

A Study of the Main Paradigms Used by P.R.C. Scholars in the History of Protestant Missions in Modern China

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This essay aims at analyzing the three major prevalent paradigms in the study of the history of protestantism in Mainland China. In discussing these three paradigms, the writer also wants to suggest a new possible approach to the study of Christianity in the future.

The first existing approach is the “cultural imperialism” paradigm. Under the influence of anti-foreign feelings and official ideology, this approach put an emphasis on the foreign missionaries’ role as pioneers of Western imperialism. The second approach is the “cultural intercourse” paradigm. This approach admits that the foreign missionaries did play an important role in Sino-Western cultural intercourse. The last approach is the “modernization” paradigm. This approach realizes that the modern transformation of China has resulted from both external stimuli and internal changes. The foreign missionaries’ engagement in educational and cultural activities had a great impact on the “modernization” process in modern China.

In concluding the essay, the writer suggests that the “post-colonial theory” approach may also serve as a possible paradigm in the future. An application of Edward W. Said’s interpretation of “Orientalism” can broaden the field in three ways. The first way is to analyse the relationship between the works of missionaries and the tradition of Sinology in the West. The second way is to reevaluate the images of China in the works of missionaries. The final way is to find out how missionaries created an image of China, and to what and how these images shaped the China policy of Western powers.