

The Yale-China Association





THE YALE-CHINA ASSOCIATION

A Centennial History

Nancy E. Chapman
with Jessica C. Plumb

On the front cover: Edward Hume (far right) taking the pulse of one of his early patients, a member of Changsha's gentry, March, 1909.

On the back cover: Senior members of the faculty at Hunan Medical College with Yale Bachelors Nancy E. Chapman and David A. Jones, Jr. (front row, third and fourth from left), at the Hsiang-ya Hospital, 1981.

Frontispiece: Opening ceremonies at Yale-in-China, November 16, 1906

A Note on Usage

The names of Chinese people who appear in the narrative are generally spelled in the way in which they were known in English to their contemporaries. In the first instance in which they are introduced, their names are also romanized in the *pinyin* system provided their full Chinese names are known. Thus, Yale-in-China's first senior Chinese physician is referred to by the name on his Yale diploma followed by the *pinyin* romanization, Fu-chun Yen (Yan Fuqing), but a faculty member quoted in the text whose Chinese name is not known appears only as T.F. Shao.

Design and composition: Carol Waag, Work and Tumble Design

Calligraphy: Charles Chu

© Yale-China Association
P.O. Box 208223
New Haven, Connecticut 06520-8223
USA

All rights reserved.

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any form, without written permission from the Yale-China Association.

ISBN 962-996-018-4
The Chinese University Press
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Sha Tin, N.T., Hong Kong.
Fax: +852 26036692, +852 26037355
E-mail: cup@cuhk.edu.hk
Web-site: www.chineseupress.com

Contents

<i>Foreword</i> by Jonathan Spence	<i>vi</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>vii</i>
1. Defining the Vision	1
2. Taking Root in Changsha	10
3. A Turn to Chinese Leadership	34
4. The War Years, 1937-1945	48
5. Rebuilding and Revolution	66
6. A Home in Hong Kong	76
7. Return to the Mainland	94
8. Looking Ahead	120
<i>Photograph Credits</i>	130
<i>Sources</i>	131

Foreword

Jonathan Spence

Sterling Professor of History, Yale University

No matter how long one has labored at trying to understand China's recent history, it remains a perpetual astonishment. The events of the century that unfolded between 1901 and 2001 could never have been imagined had they not occurred. The span of time begins with foreign expeditionary forces suppressing the last traces of the Boxer Uprising in 1901, the abolition of China's traditional Confucian-based examination system in 1905, and the disintegration of the Qing dynasty and the attempt to form a viable republic in 1911-12. It continues with the agonizing slide into warlordism, the intellectual ferment of the May Fourth Movement, and the short-lived alliance between Sun Yat-sen's nationalist Kuomintang party and the fledgling communist forces. It tracks through the fracture of that alliance, the anxious maneuvering of the Kuomintang in the "Nanking Decade" of 1928 to 1937 to strengthen and modernize China, the construction of a rival communist society in Yenan, and the near destruction of China by the forces of Japanese militarism. It follows those events into a cycle of renewed civil war, the splitting off of a new Kuomintang regime on Taiwan after 1949, and the passionate and chaotic period of the Maoist "high tide" of Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. And it has ended with the choppy waves of China's attempt to move beyond Maoism into a zone of pragmatic market-driven socialism, the tragedy of the bloody crackdown on the hopeful demonstrators of 1989, the joys and travails of Taiwan's own democracy movement of the 1990s, and the ending of the British rule over Hong Kong.

Reading of the dramas and vicissitudes of Yale-in-China and Yale-China across the same time period generates a similar mood of astonishment. For

here, step-by-step and year-by-year, we are offered a constantly changing view of the same century through two other sets of lenses. One set is that of the ever-changing cast of American characters who set off from Yale to dedicate a significant portion of their lives to working in the Chinese schools, colleges and hospitals that at different times formed the shifting entity known as Yale-in-China or Yale-China. The other set is that of the Chinese whom they encountered, the students, colleagues, administrators and neighbors, who all had to try and understand—and adjust to—the goals and strategies of their surprising and infinitely variegated visitors.

Reading this absorbing history, and pondering its rich range of illustrations, I felt a genuine sense of elation over the flexibilities of the human spirit. How huge the gaps were—culturally, politically, economically, philosophically—yet how ingeniously and courageously all parties labored at what was ultimately a common task. Of course there were misunderstandings, class and racial animosities, blind patches of incomprehension, and even personal tragedies as either the tugs of local politics, or the greater torments of the Kuomintang-Communist civil war and the Japanese invasion swept all into their wake. But taken as a whole this story demonstrates—to my mind at least—that it was indeed worthwhile. The effort justified the cost, and the values and rewards have been real ones. As a new century begins for the people of China and for Yale-China, one can legitimately salute those who worked so hard across the last one to try and make their visions a reality. And one can read their tale as at once an inspirational and a cautionary one, for all those whose turn is now to come.

January 28, 2001

Acknowledgments

The study that follows charts the course of the Yale–China Association from its founding in 1901 through the present. Our intention has been to be evocative, not exhaustive: rather than produce a detailed institutional history, we have sought to convey a sense of the challenges, continuities, and breaks with tradition the organization has experienced in its first century, as well as the contours of the times in which these events have unfolded. Above all, Yale–China’s story is that of the extraordinary people affiliated with it, people of unusual intelligence, purpose, sensitivity, and compassion. We hope our portrayals of some of them, necessarily abbreviated in a study of this kind, do them justice.

