

Book Reviews

Book Review

Alvyn Austin, *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832-1905*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007. 506 pp.

Providing assurance of its pedigree, Austin's work is one of the most recent publications of the Currents in World Christianity (CWC) series: Studies in the History of Christian Missions. Not merely another volume reiterating the beginnings, evolution and developments of Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission (CIM), Austin does indeed provide details which can be found in a number of other CIM-related volumes but more than that, rather than focus on Hudson Taylor the illustrious founder, the reader is opened up to the work of the CIM as experienced and carried out by lesser-known CIM 'foot soldiers' both foreign and Chinese.

At the same time, and in an unusual twist on 'mission organisation' biographies, the narrative of CIM is intertwined with accounts of converts, in particular Pastor Hsi of Shanxi who ran a controversial opium-addict refuge, and unashamedly reveals the benefits and drawbacks of ongoing and mutual engagement in Kingdom work with such as these when differences came into play, similarly with fellow-missionaries of other nationalities and/or doctrinal persuasion.

The narrative is presented in thirteen chapters, divided into three segments of history labelled as three successive generations of CIM operator's and/or recruits. Austin delivers a wealth of detail concerning CIM standards of lifestyle from the days of recruitment through to adjustment once on the field, learning of Mandarin Chinese, and the expectations of unquestioning adherence to CIM directives. That this latter was not universally welcomed becomes apparent in the some of the less palatable (and previously left untouched) particulars of certain personnel.

Along with attention to the different historical tensions prevailing in China as the narrative unfolds, and the missionaries' varying responses and reactions, Austin's meticulous trawl through a wealth of archive material progressively reveals both the light and dark sides of CIM as the organisation faced opposition from within and without. Readers familiar with Pollack's (1962) biography of Hudson Taylor which revealed something of the negative side of Taylor's personality, or Broomhall's 7 volumes which appeared in the 1980's and presented CIM warts and all from the perspective of an insider, will find in Austin's work a good deal more of the warts and an even more candid

exposure of the dark side, yet with a selective objectivity that has greater goals in sight than merely to fuel spectator curiosity.

Strong opinions and personalities can be both the bane and blight of mission organisations yet also a means by which great strides can be made forward. Austin's masterful exposure of both strengths and weaknesses combines these in a way that presents CIM's history as being significant in that it united conservative evangelicals from multiple nations and denominations, and its work as all the more supernaturally impressive given the range of battles it had to continually engage in.

Quoting from the foreword by the internationally renowned mission historian, Brian Stanley: "*China's Millions* is an engagingly written book that will fascinate, entertain, illuminate, and no doubt provoke lively reactions. It invites the reader to step into one of the most important yet least understood narratives of modern Christian history, a narrative that is still unfolding to this day as the long course of Christian history in China continues to defy western patterns and predictions."

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