

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Developing the Countryside: Agricultural Missions, K. L. Butterfield, and Rural Reconstruction in Asia, 1920–50

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Abstract

In the first half of the twentieth century, Protestant internationalism and missions turned their attention to social and economic matters. The 1920/30s saw an agricultural turn that was paralleled by a global discourse on the “improvement” of the rural. While the transformations in Protestant internationalism have been addressed in view of theological, ecumenical, and geopolitical changes, historians have yet to acknowledge the complex interplay of their local and global effects. By focusing on the work of a particular agent in agricultural missions, the International Missionary Council and its rural expert Kenyon L. Butterfield, and their engagement with rural reconstruction in India, China, and Japan, this article argues that impactful schemes necessitated the cooperation of a wide array of actors, from private to state, from foreign missionaries to local Christian and non-Christian communities and activists. Missionary and Christian rural reconstruction in Asia in the interwar period was shaped by forces of nationalism, (anti-)colonialism, and secularization that could benefit, halt, and transform comprehensive schemes. While the impact of missionary rural reconstruction was eventually hampered by its inherently universalist and invasive nature, its drive for professionalization led to manifold cooperations and careers that transitioned well into and in many ways anticipated and prepared a post-World War II development discourse.

Keywords: Protestant internationalism; rural reconstruction; agricultural missions; development; International Missionary Council; Kenyon L. Butterfield

I. Introduction

In February 1928, the American agricultural scientist Kenyon L. Butterfield (1868–1935), president of the Michigan Agricultural College, wrote to Howard Edwards, president of the Rhode Island College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, about an engagement that promised to Butterfield to be “literally the opportunity of a lifetime.”¹ What was it that Butterfield, an eminent figure in American rural

¹Kenyon L. Butterfield to Howard Edwards, February 6, 1928, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Kenyon L. Butterfield Papers (hereafter KLBP), Box 17, International Missionary Council (hereafter IMC), 1917–1934, Folder 7.

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sociology – selected in 1908 by President Theodore Roosevelt as one of the handful of members of the Commission on Rural Life – considered such a weighty task? Butterfield had been approached by the International Missionary Council (IMC) to be agricultural counselor for the Council's upcoming World Missionary Conference held in Jerusalem in March–April 1928 and to conduct an extensive survey on agricultural missions in Asia after the event.

The IMC was founded in 1921 and linked missionary bodies, national Christian associations as well as other interdenominational organizations and committees. It was intended to continue what had been envisioned at the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. Leading figure behind the nominally international, but factually mainly Anglo-American endeavor was John R. Mott, the prominent American missionary, ecumenical activist, and later Nobel Peace Prize winner.² While the Council had a significant British side through its secretaries like Joseph Oldham and William Paton, it also had particularly strong ties and overlaps with the Foreign Missions Conference of North America (FMCNA). The IMC's 1928 World Missionary Conference in Jerusalem represented crucial transformations in global Protestant internationalism and missions. It signified both the new role of non-“Western” Christian churches and communities as well as shifts in missiology that tried to meet the concerns of Social Gospel theology. Social Gospellers advocated for building the Kingdom of God on earth not through aggressive, direct proselytization but the social and economic advancement of (non-)Christian societies, for instance through social work, education – or agriculture.³

Kenyon L. Butterfield and the IMC's work on agriculture and the missionary shift toward agricultural missions in the early decades of the twentieth century were part of a larger, indeed global interest in the rural in general and “rural reconstruction” in particular that occupied individuals and states, religious and non-religious organizations and communities, educational institutions, colonial governments, and anti-colonial activists, from the Americas, to Europe, Asia, and beyond.⁴ In the world of

²For recent overviews on the IMC, see Dana L. Robert, “Cooperation, Christian Fellowship, and Transnational Networking: The Birth of the International Missionary Council,” in *Together in the Mission of God: Jubilee Reflections on the International Missionary Council*, ed. Risto Jukko (Geneva: WCC, 2022), 3–29; Kenneth R. Ross, “The International Missionary Council between 1910 and 1921,” in *A History of the Desire for Christian Unity: Ecumenism in the Churches (19th–21st Century)*, vol. 1, Dawn of Ecumenism, eds. Alberto Melloni and Luca Ferracci (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 722–743; Brian Stanley, “The International Missionary Council,” *International Review of Mission* 111, no. 2 (2022): 268–284. See also William R. Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and its Nineteenth-Century Background* (New York: Harper, 1952).

³On the conference in Jerusalem, see Jan Van Lin, *Shaking the Fundamentals: Religious Plurality and Ecumenical Movement* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002); Jonathan S. Barnes, *Power and Partnership: A History of the Protestant Mission Movement* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), 170–182; Michael G. Thompson, *For God and Globe. Christian Internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2015), 108–113. On the Social Gospel, see Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Christopher Evans, *The Social Gospel in American Religion: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

⁴To mention only a few examples, cf. Gi-Wook Shin, “Agrarianism: A Critique of Colonial Modernity in Korea,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (1999): 784–804; Surinder Singh Jodhka, “Nation and Village: Images of Rural India in Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 37, no. 32 (2002): 3343–3353; Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), chapters

Protestant missions, individual missions and missionaries had initiated rural schemes in the first decades of the twentieth century and were running them more or less successfully when Butterfield entered the scene. Rural improvement and agricultural missions had become a key element and much debated topic of the modern mission movement by the 1920s.⁵ In 1928, the International Association of Agricultural Missions counted 111 agricultural missionaries serving under nineteen North American foreign missionary boards.⁶ A pioneering force in promoting and installing agricultural and industrial projects in the wider field of Protestant mission and internationalism had been the international Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and its regional and national branches. The American YMCA, in particular, was highly active in Asia, cooperating with local chapters and secretaries in manifold social-reformist and "modernizing" schemes in countries such as India, China, Japan, and Korea.⁷

The International Missionary Council's work on agriculture was part of a larger focus on social, economic, and industrial issues that reflected the significant shifts in the missionary discourse of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1930, the IMC set up a Department of Social and Industrial Research.⁸ Its purpose was to gather and provide social science-based information on matters related to industrialization and social issues like forced labor, child welfare, education, or the trafficking of narcotics.⁹ The IMC has recently found renewed attention from scholars. With the centennial of its founding in 1921, authors have rediscovered the Council as a crucial stepping stone in the development of international Christian cooperation and ecumenism.¹⁰ Furthermore, the organization has been featured in recent scholarship on (American) Protestant internationalism in the interwar period.¹¹ As such, the International Missionary Council is

3–5; Amalia Ribí Forclaz and Liesbeth van de Grift, eds. *Governing the Rural in Interwar Europe* (London: Routledge, 2017); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), chapters 1 and 2.

