

Article

Missionary's Envision of Children in Late Qing China: Children's Education and the Construction of Christian Discourse in Child's Paper

Ziqi Huang, Haixia Zhao * and Fan Yang

University International College, Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau 999078, China; 3220002143@student.must.edu.mo (Z.H.); fyang@must.edu.mo (F.Y.)

* Correspondence: hxzhao@must.edu.mo

Abstract: In the late Qing Dynasty, religious periodicals by Western missionaries were made legal in China, and subsequently became an important manner of their missionary cause. Among them, *Child's Paper* 小孩月报 (1875–1881) by John Marshall Willoughby Farnham, a Protestant missionary from the United States, endeavoured to convert child readers by carrying children's stories of moral and emotional education. By concentrating on the educational elements of *Child's Paper*, this article inspects how conversion was achieved via the intertextual interpretation of Christian doctrines within these educational elements. Specifically, how the image of little Christians and urchins, respectively, represents salvation and redemption in Christian morals. This article holds that the missionaries' stress on the authority of Christian discourse in the education of Chinese children makes evident an increasing emphasis on the reformative effects of Christianity on Chinese children. Moreover, the conversion-education efforts by missionaries also construed helping Chinese children gain a cross-cultural perspective on Western religion, and arguably inspired later Chinese intellectuals' to create newspapers for the purpose of the pre-primary education of Chinese children.

Keywords: children's education; Christianity; *Child's Paper*; missionaries in Late Qing China



Citation: Huang, Ziqi, Haixia Zhao, and Fan Yang. 2024. Missionary's Envision of Children in Late Qing China: Children's Education and the Construction of Christian Discourse in Child's Paper. *Religions* 15: 232. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020232>

Academic Editor: Viktória Šoltésová

Received: 30 January 2024
Revised: 11 February 2024
Accepted: 12 February 2024
Published: 16 February 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

In the later days of the Qing Dynasty, China was forced into a series of unequal treaties with the Western powers which gave them yet more autonomous rights on Chinese territories. Among them was the freedom for Western missionaries to preach their religion and transform the mind of the Chinese people in their missionary activities. Albeit these activities did not set children as their sole target, the missionaries, while preaching their religion, did “intentionally introduce into China the modern view on children and principles of Western pedagogy (有意识地将西方现代儿童观和教育理念引进中国)” (Song 2015), so as to, at the same time, educate and convert Chinese children. This article examines the education of Chinese children in the late Qing Dynasty through the eyes of Christian missionaries, and the shaping of the image of Chinese children in a religious context where conversion to Christianity was the goal.

The education of children being examined in this article refers not only to the novel ideas and knowledge that Christian missionaries consciously imparted to children to imbue their religious beliefs, but also the advanced concepts of the West at that time that directly innovated the ideas of Chinese children. The education of children, moreover, also aimed to categorically describe the process of how Chinese children changed their minds in face of the cultural conflict during the late Qing Dynasty. The Christian missionaries applied the educational elements of religious tenets on those who were faced with a decision between cultures. Such an act meant that the education of Chinese children was in line with their objectives.

The preachings of these missionaries had to take seriously the reality of Chinese children, whose traditional concepts and life in peace were under attack amidst increasing unpredictability. Their preaching must have been able to serve as a testimony to what the children were experiencing in the extraordinary social environment, for they were living not only in the wreckage of a feudalist mindset, but also with an early glimpse of the novel ideas coming with Western Christianity. In light of all these, it may be deemed appropriate for this article to first point out the lack of attention by the early missionaries to the image of Chinese children in the late Qing Dynasty, then to examine the construct of Christian discourses in the religious periodicals where children were depicted within an educational frame, using *Child's Paper* 小孩月报 (1875–1881) by John Marshall Willoughby Farnham as an example, and conclude with a reflection on the education of children as a cultural practice within a system of Christian discourses, which, although it did advance the pre-primary education in China, constituted in essence an incursion of Christian discourses on Chinese culture against the backdrop of the West's political expansion. The education of Chinese children, in fact, was an unexpected pedagogic fruit of the Western missionaries' preaching which aimed for religious conversion.