The book is the work of three people, each of whose contributions were vital to the form it eventually took. Nancy E. Chapman served as lead author and editor, guiding the book from initial conception to completion. Jessica C. Plumb took primary responsibility for chapters four and five, wrote early drafts of chapters one and seven, coordinated early production details, and conducted oral histories that were valuable for this project and will, no doubt, be of use to future historians of the organization. Carol Waag, drawn ever deeper into the project as time passed, went far beyond her original role as graphic designer, providing sensitive readings of the text, assisting with selection of hundreds of photographs, and shaping the book into the work of beauty that it has become.

The book was produced during one of the busiest times in the history of the organization which is its subject; that it was completed at all is no small miracle, and owes much to the assistance of many individuals. We have relied on several earlier chroniclers of Yale–China’s history, most notably Reuben Holden, whose *Yale-in-China: The Mainland Years, 1901-1951* is an essential resource for Yale–China’s first half-century. Xiaohong Shen, Jonathan Spence, and Jeffrey Alan Trexler have also written insightfully about the organization’s early years. We have been privileged to draw on a treasure trove of documents, letters, and memoirs by our predecessors within the organization, who took the time to record their thoughts and experiences with eloquence and care. Especially notable in this regard is the writing of Edward Hume, Ruth Greene, Edward Gulick, and B. Preston Schoyer.

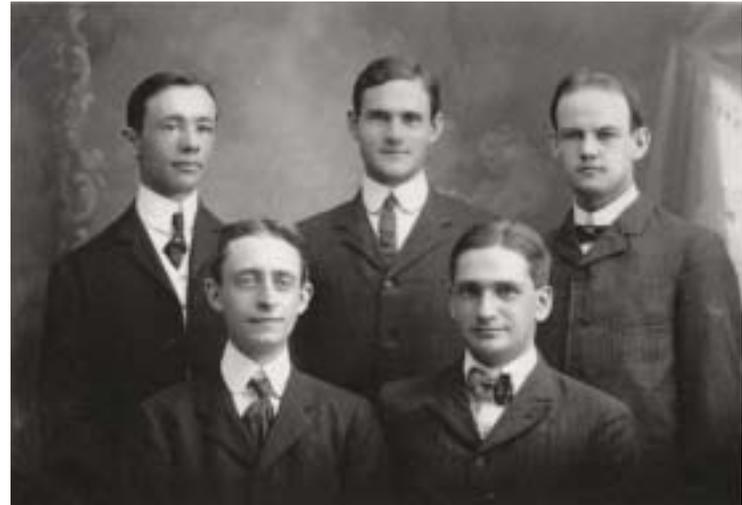
We salute with deep gratitude the many people who have shown their enthusiasm for this project and for Yale–China by providing assistance in many forms. Special thanks are due to the entire staff of the Yale–China Association, who contributed in ways large and small to getting the book completed and out the door while keeping Yale–China not only in operation but thriving; to our board of trustees, for seeing the value of this project and supporting it to its conclusion; to David Dajun You, for his help in identifying photographs and translating the chapter summaries and captions into Chinese, and for embodying the Yali spirit throughout his long life; to Linda Kantor, who generously contributed marvelous photographs, as she has so often in the past; to Charles

Chi-jung Chu, for gracing this volume with his calligraphy, as he did forty years ago for Ben Holden’s history of Yale–China’s first half-century; to the late Edward Gulick and to Elizabeth Gulick, for encouragement, inspiration, and many wonderful photographs. We are also grateful to Cameron Gearon, David A. Jones, Jr., Jean Lamont, Edith MacMullen, Douglas Murray, Mary Pasti, Jonathan Spence, Arthur Walworth, and Bill Watkins for careful reading of the manuscript and many helpful suggestions; to Maude Pettus, for her photographs and memories, so generously contributed; to Bill Massa and the staff at Manuscripts and Archives at Sterling Memorial Library, and to Martha Smalley of the Day Missions Library, for responding to countless requests, some of them highly unusual, with admirable patience and helpfulness; and again to Bill Watkins, who coordinated a research trip to Changsha and whose enthusiasm for the project and devotion to Yale–China seemingly know no bounds. We appreciate also the contributions of our work-study students at Yale–China who have provided research assistance: Janet Chen, Diana Delatorre, Kathryn Gonnerman, and the inimitable Josh Hill. Finally, our hats are off to Steve Luk and our other friends at the Chinese University Press for the patient, professional, and collegial way in which they have approached this trans-Pacific project.