⁵See, e.g., Benjamin H. Hunnicutt and William Watkins Reid, *The Story of Agricultural Missions* (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1931).

⁶List of 111 Agricultural Missionaries serving under 19 Foreign Missionary Boards," International Association of Agricultural Missions, NYC, November 1928, KLBP/13/Far East Agriculture and Religious Education (FEA&RE), 1919–1935/3.

⁷Harald Fischer-Tiné, Stefan Huebner, and Ian Tyrrell, eds. *Spreading Protestant Modernity: Global Perspectives on the Social Work of the YMCA and YWCA, 1889–1970* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2020); Harald Fischer-Tiné, *The YMCA in Late Colonial India: Modernization, Philanthropy and American Soft Power in South Asia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022); Mohan Devapriya David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India: A Centenary History* (New Delhi: National Council of YMCAs of India, 1992); Jun Xing, *Baptized in the Fire of Revolution: The American Social Gospel and the YMCA in China, 1919–1937* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1996); Thomas H. Reilly, *Saving the Nation: Chinese Protestant Elites and the Quest to Build a New China, 1922–1952* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021); Jon Thares Davidann, *A World of Crisis and Progress: The American YMCA in Japan, 1890–1930* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1998); Albert L. Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese-Occupied Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015).

⁸Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations*, 270–273.

⁹Michael Philipp Brunner, "From Converts to Cooperation: Protestant Internationalism, US Missionaries and Indian Christians and 'Professional' Social Work between Boston and Bombay (c. 1920–1950)," *Journal of Global History* 16, no. 3 (2021): 415–434, here 419–422.

¹⁰Robert, "Cooperation, Christian Fellowship, and Transnational Networking"; Ross, "The International Missionary Council between 1910 and 1921"; Stanley, "The International Missionary Council."

¹¹Dana L. Robert, "The First Globalization: The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement Between the World Wars," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 26, no. 2 (2002): 50–66; Thompson, *For God and Globe*; Justin Reynolds, *Against the World: International Protestantism*

now recognized as part of a broader network of ecumenical endeavors such as the Universal Christian Council of Life and Work, the short-lived Interchurch World Movement, or research-oriented organizations such as the Rockefeller-funded Institute for Social and Religious Research (ISRR) – movements that at their core were linked by an interest in tackling the challenges Christianity faced in modern society.¹² Much of this literature has focused on Protestant internationalist high politics, intellectual history, and theological debates, as well as missionary internationalism’s reverberations back into American politics and culture. While especially the discourse that centered around the IMC’s world conferences 1928 in Jerusalem and 1938 in Tambaram, India, has been extensively analyzed by scholars, the IMC’s schemes and activities concerned with social, industrial, and agricultural issues outside of the conferences have yet received only limited attention.¹³ Meanwhile, there has been an upsurge recently in works that acknowledge the role American missionaries as well as American modernism played in various areas of “modernization” in Asia and Africa in the late colonial period, opening up long-standing, (often British-)imperial frameworks and introducing non-state actors that moved in the gray area between the religious and the secular.¹⁴ Considerable research has been devoted to the topic of agricultural development, for instance in late colonial India.¹⁵ While these studies recognize the transnational embeddedness of their subject, they usually follow particular missionary institutions or schemes, with the Protestant internationalist discourse only peripherally touched upon.

A look at the International Missionary Council’s and Kenyon L. Butterfield’s work on agricultural missions and its repercussions in Asia, namely in India, China, and Japan, allows us draw a more holistic picture of the modern mission movement and its rural shift, while ensuring to acknowledge both the internationalist background

and the Ecumenical Movement between Secularization and Politics, 1900–1952 (PhD diss., Columbia University, New York, 2016); David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2019); Gene Zubovich, *Before the Religious Right Liberal Protestants, Human Rights, and the Polarization of the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).

¹²Charles E. Harvey, “John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and the Interchurch World Movement of 1919–1920: A Different Angle on the Ecumenical Movement,” *Church History* 51, no. 2 (1982): 198–209; Graeme Smith, *Oxford 1937: The Universal Christian Council for Life and Work Conference* (Berlin: P. Lang, 2004); Gina A. Zurlo, “The Social Gospel, Ecumenical Movement, and Christian Sociology: The Institute of Social and Religious Research,” *The American Sociologist* 46, no. 2 (2015): 177–193.

¹³See, for instance, Andrew E. Barnes, “Making Good Wives and Mothers’: The African Education Group and Missionary Reactions to the Phelps Stokes Reports,” *Studies in World Christianity* 21, no. 1 (2015): 66–85; Peter Kallaway, “Education, Health and Social Welfare in the Late Colonial Context: The International Missionary Council and Educational Transition in the Interwar Years with Specific Reference to Colonial Africa,” *History of Education* 38, no. 2 (2009): 217–246; Hyaewool Choi, *Gender Politics at Home and Abroad: Protestant Modernity in Colonial-Era Korea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 149–189.

¹⁴Fischer-Tiné, Huebner, and Tyrrell, eds. *Spreading Protestant Modernity*; Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission*; Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America’s Moral Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010); Larry Grubbs, *Secular Missionaries: Americans and African Development in the 1960s* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).

