

Mission and Colonial Violence in the First World War

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It is my great honor and pleasure to discuss my research related to the Basel Mission's China ministry and its wartime experience during and after the First World War. My presentation has three parts:

- 1) The Basel Mission's global ministry at the outbreak of the First World War and how it was affected by the British government's enemy mission policy;
- 2) The work of the Basel Mission in China, including the strategic role of Hong Kong; and
- 3) The implementation of the enemy mission policy in Hong Kong, which I will argue that the economic factor was the critical factor shaping the Hong Kong government's attitude towards German mission work.

Before I start, I need to explain why the Basel Mission, registered in Switzerland, was considered a German mission in the First World War. As you may know, from its beginning, the Basel Mission was built on the joint efforts and resources of the Swiss and Germans. The German element was evident in the mission's source of funds, workforce composition, management, and supporting community. During the War, the Basel mission workers in Cameroons - at that time a German colony - had provided money and supplies to German soldiers. Over a hundred Basel seminary students served in the German forces.¹ British consuls in Switzerland also submitted evidence to argue that the Basel Mission was 'a German institution under a Swiss cloak'. The British government told the Basel Mission that unless it permanently removed all Germans from its staff, members, and management, its work in British territories would end.² However, the Basel Mission's members refused to terminate the century-old Swiss-German fellowship in mission work.³ As a result, the Basel Mission was officially listed, together with 23 other German missions, as the British Empire's enemy. That was a big problem because, as shown in Table 1, most of the Basel Mission's work was in British territories, including India, the Gold Coast, and the Cameroons.⁴

¹ Evelyn Grant Duff, British consul in Bern, Switzerland to the Colonial Office, 27 August 1915, FO3883/49, The National Archives (TNA), Kew.

² 'Declaration of the Basel Mission for the continuation of its mission work in India and the Gold Coast', *Der Evangelische Heidenbote*, February 1917, No. 2, p.19.

³ 'The wartime plight of the Basel Mission', *Der Evangelische Heidenbote*, March 1918, No. 3, pp.30-32.

⁴ The Missionary Society of Basel, Annual Report for 1914, p. 8.

Table 1: Global Mission Work of the Basel Mission (as of 1 January 1914)

	No. of Mission Stations	No. of Mission workers	No. of Churches	No. of Church Members	No. of Schools	No. of Students
China	19 (26%)	84 (19%)	1,374 (32%)	12,185 (17%)	112 (13%)	5,151 (9%)
India	26 (36%)	157 (35%)	219 (5%)	19,762 (27%)	211 (24%)	21,071 (37%)
Gold Coast	11 (15%)	98 (22%)	766 (18%)	25,042 (35%)	157 (18%)	7,819 (14%)
Cameroons	16 (22%)	107 (24%)	1,907 (45%)	15,112 (21%)	384 (44%)	22,818 (40%)
Total	72 (100%)	446 (100%)	4,266 (100%)	72,101 (100%)	864 (100%)	56,859 (100%)

Source: Annual Report of the Basel Missionary Society, 1914, p. 8.

From 1918, China was the only foreign field that remained open to the Basel Mission and other German missions. In the Basel Mission's own words, the expulsion from British territories was 'a robbery of its assets and missionary rights' and a violence of the world power'.⁵ During this disastrous incident, Christian missions and churches in Britain and North America supported German missions significantly. They provided funds and staffing to sustain the orphaned churches and facilities in British territories. At a later stage, they also sponsored German missions' applications for the return to former mission fields in British colonies. It is fair to say that without this support, the century-long German mission work in Asia and Africa would have been lost forever in the War. Today we do not have time to go into the details of the War's impacts on German mission work and allied mission leaders' efforts to salvage German mission work worldwide. You may refer to Keith Clements' memoir for J. H. Oldham, Volume 4 of the Basel Mission's classical history book, and other historians' work.⁶

The end of the War in November 1918 did not terminate the exile of German missions from British territories. Nor did it lead to the return of German mission assets to their

⁵ 'The wartime plight of the Basel Mission', *Der Evangelische Heidenbote*, March 1918, No. 3, pp.30-32.