Many individuals contributed memories, photographs, scrapbooks, and other memorabilia; others agreed to be interviewed or allowed us to quote from their writings. These include Ted Allen, Charles Blatchford, Chen Muzhu, Judith Collins, Betty Jean Elder, Frederick Greene, Hua Hai, Daniel Hellberg, Man-li Ho, David A. Jones, Jr., Robert Johnston, Ben Lee, Sui-ming Lee, Jacques Leslie, Sumiao Li, Timothy Light, Ma Min, Nina McPherson, Christian Murck, Douglas Murray, Renae Reese, Mark Salzman, Katherine Sandweiss, Kate Schuler, John Smagula, John Bryan Starr, Sun Ming, Katherine Tai, Tan Maozi, Matt Tuchow, Wang Zongshi, Alex Wilmerding, Andrea Worden, the External Affairs Office of the Xiang-ya Medical College, the Yali Alumni Association, our colleagues at the Yali Middle School, Tom Zetterstrom, Bihong Zhao, and last but not least, Sophia Tierong Zhu. We are grateful to them all!

In the course of researching this book, we were reminded again and again of the important role that our predecessors have played over the decades in preserving the memory of Yale–China’s work and times. We would like to encourage everyone affiliated with Yale–China to consider donating their letters, diaries, photographs, and other memorabilia to the Yale–China archives at Sterling Memorial Library at Yale. Even items that seem commonplace now can speak volumes to later generations once our times have passed. The collection of our first fifty years is especially rich because of the generosity and foresight of those who came before. It is up to us to fill out the record of all that has unfolded since their time.

Three founders of the Yale-China Association, Brownell Gage (front left), Arthur Williams (front right), and Lawrence Thurston (back right), as recent Yale graduates, 1898. (Below left), The roofs of Changsha with the Xiang River and Yuelu Mountain in the distance (ca. 1908.)



I Defining the Vision

As I look back upon it now, I am astonished at two things—one, the consummate self-assurance that we had: just a group of youngsters without experience and without background going out to “tell the world” what was the matter with it; second, the results that were piled up on so inadequate a basis.

Arthur Williams, 1944

In October of 1901, Yale University marked its bicentennial with a grand celebration attended by distinguished figures from the worlds of government, business, religion, scholarship, and the armed services. With the dawning of the new century, the nation was enjoying unprecedented prosperity and power, and the festivities in New Haven reflected the national mood of optimism and self-assurance. Theodore Roosevelt, champion of American overseas expansion in the election campaign the previous year, was awarded an honorary doctorate, and speaker after speaker set forth visions of the university's future that linked it to the nation's civilizing mission in the world. “Yale is still in the glory and strength of her youth, as the United States is still in the strength and glory of its youth,” proclaimed Senator Orville H. Platt, the keynote speaker. “[Yale] has one great call or mission, which is to lead the world in the progressive education of mankind.”

To Lawrence Thurston, class of 1898, the celebration was “all one great sermon,” an affirmation of the “deep and hidden spiritual forces in Yale life and of the earnest purpose of its teachers and graduates.” The college that Thurston had

known as an undergraduate was one where devotion to church and nation were woven into the fabric of student life. Christian work had increasingly come to be portrayed as an active rather than introspective pursuit, a job demanding brave, strong, adventurous men. “Spiritual is physical,” proclaimed the *Yale Daily News*, reflecting a new campus culture of “muscular Christianity” that extolled sports, patriotism, and Christian service. Although far fewer Yale graduates were entering the ministry than in earlier generations, students joined the campus Christian association, known as Dwight Hall, in large numbers. The members of Dwight Hall, wrote one observer, represented the “new type of college Christian man,” with “physically strong bodies, aggressive personalities, and a belief in their ability to Christianize the whole world.”

The young founders of what would in time become the Yale-China Association—Lawrence Thurston, Arthur Williams, Warren Seabury, Brownell Gage, and other members of the Yale class of 1898—aspired to this ideal, more than making up in enthusiasm and moral fervor what they lacked in practical experience. As members of the intercollegiate Student Volunteer Movement for

Foreign Missions, they traveled to Massachusetts and New York to attend large gatherings of like-minded students from other campuses and spent the months following graduation crisscrossing the eastern part of the United States exhorting hundreds of church audiences to lend financial support to missionaries overseas. By the spring of 1900, Gage, Thurston, and Seabury, all of whom had enrolled in seminaries, had begun to think seriously about devoting their lives to missionary service abroad. “The missionary’s calling is one of the greatest dignity,” Warren Seabury observed after attending a missionary conference in New York, “—perhaps the nearest fulfillment of Christ’s will on earth.”

Rather than join one of the established denominational missionary boards, Seabury and his friends had begun to think of establishing a separate Yale mission, envisioning an extension of the camaraderie and shared purpose they had experienced as undergraduates and in their travels. The mission would be a direct reflection of the values, traditions, and energies of their alma mater. “The enthusiasm for missions which throbbed in those great gatherings in Carnegie Hall did not suppress the enthusiasm which we as Yale men felt for our own College,” Seabury wrote later. “Surely the two mighty forces would unite. . . . It

An enthusiastic backer of the fledgling Yale Mission was Harlan Beach, pictured below in the white helmet, probably in Fujian province in 1904. Beach served as a missionary in north China, was active in the student missionary movement in the U.S., and later taught at the Yale Divinity School.



was our conviction that our lives would be stronger with the Yale spirit on the field and the old College behind us.”