¹⁵Prakash Kumar, “Modernization’ and Agrarian Development in India, 1912–52,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 79, no. 3 (August 2020): 633–658; Harald Fischer-Tiné, “The YMCA and Low-Modernist Rural Development in South Asia, c. 1922–1957,” *Past and Present* 240, no. 1 (2018): 193–234; Subir Sinha, “Lineages of the Developmentalist State: Transnationality and Village India, 1900–1965,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 1 (2008): 57–90.

and its regional and local variations. Simultaneously, following the trails of Butterfield and the IMC provides an insight into the complex engagements with and negotiations of Christian (and non-Christian) rural reconstruction in Asia in the first half of the twentieth century. Thus, after an overview on Butterfield's work for the IMC and his surveys in Asia, the article will focus on the results of these engagements and developments in rural reconstruction in Asia in the 1930s to 1940s in three subchapters devoted to India, Japan, and China, respectively, showing how agricultural missions negotiated the complex array of state actors, local initiative, and ecumenical cooperation.

As Ian Tyrrell recently noted, in order to understand the internationalist rural reconstruction discourse and its feedback mechanisms, historians need "to sort out the complicated relationship between international influences in agrarian reform and national ones."¹⁶ As the article will show, the IMC and Butterfield engaged with a wide array of pre-existing rural schemes and experiments in Asia, conducted by religious and secular, Christian and non-Christian, private and state actors. The adaptation of Butterfield's ideas in diverse local contexts and the implementation of rural reconstruction initiatives in India, China, and Japan were influenced by a multifaceted array of factors, including nationalism, (anti-)colonialism, and secularism. These factors had the potential to facilitate, impede, or transform comprehensive schemes. What seemed to Butterfield in the mid-1920s to be an "opportunity of a lifetime" eventually resulted in an impact much less than what he had imagined when he started his work. Some of this was due to the financial restraints the Depression brought in the 1930s. Other reasons lay in the nature of Butterfield's plans. As this article argues, the IMC's agricultural efforts eventually were arrested by a universalism inherent in Butterfield's comprehensive visions, as well as challenged by the political and ideological constraints the turbulent 1920s and 1930s brought.

At the same time, the article asserts that the agricultural shift promoted and backed by the IMC and Butterfield was far from irrelevant, despite the often short-lived nature of specific rural reconstruction experiments. It popularized the idea of a concentrated rural reconstruction unit, accelerated existing efforts, and tied individual enterprises stronger to the Protestant internationalist milieu and its related international networks of experts, activists, and funders. Furthermore, it fueled a secularization of missionary and Social Gospeller "developmentalism," which was a prerequisite for its later transformation into secular post-war development aid. Through institutionalization and schemes like research institutes or courses for missionaries on furlough, it had a considerable effect on the professionalization (and secularization) of missionary personnel. In this regard, the article confirms the findings of recent scholarship that has started to interpret early twentieth-century missionary social-reformist and in particularly agricultural schemes as a "pre-history" of later, Cold War development policies.¹⁷ At the same time, the not always uncontested work and role of missionary actors in an expert discourse on agricultural science highlights the complex relationship between the "secular" and the "religious" into much of the twentieth century.

¹⁶Ian Tyrrell, "Vectors of Practicality: Social Gospel, the North American YMCA in Asia, and the Global Context," in *Spreading Protestant Modernity*, eds. Harald Fischer-Tiné, Stefan Huebner and Ian Tyrrell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2020), 39–60, here 53.

¹⁷Fischer-Tiné, *The YMCA in Late Colonial India*; Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*; Kumar, "Modernization' and Agrarian Development." Cf. Catherine Scheer, Philip Fountain, and R. Michael Feener, eds. *The Mission of Development* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

II. Agricultural Missions, the International Missionary Conference 1928 in Jerusalem, and Kenyon L. Butterfield in Asia

In the early twentieth century, Kenyon L. Butterfield built his reputation as one of the United States' leading rural sociologists. Particularly during his long-time engagement as president of the Massachusetts State College of Agriculture in Amherst, Massachusetts, Butterfield was an advocate of the progressivist Country Life Movement which sought to reform rural life in America through measures such as education and agricultural extension, often involving rural churches as an audience and agent in its visions.¹⁸ In his activities, Butterfield stood at the intersection of the Social Gospel and an increasing professionalization of rural social sciences in the first decades of the twentieth century.¹⁹ Butterfield's visions for the American countryside were based on the interplay of numerous agents. Drawing on his own career in higher education, he trusted in the impact of professionalized rural and agricultural education as well as extension work and the training of rural leaders. Having witnessed the great advances the system of land-grant universities had brought to American agriculture, Butterfield was happy to cooperate with government agencies. However, he also stressed that effective rural reform could not be solely government-based and he advocated private professional associations and commissions advising and coordinating rural development schemes. Last but not least, Butterfield was convinced that the church had a pivotal role to play. As one of the core problems of the American farmer Butterfield identified isolation and individualistic, self-centered living and working. Butterfield's solution to this was embedding the farmer in a strong network based on cooperation and community, and the rural church was supposed to strengthen this through its strong institutional and community structure.²⁰

Many of these positions translated well into Butterfield's engagement with the global discourse of rural reconstruction. Apart from his significant role in the development of American rural sociology and the Country Life Movement, Kenyon Butterfield had a vested interest in the international dimension of the agricultural question, reflected in his various professional engagements. Butterfield was co-founder of the World Agricultural Society in 1920, member of the International Institute of Sociology, and he served on the board of directors of the Rockefeller Foundation's ISRR which paralleled the International Missionary Council's interest in social inquiry and shared much of its personnel and supporters (including John R. Mott) with the Council.²¹ The Rockefeller Foundation was an important agent in financing various agricultural, educational, and other projects (and simultaneously advancing American soft power) in Asia in the interwar period, often in conjunction with Protestant internationalist organizations and networks. As Butterfield noted, "America ha[d] the money [. . .] not only in dollars but money held by persons who have imaginations"²² to support these types of research and scientific initiatives. In the United States, the Rockefeller Foundation

¹⁸Melissa Bradley Kirkpatrick, "Re-Parishing the Countryside: Progressivism and Religious Interests in Rural Life Reform, 1908–1934" (PhD diss., The American University, Washington, D.C., 1991). On the Country Life Commission, see Scott J. Peters and Paul A. Morgan, "The Country Life Commission: Reconsidering a Milestone in American Agriculture," *Agricultural History* 78, no. 3 (2004): 289–316.

