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Caught in the Middle
Issues of Interculturality in Early Missionary Encounters
The Case of the Basel Mission
with Particular Regard to Theodor Hamberg

TOBIAS BRANDNER

Abstract

The essay discusses difficult issues in the intercultural encounters of the early missionaries, particularly a) between missionaries and their home committees and b) among missionaries of different agencies in the mission field. The paper explores how the missionary becomes something "in-between," not fully belonging to either side, neither fully retaining the home perspective nor fully becoming indigenous. The essay develops this thesis by introducing issues of interculturality in the early ministry of the Basel Mission among the Hakka people in Hong Kong and eastern Guangdong Province, with a focus on the short but significant ministry of Theodor Hamberg (1819–1854) who, with Rudolf Lechler, is regarded as the first Basel missionary to China.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A story told by a former archivist of the Basel Mission (BM) in Switzerland goes as follows:

> In the old days, people preparing themselves to become missionaries would have to go through a course of several years to equip themselves with all the necessary biblical, theological, cultural, medical, or technical knowledge and with the necessary life and vocational skills to make the work in a foreign context a success. For this purpose, the Basel Mission had established a training centre, a mission school, to educate young men and (since the early 20th century) women to become missionaries. These young people mostly came from little farming villages and market towns and only brought a passion to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with them. Most of the educational and vocational skills they were supposed to bring to the future mission field were taught in this mission school. Upon their graduation, after several years of such education, the students would gather in front of the meeting room of the mission board where the final decision about their missionary destination was made. And then, the door opened and the president of the mission would step out and declare where each student would be sent. In just a few seconds they would all realize what their future field of work would be. The people in the Basel Mission used to say amongst themselves that those with the best grades would be sent to China, those with the second best to India, and all the others to Africa. If they were being sent to Africa they knew they would be in danger of severe illness and of dying within only a few years in average. . .[1]

This story tells us something about the tremendous respect that the mission in Basel had for the task of sharing the gospel in China. They were aware that they were encountering people with a long history, a difficult language, and a strong pride in their culture.

Missionary encounters belonged to the first and earliest forms of *intercultural encounters*. Missionaries engaged in a far deeper way with the foreign context than any politician or trader would. Such communication necessarily included a deep knowledge of the whole frame-

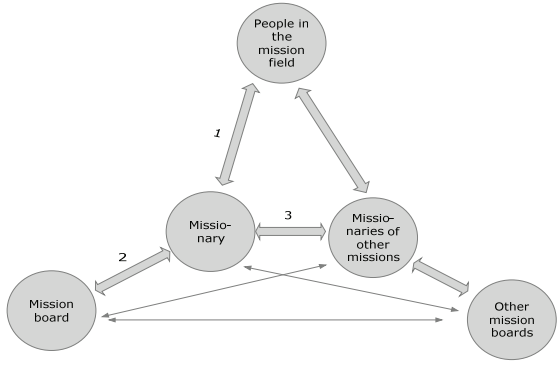
[1] Paul Jenkins, on a tour through the Basel Mission House, May 1996.

work in which understanding happens: linguistic, cultural, social, philosophical, and religious aspects of a counterpart's world view. Through the process of acquiring understanding, missionaries played an important role in the transmission *to* the West of knowledge *about* China. On the other hand, as these encounters included the communication of both spiritual and cultural knowledge, the reverse was also true, with cultural knowledge *about* the West being transmitted *to* China.

The topic of this essay is the *difficult issues* in this intercultural encounter. Interculturality refers to the interactions between people of different cultures, and to the difficulties due to different symbols, contexts, social rules, or expectations.[2] In the early missionary encounters, we can distinguish three core relationships:

1. Between the missionary and the local people in the so-called mission field.
2. Between the missionary who has left his home and the mission board at home.
3. Among missionaries from different contexts in the mission field.

This three-fold structure particularly applies to the early mission period. For later periods, we would need to add a further relationship—the possibility of direct relations between the mission board and locals in the mission field. Other less important relationships could be added, for example, between a missionary and other mission boards or between local converts and those who rejected contact with missionaries.



[2] See Donald K. Smith, "Intercultural Communication," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 492.

Traditionally, attention has been focused on the relationship between missionary and the people in the mission field (relationship 1).[3] This is where the most important intercultural difficulties arise. Missionaries are constantly struggling with everyday difficulties: foreign food, foreign language, a foreign cultural framework and confrontation with an alien religion. Another difficulty, the feeling of being cheated, was a huge issue in the early Basel missionaries' dealings with the Chinese Union, the *Fuhanhui* 福漢會, a group of local gospel workers who were supposed to carry out most of the actual evangelization.[4]

This essay uses a different approach, focusing instead on the less-observed interactions between the missionary and the home committee (2) and among missionaries of different agencies in the field (3). By studying the case of Theodor Hamberg (one of the first two Basel missionaries to China), his relationship with the mission board in Basel, and his role within the missionary community of Hong Kong, this essay shows how the missionary him- or herself becomes something "in-between," not fully belonging to either side, neither fully retaining the home perspective nor fully becoming indigenous in the field. More programmatically speaking, the aim of the essay is to muster evidence to support the thesis that we should move away from dichotomic thinking towards a triadic structure, that means not a dualism of sending agent and receiving group, but a triad of sending agent, receiving group, and missionary caught in the middle. A discussion of communicative difficulties in this three-way relationship supports the thesis.