Students and graduates of other colleges had initiated such endeavors—Oxford and Cambridge in India, Oberlin in China; given Yale’s two hundred years of experience in preparing leaders for church and state, Seabury and his colleagues felt certain that the university and its graduates could furnish the resources, men, and dedication to make such an undertaking a success. A Yale mission, in turn, would help to sustain Christian faith in a home community increasingly threatened by the base values and self-satisfaction of the Gilded Age. Despite the dedication and fervor of Dwight Hall’s student activists, the *Yale Alumni Weekly* still felt compelled to inveigh against those at the college inclined to “sneer and talk with a sagacious cynicism about religious activities at Yale,” and the president of the university, Arthur Hadley, lamented in his baccalaureate address of 1903 that Christians had become a minority in a nation plagued by godless, selfish materialism. The new mission would counter these influences, one of its central purposes being to “arouse to a burning point a vital interest in missions, and to sustain that interest not only at Yale but in other colleges and churches and young people’s organizations.”

In the fall and winter of 1900, Seabury and Williams eagerly deliberated over the details of the proposed mission—its structure, location, and means of support. Some consideration was given to locating the mission in Africa or India, but China soon emerged as the favored site, in part as a memorial to Horace Tracy Pitkin, class of 1892, whose murder during the Boxer Rebellion the previous summer had stunned the Yale community. Charismatic and athletic, the very embodiment of the muscular-Christian ideal during his student days at Yale, Pitkin had organized Yale’s first Student Volunteer Band for foreign missions, attended seminary, and gone to China as a missionary. He had reportedly been shot and then beheaded while trying to save the lives of two women missionaries. His life and death—so striking in their overtones of heroism and martyrdom—inspired his successors at Yale “to see if possible that Pitkin’s sacrifice was atoned for somehow by us as Yale men.”

On February 10, 1901, Warren Seabury and Arthur Williams presented their vision of a Yale mission in China to Robert Speer of the Presbyterian Board for Foreign Missions at the home of Anson Phelps Stokes, secretary of the university. Stokes had a strong interest in mission work in China, and the meeting around his grand fireplace was so full of promise for Seabury and Williams that it was later designated the founding of the Yale-China Association. Several members of the faculty immediately lent their support, notably Harlan Beach, who had served as a missionary in north China and written a manual for new missionaries to China, and Frederick Wells Williams, who, like his father, taught Chinese at Yale. When the newly formed Executive Committee met for the first time in 1902, the circle of supporters had expanded to include President Hadley, his predecessor Timothy Dwight, and several deans of the college.

Hadley brought the missionary effort to the attention of the broader Yale community at the commencement ceremony in 1902, and the *Yale Alumni Weekly* took up its cause.

As the Yale Mission—formally, the Yale Foreign Missionary Society—took shape in ensuing meetings, some tenets emerged. “It must be deeply Christian in spirit and teaching but entirely undenominational and sympathetic in its attitude towards all that is best in China and Confucianism,” wrote Stokes, pointedly distancing the Yale effort from those of earlier missionaries who had discounted Chinese traditions and cultural achievements. The society would draw on the Yale community for staff and financial support and would focus on education in a strategic location in China. In keeping with the liberal tenor of Christian life at Yale, the founders eschewed narrow doctrinal disputes, emphasizing instead Christian character and ethics as the best antidote to ignorance, the sturdiest foundation for social progress, and the surest protection against the rapacious materialism of Western capitalism that threatened Chinese and American society alike. “There is instant need of saving China from herself and from harpies of the Occident,” an early promotional pamphlet declared. “This must be accomplished by the two agencies of Christianity and education. The Yale Foreign Missionary Society is an organized effort on the part of the graduates and students of Yale University to consecrate some part of that energy known as the Yale spirit to the service of God and the good of their fellow men in the Far East. In setting up an offshoot of Yale in the center of China, we leave the active evangelistic work to the missionary bodies with which we are in hearty cooperation.”

The immediate challenges for the new mission were to solicit financial support and recruit personnel. Although President Hadley declined to support the mission directly with Yale funds, he encouraged its founders to solicit individual donations from graduates of the university. Within a matter of months, the society had raised seventeen thousand dollars from enthusiastic alumni and was ready to send a team to China. When several candidates postponed the journey, the job fell to Lawrence Thurston, who had recently completed his studies at the Hartford Seminary. An earnest, diffident, somewhat sickly man, Thurston lacked the self-confidence of the ideal muscular Christian and prepared for his



The murder of Horace Tracy Pitkin, Yale class of 1892, by the Boxers in the summer of 1900 shocked the Yale community, helping to inspire the establishment of the Yale Foreign Missionary Society.

new assignment with apprehension, mindful that the experience could cost him his life, as it had Pitkin. In the whirlwind month before his departure, he was ordained in his father's church and married to his fiancée, Matilda Calder, who had recently returned from a missionary stint in Turkey. Following an emotional farewell meeting at Dwight Hall, the Thurstons embarked on the journey to China with the important job of selecting a potential site for the new mission.

The vision was grand and exuberant, with every apparent assurance of success. “The country and Yale, and in this case the Chinese, stand close by the side of God,” intoned the *Hartford Daily Courant*. “The little but select Yale crowd in China will be like an intellectual and evangelical football team, always playing fair but bound to win the great game.” If there were doubts, they were not of the goals or eventual success of the undertaking, but rather of one's fitness for the enormous challenges ahead. “I often wonder if they are not mistaken in thinking me of any use,” wrote Thurston anxiously on the eve of his departure for China. “I see so many places where I need discipline, where I must improve or I'll not be efficient.” For all of the enthusiasm and shared conviction of Yale's Christian activists, the decision to leave loved ones and familiar surroundings behind for an uncertain future remained difficult and intensely personal.