⁶ Samuel Prempeh, "The Basel and Bremen Missions and Their Successors in the Gold Coast and Togoland, 1914-1926: A Study in Protestant Missions and the First World War," PhD dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1977. Frieder Ludwig, "Die Basler Mission im Ersten Weltkrieg," *Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 117 (2017): 63-83. Margaret Gannon, "The Basle Mission Trading Company and British Colonial Policy in the Gold Coast, 1918-1928," *Journal of African History*, 1983, vol. 24, 4 (1983): 503-515. Michael Kpughe Lang, "World War One in Africa: Implications on Christian Missions," *Contemporary Journal of African Studies*, vol. 4, 2 (2017); 37-65. Michael Kpughe Lang, "The Plight of German Missions in Mandate Cameroon: An Historical Analysis," *Brazilian Journal of African Studies*, vol. 2, 3 (2017): 111-130. Jayabalan Murthy, "The First World War and Its Impact on the Leipzig Mission Society in India," in *The First World War as a Turning Point - The Impact of the Years 1914-1918 on Church and Mission*, ed. Frieder Ludwig (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2020), 213-232. Wilhelm Schlatter & Hermann Witschi, *Geschichte der Basler Mission 1914-1919* (Basel: Basileia Verlag Basel, 1965).

legitimate owners. New regulatory barriers were introduced across the British Empire, banning the admission of German subjects from entering British territories for three years. Even after that, German missions needed to obtain the approval of the colonial government before they could resume their mission work in British colonies under a new control regime on foreign missionaries. Article 438 of the Treaty of Versailles also placed all German mission property in British territories in the custodianship of British missions for continuous usage of missionary purposes. This arrangement was supposed to save German mission property from confiscation as enemy assets. Nonetheless, as I will explain later, it became a means for the Hong Kong government to acquire German mission properties in its territories.

Mission Work in China

Now let us look at the Basel Mission's work in China. It started with the invitation of Karl Gützlaff, an independent Prussian missionary, a writer and translator, and the Chinese Secretary to the governor of Hong Kong. Realizing the massive evangelical potential of China, he invited the continental missions to join in his mission. The Basel Mission sent Theodor Hamberg and Rudolf Lechler to Hong Kong on 19 March 1847. On the same ship were two other missionaries from the Rhenish Mission. The Basel and Rhenish missionaries lived and worked with Chinese preachers from the very first day. They spread Christianity in the remote villages in the Guangdong province and were recognized as the first Protestant missionaries who worked in inland China.⁷

At the advice of Gützlaff, the Basel Mission focused its work on Hakka-speaking Chinese. *Hakka* means 'Guest People' (客家). Their ancestors came from the northern part of China. They settled in the poorest, remote areas to avoid conflicts with the local Cantonese. The inferior social position made Hakkas particularly receptive to the gospel and the Basel missionaries' offering of education and medical services. At the same time, their strong kinship ties allowed the rapid expansion of Christianity among the Hakka communities in Guangdong. Therefore, after decades of efforts, the Basel Mission established Christian congregations in South China.

The Basel missionaries brought immense changes to the Hakka community, particularly in the welfare of Hakka females. The provision of girl education and the ban on child marriages changed the lives of many Hakka little girls. The first girl school was established in the mission house, Hong Kong, in 1862. It moved to inland China in 1891 until its closure in 1985. Going to Shenzhen today, you can still see that old school building renovated and transformed into a public facility in 2016. The building displays artifacts

⁷ Jessie Gregory Lutz, *Opening China - Karl F. A. Gützlaff and Sino-Western Relations, 1927-1852* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William N. Eerdmans, 2008), p. 298.

and exhibits to remember its past as a Basel Mission school. Likewise, the two Basel Mission hospitals in Guangdong also survive the wars and difficult time in the past century. Today they are first-rate government hospitals in Guangdong, continuing to help Chinese patients.