The essay starts with a short introduction to Hamberg's life and to the BM's encounter with the Hakka people in southern China before turning to a discussion of intercultural issues in Hamberg's life and ministry.

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[3] An example of such an approach is the study by Thoralf Klein, *Die Basler Mission in Guangdong (Südchina) 1859–1931: Akkulturationsprozesse und kulturelle Grenzziehungen zwischen Missionaren, chinesischen Christen und lokaler Gesellschaft* (München: Iudicium, 2002). Klein discusses the process of acculturation, meaning changes in cultural patterns, both on the side of the Hakka people and the missionaries from Basel.

[4] Regarding the work of the Chinese Union, see Jessie G. Lutz and Rolland R. Lutz, "Karl Gützlaff's Approach to Indigenization: The Chinese Union," in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel H. Bays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 269–291.

2. THE BASEL MISSION, THEODOR HAMBERG, AND THE MISSION TO THE HAKKA PEOPLE IN CHINA

The Basel Mission, founded in 1815, emerged from a wave of evangelical revivals that touched people in America, England and the rest of Europe. Unlike the revivalist movements in the Anglo-American world, the continental revivals of the early 19th century were part of conservative Christians' response to the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and the political revolutionary and republican movements of the time.[5] This continental revivalism, known as Pietism, stayed doctrinally close to Lutheran and Calvinist belief and did not separate from established churches, as revivalist groups did in other contexts. The Pietists wanted instead to revive existing churches, emphasizing spiritual rebirth, personal Bible study, a clean break with the world, discipline, social conservatism and a strong commitment to mission. The BM belongs, together with the London Mission (LMS), the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and the American Baptist Missionary Union, to the first generation of Protestant missions. It was an ecumenical mission that, in the beginning, worked well with others, particularly the CMS.[6]

The BM approached ministry in China with hesitation.[7] It was al-

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[5] See Jon Miller, *Missionary Zeal and Institutional Control: Organizational Contradictions in the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast, 1828–1917* (Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge: W. B. Eerdmans; London: CurzonRoutledge, 2003), 96. Regarding the emancipative elements of revivalist movements in the Anglo-American world, see Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); see also Graham Maddox, ed., *Political Writings of John Wesley* ([Durham]: University of Durham; Bristol: Thoemmes, 1998), 9–41, showing the combination of Wesley's explicitly socially conservative teaching and implicitly socially transformative contribution.

[6] Paul Jenkins, "The Church Missionary Society and the Basel Mission: An Early Experiment in Inter-European Cooperation," in *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity 1799–1999*, eds. Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 43–65; see also Erich Schick, *Vorboten und Bahnbrecher: Grundzüge der Evangelischen Missionsgeschichte bis zu den Anfängen der Basler Mission* (Basel: Basler Missionsbuchhandlung, 1943), 239, 264f.

[7] The discussion about a mission to China started in 1839. Since 1835, Gützlaff had been corresponding with one member of the BM board, Dr. Barth. About the process leading to the beginning of BM's mission in China, see Wilhelm Schlatter, *Geschichte der Basler Mission 1815–1915. II. Band: Die Geschichte der Basler Mission in Indien und China* (Basel: Basler Missionsbuchhandlung, 1916), 271–275;

ready involved in Africa (the Gold Coast and present-day Ghana) and in India. The limited resources—or, more directly speaking, a constant deficit—and the small home base made the mission board wonder whether sending missionaries to China was indeed God's plan. The financial constraints continued to play a role in their endeavour in China. Eventually, due to repeated calls for help from Karl Gützlaff, they sent Theodor Hamberg, from Sweden, and Rudolf Lechler, from southern Germany, as the first Basel missionaries to China. They left Basel on 27 October 1846 and travelled through the Mediterranean, Egypt, and the Red Sea to India. After a three-week break, they moved on towards China and arrived in Hong Kong on 19 March 1847.

Hamberg (1819–1854) and Lechler (1824–1908) are known as the first Basel missionaries to work in China and as founders of today's Tsung Tsin Mission Church. Hamberg's significant contribution has often been overshadowed by Lechler's much longer and better-known ministry, as he worked longer in China and thus had more time to contribute to the establishment of the church. The limited knowledge about Hamberg is also due to his Swedish origins. Important source material—his communication with his home base in Sweden, the Lund and the Swedish Missionary society, and his letters to his family—are in Swedish and have therefore been neglected by most missionary research. This has changed with a recent English translation (prepared for a subsequent Chinese translation) of a biography by Herman Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg, den förste svenske Kinamissionären* (1952).[8] This paper does not modify Schlyter's interpretation of Hamberg, which is based on a thorough processing of the relevant material at the BM and Lund Mission archives. Instead, this paper draws on Schlyter's biography and compares it with more recent research on the BM in order to discuss intercultural issues arising from Hamberg's ministry. While much research on the history of mission has focused on An-

for Chinese translation, see Wilhelm Schlatter 施拉德, *Zhenguang zhao Kejia: Base Chahui zaoqi lai Hua xuanjiao jianshi, 1839–1915* 真光照客家——巴色差會早期來華宣教簡史，1839–1915 (Hong Kong: Jidujiao Xianggang Chongzhenhui, 2008), 20ff.