The early representatives of the Yale Mission in China were probably better informed about the culture and traditions of the society they were proposing to change than were many of their fellow foreign missionaries; indeed, Yale and its graduates had had an unusually rich interaction with China for the better part of the nineteenth century. Lawrence Thurston, Warren Seabury, and their colleagues would almost certainly have seen Yale professor Samuel Wells Williams's encyclopedic study of Chinese civilization, *The Middle Kingdom*, first published in 1848, or the more condensed introduction to Chinese religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions in Harlan Beach's *Dawn on the Hills of Tang*, his man-

Why China?

India and Africa were briefly considered as possible sites for the Yale Mission overseas, but Yale's long history of cultural interaction with China made China seem a logical choice and predisposed men like Harlan Beach and Anson Phelps Stokes to support it with enthusiasm. As many as thirty Yale graduates had served in China as missionaries during the nineteenth century, including Peter Parker, an early medical missionary. Yale had also enrolled Yung Wing, Yale class of 1854, the first Chinese to graduate from an



Yung Wing graduated from Yale in 1854, the first person from China to receive a degree from an American college. Yale's long relationship with China made it a logical location for a mission.

American university, as well as a number of Chinese Educational Mission students whom Yung brought to study in New England in the 1870s and 1880s.

In addition to viewing the Chinese as something of a known quantity, Harlan Beach believed that China was destined for great things, making it all the more important to influence the next generation of leaders. "To the Christian who sees the *purposes of God in history*, His hand is beneath the Chinese throne and this wonderful Empire has been continued through the ages to accomplish His will," Beach wrote. "That a nation of such marked strength has existed for 4,000 years is an indication of its future survival, and we may be sure that God has reserved it for some gracious and world-influencing purpose."

A nation awakening to the ideas and technology of the Western world was fertile ground for missionary efforts, and such efforts were of the utmost urgency, Beach believed, if China was to avoid being overwhelmed by a tidal wave of greed from the West. "China's open ports are filled with the merchantmen of the world" he wrote. "Railroads are beginning to be built; telegraphs extend to most of her provincial capitals; her mineral wealth is coveted by the

nations, and has become an object of importance to her own prosperity. . . . China's garished house has been swept clean from effective opposition and prejudice. But who is to enter in through her open gates—the Church of God with her ministration of mercy and salvation? Or Western avarice and land-hunger, occidental vices and materialism? The latter forces are entering; shall not Christianity enter with equal stride as a conserving factor in this period of national transformation?"

Finally, China's needs were especially suited to what Yale had to offer. "China presents itself as unquestionably the most promising field in the world for the kind of work which a university mission is fitted to undertake," Beach asserted. "The difficulties here are such as appeal peculiarly to educated men. A people justly proud of their ancient culture and entertaining no illusions as to the tender mercies of the great Western Powers, though compelled by the shock of recent events to acknowledge their own political incapacity, cannot be successfully cajoled or frightened into adopting revolutionary reforms. They must be convinced of the sincerity of offers made to enlighten them."

ual for missionaries preparing for service in China.

From the distance of New Haven, however, it would have been difficult to comprehend fully the depth of anger and humiliation that many Chinese people felt at the trauma inflicted on their country by contact with the West in the nineteenth century: the enslavement of millions of Chinese to foreign opium; the devastation of native industries by the influx of cheap foreign goods; the imposition of crippling penalties after every clash between Chinese and foreigners; the forcible opening of Chinese ports and cities; the patrolling of China's inland waterways by foreign gunboats; the creation of foreign enclaves that ordinary Chinese were forbidden to enter; and the ravaging of vast swaths of central China and the massacre of tens of millions of people by the Taiping rebels, followers of a man who had proclaimed himself the son of the foreigner's Christian god. A powerful sense of economic, political, and social dislocation was leading prominent intellectuals to propose sweeping reforms of age-old institutions, and Harlan Beach concluded that a China in such turmoil was one especially open to and needful of the message of Christian educators. Yet missionaries, whose dogged penetration of the inland areas had been unremitting throughout the nineteenth century, had often been the target of resentment, and antiforeign feeling proved a continuing impediment to the best efforts of the Yale Mission.

Lawrence and Matilda Thurston arrived in Beijing in the fall of 1902, only a year after the city had been besieged first by Boxers and then by foreign troops. Setbacks from the uprising had served only to intensify missionary efforts in China, and the Chinese capital was awash in Christian groups. The Thurstons set up housekeeping and were soon swept into the social world of the expatriate community, rarely encountering Chinese people apart from their servants. They celebrated Christmas with other missionaries, dining on turkey, cranberry sauce, vegetables, and apricot sherbet; New Year's Eve was spent at the International Club, "where we skated the old year out." Having braced himself for a life of spiritual testing and material sacrifice, Lawrence Thurston found the comforts of life in Beijing pleasant, if somewhat unsettling. "I feel like a child with a man's responsibilities," the twenty-eight-year-old Thurston observed, struggling to fend off distractions.