¹⁹Peters and Morgan, "The Country Life Commission"; Merwin Swanson, "The 'Country Life Movement' and the American Churches," *Church History* 46, no. 3 (1977): 358–373; Harry C. McDean, "Professionalism in the Rural Social Sciences, 1896–1919," *Agricultural History* 58, no. 3 (1984): 373–392.

²⁰On Butterfield's work in American rural life reform in the early twentieth century, see Kirkpatrick, "Re-Parishing the Countryside."

²¹Zurlo, "The Social Gospel, Ecumenical Movement, and Christian Sociology."

²²KLB to John Mott, January 17, 1930, KLB/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/3.

had funded important projects in rural extension and demonstration in the American Southern states as well as in New England in the first decades of the twentieth century.²³

In addition to his agricultural interests, Butterfield had also close ties to the American missionary movement, serving as vice-president of the Congregationalist mission board, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The idea for Butterfield to go to Asia and work for the IMC, hence, did not come out of the blue. Butterfield had already been to China in 1921–22 as part of the China Educational Commission, a joint project of the FMCNA's Committee of Reference and Counsel and the China Christian Educational Association, joined by the Conference of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and England and financed by the various North American mission boards and additional benefactors such as the Rockefeller Foundation.²⁴ In 1925, the National Christian Council (NCC) of China asked the International Missionary Council for a rural specialist but the IMC and Butterfield could not agree on the exact form and extent of the visit. The following year, the National Christian Council (NCC) of India, Burma and Ceylon made a similar request and there were preliminary plans for Butterfield to visit Korea on behalf of the IMC. In the end, none of these plans came to fruition. However, in advance of the upcoming World Missionary Conference in March–April 1928 in Jerusalem, the IMC in cooperation with the ISRR put together a small group of specialists tasked to prepare reports and statements for the conference, consisting of missionaries and agricultural experts like Butterfield, Edmund de S. Brunner, Director of Rural Investigations of the ISRR, or William McKee, a former rural missionary in Moga, India. Butterfield was also invited by the IMC to provide the memorandum on rural missions and agriculture for the conference and co-authored the Council's final statement on the topic eventually published in the conference volume six on "The Christian Mission in Relation to rural problems."²⁵

Butterfield's input was indeed valued and sought after in the American and international missionary milieu after the widely acknowledged 1928 Jerusalem conference. After the conference, the International Missionary Council and Butterfield received numerous invitations from missionary organizations. From February through August 1929, for example, Butterfield studied the rural situation in South Africa, funded by the Carnegie Foundation.²⁶ In response to the numerous requests, the IMC eventually

²³Landrum R. Bolling, *Private Foreign Aid: U.S. Philanthropy for Relief and Development* (Boulder: Westview, 1982), 54. On the foundations' role in expanding American soft power in the twentieth century, see Inderjit Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). For an example of Rockefeller-mission cooperation as well as the issue of the secularization of missions, see Philippe Bourmaud, "Missionary Work, Secularization, and Donor Dependency: Rockefeller-Near East Colleges Cooperation after World War I (1920–1939)," in *Christian Missions and Humanitarianism in The Middle East, 1850–1950: Ideologies, Rhetoric, and Practices*, eds. Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Karène Sanchez Summerer (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 155–182.

²⁴See Kenyon L. Butterfield, *Education and Chinese Agriculture* (Shanghai: China Christian Educational Association, 1922). The commission's main report was published as Chinese Educational Commission (ed.), *Christian Education in China, the Report of the China Educational Commission of 1921–1922* (Shanghai: Commercial, 1922).

²⁵IMC, ed., *Report of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, March 24th–April 8th, 1928*, Vol. VI: The Christian Mission in Relation to Rural Problems (London: Oxford University Press, 1928).

²⁶Foreign Missions Conference of North America, *Report of the Thirty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Conference of Foreign Mission Boards in Canada and in the United States, January 14–17, 1930* (New York: FMCNA, 1930), 86.

commissioned Butterfield as a full-time “counselor of rural work” for a two-year period beginning in October 1929, with the specific purpose of conducting rural surveys in Asia. This took him first on an extensive tour of British India.

Under the auspices of the NCC of India, Butterfield spent half a year touring the country. At numerous conferences and in personal exchanges with missionary, secular, private and governmental rural activists, he advocated the concept of the “Rural Reconstruction Unit.” For the conclusion of his visit, the Indian NCC organized a Conference on Rural Work, held in Pune in April 1930. The meeting was attended by the who-is-who of agricultural missionaries as well as Indian Christianity. Butterfield defined the concept of the Rural Reconstruction Unit in Pune as

a group of contiguous villages, perhaps 10 to 15 in number, in which as full a programme as possible of rural re-construction service shall be made available to all the people. All agencies for educational, health, economic and social progress will be urged to pool their efforts through some form of community council in an attempt get the people to co-operate in building a new type of Indian rural community. The Church must lead this endeavour to make the enterprize [sic] thoroughly Christian in spirit.²⁷