[8] The English translation by Göran Wiking has not yet been published, but could be used for this essay. It was the basis for the subsequent Chinese translation by Zhou Tianhe 周天和, published as Schlyter 史萊搭, Theodor Hamberg 韓山明, *Ruidian diyi wei qianwang Zhongguo de xuanjiaoshi* 瑞典第一位前往中國的宣教士 (Hong Kong: Jidujiao Xianggang Chongzhenhui, 2007). When making reference to Schlyter, the author refers to the Swedish original with the help of this English translation. The quotations come from the English translation by Wiking. Additionally, for the convenience of the readers who have access to the Chinese translation, references are given to both Swedish and Chinese translation.

glo-American missions, there is also scholarship on continental mission history, although often only in German.[9] Recent scholars like Jessie Lutz and Jon Miller have significantly contributed to a better understanding of continental mission for English readers.[10] It is particularly Miller's sociological case study on the BM in West Africa (Ghana) that offers a helpful comparison and parallel analysis of the social dynamics between different participants in the missionary endeavour.

Theodor Hamberg was born into the family of a merchant marine captain in Stockholm but, after losing his father at the age of eleven, spent much of his youth in the family of the English consul and businessman George Foy. His upbringing was thus significantly different from that of most other missionaries sent out by the BM, who typically came from agrarian, craft, and/or semi-industrial backgrounds in southern Germany.[11] Hamberg's different cultural, linguistic, and social origins offer a useful and interesting example of the complexity of intercultural relations. At the age of twenty three, Hamberg experienced a conversion and was subsequently drawn to the BM by one of its booklets calling for missionary candidates. In 1844, Hamberg was admitted to the BM school and, three years later, he was sent to China. Hamberg was the first missionary to the Hakka, a people group living mainly around Meixian and Heyuan in the mountainous areas of eastern Guangdong. Lechler was first sent to the Hoklo people around Chaozhou on the southern coast. Only in December 1852, after repeated failures in his attempt to establish a mission base among the Hoklo, did Lechler give up and join Hamberg. If there were to be any hierarchy between the two, Hamberg would have been the superior, as he was older and was addressed as senior by the home board.[12] Ham-

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[9] Besides the quasi official history of BM by Schlatter, *Geschichte der Basler Mission 1815–1915* and Paul Eppler, *Geschichte der Basler Mission 1815–1899* (Basel: Verlag der Missionsbuchhandlung, 1900), an important mission history is Schick, *Vorboten und Bahnbrecher*. More recently, the contributions of Thoralf Klein about continental mission in China deserve particular attention, besides the study mentioned in footnote 3, see Thoralf Klein and Reinhard Zöllner, eds., *Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851) und das Christentum in Ostasien: Ein Missionar zwischen den Kulturen* (Nettetal: Institut Monumenta Serica, Sankt Augustin, 2005).

[10] Lutz and Lutz, "Karl Gützlaff's Approach to Indigenization," 269–291, or, more recently, Jessie G. Lutz, *Opening China: Karl F. A. Gützlaff and Sino-Western Relations, 1827–1852* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Miller, *Missionary Zeal and Institutional Control*.

[11] Miller, *Missionary Zeal and Institutional Control*, 47. See also the table of the social origins of the first missionaries of the BM to West Africa, 54.

[12] Letters, dated 30 Sept 1852 and 1 Oct 1852, from the director of BM, Josenhans, to Hamberg, Lechler, and Winnes, addressed Hamberg as "senior." See Basel Mission

berg became known mainly through his contribution to the understanding of the mid-19th century Taiping Rebellion[13] and his compilation of a Hakka dictionary that built an important foundation for all later Hakka linguistics.[14] As Hamberg's description of the origins of the Taiping Rebellion has been widely referred to,[15] it is not a topic of this essay. Hamberg died of diarrhoea and dysentery on 13 May 1854, after only seven years in China. His wife, who joined him in September 1851, died barely a year later, in August 1855, having lost her two young sons in the meantime—one during a journey back home from Hong Kong to Europe, and the other in July 1855, after returning to Sweden.

The Hakka are, like the Hoklo, ethnically Han, but linguistically and culturally distinct.[16] Yet, against common doubts about their Chinese identity, the Hakka stressed their Han-ness and their descent from the Chinese heartland around the Yellow River.[17] They are nowadays spread mainly over several southern provinces of China. Their origins are traced to different migration movements that brought them from north-central China to the south, the first instance possibly during the early Han period.[18] As migrants from the north, they were confined to

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Archive, quoted from Herman Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg, den förste svenske Kinamissionären* (Lund: Gleerup, 1952), 168, footnote 20.