2. Chinese Children as Objects of Detached Observation

“Children's literature plays a significant and meaningful role in defining the youngsters' personal identity and in instilling national traditional values” (Brânzila 2018). In this light, the portrayal of Chinese children and the concern for their life for educational purposes were the key elements of the writings by Christian missionaries in the late Qing Dynasty. Meanwhile, many of the religious documents showed a lack of interest in the growth and education of Chinese children. The articles in *The Shipping List and Advertiser* 上海新报 (1861–1872), a newspaper in Shanghai with British and American missionaries as editors, such as *Xiaohai Luoshui* 小孩落水 (*Child Fell into River*), *Zoushi Xiaohai* 走失小孩 (*Missing Child*), *Xiaohai Nishui Wujiu* 小孩溺水无救 (*Child Drown*), and *Xiaohai Shou Huoyao Shang* 小孩受火药伤 (*Child Wounded in Gunpowder Accident*), seemed to direct the attention to the living conditions of children while treating them no more than objects of observation—a part of Chinese lives somehow excluded from the Christian system. Vallgård once described Christian missionaries' attitude toward Native American children as, “While during the 1860s and 1870s the missionaries most often represented Indian children as backward, more or less incapable of independent reflection, and as always already marked by heathenism—and therefore perhaps even doomed to failure as Christians” (Vallgård 2015). This was also their impression of Chinese children at that time.

To examine today the image of Chinese children as the object of both religious conversion and education, it is necessary to take notice of the changed imagery of Chinese children by missionaries at that time. Notwithstanding that the missionaries were yet to regard Chinese children as objects of religious education, they had already applied the life experiences of Chinese children to their writings, which indicated a heightened awareness of the society surrounding the children's situation, and gathered momentum for such discussions. *Child's Paper* by John Marshall Willoughby Farnham introduced a mechanism of interaction among children, religion, and education. Following the Christian doctrine, he treated children as an independent object of religious education, and created religious periodicals suitable to child readers, through which Chinese children could find their divine calling, as well as getting educated. This article will inspect *Child's Paper* to examine the religious education of Chinese children.

3. Educational Religious Periodicals Tailor-Made for Children

John Marshall Willoughby Farnham is a religious educator who came to Shanghai as a Protestant missionary in 1860. He set to promote Christian education by compiling *Child's Paper*, a religious periodical targeting child readers. “The newspapers in late Qing Dynasty can boost their circulation and popularity as to be ‘known even to women and children’ by either using vernaculars or illustrations. (晚清报刊凡追求普及，希望‘妇孺皆知’的，有两条

捷径可走：一是使用白话，二是配上图像)” (Chen 2011). Farham followed these short-cuts in the positioning and designing of the periodical by incorporating easy-to-read stories in religious education. In *Child's Paper*, he used short stories with illustrations to preach Christianity, encouraging children to build connections between the religious fiction and their actual life. Farham suggested a prospect of educating children, positioning *Child's Paper* as a reader of “firstly knowledge, then literature (首在器识，文艺次之)” (Farnham 1875a). He commented that “through reading, children can first find their calling, then broaden their mind, then inspire their spirit, then improve their literacy (俾童子观之，一可渐悟天道，二可推广见闻，三可辟其灵机，四可长其文学)” (Farnham 1875a). Although Farham did not make any observation on children, his comments acknowledged children's potential as the object of religious conversion and education, and invited other missionaries not to otherwise miss the opportunity to join in their transformation.

The educational religious periodicals suggested by Farham enable children to read books of popular science and accept religious ideas the same as adults. In fact, what he suggests entails a constitutive concept for religious periodicals—the education of popular science and dissemination of religious ideas, both crucial to children's growth. “Throughout many other government publications in Western societies, spirituality has continued to be recognised as a distinct dimension of children when they are being understood in a holistic sense, and is often included in a list of other dimensions such as the physical, mental, emotional, moral, social and cultural” (Statham and Webster 2021). From the perspective of religious education, a religious periodical created for child readers that intends to for them to transcend the general perception of “doomed” failures as Christians, must realize the importance of a non-adult perspective—one that does more than examine and criticise children as a detached observer, but looks through children's eyes, and views the education and conversion of children as rooted in a comprehensive knowledge of children. It is the missionaries' responsibility to achieve a mutual understanding with their child readers, and a contrary perception of children's education that fails to regard the children as what they are—readers of religious periodicals—will not be adequate. Moreover, viewing children as readers is also religiously important, as to promote the growth of spirituality of Chinese children.