This idea of a “local development unit” – what he called the “Rural Reconstruction Unit” in India, and later the “Rural Community Parish” in East Asia – lay at the core of Butterfield’s analyses and recommendations.²⁸ For Butterfield, who was aware that he was only one small piece in a dynamic and quickly expanding field of agricultural missions, this concept – defined by him concisely as the “intensive work among a group of contiguous villages [...] on a very comprehensive program” – was his “special contribution” to the field.²⁹ As the main coordinating agents of his extensive Christian rural reconstruction visions Butterfield had the National Christian Councils in their respective countries in mind.³⁰ Most of these Councils were formed shortly after the IMC was founded in 1921.³¹ They signified a transition from purely missionary umbrella associations to attempts at establishing national (Protestant) Christian organizations that would also – or mainly – represent native churches and leaders. Some of the NCCs grew out of re-organized and re-branded former National *Missionary* Councils. As such, the establishment of the National Christian Councils was part of a larger trend of “indigenization” of mission and the indigenous church that had been pioneered by the YMCA as early as the 1910s.³²

The idea of a comprehensive unit was hardly new but followed widespread concepts of holistic rural reconstruction present in various experiments and schemes around the world. Even the term “Rural Reconstruction Unit” had been coined in India already a

²⁷“Report of a Conference on Rural Work, Poona, April 13–16, 1930,” p. 5, American Baptist Historical Society Archives, Mercer University, Atlanta (hereafter ABHS), Box 43, Folder 5: All-India National Christian Council – Conference on Rural Work, 1930.

²⁸KLB to J. Reisner, October 12, 1931; KLBP/45/Special Correspondence, John Reisner; KLB to James L. Barton, June 6, 1932, KLBP/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/3.

²⁹KLB to James L. Barton, June 6, 1932, KLBP/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/3.

³⁰KLB to J. Reisner, October 12, 1931; KLBP/45/Special Correspondence, John Reisner.

³¹The NCC of China, for instance, was founded in 1922, the Councils of India and Japan both in 1923, the Council of Korea in 1925.

³²David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 105–108.

decade earlier by K. T. Paul, secretary of the Indian YMCA and an important pioneer of Christian rural work in the country, although it soon became closely associated with Butterfield.³³ What made Butterfield's ideas stand out to some extent was his emphasis on the Christian village community and church as the focal and coordinating agent in his envisioned unit, ideas that showed parallels to his earlier work in the United States. Other recommendations made by Butterfield in India included the establishment of dedicated offices for rural work in the National Christian Council of India, research institutes, rural service associations, health associations, as well as rural reconstruction and leadership training centers.³⁴

In 1930, shortly after his return to the United States, Butterfield's survey work and his recommendations were published as *The Christian Mission in Rural India*.³⁵ The report was well received in the missionary milieu and press. One commentator deemed it "the most significant document that has been issued in recent Missionary history."³⁶ Others compared Butterfield's study favorably to the more controversially received work of the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry. The Inquiry, conducted by the Institute for Social and Religious Research, was a large-scale survey of the American missionary enterprise in Asia led by a lay commission independent of the mission boards between 1930 and 1932. Its final report, *Re-Thinking Missions*, was met with both approval and disapproval in the missionary milieu, as it painted a rather critical picture of contemporary missionary practice, harshly criticizing traditional missionary theology and opting for the missionary to be more of a religious ambassador than a conqueror, as well as calling into question the technical and professional expertise of the missionaries in the field.³⁷ The study by the ISRR was conducted strictly along the lines of and in cooperation with professional and academic social inquiry.³⁸ Rooted in Social Gospel theology and social-reformist language, the report was attacked by critics for what they considered an almost "secular" character.³⁹ Butterfield's India report, in contrast, was considered more helpful than what was criticized as the too "sociological" approach of the

³³L. A. Hogg, note, November 1931, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (hereafter KFYA), Records of YMCA international work in India (Y.USA.9-2-40), National Council of India, Burma and Ceylon correspondence, July–December 1931; John H. Reisner, invitation to a "Conference on the Rural Reconstruction Unit, led by D. Spencer Hatch," New York, November 4, 1933, KLB/7/Agricultural missions, 1906–1935: Folder 1. Cf. Fischer-Tiné, "The YMCA and Low-Modernist Rural Development in South Asia"; Tyrrell, "Vectors of Practicality"; David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 108–120.

³⁴"Report of a Conference on Rural Work, Poona"; cf. KLB to John R. Mott, May 29, 1930, KLB/17/IMC, 1917–1934/4.

³⁵Kenyon L. Butterfield, *The Christian Mission in Rural India* (New York: IMC, 1930).

³⁶Clifford Manshardt to KLB, January 4, 1931, KLB/17/IMC, 1917–1934/5.

³⁷Cf. William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 162.

³⁸On the inquiry as an example of a "missionary social science," see Gregory Vanderbilt, "The Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry, the Omi Mission, and Imperial Japan: Missionary Social Science and One Pre-History of Religion and Development," in *The Mission of Development*, eds. Catherine Scheer, Philip Fountain, and R. Michael Feener (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 59–81. On the inner workings of the inquiry's Commission of Appraisal, see Peggy Bowler Lindsey, "Around the World in 283 Days: Traveling with the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry Commission of Appraisal," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 46, no. 4 (2022): 492–503.

³⁹On the extensive debate on the report in the American mission movement see, Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 164–175.

Laymen's Inquiry.⁴⁰ Other commentators agreed with this, highlighting that Butterfield's ideas went beyond advocating "a merely secular and social advance."⁴¹

Outside of the missionary bubble, the reactions to Butterfield's report were less excited. In the Indian nationalist newspaper *The People*, one reviewer, an Indian Christian, combined his review of the publication with a broader criticism of Western missions. To him, Butterfield's comprehensive rural vision only showed that Western missionaries would "resent the very idea of abandoning control."⁴² This sentiment coincided with the contemporary debate in the mission field on the "devolution" and "indigenization" of missions.⁴³ Another Indian publication, the *Servant of India*, was milder in its assessment, calling *The Christian Mission in Rural India* an "essentially bipartisan report," however lamenting an unnecessary but "startling statement" by Butterfield that had "the flavour of a missionary"⁴⁴ and claimed that "the Hindu religion ha[d] no teaching as to the worth of a man as a man."⁴⁵ The passage was refuted by the reviewer of the journal, which was the mouthpiece of the Servants of India Society, one of the leading social reform associations in India – mostly led by Hindus – which Butterfield himself cited in his report as a commendable enterprise doing crucial work.⁴⁶

Butterfield's engagement in India was followed by further studies in East Asia. The National Christian Council of China had invited Butterfield once again after the Jerusalem conference in 1929. Butterfield arrived in China in November 1930 where he stayed until spring 1931, when he left for Japan. In China, he toured the countryside with Chang Fu-liang (1889–1984), the key figure behind the Chinese NCC's effort on rural reconstruction in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Before leaving China, Butterfield spoke on rural problems at the NCC of China's biennial meeting in Hangchow in April 1931.