13 Theodor Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection* (New York: Praeger, 1968 [reprint of 1854]).

14 Hilary Chappell and Christine Lamarre, *A Grammar and Lexicon of Hakka: Historical Materials from the Basel Mission Library* (Paris: Écoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Social, Centre de Recherches Linguistiques sur l'Asie Orientale, 2005).

15 See among others P. M. Yap, "The Mental Illness of Hung Hsiu-ch'uan: Leader of the Taiping Rebellion," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 13 (1953/54): 287–304; R. G. Wagner, *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1982); Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996) and Jonathan D. Spence, *The Taiping Vision of a Christian China, 1836–1864* (Waco, TX: Markham Press Fund, Baylor University Press, 1998).

16 Regarding the issue of Hakka identity, see Nicole Constable, "Christianity and Hakka Identity," in Bays, *Christianity in China*, 158–179. Further information on the culture and society of the Hakka people can be found at: Jessie G. Lutz and Rolland R. Lutz, *Hakka Chinese Confront Protestant Christianity, 1850–1900, with the Autobiographies of Eight Hakka Christians and Commentary* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 155–185.

17 Constable, "Christianity and Hakka Identity," 160.

18 This is the theory presented by the Museum of Heyuan. See also Klein, *Die Basler Mission in Guangdong (Südchina) 1859–1931*, 49. Constable mentions the fourth century AD. Constable, "Christianity and Hakka Identity," 160.

the less fertile lands of the mountain areas and commonly lived in conflict with the resident Cantonese population (*bendi* or *punti* 本地[人]).

3. ISSUES OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

While studying at the mission training centre, Hamberg was a highly promising student on whom the mission set high hopes. Yet, soon after his 1847 arrival in Hong Kong, his relationship with the home board turned sour and saw some serious crises. These were partly due to avoidable mistakes on both sides; much more, however, were due to difficulties in cross-cultural communication. This section gives an account of these issues.

Technical difficulties and an unequal relationship

The most obvious and most simple issue making communication extremely difficult was that there was no other way than to write letters and wait for a response. At the time, it took a letter around three months to make the journey from Hong Kong to Basel, that is, a six-month round trip.[19] Imagine a missionary needing to wait half a year when facing crucial and sometimes urgent questions regarding his own life, strategic mission decisions, or financial questions. What aggravated this simple issue of time, however, was the nature of the relationship between the board of the BM and its missionaries. It was strictly authoritarian: the board expected strict submission to its authority, which missionaries usually accepted fairly readily. The unequal relationship between home board and missionaries was supported by the social separation of members from each group and by a conservative, patriarchal theology of order.[20] There is plenty of evidence in the letters between Hamberg and the mission board that illustrates this relationship and expresses both Hamberg's readiness for such submission and the mission director's expectation of strict obedience.

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[19] Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg*, 68 (Chinese translation, 60).
[20] Miller, *Missionary Zeal and Institutional Control*, 35–60.

Director Josenhans, the BM's inspector at the time of Hamberg, emphasizes that he "as inspector expects the utmost obedience. . . Rather no missionaries than disobedient ones."[21] He followed the educational principle to break each and every of his pupils and to "smash them."[22] Hamberg expresses his obedience (and its limits!) in one of his letters in the following way:

> This can only be done, as you correctly put it, by me as a subordinate conforming with what the dear committee decides in its capacity as my superior, and I am prepared to do this as far as a clear conscience permits . . . but the dear committee can meanwhile not expect me to obey you more than God.[23]

However, when direct communication with the mission authority is at intervals of six months, the missionary can hardly avoid making at least provisional decisions independent of the mission board. This dilemma became particularly obvious when Hamberg faced the question of whether to take up the leadership of the Chinese Union while Gützlaff travelled to Europe in September 1849. When invited by Gützlaff to do so, he was already highly critical of the Chinese Union. Still, he was not ready to give it up completely and thought it worth being reformed. He also felt some personal loyalty towards Gützlaff. Facing this difficult question, Hamberg was alone. He knew that direction from the mission board would only arrive after half a year, yet the decision had to be made right away. He decided to accept the leadership of the Chinese Union. Six months later, it turned out that the mission board had come to the opposite conclusion. They could not understand how Hamberg could express so much criticism of Gützlaff in his letters while at the same time supporting him and taking up his post while he was in Europe. They regarded Hamberg as confused and interpreted his decision as insubordination.[24]

Although Hamberg clearly showed submission to the direction of the mission board, there might have been some truth in the mission committee's impression that Hamberg was less than submissive. In

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[21] Letter of Josenhans, dated 15 Nov 1850 (from Archive of BM), quoted from Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg*, 130, footnote 44 (Chinese translation, 105).

[22] Cornelia Vogelsanger, *Pietismus und Afrikanische Kultur an der Goldküste: Die Einstellung der Basler Mission zur Haussklaverei* (Zürich: Wohlgemuth, 1977), 59.

[23] Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg*, 121 (Chinese translation, 99).