The article finds it helpful to contemplate on the religious education of children that Farham used story-telling and religious periodicals to participate in this process. The method and medium of religious education play a particular role in influencing the children, since the text is an important source for them to acquire knowledge. Religious periodicals, in fact, point out the narrow definition we have for educational texts that focuses overwhelmingly on school textbooks and thus fail to notice the other reports children can have, and how texts such as religious periodicals can contribute to children's education.

School textbooks and the metaphor of them also suggest power dynamics that have to do with children's subordinate status. The control over children by an official educational authority is plain to the eyes, which regards young children as those who “must be protected and controlled by adults” (Wilson 2022). In feudal China, the officially assigned school textbooks “stress on teaching with ‘Mandarin dialects’ (重视‘官话’教学)” (Bi 2010), which is a predominant way of indoctrinating people's minds by the rulers. In the discussions of children's education, non-governmental commercial newspapers and magazines—one of “civilization's three weapons (传播文明的三利器)” (Liang 1936)—may shed a new light on the repressiveness therein. In this sense, to delve into the educational aspect of religious periodicals for children, Christian missionaries needed to view children's books as a replacement instead of a reference to the discourses of authority. On the other hand, for the religious aspect to work in children's education, educational religious periodicals must have been re-assigned as to consciously reach out to the nature of children, something compatible with children's predispositions.

In the religious periodicals for children, Christian missionaries redefined the dynamics between the ruled and the ruling, specifically, the children and the authority. Their logic was no longer one that treated children as the ruled, but one where they realized

children were the “eternal Messiah and hope of human’s redemption” (Song 2015). They expected children to come to view themselves as all virtuous in body and the usher of the inspirations of Christian tenets—in other words, as something closest to God. Farham also reinforced the connection between children and God in *Child’s Paper*. He stopped questioning the children, but instead stressed their autonomy to help free themselves from doubt, find faith in Christianity, and follow Christian doctrines in their acts, thus completing their conversion, which also replaced the officially recognized Chinese cultural tradition with God as the children’s guide.

Christian missionaries’ interpretation of children as crucial to the religion resonates with the priority of religious periodicals in children’s life, and the necessity of reconstructing the relation between children and religious education. As “the first children’s periodical of considerable influence in modern China (我国近代历史上第一份产生了较重大影响的儿童报刊)” (Zhao and Wu 2011), Farham’s *Child’s Paper* is a valuable reference of the transition from the neglect of children’s autonomy in the official school textbooks to the emphasis on them by the religious educators in civil society. Children were no longer objects of repression or alienation, but found their place in Christian discourses—that they had the same potential as adults to be educated as a Christian.

4. Moral Education through Characterization as “Little Christians”

As Christian missionaries learned more of Chinese children, moral education was also introduced in the religious periodicals for child readers. This type of education attempted to picture the varied aspects of how religion shapes children’s behaviours and values. According to Tobias Krettenauer, “moral education can be understood as the design, implementation and evaluation of programs aimed at fostering specific competencies crucial for moral functioning in everyday life (e.g., empathy, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, grit)” (Krettenauer 2021). In the growing numbers of studies on the effect of moral education on children, the concept of moral education is “the improvement of the moral beliefs, values and behaviours of young people” (Rehren and Sauer 2022), which can be achieved by “exposure to compelling texts, images, or oral narratives” (Morrow 2020).