Thurston's first priorities were to study Chinese and investigate existing missionary work in China. It is perhaps not surprising that, in a world of extraterritorial privileges, he seems to have been concerned more with earning the approval of his fellow missionaries than with gaining acceptance by the local authorities or the mission's eventual Chinese adherents. "My hope is that we shall win the confidence of the older missionaries and find them ready to cooperate with us in supplementing their work by a great educational institution which shall reach at least a large section of the Empire," he wrote to Beach. He recommended pursuing "medical work which in the end will train native physicians" and suggested that the mission recruit an American doctor to "grap-

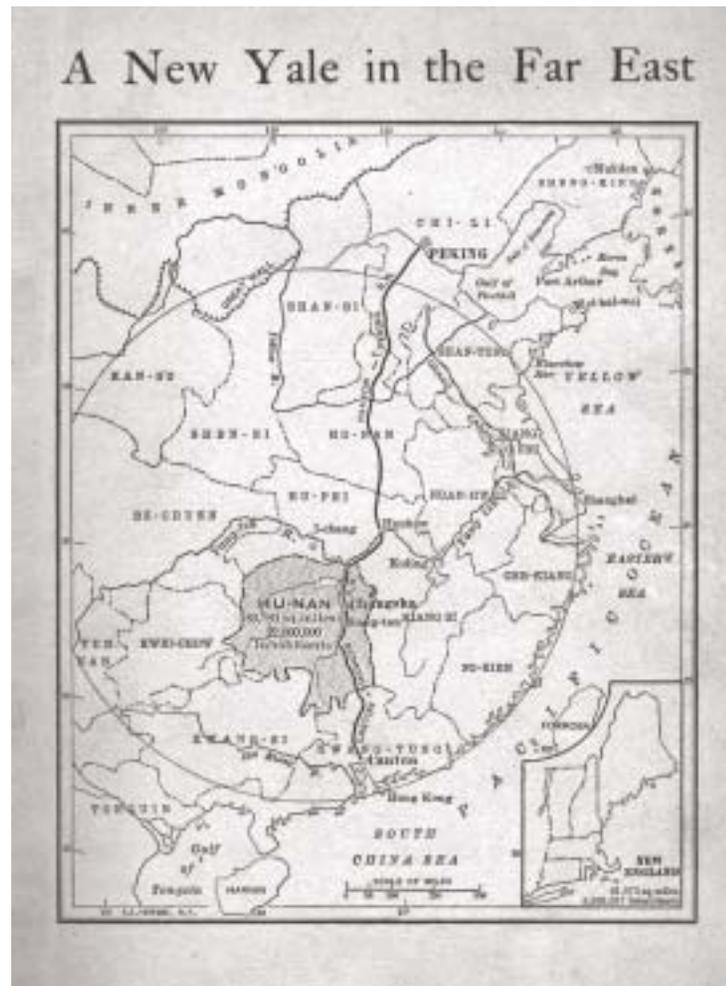
ple with some of the diseases peculiar to the Orient.” This approach, he wrote, would distinguish Yale’s work from that of others in the crowded missionary field. “If we do not go into educational work,” Thurston explained, “I am at present in the dark as to where we can find a free field for a regular mission.”

Beach found Thurston’s arguments compelling, particularly in light of Chinese reverence for education and culture; as a member of the mission’s Executive Committee, he also concluded that work in education would appeal to the larger Yale community, whose support would be essential for success. Beach proceeded to develop a proposal that included establishing a preparatory department led mostly by Chinese scholars, a teacher-training department, a regular collegiate department, an interdenominational seminary, and a medical department. He also speculated about the potential for a school of journalism and a school of law. Thurston, undaunted by the growing scale and ambition of the Yale Mission, saw each opportunity as a call from God. “It will not be completed in my life time or in my children’s,” he responded enthusiastically, “but that does not matter.”

In the spring of 1903, the Thurstons investigated one potential site for the mission, an abandoned mission compound in Shanxi province whose entire American staff had perished in the Boxer Rebellion. The Thurstons embarked on an arduous six-week journey by mule litter to the remote region to consider the possibilities, accompanied by military escorts sent by local officials wary of the consequences of any further violence against foreigners. It was the Thurstons’ first trip beyond Beijing and their first extended encounter with Chinese people. Mindful that hundreds of missionaries and their Chinese converts had been killed in the region by roving Boxers just a few years before, they were delighted by the hospitality they received from officials and common people along the way, seeing in it the fruit of decades of missionary work. For all of the advantages of building on this foundation, however, they decided to look elsewhere. “I believe that the Yale Mission has greater things before it than it could possibly find room for in Shansi,” Thurston wrote to New Haven. “Shansi is not as strategic a field as some others, and it stands to reason that it is our duty to enter the most strategic field available.”



Hunan, one of the provinces in China traditionally most hostile to missionaries, eventually emerged as a place of special promise. It was far to the south, near Guangdong province, inland but accessible from the port of Hankou, on the Yangzi River. The opportunity to reach a population of some twenty-one million people was appealing to the new missionaries, despite—or, in some cases, because of—strong antiforeign sentiment in the province and its capital,



Having rejected Shanxi as insufficiently “strategic,” the Yale Mission’s earliest representatives soon focused on Hunan province, only recently opened to foreign residents. Hunan’s reputation for producing national leaders seemed to promise an appropriate audience for the Yale Mission’s efforts.

