaching, sometimes in the company of the Western woman missionaries but most of the time carried out independently, was quite effective. Herb first heard the Gospel from a missionary lady preaching in Xunmei (巡梅, Sun Bue) in Chaoyang district.⁵²⁴ She recalled how this missionary lady sat down and talked with the women in her neighbour's house. Herb went and heard what she said. After she had left,

A Bible-woman came and taught us more, she stayed some days, and slept with my sister-in-law, but then some of the neighbours drove her away...After awhile the neighbours let the Bible-woman come back, and made no more violent objection to her teaching in the village.⁵²⁵

Herb was converted in 1874. Her narrative reveals an important regulation set down by Fielde: “I always visit the stations to which the Bible-women go, and never send them to places where I have not myself been.”⁵²⁶ Armed with personal knowledge of the locality and its people, she could understand the reports sent by the Bible-women to her once every two months properly. The constant personal superintendence of the Western female missionary of the local Bible-women was of the utmost importance if misdirected effort, waste of money, discouragement and failure were to be avoided.⁵²⁷

Fielde claimed that preaching during meal-times and at night seemed to have a higher rate of success because the attention and good example the Bible-women revealed to the target person through their intimate personal contact could effectively clear away any doubts in the latter's mind and urge her to take action.⁵²⁸ It was the earnest preaching of Keepsake and Tolerance to Treasure during meals and “night talk” eventually brought her into the Church.⁵²⁹ Minute invited two Bible-women to sleep in her house during their visit in her village. After they went to bed, they talked till dawn, telling her who God was, what He did, and about Heaven and the Lord Jesus. Minute never forgot what they said that night.⁵³⁰ Fielde gave Minute's autobiography the title of “One Night's Work”. These examples seem to imply that night was a good time to talk because women would have time and peace of mind to discuss

522 342 林廷意 (Teng In) 男 15 1874 揭阳坎下,

See also *The Good News for Lingdong*, p.6.

523 313 李金菊 (Kim Kek) 男 15 1874 普宁贵屿,

See also *The Good News for Lingdong*, p.6.

524 She might have been Miss Fielde, since Herb mentioned that she could communicate with the native Hoklo women. Only Miss Fielde had such language competence at that time.

525 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.137.

526 Fielde, “The training”, p.157.

527 Ibid.

528 She said: “Some of the most valuable work done by the Bible women, is done at meal-times and in the night-time, among the women with whom they eat and lodge.” Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.96.

529 Ibid., p.175.

530 Ibid., p.133.

difficult things—something perhaps not available during the day when they were busy with household chores or other work, or when the presence of the other people prevented further discussion.

The visit to Lily's home by Keepsake and Tolerance reveals another regulation set down by Fielde: they (the Bible-women) were never sent to places where they had no personal acquaintances to vouch for them. A Christian woman belonging to that station would act as local guide to the Bible-woman. Lily was such a local guide for Keepsake and Tolerance in Nanlong. There are two reasons for this regulation. Firstly, acquainted with the meandering paths, a local guide could take the Bible-woman to her natal village.⁵³¹ Secondly, since Chinese villagers were so distrustful of strangers (in this case Bible-women), a local guide could act as an intermediary.⁵³² Constant visits and one-to-one conversational preaching contributed to the successful conversion of the male or female audiences.

The success Bible-women gained in evangelizing among their own family, kinsmen, neighbours and friends does not mean that they were equally successful in their itinerant preaching. This can be attributed to the xenophobic sentiment of the ordinary people, especially between 1860 and 1870, the first period of anti-foreignism in China.⁵³³ Both the Bible-women themselves and Fielde commented on the relative effect of their evangelism. In 1876 Love said that: "I have now been to seventy villages with the Lord's message. I do not know how many women have believed it. I am sure of only a very few who have become Christians because of my words."⁵³⁴ The next year, Herb stated that, although all the people in her village had heard the Gospel, only a few believed in it.⁵³⁵ On her journey to Baita village in Jieyang district on December 16, 1880, Fielde recorded that: "In paying a visit to her own mother, Mue (Minute) has proclaimed the Gospel as she had the opportunity, but apparently without marked effect upon her hearers."⁵³⁶ However, in the 1890s, "the work of Bible-women was so successful that American Baptist men affirmed that their role in direct evangelization in the towns and villages in Shantou (Swatow) area was as crucial as that of the local preachers and missionaries".⁵³⁷

However successful the Bible-women's work and their positive images as model Christians might have been, the fact that they were, when it was all said and done, Christians in Chinese society should not be ignored. Having been soaked in Chinese traditional values for the most part of their lives, these women were inclined to follow the customs of the local society. Long gave birth to her second daughter, Jewelled Branch (姚玉枝), three years after her baptism. She did not destroy this little girl because by then she and her husband were pious Christians. However, since they were extremely poor, they sold their elder daughter, Light Follower (姚顺观), to a lady in the district city of Chaoyang for five pounds.⁵³⁸ Her behaviour shows that the social custom of "selling a daughter in time of hardship"

531 Fielde, "Annual Letter to Helpers in America", see Stevens, *Memorial Biography*, p.118.

532 Fielde, BMM, 1884, p.144. See Warren, *Fielde*, p.66.

533 Paul A. Cohen, *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Antiforeignism, 1860-1870*, Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1963.