This article opts to use moral education to describe the moral beliefs, values, and behaviours the characters have in the popular stories in *Child’s Paper* by Farham. Moral education here means children’s pursuit for good out of the comprehension and inspiration of the Bible. It also means the positive guiding derived from children’s experience of being inspired by the Bible; in other words, children can reflect and reform their behaviours, or help others correct their mistakes and improve themselves, through Christian belief and the inspiration they have from the Christian doctrines. An example of children improving themselves morally can be found in the story of *Tongzi Xingdao* 童子行道 (*Child Practicing Doctrines*) in Volume 3 Issue 3, where a quick-tempered child found out God could help him to find peace. When he got into a quarrel with other children, he followed the teachings in the Bible and not only did he remain calm, he also told the other children to treat each other in peace. In Issue 12, in the story *Tianyan Jie Zhao* 天眼皆照 (*The Divine Eyes See It All*), the child realized that it was morally wrong for his father to commit theft, and told his father that God was omnipresent so he should reform and be a righteous man. The child admonished the father as a Christian, while his father followed his words and subsequently the right path. Children in these stories appear more autonomous and proactive. They assume the identity as “little Christians”, leading the children, and even the adults, around them to be inspired by Christian tenets and correct their wrongdoings, thus fulfilling the purpose of moral education. There are also stories of faithful Christian children who would influence people in need of help with their kind deeds, and guide them to the path of faith. In Issue 16, for example, in the story *Huanxi Shengshu De Guinv* 欢喜圣书的闺女 (*The Girl Who Loves the Bible*), a faithful girl offered food to a man who was a non-believer. The man then came to realize that Christians were good people and, furthermore, that Christianity was important to the education of morality. He then began to read the Bible every day. These concepts and conducts of self-improving and benevolence to others make the “little

Christians" moral models, which enable children in a context of Chinese culture to have a moral education and understand the origin of Christian morality.

Therefore, the moral education of *Child's Paper* may have included reformatory education that does not intend for religious purposes, but in effect achieves religious ends, as shown by the decisions and values in everyday life. When channelled to everyday life, moral education has the characteristics of kindness, and sometimes of optimism, especially in face of imminent death. In this scenario, the children may educate the people around them with an optimistic view on death that says that "successful and effective emotion regulation is essential to mental health and well-being" (Vaccarezza and Niccoli 2019). In Issue 8, for example, in the story *Yuedong Shengcheng Jishi* 粤东省城纪事 (*Stories from Easter Canton Province*), a Christian girl contracted a deadly disease. When she was well, she always helped around the home and explained the gospels to her entire family. On her deathbed, she told her parents to "Worry not, for I am protected by the Lord (不须忧愁惊慌, 我得耶稣保佑等语)" (Farnham 1875b) and bravely accepts her fate. After she passes away, there was a "joyous look easy as Spring breeze (容貌欢悦, 有春风和气之色)" (Farnham 1875b) on her face that was completely devoid of any haggardness from disease. Coincidentally, in *Xu Lanxing Shu Lue* 续兰性述略 (*Sequel to A Biography*), a story in a contemporary magazine in Shanghai, the child protagonist was also full of optimistic imagination in the face of death, believing that "I shall soon be in Heaven and with my dear Lord and Savior (我不久即到天堂, 在那里有亲爱的救主, 与我同住)" (Ni 1875). All these stories stress how children can view death in the Christian context: albeit death brings harm to every living man, it brings relief, too. Children, when they become "little Christians", can face death particularly with easy optimism because they are endowed with Christian values that can "set people free from the fear of death (将人从对死亡的恐惧中解放出来)" (Song 2015).

5. Experience of Urchins as Reinforcement of Christian Emotional Education

The reason that Christian missionaries portrayed the child protagonists as urchins in religious periodicals lies in the perception of the mischief of children as an essential part of human nature. This universal experience transcends individuals and reaches out to that of a large portion of Chinese children. In other words, Chinese children shared the influence of this particular human nature because children from ordinary families in the late Qing Dynasty, when popular education was non-existent, had fewer accesses to moral education, let alone the reformatory education by Christianity. When faced with moral challenges, Chinese children were also put to test their own decisions, which could go against moral principles.

Children in want of education and guidance are particularly vulnerable to everyday vices, such as temptations and negative emotions. In Issue 14 and 15, for example, in the story *Yikuai Jinqian* 一块金钱 (*A Piece of Gold Coin*), the child protagonist was sent to work and live away from home since he was little. One day, he found a piece of gold coin, and before finally giving it back to its owner, he contemplated keeping it for himself, despite a troubled conscience. This story makes it clear that children have only limited capability to follow the virtuous life. In fact, in a life where guidance is absent, children are more likely to be left to their misbehaviours.