[24] Ibid., 183 (Chinese translation, 148).

several ways, Hamberg stood in contrast to the BM's usual order. His different social background and his friendship with the family of the British consul to Sweden must have shaped his self-understanding. His spiritual formation under the revivalist influence of George Scott and Carl Olaf Rosenius distinguished itself from the more conservative revivalism of the continent, which more strongly emphasized traditional order and authority. Swedish pietism, influenced by Anglo-Saxon revivalism, was nonconformist, republican, and democratic.[25] The BM expected missionaries to make a clean break with the past, as Christian Gottlieb Blumhardt, the first inspector of the mission, stated in the house rules: "At the moment of entry into authentic mission service, [seminarians are] completely torn away from their previous ties."[26] The later house rules issued by Josenhans stressed the missionaries' submission even more. On this point, the BM must have felt that they had failed, as shown by Hamberg's on-going independent correspondence and contact with his Swedish supporters and friends, in particular his fiancée (see more below).

The unequal relationship between the Basel Committee (or the inspector) and the missionary was further complicated by the fact that it was not simply functional but was also described in family terms: unconditional submission from the missionary, fatherly care from the committee.[27] It appears that Joseph Josenhans embodied the fatherly image particularly strongly; he was described by some as dispensing "fear and love, punishment and grace just like the Old Testament God to whom he knew himself to be responsible."[28] It is not a far-fetched guess that Hamberg had ambivalent feelings about an inspector in such a fatherly role: possibly yearning for a father, as he himself had lost his own father at early age, but at the same time not so easily accepting someone stepping into his life as a father. The conflict might also have stemmed from Hamberg struggling with such strict fatherly authority

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[25] George M. Stephenson, *The Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration* ([Minneapolis]: University of Minnesota Press, 1932), 24–26.

[26] Blumhardt, *Hausordnung*, 4, quoted from Miller, *Missionary Zeal and Institutional Control*, 48.

[27] Wilhelm Schlatter, *Geschichte der Basler Mission 1815–1915. I. Band: Die Heimatgeschichte der Basler Mission* (Basel: Basler Missionsbuchhandlung, 1916), 233.

[28] Cornelia Vogelsanger, *Pietismus und Afrikanische Kultur an der Goldküste: Die Einstellung der Basler Mission zur Haussklaverei* (Zürich: Wohlgemuth, 1977), 60, quoted from Miller, *Missionary Zeal and Institutional Control*, 93.

and going through his own process of rebellion against a powerful father figure.

Linguistic difficulties

Hamberg was a linguist who knew several languages. His mother tongue was Swedish, but he also spoke German, French, and English, and he had studied Latin, Greek, and Portuguese.[29] On his journey to China, during the long boat trip from Bombay to Hong Kong, he began to study Chinese with two teachers;[30] arriving in Hong Kong and upon Gützlaff's decision, he began to study Hakka.[31] Later, he started Mandarin studies.[32] His contribution to the field of linguistics is particularly remarkable, as he was the first Westerner to make a serious effort at the Hakka language.[33] After his death, several people made reference to his excellent Hakka skills.[34]

Yet, despite Hamberg's obvious linguistic gifts, language remained a contentious issue in his communication with the home board. What made matters more complicated was that Hamberg was not a native German speaker. Although both his spoken and written German were good, he himself sometimes wondered whether some of the misunderstandings with the mission board were due to his difficulties in writing German. The mission board shared this impression and equally mentioned that his German writing and understanding of the received letters led to misunderstandings. At some point, they even asked him to make sure that his letters were proofread by his co-workers Lechler or Winnes before being sent.[35] Linguistic misunderstandings, linguistic vagueness, or simply constant doubts about whether one really understands the counterpart correctly—are all typical elements of an intercultural conflict. It should be observed that no such communicative

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[29] Recommendation letter of Fjellstedt, a Swedish missionary, to the BM, quoted from Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg*, 26 (Chinese translation, 25).

[30] Ibid., 51 (Chinese translation, 47). It is not clear which Chinese language he studied.

[31] Ibid., 59 (Chinese translation, 53).

[32] Ibid., 81 (Chinese translation, 69).

[33] Ibid., 213 (Chinese translation, 174).

[34] James Legge of LMS and later professor in Chinese at Oxford University is quoted with the following words: "The progress he had made in terms of language skills was very good." Quoted from ibid.

[35] Letter from Josenhans to Hamberg, dated 28 April 1853, see ibid., 186 (Chinese translation, 150).

difficulties are mentioned in the relationship between Hamberg and Lechler or in the time Hamberg was in missionary training in Basel. Obviously, however, the restriction to only written expression and the geographical distance turned these difficulties into an issue of understanding.

There is another issue in play: communication depends on mutual trust. In the relationship between Hamberg and the mission board, trust was surely given and strengthened through the years of Hamberg's training in Basel. Yet, once cracks appear in a relationship and doubts about the counterpart's mind and decision-making sneak in, trust diminishes and any later communication is undermined. In normal circumstances, such rifts can easily be clarified and healed through a short face-to-face meeting. But with geographical distance making such a clarifying encounter impossible, such issues easily gain negative momentum and make any later mutual understanding more difficult. Hamberg thus implores the board to read his letters with love: "From a man's character one can understand his letters, rather than the other way round. I am absolutely convinced that [. . .] a good relationship would soon be restored just by a short dialogue."[36]

Something similar still happens nowadays in cases of strict separation, as experiences from the life of prison inmates show: they are separated from family and unable to communicate freely or directly; minor misunderstandings easily turn into major problems.