The National Christian Council of Japan had hoped for Japan to be part of the rural expert's itinerary already in 1929. The wish was granted in 1931 after persistent requests by the NCCJ's secretaries Ebisawa Akira and William Axling, and Butterfield visited the country from May to July of that year. The highlight of his visit was an "All Japan Conference on Rural Evangelism" held in the city of Gotemba in July. As was the case with his visit to India, Butterfield published a report of his survey, titled *The Rural Mission of the Church in Eastern Asia*, shortly after his return from his East Asia tour, which included, apart from the longer stays in China and Japan, also brief visits to the Philippines and to Korea.⁴⁷

Following his trip to Asia, Butterfield hoped to institutionalize the International Missionary Council's work on agricultural missions beyond his own personal engagement. He proposed the creation of a permanent rural office in Geneva,

⁴⁰William H. Stacy to KLB, June 1, 1933, KLB/17/IMC, 1917–1934/5.

⁴¹Henry W. Peabody to KLB, March 12, 1934, KLB/17/IMC, 1917–1934/5.

⁴²*The People*, Lahore, August 2, 1931, KLB/17/IMC, 1917–1934/5.

⁴³Cf. Brunner, "From Converts to Cooperation." On the challenges of indigenization in the context of Africa, see Elisabeth Engel, "The Ecumenical Origins of Pan-Africanism: Africa and the 'Southern Negro' in the International Missionary Council's Global Vision of Christian Indigenization in the 1920s," *Journal of Global History* 13, no. 2 (2018): 209–229.

⁴⁴*The Servant of India*, Pune, August 20, 1931, 399–400.

⁴⁵Butterfield, *The Christian Mission in Rural India*, 27.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 34, 127.

⁴⁷Kenyon L. Butterfield, *The Rural Mission of the Church in Eastern Asia: Report and Recommendations* (New York: IMC, 1931).

modeled after the example of the Council's Department for Social and Industrial Research.⁴⁸ The proposal was not too far-fetched: the annual expenses for Butterfield's surveys after 1928 amounted roughly to the same sum as allocated to the DSIR.⁴⁹ However, the financial constraints of the 1930s eventually prevented the establishment of a respective rural office.⁵⁰

While the engagement with rural matters could not be institutionalized in the IMC in the way Butterfield had hoped for, his work for the Council reverberated in manifold ways, and the American rural sociologist continued to be involved in international agricultural missions until his death in November 1935. He maintained his particular interest in Asia where rural reconstruction remained a much debated and highly dynamic field. The following section will trace these dynamics in the three regions that served as Butterfield's primary objects of study during his journeys through Asia: India, Japan, and China.

III. Christian Rural Work after 1930 in Asia: India, China, and Japan

Assessing the tangible effects of Butterfield's survey work and recommendations is difficult to do. There is no dearth of positive feedback in the early 1930s, confirming that Butterfield's work had been an "undoubted success,"⁵¹ and that his reports had turned the missionaries' attention toward agricultural missions "more than anything that has been said before,"⁵² and "much [was] happening in many parts of the world"⁵³ as a result of Butterfield's visits. The Laymen's Inquiry, conducting its survey work in Asia almost at the same time as Butterfield, could note in its reports that Butterfield's engagement had placed rural missions prominently on the agenda of numerous missions, and that much of the missionary discourse on agriculture had converged around the idea (or at least term) of the Rural Reconstruction Unit.⁵⁴ Simultaneously, however, the surveyors of the Inquiry in India remarked that "there was no indication that anyone was seriously pushing for or constructively visioning this type of concentration suggested by Dr. Butterfield."⁵⁵

Butterfield himself was eager to find out what parts of his recommendations were being put into practice. In 1934, planning to write a follow-up book to his studies on South and East Asia, he sent out a survey to the North American mission boards inquiring about the efforts made in rural missions since the 1928 Jerusalem conference.⁵⁶ The feedback Butterfield received – and was never able to put into book form due to his

⁴⁸KLB to Mott, September 12, 1931, KLB/17/IMC, 1917–1934: Folder 4; KLB to Mott, May 19, 1932; KLB/17/Agricultural missions, 1906–1935/6.

⁴⁹"Recommendations of the Finance Committee," IMC, 1928; KLB/17/IMC, 1917–1934/4.

⁵⁰KLB to John Merle Davis, February 10, 1932; Abbe L. Warnshuis to KLB, February 4, 1932, both in KLB/22/Modern Missions Movement/4.

⁵¹John Z. Hodge to Leslie B. Moss (copy), March 12, 1931, United Methodist Archives, Drew University, Madison, Microfilm Edition of the Missionary files series of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, Roll no. 380: NCCI, 1923–1949, November 1923–1933.

⁵²Harper Sibley to KLB, April 13, 1932, KLB/17/IMC, 1917–1934/5.

⁵³A. L. Warnshuis to KLB, September 26, 1933, KLB/17/IMC, 1917–1934/5.

⁵⁴Orville A. Petty, ed. *Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry, Supplementary Series, Vol. IV: Fact-Finders' Report: India-Burma* (New York: Harper, 1932), 111, 330. Cf. John H. Reisner, invitation to a "Conference on the Rural Reconstruction Unit, led by D. Spencer Hatch."