Moreover, children also suffer from the lack of emotional education because of the absence of proper parenting. Their inadequacy in dealing with reality makes them reliant on help from others. Such a case can be found in Issue 22 in the story *Yaofu San Huang* 耀福三谎 (*Thrice Did Yaofu Lie*), where the child protagonist grew prone to lying because the busy parents failed to discipline his behaviours. However, he was caught lying one day and, in panic, had to tell the truth to his parents. The three of them ended up confessing to God for forgiveness. Had the child's parents not intervened, he would have been caught up in the mental struggle between his shame as a liar and his innocence as a child. For children thirsty of emotional connection, the absence of timely emotional guidance will only aggravate the already existing negative emotions.

All these child protagonists, or urchins, with their negative emotions, inspire the child readers to proactively deal with similar situations which the child readers can resonate with, and even identify with the emotional vulnerability of the protagonists. It is easy to dismiss negative emotions, such as perplexity and remorse, as emotional vulnerability, but they can be more than just signs of emotional frailty and dependence. Since “negative emotions can be considered as valuable paths to moral progress” (Vaccarezza and Niccoli 2019), the protagonists’ spontaneous display of negative emotions is pivotal in bringing in emotional connection and moral education through sympathy from child readers. To give an honest portrayal of the urchins, the missionaries take into consideration their dual aspects of being both mischievous and innocent, and invite the child readers to empathise with the urchins as their peers, thus gaining the emotional strength to find love and go beyond all transgression. The child readers, when entering the stories, both observe and experience the world of the urchins. Through the experience, the child readers walk through the story in the shoes of the urchins, thus learning their mistakes. Through the observation, the ups-and-downs of the urchins’ life strike a chord in the heart of the child readers, evoking their sympathy. The boundary between experience and observation becomes fluid, and empathy leads to love in the heart of the child readers, which corresponds to Christianity’s core of “seeking a universal love from the redemption and transcendence of sins (从罪的忏悔与超越中生成普世的爱的社会情怀)” (Song 2015). Moreover, children reading these stories will also have their first inspiration of “transcending sins/transgressions. “The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy” (Proverbs 12:22, NIV) (International Bible Society Corporation and Zondervan 2001). “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour” (Exodus 20:17, NIV) (International Bible Society Corporation and Zondervan 2001). Christian doctrines, such as that believers of God shall not lie or covet for what is not theirs, become the urchins’ guilty feelings and confessions, and serve as the lessons of the emotional penalty by God, should the child readers commit the same transgressions. When the child readers begin to correct their behaviours as not to be vexed by these negative emotions, they achieve the transcendence over transgressions and progress over moral integrity, thus completing their emotional education in a Christian perspective.

6. Christian Discourse of Power behind Children’s Education

The presence of discourse of power in religious periodicals is not acknowledged by every Christian missionary, and less so when it presents an issue in need of addressing in *Child’s Paper*. One critique derives from the criticism on Christian discourses per se: “To show the superiority of their own beliefs, many missionaries denigrated the beliefs of other peoples” (Gao 2008). Albeit this criticism does not invoke discourse of power, it concerns the monotheistic horizon of Christianity that tends to reject and diminish non-believers and other beliefs, rather than embrace them with tolerance and peace. In *Child’s Paper*, an author commented disparagingly about the worship of non-Christian deities that “to the well-read, such things are no more than primitive conventions, but those simple-minded men and wives take them really seriously (这些事在读书达礼之人, 不过从俗而已, 不知那些愚夫愚妇就信以为真)” (Farnham 1875c). Those who never get to read Christian writings were deemed simple-minded, and their belief primitive. This debasement served as a contrast against those who believed in Christianity as intelligent, and Christianity as sophisticated and superior. In Issue 4, for example, in the story *Xi Na Zhen Dao* 喜纳真道 (*Accept the True Faith with Rejoice*), in the presence of Guan Yu, Kuan Yin (Avalokitesvara), and God of Fortune—all deities long cherished in Chinese religion and culture—the protagonist girl regarded them only as paintings on paper or figurines of mud, thus false gods. She believed one should worship the true god, the God of Christianity. When she saw her neighbour worshipping a painting of Kuan Yin, she was filled with misgivings and preached that only the God of Christianity was true, and would not settle until the neighbour tore up the painting of Kuan Yin. Christian missionaries, by seemingly conveying a scientific