Hunan in 1905

With an area greater than England's and a population roughly twice as large, Hunan in 1905 was a province of relative prosperity and strong educational traditions. Sons of its gentry families had risen to official rank in impressive numbers for generations, among them Zeng Guofan, Zuo Zongtang, and other prominent nineteenth-century officials. In the 1890s, Hunan became a center of reformist thought, drawing thinkers and political activists determined to stem the tide of national decline and imperialist exploitation. In later decades, the province also produced a disproportionate number of military men and revolutionaries.

Western missionaries, who made forays into Hunan as early as the 1850s, had long considered Hunan and its inhabitants of strategic importance. Their efforts to establish missions there were repeatedly rebuffed, however, and several violent incidents had earned for the province—and especially the walled city of Changsha—a reputation as one of the most staunchly antiforeign places in China.

Following the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 and the imposition of treaties that opened Changsha and other cities in Hunan to foreign settlement, foreign penetration of the province proceeded with remarkable speed. By 1903 more than fifty missionaries from England, Scotland, the United States, Canada, Finland, Germany, Scotland, and Australia had established missions in Hunan. One observer likened their arrival to a “rush into a new diamond field, men racing past the barriers to stake out claims and work the virgin soil.” With the missionaries came diplomats, businessmen, mining engineers, and the trappings of Western expatriate life. By 1905, Warren Seabury was playing tennis twice each week with the British commissioner of customs on Orange Island and attending Western dinner parties in a tuxedo brought from home.



Houseboats on the banks of the Xiang River at Changsha, capital of Hunan province (ca. 1909.)



Chinese street preacher with a crowd of onlookers, Changsha, about 1905. Antiforeign sentiment in Hunan prevented Western missionaries and their Chinese converts from establishing regular operations there until the early twentieth century, decades later than other places in China.

Changsha. Thurston was intrigued by the reputation of the province and its people. “I know nothing about Changsha,” he wrote, “save that Sir Robert Hart agrees with the men in Shanghai that the Hunanese are a most virile people, born to lead, and very independent, a most attractive kind to work for.” One experienced missionary told Thurston that “Hunan people would be as influential as any people in the Empire,” a prediction proven eerily accurate several decades later by Mao Zedong, then a young boy in Hunan, and several of his future commanders growing up nearby.

Lawrence Thurston's search for a site took on a new urgency in the spring of 1903, when he learned that the missionary societies that had entered Hunan two years earlier were planning to hold a conference in Changsha to discuss the “division of territory” in the province. “You can well imagine my feeling,” Thurston wrote to the Beach. “While the Yale Mission is getting together, practically the last great field in China is being divided so that missionary comity will forbid our entering.” To his relief, his appeal to the missionaries meeting in Hunan met with a warm welcome and an invitation to the Yale Mission to assume responsibility for Christian higher education in the province. “It was beyond my wildest dreams that the conference would treat us so royally,” Thurston wrote.

Directives from New Haven were slow to arrive, however, and Thurston



While Harlan Beach praised Changsha's relative cleanliness and prosperity, other Americans found its high walls and narrow streets confining. (Clockwise from above left) A street in the city center; residents draw water at a public well; street scene outside the Yale Mission's first medical clinic.



again became anxious, this time concerned that the Yale Mission would squander its best opportunity. As he waited for a response from New Haven, his health deteriorated, and he was eventually diagnosed with tuberculosis, forcing him and his wife to return to the United States that fall. "Whether I can return to China must be decided later," he wrote dejectedly to Beach from the steamer to California, where he soon died at the age of twenty-nine. "To leave has been like breaking every heart string. To return is our determination. . . . I am praying that instead of discouraging Yale men, my return may spur some of them to their own duty and privilege."



Thurston's premature death failed to dissuade others from following in his footsteps; indeed, momentum had been growing in New Haven, thanks in part to the enthusiasm of Harlan Beach, the society's newly elected general secretary. Beach and his wife sailed for China in the spring of 1904. Intending to make a final decision about the location of the mission, they traveled directly to Hunan province.

About the provincial capital, where much of the mission's work later unfolded, Beach wrote: "It is extremely clean and well built. The narrowest



Warren Seabury (left) and Brownell Gage setting out on one of their jaunts around Changsha in search of a site upon which to build the Yale Mission's campus. Land surrounding the walled city was largely given over to graveyards and farms whose owners were reluctant to sell to foreigners.

alleys are paved with granite and with the absence of all draught animals and the presence of a good sewage system, the filth and odors of the ordinary Chinese city are largely absent. Its more than 190,000 residents so nearly fill the space inside the walls that there is very little empty land."

Equally impressive were the residents of Changsha, who also compared favorably in Beach's view with the people of Shandong province, where he had worked for a number of years. "Our future fellow citizens naturally greatly interested us," he wrote. "The squalor and raggedness of north China are less in evidence than in New York City slums. . . . Intelligence is written on the faces of the majority of the men and boys seen. The same is true of the women who frequently appear on the principal streets. . . . The officials are also exceptionally pleasant and courteous."