At the outbreak of the War, the Basel Mission was the second-largest Protestant mission operating in the Guangdong province.⁸ It had 19 mission stations in China, operating 1,374 churches with 12,000 communion Christians, 112 schools with 5,151 students, one seminary, and two hospitals.⁹ Hong Kong was the smallest station: seven churches with 700 Christians; four primary schools with 340 students.¹⁰ However, Hong Kong was strategically vital to the Basel Mission. Benefiting from its geographical location and unique status as a British colony, Hong Kong was the gateway to China; the safe house and resting place of missionaries in troubled times; and the management center for the mission funds, supplies, and logistics.¹¹ Moreover, the Basel Mission possessed some large European houses in the colony, which generated regular income to support its inland mission work. Table 2 shows the property portfolio owned by German missions, which I argue was critical in delaying their return to the colony.

Table 2: Properties Owned by German Missions, 1919

Name of Mission	No. of property	Total Area (sq. ft)	Total Estimated Value (\$)	% of all German Missions Property's value	Total Estimated Value if Held on Ordinary Lease (\$)
Basel Mission	23	213,892	179,420	45.8%	267,510
Rhenish Mission	3	71,870	57,230	14.6%	187,870
Hildesheim Mission for the Blind	2	89,912	40,000	10.2%	42,362
Berlin Women's Mission for China	1	46,125	115,312	29.4%	115,312
Total	29	421,799	391,962	100%	613,054

Source: Severn to Andrew Bonar Law, 7 April 1919, CO 323/793/33, TNA.

⁸ *The Christian Occupation of China* (Shanghai: National Christian Council of China, 1922), 431.

⁹ Annual Report of the Basel Mission for 1914, 8.

¹⁰ Ecclesiastical Return section, *Hongkong Blue Book for 1914* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government, 1915), section P, 1-5.

¹¹ Annual Report of the Basel Missionary Society, 1914, 29.

Hong Kong Experience

In 1914, four German missions were operating in Hong Kong: the Basel Mission, the Rhenish Mission, the Berlin Women's Mission for China, which runs a foundling home, and the Hildesheim Mission for the Blind, which operated a blind girl school and a blind women workshop. These missions were established in the colony for many decades and had always received support from the colonial government and Hong Kong residents. If the War had not occurred, these missions would have continued to prosper. But the development in world history put them on a different path.

Surprisingly, the wartime period (1914 - 1918) was relatively peaceful for these German missions. Hong Kong was governed by Sir Francis Henry May, who had served in the colony for many years. May was sympathetic to the German missions and treasured their work in the territory. After the War was declared, he ignored the military's strong opposition and allowed the male German missionaries to proceed to their inland stations in Guangdong after deportation. He also convinced London to let female German missionaries stay in Hong Kong to care for the hundreds of children in their facilities. The governor and his friends supported the German mission facilities with their own money until government funds were available. The correspondences of the German female missionaries indicated that the foundling house and the blind facilities operated as usual during wartime, thanks to the sympathetic governor and the generous support of Hong Kong residents.

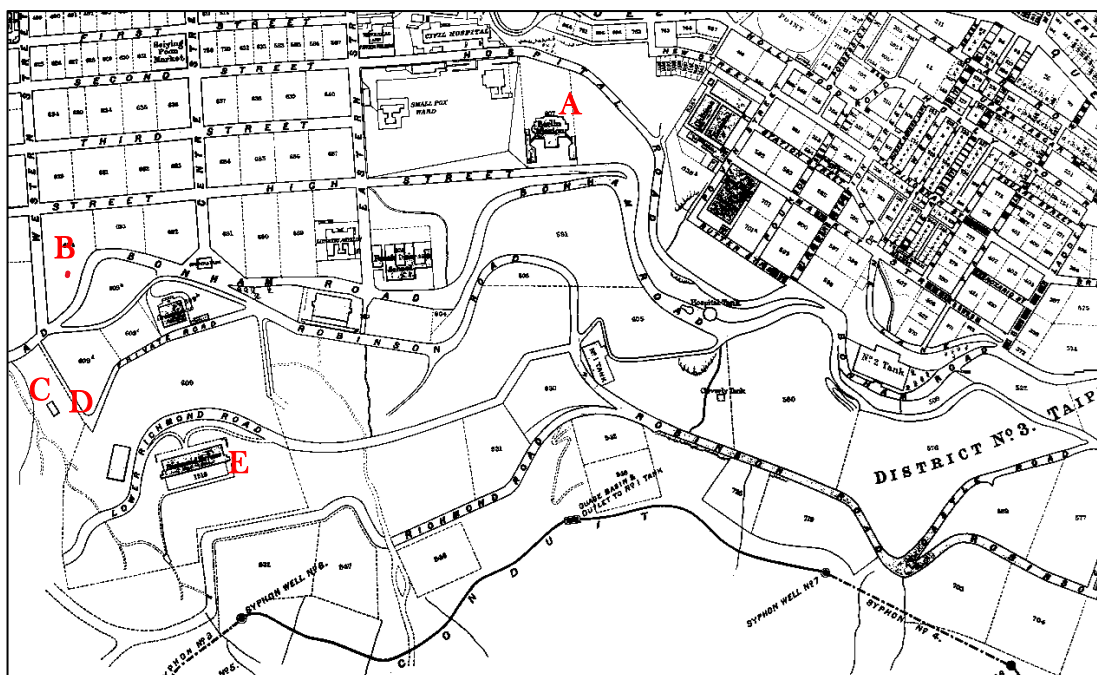
During the War, the German missions' Chinese churches in Hong Kong were under the supervision of British missionaries in accordance with the government's order. After the departure of their German pastors, holy communions and rituals were performed by Chinese pastors and elders. The War did something good by effectively speeding up the self-management of the German missions' Chinese churches.