view that the idols people worshiped were nothing more than paintings and figurines, and dismissing the popular worship of deities in Chinese culture as superstition, had in effect brought Chinese children into the religious discourses of the West. By identifying with the protagonist in the story, the child readers learned to reject the believers of other religions, and acknowledge the Christian God as the only god of all beliefs, that “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Exodus, 20:3–5, NIV) (International Bible Society Corporation and Zondervan 2001). It is understandable, though, that the comprehension of Christianity must be focused on the predominance of God and no deities of any other religions, thus maintaining the religious horizon centred on the faith of God.

It will not suffice to consider the discourse of power just by reviewing Christian missionaries advocating God’s predominance in the world of religion. “Religion can be analysed as a system of symbolic power with properties analogous to other cultural domains” (Swartz 1996), while culture is “benevolent in what they include, incorporate, and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote” (Said 1994). The Christian discourses that promoted the cultural power of the West highlighted the situation Chinese children found themselves in as subjects of Christian religious education and cultural propagation, in that they often found their discussion of worshiping indigenous Chinese deities overlooked or underrated. To examine the education of children by missionaries in the late Qing Dynasty through the perspective of Christian discourses of power also leads to viewing the religion as something that “acts as a reinforcer of ethno-national differences” (O’Malley and Walsh 2013). Religious periodicals including *Child’s Paper* habitually dismissed the possibility of Chinese children absorbing nourishments from indigenous Chinese religions, just as the desirable aspects of Chinese traditional education was dismissed by Western missionaries. Nonetheless, with the fluctuation Chinese children had experienced in their religious belief, and the new education Chinese children had been given that echoed to the uncertainty of China and the impact of the West, the focus on the Christian discourse in children’s magazines provided a glimpse of how Western ideas of education behind Christian missionaries viewed and engaged with those of China, and how the discourse of power of Western culture engaged with indigenous Chinese cultures.

7. A Fruit of Children’s Education among Discourses of Power

The Christian discourses in *Child’s Paper* also reflect the privileges of the West in China in the late Qing Dynasty. An examination that takes account of the political influence is valid and important since “The borderline between religion and politics is fluid” (Riis 1998). In many aspects, the missionary discourses ran in conflict with those of politics. The former stressed the free advancement of their religious cause and spreading of their beliefs, while the latter stressed the harvesting of the maximum benefits from China. Prior to the Second Opium War, Christian missionaries made a point of adding clauses that would facilitate their preaching in China into the unequal treaties to be signed afterwards. At that time, the missionary cause and the political agenda went generally side-by-side. After the Second Opium War was over, with the many benefits from preaching in the hinterlands of China secured, the missionaries became less enthused politically, but bent on opening religious schools and promoting Christian education. “As the immediate purpose for the introduction of education was to propagate Christian religion” (Piang 2022), the missionary cause gave priority to education, thus making *Child’s Paper* the legitimate medium to enlighten Chinese children and impart Western religion and culture.

As much as politics plays a part in religious education, the missionaries were pivotal in opening a new horizon of children’s education, as they disseminated Christian discourses in China. That being said, it is equally necessary to realize that it will be a mistake to assume their education of children to be without utilitarian ends. China in the late Qing Dynasty was harrowed by both domestic unrests and foreign invasions, and there were

yet to be discourses of power, political or religious, to mitigate the impact on Chinese children by the assertive Christian discourses in religious education, which, while showcasing the West's political power and Christian superiority, did bring a positive and conducive outcome of children's education.

Specifically, the outcome can be viewed as a pathway to the growth of education for Chinese children, which in fact was the children's predictable reaction conditioned by their religious education and guidance. For example, in the aforementioned story *Yikuai Jinqian* 一块金钱 (*A Piece of Gold Coin*), the child protagonist returned the gold coin rather than gave in to greed. The story points toward an anticipated reaction, through which the missionaries expect the children to correct their mistakes, and to further build a new model of mind. In other words, this anticipated reaction goes beyond reforming children's behaviours, but belongs to the education of children that constructs their behaviour patterns in the future, and prompts them to play a dynamic role in their own growth.