Beach's meeting with the governor of the province and with prominent Chinese educators reinforced his optimism. The governor, he reported, was doing his best to reform education in the province by introducing elements of Western learning. Interest in Western-style education among the local elite did not necessarily translate into support for a foreign presence in Changsha, however. "The daily newspaper of the city is perpetually reiterating the watch cry, 'Hunan for the Hunanese!'" Beach reported. "They at once approve of Western learning and repudiate the foreign agent of such an education." Although the governor responded with interest to Beach's description of the plans for educational work, he suggested that the Americans would overcome antiforeign prejudice only if they avoided teaching Christianity or holding worship services. "The [Executive] Committee must be prepared for a protracted series of apparent successes and real defeats," Beach concluded, "especially during the present period of anti-foreign opposition."

The choice of a location for the mission proved far easier than the challenge of finding land upon which to build. The walled city of Changsha had stoutly resisted all attempts at penetration by foreigners until decades after other parts of China had been forced open. Indeed, it was not until 1901 that foreigners in Western dress could walk freely inside the city walls. Even after the official opening of the city as a treaty port, the hostility of the Hunanese remained high, and residents were extremely reluctant to rent or sell property to foreigners. Compounding the problem of antiforeign sentiment was the sheer shortage of land. Space inside the city walls was scarce and conditions crowded. Outside the city, almost all the land was either carved into small plots for growing rice and vegetables or set aside for grave plots. Purchasing a large area would require negotiating with many different owners, filling in stagnant rice fields, and, potentially, moving ancestral graves, thereby risking the animosity of the local community.

During his visit to Changsha, Harlan Beach briefly investigated possible sites for the mission, assisted by Harry Luce, who, like his friend from both Yale and seminary, Horace Pitkin, had been serving as a missionary in north China since

before the Boxer Rebellion. The task of finding land fell largely to the new arrivals, however—Edward Hume, Brownell Gage, and the indefatigable Warren Seabury. While the Humes and Gages studied Chinese in Kuling and Hankou for a year, Seabury consulted with other missionaries in Changsha, taught English in a local Chinese school, and, accompanied by a Chinese assistant, tramped through the city and its environs looking for available land.

“Never before in my life have I thought that in any way I could sympathize with Christopher Columbus!” Seabury reported in February of 1905. “But the experiences of the last few weeks, during which I have been faithfully ‘looking for land,’ have given me a sense of comradeship with the man! Finding land in China, which shall be suitable for a young Yale, is no easy matter.” By all accounts a man of impressive physical stamina and buoyant spirits, Seabury estimated that he walked over one hundred miles in his first month alone. Although no promising sites presented themselves, he remained optimistic, braving the brutal heat of two Changsha summers without losing any of his New England decorum. “We are now seeing China as she is in summer,” he wrote. “Everyone, who has a hand disengaged, carries a fan and a good proportion of the race is bare to the waist. . . . Thus far I have been able to wear a shirt with a coat, although I lay the latter aside when I am working.”

Seabury spent some summer nights at the home of Greenwell Fletcher, the newly arrived British commissioner of customs, on the long narrow island in the Xiang River that had become a foreign enclave. Like the Chinese residents of the city, whom he observed hauling bamboo cots out to the streets or to the tops of buildings to escape the heat, Seabury sometimes slept outdoors. “I have slept on the roof . . . with no shelter above my head save the top of the mosquito netting,” he wrote. “The wind comes through nicely and it is fine being up there behind the iron palings, with the lights along the river to the East, the big mountain towering gauntly aloft to the West, and the stars closing in all around you above. No better air than that.”

The search for land having proved fruitless after a year, the Executive Committee in New Haven cabled its willingness to consider renting or purchasing an existing building, deferring for the time being the search for a permanent home for the mission. Eventually a building in the heart of the city—“a semi-Chinese, rambling, unsanitary structure”—was located, and renovations created classroom space, a small chapel, and living quarters for the American staff. A second building was secured across the street to serve as a medical clinic.



Members of the Yale Mission community pictured in 1908. Back row, from left: William Hail, Edward H. Hume, Brownell Gage, William Sallmon. Front row, from left: Matilda Thurston with Teddy Hume, Lotta Hume with her daughter Charlotte, Helen Gage with two of her children, unidentified.

The Yale Mission had been launched in New Haven with the fervor and rhetoric of a moral and spiritual crusade; the reality was proving far more prosaic, however, having to do more with leases and bricks and mortar than with spiritual awakening. Nevertheless, by the Christmas of 1906 a small Yale community had assembled in Changsha, some of whose members would remain there for the better part of the next two decades. In addition to Warren Seabury, these included Edward Hume, a graduate of Yale College and the Johns Hopkins Medical School, who had arrived with his wife, Lotta, a young son, Teddy, and dreams of establishing a medical college and hospital; the Reverend William Hail, a recent graduate of the Yale Divinity School; and Matilda Thurston, who returned to continue the work she and her husband had begun. “As a crowd of six young people we are very happy and often forget that we should carry ourselves with the dignity expected of missionaries,” Seabury wrote to his family. All were adventurous and idealistic; most had yet to reach their thirtieth birthdays.