⁵⁵Petty, *Fact-Finders' Report: India-Burma*, 614.

⁵⁶Butterfield's questionnaire as well as the mission boards' responses can be found in KLB/22/Modern Missions Movement/4.

passing in late 1935 – was mixed. None of the mission boards had actually adopted a definite policy on rural work, as Butterfield had hoped, but almost all of them reported that the Jerusalem conference, Butterfield's surveys and visits, and the issue of rural work in general were now being discussed in numerous meetings, conferences, and commissions, both in the United States and in Asia.

India: The Rural Reconstruction Unit among Missionaries, Princes, and Colonial Officials: As Kenyon Butterfield noted in 1932, during his tours through Asia he had come across the most numerous and most promising Christian rural enterprises in India.⁵⁷ In fact, by the late 1920s, the subcontinent had a substantial number of missionary institutions and individuals devoted to agricultural science and education, from Sam Higginbottom's Allahabad Agricultural Institute, to the YMCA's Rural Demonstration Centre in Martandam, or the Presbyterians' Moga School in Punjab. Already in 1922, the Indian National (then still) Missionary Council held a rural conference in Moga to discuss Christian village education. By the second half of the decade, the National (now) Christian Council had two secretaries devoted to the subject of rural education.⁵⁸

When Kenyon Butterfield proposed his own schemes at the National Christian Council of India's Rural Conference in Pune in 1930, the Council adopted the recommendations in full and distributed his ideas through a series of follow-up conferences and publications. At the conference, the Council vowed to develop its temporary "Rural Service and Information Bureau" into a standing committee of the NCCI and to employ three regional rural secretaries. Furthermore, the conference approved the idea of establishing a research center that was supposed to work together with both government and academia, to be modeled after the ISRR in New York.⁵⁹

However, the initial enthusiasm in the Nation Christian Council quickly waned. J. Z. Hodge, secretary of the Council, had to admit to Butterfield already in December 1932 that the NCCI's rural service initiative and other ambitious plans had "rather faded out of the picture."⁶⁰ Still, he could also report that a widespread interest had developed among individual missionaries following Butterfield's visit and report. Hodge felt that the most productive way to implement Butterfield's ideas of the Rural Reconstruction Unit in India was to have them "naturally grow out of the larger centres of rural work"⁶¹ already in place, and, indeed, he saw it being taken up by existing rural centers.

One of these larger centers was found in and around Katpadi, a village in southern India, where the Arcot Mission of the Reformed Church in America, led by the "chicken missionary" John J. De Valois,⁶² had started several rural related enterprises including an agricultural institute established in 1923. Butterfield visited the mission

⁵⁷KLB to James L. Barton, June 6, 1932, KLBP/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/3.

⁵⁸Kaj Baagø, *A History of the National Christian Council of India, 1914–1964* (Nagpur: National Christian Council, 1965), 45–47.

⁵⁹National Christian Council of India, Burma and Ceylon, *Report of a Conference on Rural Work held at Poona, April 13–16, 1930* (Poona: NCCI, 1930). Butterfield had even lobbied for the idea to establish a "branch centre" of the ISRR in India (and, eventually, other places in Asia), see KLB to John Mott, January 17, 1930, KLBP/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/3.

⁶⁰J. Z. Hodge (NCC India) to KLB, December 16, 1932, KLBP/45/General Correspondence, A-K.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²John J. De Valois, *Autobiography of John James De Valois: Agricultural Missionary, Church of South India* (Zeeland, M.I.: Self-published, 1978).

during his Indian tour and praised it as “one of the best organized and most forward-looking”⁶³ of the American missions in India. After Butterfield’s visit, the Katpadi mission authorities took steps to reorganize and consolidate the various rural endeavors along the lines of Butterfield’s Rural Reconstruction Unit.⁶⁴ However, the attempt faced two problems: first, the financial constraints of the Depression, and second, the resistance of conservative forces among the mission board. As John De Valois reported, the Social Gospel and developmentalist rationale behind agricultural missions was not unchallenged, and many critics did not see the “ultimate gain to be made from [the] nation building activities”⁶⁵ that rural reconstruction efforts implied. Still, the mission continued its various efforts in the area well into the 1950s and 1960s.

Another promising “advanced piece of rural reconstruction work in India”⁶⁶ that directly took on Butterfield’s suggestions was the work of the Presbyterian mission in Sangli in western India. The mission maintained several schemes related to rural and agricultural development in the area. After Butterfield had visited India and the mission, the latter put an emphasis on converging these various enterprises into a Rural Reconstruction Unit in Butterfield’s sense.⁶⁷ Around the village of Kavalpur on the northern outskirts of Sangli the mission sought to concentrate its efforts into a unit in which Kavalpur would serve as the central village in a network of ten to twelve contiguous villages. The scheme included a movable school, a cooperative society, two poultry clubs, and a Boy Scouts association. In this network the Christian church and community were meant to take the lead in coordination, working together with local agents such as the state registrar of cooperative societies, the headmaster of the local state school, or the village *patils* (heads).⁶⁸ However, the ambitious scheme in Kavalpur did not make the progress the missionaries and Butterfield had hoped. It was hampered, first, by a severe outbreak of the plague. Second, and probably more severe in the long term, the Christian church in the area did not prove to be the cohesive element needed to hold together the various elements in the unit. As the missionary J. L. Goheen reported, quarrels and litigations in and between villages hindered the cooperation and eventually, as in other places, financial troubles thwarted further expansion plans.⁶⁹

Cooperation with multiple agents – from educational institutions, philanthropic foundations, to national, provincial, and local governments – was crucial for agricultural missions to achieve their intended impact. This was most evident, for example, in another Presbyterians enterprise in western India, a successful collaboration in Ichalkaranji that contrasts well with the efforts in Kavalpur. Ichalkaranji was a small princely state close to Sangli that, like other princely states in British India, was only

⁶³“The Arcot Mission and Rural Reconstruction,” n.d., KLBP/14/FEA&RE/1.

