William Lockhart of Liverpool: the first British medical missionary to China

ZHAI HAI-LONG, CHEN SHIMIN, LU YALAN*

During the late Qing Dynasty medical mission began and developed in China. In 1807 Robert Morrison (1782-1834), the first Protestant missionary to China, came to Canton, and some years later began to spread Christianity for the first time in China. He, with another East India Company Surgeon, Dr John Livingstone, opened a dispensary for the poor in Macao in 1820.\(^1\) After that many medical missionaries came to China. In 1835, the American Reverend Peter Parker, founder of medical missionaries to China, established the Canton Ophthalmic Hospital, the first western style hospital in China.\(^2\) Then in 1854 John Glasgow Kerr, a Presbyterian medical missionary to China working with the American Presbyterian Mission, came to Canton and soon took over the Canton Ophthalmic Hospital, which was unfortunately burned during the Arrow War (the second Opium War). In 1859, he established the Boji Hospital, one of the most influential hospitals with the longest history in modern China.\(^3\)

William Lockhart (1811-1896) was another prominent medical missionary. He was the first British Protestant Christian missionary to China who served with the London Missionary Society during the late Qing Dynasty. He made significant contributions to Chinese health services and the cause of evangelism in China during the late Qing Dynasty.

**Early life**

William Lockhart (Figure 1) was born in Liverpool on 3 October 1811. Initially he was apprenticed to a Mr Parke, a local apothecary. In March 1833, he went to the Meath Hospital in Dublin, where he studied under Dr William Stokes (1804-1878), one of the leading physicians of his age. On 3 October 1833, Lockhart passed the examination and obtained the Licenciate of the Society of Apothecaries (LSA). In 1833, he continued his studies at Guy’s Hospital in London. On 29 April 1834, he became a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons of England on passing their exams with distinction and won Mr Key’s Surgical Prize.

\(^*\) E-mail: zhi135246@sohu.com


Figure 1: Dr William Lockhart of Liverpool (3 October 1811-29 April 1896)

Early in 1838 William was appointed by the London Missionary Society (LMS) as Medical Missionary to Canton, and as such he was the first British medical
missionary to China. On 31 July 1838, he travelled to China aboard the *George the Fourth* from Gravesend.⁴

**Experiences in China: in Hong Kong and Macao**

In January 1839, William arrived in China.⁵ On 28 February, he arrived in Macao, where he met John Robert Morrison, who was the senior member of the LMS, the Chinese Secretary to the Superintendent of Trade, and also the son of Robert Morrison, and with whom he visited Guangdong. The next four months were spent in Macao in intensive study of the Chinese language.

On 1 July 1839, Lockhart reopened the Macao hospital, which had been founded by Dr Peter Parker but closed pending his return to Canton. However, the hostility between the Chinese and British governments compelled him to close the hospital and embark on a merchant ship bound for Hong Kong for safety in August 1839, thence to Batavia in November. In April 1840, he returned to Macao again, then opened a hospital with Dr Benjamin Hobson in accordance with an arrangement between the American and London missionaries.⁶

**In Chou-shan (Zhoushan)**

At the end of August 1840, Lockhart had the opportunity to go to Chou-shan. Leaving the hospital in Macao in the hands of Dr Hobson, he reached Tinghai, principal city of Chou-shan, on 2 September, where he immediately started a hospital. In less than six months he had already seen 3500 patients.⁴

**In Macao, Hong Kong, and Chou-shan again**

In January 1841, according to a peace treaty negotiated by the Chinese government and Captain Elliott, which included the ceding of the then barren island of Hong Kong in return for the evacuation of Chou-shan, William was forced to return once again to Macao where he rejoined Dr Hobson at the hospital. William remained in Macao for some months. On 13 May 1841 William married Catherine Parkes in Macao.

In September 1842, he went to Hong Kong to superintend the building of the Medical Missionary Society’s hospital there.

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⁶ William Lockhart papers, School of Oriental and African Studies, [http://www.aim25.ac.uk/cats/19/5391.htm](http://www.aim25.ac.uk/cats/19/5391.htm)
In June 1843 William returned to Tinghai and reopened the hospital there. During the summer in 1843 he visited Ningpo to assess the possibility of establishing a mission there.\textsuperscript{4,5}

**In Shanghai**

In November 1843 he went to Shanghai and immediately set about finding a house. In January 1844 they moved there with Walter Medhurst and it was to be their abode for the next 14 years.

In February 1844 William opened a hospital known as ‘the Chinese Hospital’, also known as ‘Renji Hospital’, in a Chinese house rented by LMS in the inhabited area near Big East Gate (Da Dong Men) of Shanghai County (Figure 2). It was the first western hospital in Shanghai and the second one in China. Crowds of people daily came to the hospital, urgently, often boisterously, requesting to be attended. The applicants were not only residents in Shanghai, but many came from the vicinity of Shanghai.\textsuperscript{5}

![Figure 2: The Chinese Hospital, also known as Renji Hospital, Shanghai County](image)

All patients were treated without charge but all were told about the Christian religion and handed books and tracts to take away with them. It was estimated that there were already about 60000 Christians in Jiangsu province, under the jurisdiction of which Shanghai was at that time, mostly Roman-Catholics. By the end of 1844, William had seen over 10000 patients in Shanghai, seeing between 100-150 patients a day. The Chinese seem to have been very susceptible to diseases of the eye and William was frequently operating for cataract and other conditions of the eye. (In 1946 the hospital moved to Medhursts’ circle (Mai Jia Quan, now Middle Shandong Road), and changed its name to Shantung Road Hospital, also called Renji Yi Guan.)