Strategic issues

For the first four years of his seven years in Hong Kong, the dominant theme of Hamberg's ministry and life was his relationship with Gützlaff. The conflict that arose was strategic, not personal. Just a few months after arriving in Hong Kong, Hamberg started to realize how the workers of the Chinese Union commonly cheated the organization. He therefore became increasingly critical. Still, he felt personally attached to Gützlaff and enjoyed staying at his home.[37] The issue was

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[36] Letter from Hamberg, dated 28 December 1852, quoted from ibid., 183 (Chinese translation, 147).

[37] In August 1849, Hamberg wrote to his mother that the Gützlaff home was for him the only house in Hong Kong where he could enjoy social company. See ibid., 91 (Chinese translation, 77).

instead the right mission strategy, which was partly related to interculturality.

The BM decided to start their China mission because Gützlaff had convinced the board (and a good number of friends of the mission). Gützlaff was the first German and the first Lutheran missionary in China, and his pietism was close to the theology of the BM. The missionaries sent by the BM were called by Gützlaff and were to serve under his leadership.[38] For this reason, the BM's missionaries clearly allied themselves, at least at the beginning, with Gützlaff's mission strategy.

In short, Gützlaff's strategy consisted of several core elements:[39]

1. Chinese, not foreigners, must effect the conversion of China.[40] Missionaries had only an auxiliary function.
2. Western mission needs to rely as much as possible on cooperation with local co-workers, to whom responsibility should be quickly handed over.[41] For this reason, a local group of co-workers was trained, that is, the Chinese Union. The duty of the Western missionary was primarily to instruct and supervise these local preachers.
3. The gospel should reach the whole of China; the missionary should therefore as soon as possible leave the coastal areas for the interior.
4. The Western missionary should become fully Chinese, completely immersed in the local lifestyle, including Chinese clothing, hairstyle and diet.[42]

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[38] Ibid., 49f. (Chinese translation, 46).

[39] Regarding Gützlaff's overall mission strategy and the work of the Chinese Union, see Lutz and Lutz, "Karl Gützlaff's Approach to Indigenization," 269–291, or, more recently, Lutz, *Opening China*, 215–258; see also Gerhard Tiedemann, "Missionarischer Einzelgänger oder Visionär? Die Missionsmethoden Gützlaffs," in Klein and Zöllner, *Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851) und das Christentum in Ostasien*, 193–231.

[40] Lutz and Lutz, "Karl Gützlaff's Approach to Indigenization," 270.

[41] See the early description of the workings of the Chinese Union and of Gützlaff's strategy regarding these co-workers by Hamberg in a letter to Keyser from the Swedish Missionary Society. Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg*, 57f (Chinese translation, 52f).

[42] Lutz and Lutz, "Karl Gützlaff's Approach to Indigenization," 271; Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg*, 57 (Chinese translation, 52). Soon after his arrival Hamberg wrote to his mother that they had "given up the use of knife and fork and now eat with wood sticks, similar to but slightly longer than pencils, which are held between the thumb and the 3rd and 4th finger, and then you pick up the food as if with a pair of pliers.

5. Accommodation should be rented locally rather than bought. No mission station should be started; rather, an itinerant preaching ministry should be pursued.[43]
6. The focus of the missionary work is preaching and extensive evangelization because setting up schools and hospitals is too slow.[44]

In terms of culture and theology, the BM's missionaries were close to Gützlaff. Their strategy stood in contrast to that of the more stationary British missions (LMS and CMS) that Gützlaff often derogatorily called "gentleman missions" (紳士式的宣教).[45]

When Hamberg discovered deficiencies amongst the preachers of the Chinese Union and distanced himself from them, it brought a conflict of loyalty with Gützlaff. This conflict deepened when British missionaries, most importantly James Legge and J. F. Cleland of LMS, sharpened their criticism of Gützlaff and his Chinese Union. Hamberg and Lechler of the BM were caught in the middle, between different strategies and different mission cultures: they shared in general the British missionaries' criticism of Gützlaff, yet they still felt loyal to him and even defended him by writing to London.[46]

It was an expression of this loyalty conflict that Hamberg accepted Gützlaff's request to lead the Chinese Union during his trip to Europe where he wanted to raise further support for the mission in China. In September 1849, Hamberg took up the leadership of the Union although he was already completely disillusioned with the organization. When the English missionaries, led by Legge and with the cooperation of Hamberg, investigated the faith and life of the Chinese Union co-workers, the results were damaging.[47] This in turn again brought Hamberg to a difficult situation. Instead of dissolving the Union, he insisted that there was room for reform, if only the few able ones could

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[. . .] As soon as we understand the language a bit, we shall put on Chinese dress and shave the hair, leaving only an amount in the neck needed for a tail." Ibid.