During wartime, the Basel Mission's funds and assets in Hong Kong were professionally managed by a government-appointed receiver. The Hong Kong governor allowed the Basel Mission to draw money from Hong Kong accounts to support its inland ministry. The receiver also provided regular updates on the status of the mission's assets in Hong Kong to the Basel Mission's treasurer in China. One may say that, during the wartime period, the German missions were generally well-treated by the Hong Kong government. Their mission work in the colony and inland China was largely intact, with the increasing financial support of its Chinese congregations and a sympathetic governor in Hong Kong.

The real trouble came after the end of the War, when governor May resigned due to his sudden illness. Hong Kong was governed by Claud Severn, the Colonial Secretary for almost a year, until the arrival of a new governor Reginald E. Stubbs in late 1919. Severn and Stubbs had very different agenda and approach in handling German missions and their work. They had no hesitation in removing German missions permanently from the colony. And the reason was related to their interest in the substantial property portfolio possessed by these missions.

Just like today, Hong Kong was then facing a shortage of housing and property. Since the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, Hong Kong has become a shelter for many Chinese refugees. Housing rentals rocketed and created many social problems. Even the colonial government had difficulties finding proper houses for its European employees.¹² Properties in the Mid-Levels became the hottest item in the market. As you will see in this map, many of the German mission properties in Hong Kong were located in this area, including the Chinese churches and mission houses of the Basel and Rhenish missions, the Berlin Foundling Home, and the Basel Mission's European houses for rent.

Map of the Mid-Levels, Hong Kong, 1888



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| A: Berlin Foundling Home | D: Rhenish Mission House |
| B: Basel Mission House and Sai Ying Pun Church | E: Basilea, Basel Mission's properties for rent |
| C: Rhenish Mission Chinese Church | |

¹² "Hong Kong's Housing Question", *Hongkong Telegraph* (26 March 1919).

In 1916, a list of these German mission property with estimated value was submitted to London. Governor May excluded the mission properties for religious, educational, and philanthropical purposes.¹³ He stressed that many mission properties were ‘very old’ and could only be sold at a loss. May also pointed out that there were over a hundred Chinese foundlings and blind girls staying at these mission premises. However, just a few months after Severn took over the governorship, he resubmitted the list to London. He gave an estimated value to every mission property, with a new total value three times the previous estimate. As if it was not enough, a note at the end remarked: “there has been a large increase in the value of the land since 1916.”¹⁴

Severn also tackled the ‘problem’ of the foundling and blind girls in the mission property. With the help of the Anglican church’s archdeacon Ernest J. Barnett, he moved the younger blind girls to a blind facility in Guangdong so that the 106 foundlings could be moved to the blind school. The foundling home in the Mid-Levels could be vacated and turned into police quarters. The government told the archdeacon, who was responsible for the care of the foundlings and blind people, that it reserved the right to further remove the children from the blind school or the blind facility ‘if these properties should be required for other purposes.’ I wish I have time to tell you more about these German missions’ foundlings and blind children under the government’s arrangement. I can only say that because of the Hong Kong government’s action, these children lost their warm shelter under the German missionary care, and the Berlin Women’s Mission lost its mission work in Hong Kong forever.