In case of natural disasters, in order to alleviate hunger the hospital set up a charity porridge house to dole out to victims. For example, within 10 weeks
of the famine in 1852, Renji Hospital had handed out more than 34392 bowls of cooked rice! These medical and relief costs were mainly contributed by the London Missionary Society Fellowship, the Medical Missionary Society in China, and foreign merchants. In 1864, the Qing court granted a nanmu plaque to William Lockhart, father of Renji, inscribed ‘coming from the west gently’.

The Chinese Hospital provided the earliest vaccination services for the public, especially children in Shanghai, as well as applying surgical sterilization for the first time in China. William Lockhart opposed the opium trade in China. The Chinese Hospital helped thousands of patients with opium addiction to quit, most being cured.\textsuperscript{7,8}

\textbf{Back in England}

William arrived back in England on 29 January 1858. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons (FRCS) in March 1857 and also became a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in 1858. He also wrote a book about his experiences, \textit{The medical missionary in China. A narrative of twenty years’ experience}, which was published in London in 1861.

He left England on 11 June 1861 and by 15 July was in Singapore, reaching Hong Kong on 5 August. A week later he was in Shanghai, and after two weeks he embarked again for the North.\textsuperscript{4}

\textbf{In Beijing}

On 13 September 1861 he arrived in Beijing as a medical officer to the British Embassy. On 23 October 1861 he was able to move into his own house next door, provided by Mr Bruce, and commence hospital work. In October 1861 he established the London Missionary Society’s Chinese hospital in the Dongcheng District of Beijing, the first missionary hospital in the city and the predecessor of Beijing Union Medical College Hospital as well.

Lockhart was an extremely popular doctor. During the two and half years of his stay in the capital, over 30000 patients were treated, suffering from various diseases including communicable diseases, internal diseases, surgical diseases and eye diseases. He was also busy reviewing the operation of the LMS missions in central and northern China and doing everything possible to get them all on a solid footing.\textsuperscript{9,10}

\textsuperscript{8} Shen Youmin, Li Jin, ‘Benevolence skills aiding lives began in Medhursts’ circle (Mai Jia Quan)’, \textit{Xinmin Evening News}, 21 August 2011.
\textsuperscript{9} W. Lockhart, \textit{The first report of the London Missionary Society’s Chinese Hospital at Peking from October 1\textsuperscript{st} 1861 to December 21\textsuperscript{st} 1862} (Shanghai, London Mission Press, 1862, Pamphlet 21).
In 1863 Joseph Edkins (1823-1905) joined William, sent by the LMS from Tientsin. Edkins and a Beijing preacher held daily services in the LMS’s Chinese Hospital hall during the time when the patients were waiting for their turn to go into the surgery. In this way Christian knowledge was imparted to the patients. Soon Edkins established a school and preaching place in the Xicheng District which was the predecessor of the Gangwashi Church, the earliest Christian church in Beijing.

Geographical study

As a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, William Lockhart recorded notes on the geography of Chou-shan, Shanghai, Beijing, and the surrounding region in his book and in his reports to LMS. Interestingly, he was also a quite good amateur ethnographer, recording the society of the late Qing Dynasty (Figure 3).

While in China, he had been outspoken on a variety of issues, including opposing the binding of women’s feet, a traditional Chinese practice.

Later life

Lockhart finally left Beijing on 5 April 1864. After visiting Hangkow he went over to Japan where he made a brief stay, probably at Nagasaki, before returning to England where he arrived on 14 August.

He was elected a Director of the LMS in 1864, Chairman of the LMS Board of Directors in 1867, and director of the Medical Missionary Association in 1878.

William Lockhart died at Blackheath on 29 April 1896 after an illness of only two days and was buried in the Abney Park cemetery.

Conclusion

Throughout William Lockhart’s life, he was firstly a doctor who did all he could to relieve the sufferings of tens of thousands of patients, whether European or Chinese, rich or poor, Christian or Confucian. Secondly he was a missionary who endeavoured to spread the Gospel to his patients. But he advocated the strict separation of the roles of preacher and physician.

He made a significant contribution to Chinese health services during the late Qing Dynasty. The spirit sustaining his noble deeds was his fraternity to the world as a doctor and his persistence in evangelism in China as a

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Figure 3: A picture taken by William Lockhart: a Manchu girl shows off the dress typical of the ruling Qing dynasty missionary. This spirit deserves our respect, commemoration and learning forever.

Acknowledgement

The study was supported by the Scientific Research Foundation for Introduced Doctors of Hubei Polytechnic University (No. 8353).