43 Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg*, 42f, 54–56 (Chinese translation, 40, 49f).

44 Lutz and Lutz, "Karl Gützlaff's Approach to Indigenization," 271.

45 Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg*, 71 (Chinese translation, 62).

46 Ibid., 81 (Chinese translation, 69).

47 See the minutes of the meeting, held for several days from 20 February 1850 at the house of Hamberg, Basel Mission Archive; see also Lutz and Lutz, "Karl Gützlaff's Approach to Indigenization," 275. The minutes are partly reprinted in Klein and Zöllner, *Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851) und das Christentum in Ostasien*, 339–347.

be brought to confess their wrong-doings and then carry on the evangelization of China.

In the wake of this conflict, and after realizing the weakness of Gützlaff's speed-evangelism approach, Hamberg started to develop his own strategic approach, still influenced by Gützlaff's basic principles while pragmatically adjusting them to the reality on the ground. This brought Hamberg closer to the more stationary approach of the English missions. Hamberg maintained the idea of inland mission but basically abandoned the idea of itinerant ministry. In further contrast to Gützlaff, he focused not on winning individuals, but families. He understood that the family and the network of relatives constituted the real acting subject.[48] Since he as a man was unable to reach out to women, the only ways to evangelize families were setting up institutions like schools and health services (thus establishing something like a mission station) and/or finding a wife to help him in his missionary ministry. When Hamberg communicated these thoughts to the BM, they could not understand his shift and strongly rejected him.[49] Although the criticism of Gützlaff had reached Europe and caused many mission friends to become disillusioned with Gützlaff's approach, his basic strategic principles continued to affect the BM and those close to it.

Spiritual, theological, cultural, and personality tensions

The strategic differences emerging between Gützlaff and Hamberg, between Hamberg and the BM, and between Hamberg and the English missionaries reflected differences in their personalities, spiritual orientations, basic and underlying convictions, and also missionary origins. The BM and Gützlaff had their roots in German pietism, while Hamberg, although equally Lutheran, came from Swedish pietism. The British and American missionaries that Gützlaff and Hamberg encountered in China had an Anglo-American revivalist background. Pietists were more self-effacing and quietist, stressing mystical communion with God. Also, Pietism had a more significant countercultural element than did English revivalism: Christianity is to be manifested in a clean break with the world[50] expressed through repentance and forgiveness.

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[48] Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg*, 211 (Chinese translation, 172f).

[49] Letter to Hamberg from 30 January 1850, quoted from ibid., 99 (Chinese translation, 83).

[50] Ibid., 31 (Chinese translation, 29).

These differences were not only spiritual, but also ecclesiological and theological, as shown by an informal interrogation to which a BM inspector was subjected during a visit to England.[51] Despite the overall good cooperation between the different mission societies, the national element always had a separating effect, which grew in significance through the 19th century.[52]

However, differences were not only spiritual, theological, or social and cultural—there were also differences among missionaries of the same background. For example, despite Gützlaff's equally Pietist theological background he did not stress clearly enough the need for a break with the past in dealing with the co-workers of the Chinese Union. He was interested rather in a speedy spread of the gospel, penetrating the whole country. It was thus also differences in character and institutional origins that set the different missionaries apart. Gützlaff had a strategic vision aimed at the whole of the country. He was driven not only by Pietist humbleness, but equally by Romantic heroism, seeing himself both as an insignificant tool in the hands of God and as an apostle called to China and all of East Asia.[53] To reach his goal, Gützlaff developed a strategy driven by highly progressive missionary principles that were ahead of his time. Yet, his conviction and confidence in his own judgment made him blind to the fact that his plans did not fit reality.

One of the reasons for this relative blindness (and the eventually irreconcilable difference between Gützlaff and Hamberg) was that Gützlaff, independent and enthusiastic, operated on his own and was accountable to no one other than God. In contrast, Hamberg always remained accountable to the mission board. Schlyter is right that in the end, Gützlaff could simply not understand the "society missionary" Hamberg.[54] The alienation between the two was further exacerbated when Hamberg grew increasingly critical of Gützlaff's "speed evangelism," regarding it as useless as long as no clear basis was laid. Hamberg preferred to stress the need for thorough Christian formation (discipleship) and a clear understanding of sin. This slow approach brought him, as we have seen, closer to the English strategy.

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[51] Jenkins, "The Church Missionary Society and the Basel Mission," 59.

[52] Tiedemann, "Missionarischer Einzelgänger oder Visionär?" 210f.

[53] Lutz, *Opening China*, 30.

[54] Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg*, 135 (Chinese translation, 108).

Despite this basic difference, Hamberg and Gützlaff remained close in other respects. Of German and Swedish backgrounds, supported mainly by German and Scandinavian churches, they remained separate from the British missionaries, who felt much more at home in British-colonized Hong Kong.[55] The overall good relations between the missionaries and even Gützlaff's service as Chinese secretary for the colonial government could not hide the fact that both Gützlaff and Hamberg remained cultural outsiders.[56] The British could operate with a different kind of self-confidence, backed by the colonial power of the British Empire.