In a bigger picture, the missionaries' practice of educating children via religious periodicals also set a precedence for Chinese people for "the foundation and promotion of education in China" (Magdalena Mironesko 2020). In fact, following this example, Chinese intellectuals in the late Qing Dynasty created several newspapers for children, such as *Meng Xue Bao* (*The Children's Educator*) and *Qimeng Huabao* (*Pictorial of Enlightenment*), just to name a few. Apart from carrying stories of popular science, these papers also imparted patriotism and modern ethics, as to provide an alternative of children's education to that by Christian missionaries. Although much was still needed to work out their own educational ideas and practices, their efforts were key to the continuation of children's education ushered in by Christian missionaries, with *Child's Papers* as the predecessor and fruitful outcome.

8. Conclusions

Chinese children were an important community the Christian missionaries engaged with in the late Qing Dynasty. Due to the missionaries' expanded political power, the assertion in their discourses was an appropriate reaction: the education of children devoid of political dynamics is unrealistic. However, to Chinese children who had been immersed in traditional ideas and culture, the assertion in the Christian discourses could be excessive. It helps to focus on the education of children per se to retrieve the educational themes in religious periodicals as testimony to their contribution to children's education in China. In particular, the educational practice in *Child's Papers* by John Marshall Willoughby Farham, which shows that children's education means cultivating their morality, enlightening their emotion, and enabling them to build a model of mind that guarantees their correct behaviours in real life. Indeed, the education model Farham proposed in *Child's Papers* was intended for Chinese children's acceptance of, and even conversion to, Christianity, and arguably was not the sole prescription to education of children in the late Qing Dynasty; however, it did promise a change of education that had to happen to innovate the mind of Chinese children. Moreover, the study on children's education by Christian missionaries in the late Qing Dynasty had also benefitted Chinese intellectuals of that era, for this model of education invited them to update their ideas of education, and continue to promote the pre-primary education in China based on the experiences of Christian missionaries. Today, there is ample evidence showing that the contribution by missionaries to education has attracted more and more attention. Missionaries such as Farham intended to spread Christian ideas among Chinese children through educational practices, and doing so required their understanding of Chinese children's mindset and the cultural context they grew up with. In the process, these missionaries were equipped with a competence of communication in a heterogeneous cultural context, which played a key role in the cross-cultural communication and exchange of educational ideas between China and the West. It is time to bring this perspective back to the China of the late Qing Dynasty, and examine the Christian discourses, and the moral and emotional education by the missionaries.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Z.H.; resources, Z.H. and F.Y.; writing—original draft preparation, Z.H.; writing—review and editing, Z.H., H.Z. and F.Y.; supervision, H.Z.; funding acquisition, H.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: The Humanities and Social Sciences Foundation Project of the Ministry of Education of China “Research on the Language Evolution of Macau Daily from the Perspective of Identity Construction” (22YJA740022).