The Hong Kong officials also transferred the funds and properties of German missions to a German Mission Trust composed of British missionary trustees. The Basel Mission, since then, no longer received any money from Hong Kong or any information about the status of its property. From the government records, we know during 1920 to 1925, the Hong Kong government made many attempts to acquire control on German mission properties. For instance, in 1920, the governor suggested granting the Rhenish Mission’s chapel to a catholic mission in exchange for its leased land nearby.¹⁵ In another attempt, he proposed purchasing the Berlin Foundling Home for residential development, with the proceeds divided between the two British missions.¹⁶ But each time, his actions were stopped by the Colonial Office. Its London staff, who worked with Oldham in creating Article 438, was very devoted to the British government’s obligation under the Article. Government records also indicate that during the drafting of the ordinance on establishing the German Mission Trust 1923, the Hong Kong governor also inserted

¹³ May to Andrew Bonar Law, 23 March 1916, CO 323/698/44, The National Archives.

¹⁴ Severn to Viscount Milner, 7 April 1919, CO 323/793/33, The National Archives.

¹⁵ Stubbs to Viscount Milner, 4 September 1920, CO 129/462, 354-358, TNA.

¹⁶ Stubbs to Viscount Milner, 10 September 1920, CO 129/462, 329-340, TNA.

wordings to empower himself to instruct the trustees on the sale of mission properties or to surrender the trusted property to the crown. Fortunately, these peculiar wordings were spotted by the eagle-eyed Colonial Office staff, who insisted on their removal from the final version. One of them commented, 'It seems to me contrary to the spirit of the Peace Treaty and wrong in itself for state power to compel trustees to surrender trust property.'¹⁷

The failures in the legislative process did not stop the Hong Kong government's desire for the German mission property. It continued to bar the return of German missions to the colony even when the plans for German missionaries to return to India and Africa were all well advanced. In July 1925, just a few months before the end of the governor's terms, Stubbs recommended the disposal of all German mission property in the colony.¹⁸ He claimed that only the Basel Mission wanted to return, but there would be 'significant opposition' to its resumption of mission work in Hong Kong.

When the news came out, J. H. Oldham, the Secretary of the International Missionary Council, immediately opposed the idea, warning that the continuous expulsion of German missions in Hong Kong would violate 'the principle of missionary freedom'.¹⁹ He also informed the British missionary trustees in Hong Kong that the Rhenish and Hildesheim missions also wished to resume their work in the colony. Eventually, due to the protest of Oldham and the British trustees, as well as the opposition of the Colonial Office staff, the Hong Kong government's idea to expel German missions permanently from mission work in Hong Kong did not proceed.²⁰

Stubbs and Severn, well-known for hankering after German mission properties, left Hong Kong in late 1925. The next governor Cecil Clementi had no interest in German mission properties, and most importantly, the Hong Kong property market collapsed after the Canton-Hong Kong Strike. From 1926 onwards, the Basel Mission and the other three German missions finally began their negotiation on the return of their assets and the resumption of work in Hong Kong. I am afraid it will take another session to explain the role of British missionaries in this history and the difficulties they caused in the negotiation. I would like to end the presentation by telling you that the Basel, Rhenish, and Hildesheim missions resumed their mission work in Hong Kong in the late 1920s, almost a decade after the War. And their work continued prosperously for many more years. This is the end of my presentation. Thank you.

¹⁷ Comments of Sir Gilbert Grindle on Stubb's telegram on the draft of German Mission Trust Ordinance, 1923, 12 January 1923, CO 129/479, pp 215-220, TNA.

¹⁸ Stubbs to Amery, 7 July 1915, CO 129/488, pp 539-565, TNA.

¹⁹ Oldham to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 October 1925, CO 129/491, pp 371-376, TNA.

²⁰ Draft letter of L. S. Amery to Hong Kong governor, 4 November 1925, CO 129/491, pp 378-379.