534 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.130

535 *Ibid.*, p.137.

536 Stevens, *Memorial Biography*, p.138.

537 "The South China Mission, Swatow Department, the 79th Annual Report, 79th Annual Meeting of the Baptist Missionary Union held on 26 May 1893," *Missionary Magazine*, 73, 7 (July 1893): 301. Quoted from Ling, "Bible women", p.257.

538 Fielde, *Pagoda Shadows*, p.151.

was still deeply rooted in her mind. As a Christian, she might have considered it a sinful action but just did not see any other way to survive. One and a half years later, when this couple heard that Light Follower was badly treated by her mistress, they resorted to the Baptist Church for help and Light Follower was redeemed. For a long time, they were distrusted and blamed by the Church for having sold their own daughter.⁵³⁹ A similar case of clinging to the local custom happened in the EP church. This time the matter related to the disposal of ancestral soul tablets. Ricketts was horrified to find many years later that Mrs Good, one of the Bible-women, had not really thrown away her ancestral tablets, only hidden them. This was a terrible blow to Ricketts. As she saw it, an unqualified Bible-woman could be a disaster to the congregation. Ricketts noted in her diary: "I feel I can never believe her again....She came to the service looking the picture of misery. I had no message for her".⁵⁴⁰ In the minds of the woman missionaries, the Bible-women were trained to be pioneers and models for the Christians and non-Christians around them. It would be hard to convince ordinary people to accept Christianity if the Bible-women themselves still adhered to the "heathen" social customs. However, on the issue of ancestor worship, some voices had already proposed a compromise at the Protestant Conferences in Shanghai of 1890 and 1907.

Conclusion

Though male missionaries and local male evangelists were able to reach women with the Gospel message in public, entry to women's private spheres was restricted to those of the same sex. This was the situation that confronted Chen Dui when he preached in Changzhou near Hong Kong in 1852. From the opening of Swatow in 1860 until the arrival of Adele Field in 1873, male evangelists played a leading role in the itinerant preaching but, from their advent in 1873, the employment of Bible-women enlarged the preaching network to a far wider extent. Bible-women could obtain access to women of all ages. Close co-operation existed between male evangelists and Bible-women. Several male evangelists and Bible-women came from the same family. They could be father and daughter (Lu Caiqi and Speed), mother and son (Snow and Po San, Silver Flower and Lin Tingyi, Cress and Li Jinju, Li Meifeng and Chen Renshan), sister and brother (Tolerance and Po Heng), or husband and wife (Hong Ming'an and Orchid, Po San and Zheng Yingjiao). Their co-operation made a huge contribution to the expansion of Christianity among women from the 1870s onwards.

The analysis of the autobiographies of the Bible-women sheds light on the reasons for women's conversion in the Chaozhou region. Most prominent was the fact that Christianity could mitigate their sufferings and promise a happier life. No light matter considering that most of these women had endured tragic experiences before their conversion. Once Christianity was established in the region, the prospect of an education, career possibilities and a new type of marriage and family life might also

539 Ibid., p.152.

540 Mann, *Ricketts*, pp.28-29.

have contributed to the attraction of Christianity. That women in the Chaozhou area seem to have been particularly receptive to Christianity should also be attributed to the fact that male householders were often absent, allowing the widow or grass widow to make their own decisions about whether to convert or not.

The newly converted Christian women had to go through a strict screening and training process before becoming Bible-women. Most of them came from sojourner families (侨眷) and were widows or grass widows. Without the support of their husbands, they were forced to be independent. In the Mingdao Women's School, the Bible-women experienced an intensive training in Christian doctrines, professional skills in evangelism and were taught new ideas about foot-binding, infanticide, suicide and marriage. However, having been soaked in Chinese traditional values for the most part of their lives, some of them could not do away with certain traditional customs completely.

Although their preaching work among the Bible-women's own kin was quite fruitful, they did not have the same level of success in their itinerant preaching in the 1870s. This was often among people with whom they were unfamiliar at a time when anti-foreignism was rife. From the 1880s, close co-operation between the male evangelists and Bible-women contributed greatly to the expansion of the Christian population of both sexes. After 1890, Bible-women were recognized by the ABM as an effective evangelical force among the Protestant congregations in China. Fielde's employment of Bible-women was imitated by various Protestant missions which worked in other parts of China. They assisted the woman missionaries when growing numbers of single Western ladies came to China after 1880. Together they had achieved the rapid increase in the female Christian population by the turn of the nineteenth century.



Figure 25: Collective photo of the Bible-women in Swatow, ABM
(No date, from Stevens, *Memorial Biography*)



Figure 26 (left): Bible-woman (EPM) at a hospital bookstall, Swatow, ca. 1895



Figure 27 (right): Aunt Golden Peace (i.e. Tapestry, 1843-?) and Abbie G. Sanderson, ABM, ca.1920-1937