Another point deserves mentioning. Loneliness is an issue in every missionary's life, and feeling alien among one's own peers intensifies this feeling. One way to counter this loneliness is to establish a family. From very early on, Hamberg called on the mission board to allow him to get married; as mentioned above, a missionary who got engaged without the mission board's approval contradicted basic rules. The Basel Committee preferred single missionaries whose loyalty and emotional energy would be fully focused on the evangelistic task.[57] The mission board's repeated rejection of Hamberg's wishes was a continuous cause of frustration. There were reasons for the board's position: partly, they feared marriage would be an additional burden that would weaken the flexibility and impact of their first missionary; partly, they worried that a wife would naturally keep Hamberg away from his planned itinerant mission; finally, they were upset that Hamberg had gotten engaged before his departure without asking for permission. In his frustration, Hamberg found comfort in Gützlaff's support and willingness to bring along Hamberg's fiancée Louise Motander when returning from his Europe trip to Hong Kong.

This did not work out as planned because Louise Motander arrived in Geneva too late to meet Gützlaff.[58] Nevertheless, the support in this matter that Hamberg thought to receive from Gützlaff meant a lot to him. He did not know then that Gützlaff had made serious complaints to the Basel Mission committee about Hamberg accusing him of de-

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[55] Lutz, *Opening China*, 257.

[56] Ibid., 114.

[57] Waltraud Haas-Lill, *Missionsgeschichte aus der Sicht der Frau: Die Missionarin in der Geschichte der Basler Mission*, 14, quoted from Miller, *Missionary Zeal and Institutional Control*, 61.

[58] Schlyter, *Theodor Hamberg*, 125 (Chinese translation, 101).

stroying the Chinese Union.[59] Eventually, Hamberg succeeded in convincing the mission board to allow him to get married.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The last section provided a broad range of incongruence and misunderstandings due to the gaps a) between missionary and mission field, b) between missionary and mission board, and c) between different missionaries. Standing in a position in between two worlds, belonging fully to neither one, was what shaped the missionaries' life most profoundly. I like to conclude with three remarks:

First, there were not only experiences of incongruence, but also experiences of *congruence*. The early missionaries of the BM came mainly from the countryside in southern Germany, and they were drawn to the simple life of the village people. They always remained suspicious about the materialism of the city. This is not simply a retrospective projection; it was expressed by Hamberg in one of his letters, when he wrote that Hong Kong gave little hope to a missionary and that it was easy to "grow weary of their shrewdness, lies and duplicity."[60] Hamberg found that in Hong Kong ulterior motives must always be suspected. Its loose family patterns made it not the right soil for a successful mission enterprise. In contrast, on the mainland, where families lived under strict surveillance, where each man had his particular profession and occupation, there was obvious reason to rejoice when a family was baptised. Hamberg thus put his hope in the inland families and saw real possibilities for the growth of Christianity among stable rural folks.[61]

Second, despite tremendous difficulties and setbacks, the mission among the Hakka is regarded as the most successful mission of this earliest time.[62] The Hakka people were relatively open to receiving the

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[59] Minutes of the Basel Mission Committee, 6 November 1850.

[60] Ibid., 166 (Chinese translation, 135).

[61] Ibid.

[62] Schlatter, *Geschichte der Basler Mission. Band II*, 300 (Schlatter, *Zhenguang zhao Kejia,* 55), quotes a statistic according to which from among the 21 mission agencies working in China, the mission of the BM had the highest number of people con-

gospel, a fact which deserves further research. Here, we may simply suggest two reasons. In general, the Protestant mission was (unlike earlier Catholic efforts) a mission from below, not trying to evangelize the social elite but rather reaching out to the common people. This care for the common people attracted many. A more particular reason can be found in the nature of the Hakka people. As explained earlier, the Hakka were cultural and economic outsiders, living in the poor mountainous areas of Guangdong, in constant conflict with the more affluent and mainstream Cantonese-speaking Punti. The contact with Christian missions allowed the Hakka to gain an advantage and find support for upward social mobility.

Third, a missionary caught in the middle endures a lot of pain. However, this position should be understood not only negatively, but also positively, as a place where fruitful theological reflection and spiritual revival may happen. Paul Tillich wrote: "The border line is the truly propitious place for acquiring knowledge."[63] Tillich himself was somehow caught in the middle, being forced during World War II to migrate to the US, having to reinvent himself in a new context, and having to transfer his knowledge into a new world. However, this experience made him understand that the position in-between, on the boundary, is an important epistemological starting point. Yet it is not merely a starting point for theological understanding, but also a fruitful place to deepen one's faith. A kind of *homeliness in the homelessness* is what the early missionaries experienced—fully understood neither by the people in the mission field, nor by the people at home. This made them more truly understand the homeliness of God's kingdom: being strangers in this world and yearning for our true home, God's kingdom.

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verted—205, compared to LMS 160, American Board 93, Rhenish Mission (Barmen) 85.

[63] Paul Tillich, "On the Boundary: An Autobiographical Sketch," in Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History* (New York / London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 3.