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- Bi, Yuan. 2010. *Jianzao Changshi: Jiaokeshu yu Jindai Zhongguo Wenhua Zhuanxing* 建造常识：教科书与近代中国文化转型 (*Constructing Common Sense, Schoolbooks and the Transformation of Culture in Modern China*). Fuzhou: Fujian Education Press.
- Bränzila, Carina Ionela. 2018. Identity and Education in the Case of Children’s Literature. *Hermeneia* 21: 267–73.
- Chen, Pingyuan. 2011. Zhuanxingqi Zhongguo de “Ertong Xiang” 转型期中国“儿童相” (The “Image of Children” in China during Transition—Focusing on Illustrated Paper of Enlightenment). In *Ertong de Faxian—Xiandai Zhongguo Wenxue ji Wenhua Zhong de Ertong Wenti* 儿童的发现—现代中国文学及文化中的儿童问题 (*Discovery of Children—The Children Problem in Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*). Edited by Lanjun Xu and Andrew F. Jones. Beijing: Beijing University Press, p. 77.
- Farnham, John Marshall Willoughby. 1875a. Xiaohai Yuebao Zhiyi Xu 小孩月报志异序 (Preface to Strange Tales of Child’s Paper). In *Xiaohai Yuebao Zhiyi* 小孩月报志异 (*Strange Tales of Child’s Paper*). Shanghai: Shanghai Qingxin Institute.
- Farnham, John Marshall Willoughby. 1875b. Yuedong Shengcheng Jishi 粤东省城纪事 (Stories from Easter Canton Province). In *Xiaohai Yuebao* 小孩月报 (*Child’s Paper*). Shanghai: Shanghai Qingxin Institute.
- Farnham, John Marshall Willoughby. 1875c. Xi Na Zhen Dao 喜纳真道 (Accept the True Faith with Rejoice). In *Xiaohai Yuebao* 小孩月报 (*Child’s Paper*). Shanghai: Shanghai Qingxin Institute.
- Gao, Yanli. 2008. Judd’s China: A missionary congressman and US-China policy. *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 2: 197–219. [[CrossRef](#)]
- International Bible Society Corporation, and Zondervan, eds. 2001. *The Holy Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Krettenauer, Tobias. 2021. Moral sciences and the role of education. *Journal of Moral Education* 50: 77–91. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Liang, Qichao. 1936. *Yin Bingshi Heji Zhuanjì* 饮冰室合集·专集 (*The Collected Works of YinBingShi*). Three Weapons of Civilization. Shanghai: Zhonghua Book Company, vol. 2.
- Magdalena Mironesko, Alexandra. 2020. Mission and Education: Occidental and Christian influence in the last years of the Qing Dynasty in China and in the Period of the Republic of China (1912–1949). *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 17: 117–50. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Morrow, Paul. 2020. Identity-Directed Norm Transformations and Moral Progress. *Journal of Value Inquiry* 54: 493–509. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Ni, Shimu. 1875. Xu Lanxing Shu Lve 续兰性述略 (Sequel to A Biography). In *Xiaohai Yuebao* 小孩月报 (*Child’s Paper*). Shanghai: Shanghai Qingxin Institute.
- O’Malley, Eoin, and Dawn Walsh. 2013. Religion and democratization in Northern Ireland: Is religion actually ethnicity in disguise? *Democratization* 20: 939–58. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Piang, L. Lam Khan. 2022. Evangelism and education: Themaking of the Zo people into a Christian community. *International Journal of Christianity & Education* 26: 284–99. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Rehren, Paul, and Hanno Sauer. 2022. Another Brick in the Wall? Moral Education, Social Learning, and Moral Progress. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 1–16. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Riis, Ole. 1998. Religion re-emerging—The role of religion in legitimating integration and power in modern societies. *International Sociology* 13: 249–72. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Said, Edward W. 1994. *Culture and Imperialisms*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Song, Lihua. 2015. *Jindai Laihua Chuanjiaoshi yu Ertong Wenxue de Yijie* 近代来华传教士与儿童文学的译介 (*A Translation and Introduction of the Missionaries and Children’s Literature in Modern China*). Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House.
- Statham, Audrey, and R. Scott Webster. 2021. Engaging with Dewey’s Valuation in Religious Education to Enhance Children’s Spirituality for Democratic Life. *Religions* 12: 629. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Swartz, David. 1996. Bridging the study of culture and religion: Pierre Bourdieu’s political economy of symbolic power. *Sociology of Religion* 57: 71–85. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Vaccarezza, Maria Silvia, and Ariele Niccoli. 2019. The dark side of the exceptional: On moral exemplars, character education, and negative emotions. *Journal of Moral Education* 48: 332–45. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Vallgård, Karen A. A. 2015. Tying Children to God With Love: Danish Mission, Childhood, and Emotions in Colonial South India. *Journal of Religious History* 39: 595–613. [[CrossRef](#)]

-
- Wilson, Marguerite Anne Fillion. 2022. Problematizing child-centeredness: Discourses of control in Waldorf education. *Global Studies of Childhood* 12: 118–33. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Zhao, Xiaolan, and Chao Wu. 2011. *Chuanjiaoshi Zhongwen Baokan Shi* 传教士中文报刊史 (*A History of the Missionaries' Chinese Press*). Shanghai: Fudan University Press.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.