⁶⁴“The Arcot Mission and Rural Reconstruction,” n.d.; “A Comprehensive Program for Christian Work in South India,” K. L. Butterfield, n.d., bot in KLBP/14/FEA&RE/1.

⁶⁵John J. De Valois to KLB, August 23, 1933, KLBP/7/Agricultural missions, 1906–1935/1.

⁶⁶“An Advanced Piece of Rural Reconstruction Work in India,” n.d., KLBP/14/FEA&RE/1.

⁶⁷“Sangli Industrial and Agricultural School,” n.d., Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA (hereafter PHS), RG 83, United Presbyterian Church in the United States. Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations Secretaries’ Files India Mission, Box 34, Folder 20: Sangli Industrial and Agricultural School, 1921–1947.

⁶⁸“The Rural Reconstruction Work of the Sangli Industrial & Agricultural School,” John L. Goheen, December 17, 1931, PHS/RG 83/34/20: Sangli Industrial and Agricultural School, 1921–1947; “An Advanced Piece of Rural Reconstruction Work in India.”

⁶⁹J. L. Goheen to KLB, October 26, 1933; KLBP/45/General Correspondence, A-K.

indirectly administered by the British, who controlled its external affairs while the Indian prince was (formally) autonomous in most internal matters. The ruler of Ichalkaranji, Narayanrao Govindrao Babasaheb Ghorpade, made considerable efforts in the early twentieth century for the economic and social improvement of his state, encouraging, for instance, the development of a textile industry, and showing much interest in the global cooperative movement. In 1930, the ruler employed a missionary couple from the mission in Sangli as administrators in his state. This allowed the mission to carry out its rural reconstruction visions throughout the state's cluster of villages to an extent rarely possible elsewhere. The missionaries had direct supervision over the departments of education, public health, public works, forests, and cooperative societies. Over the years, the productive cooperation between the Indian prince and the mission made possible the introduction of training classes for vernacular teachers in state schools, a parent–teacher association, agricultural extension programs through the home project method, the improvement of cattle and poultry, the introduction of a Boy and Girl Scouts organization, as well as various infrastructural measures in the state.⁷⁰

While other small Christian rural centers in India, for instance in Ushagram or Vanieke, undertook reorganization efforts similar to those of the Katpadi and Sangli missions, one of the best examples of Butterfield's Rural Reconstruction Unit commentators located in a place that had not even participated in Butterfield's initial survey work and itinerary in India: The Rural Demonstration Centre in the south Indian village of Martandam run by the YMCA.⁷¹ The Centre had been started in 1924 and was less so inspired by Butterfield's India visit and survey, but rather built on the pioneering efforts of the YMCA secretaries K. T. Paul and the American Duane Spencer Hatch.⁷² In fact, both the Martandam experts and Butterfield in his internationalization of rural sociology in the early 1920s had taken inspiration from pre-World War I experiments of the YMCA in India, which in turn had been made possible by non-missionary schemes as well as changing colonial policies in British India in the early twentieth century.⁷³ The Centre in Martandam pursued a comprehensive program of agricultural and rural uplift schemes and through rural training, extension services, agricultural demonstration, and experiments with improved seeds, or, for instance, the establishment of a network of micro-credit cooperatives. Martandam's rural work radiated to the villages surrounding the Centre, thus functioning to observers like J. Z. Hodge as a "good illustration" of what Butterfield had in mind.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the Centre differed to some extent from Butterfield's conception of the Rural Reconstruction Unit: the Centre in

⁷⁰J. L. Goheen, *Glimpses of Ichalkaranji* (Mysore: Wesley, 1934), 13–23; "Report of Extension Work, 1932–33: Extension Work at Kavalpur, near Sangli" and "The Rural Reconstruction Work of the Sangli Industrial & Agricultural School," J. L. Goheen, December 17, 1931; both in PHS/RG 83/34/20: Sangli Industrial and Agricultural School, 1921–1947.

⁷¹A. L. Warnshuis to Ethan T. Colton, March 11, 1930, KFYA/Y.USA.9-2-40/India 1929–1934. For an overview on the multifarious efforts in different parts of India, see J. Z. Hodge to Leslie B. Moss (copy), March 12, 1931.

⁷²Fischer-Tiné, "The YMCA and Low-Modernist Rural Development in South Asia."

⁷³Tyrrell, "Vectors of Practicality," 46–47. Cf. Baagø, *A History of the National Christian Council of India*, 46–47.

⁷⁴J. Z. Hodge, "A Comment," June 15, 1931, KFYA/Y.USA.9-2-40/National Council of India, Burma and Ceylon correspondence, June 1931. Cf. Leonard A. Dixon, Extract from Publicity Department, April 27, 1931, KFYA/Y.USA.9-2-40/National Council of India, Burma and Ceylon correspondence, April–May 1931.

Martandam was run by a specific socio-religious organization, whereas in Butterfield's schemes the focal agency was supposed to be the local church.⁷⁵

The colonial state, too, was heavily involved and interested in the matter of rural reconstruction on the Indian subcontinent. An example of and a crucial juncture in British Indian imperial agricultural policy was the Royal Commission of Agriculture in India inquiry that was conducted between 1926 and 1928.⁷⁶ Various provincial governments and individual administrators were involved in smaller and larger rural projects in the early decades of the twentieth century. When Kenyon Butterfield toured British India, he met and later stayed in contact with Frank Brayne, a colonial administrator who had become a prominent figure in rural reconstruction after conducting an ambitious village uplift project in Gurgaon, a rural district near Delhi, in the 1920s. By 1933, Brayne was Special Commissioner of Rural Reconstruction of the British Indian province of Punjab.⁷⁷ But while Brayne supplied Butterfield with plenty of informational material from Punjab, the exchange was rather one way. As Butterfield complained, unlike the missionary milieu in India, Brayne was hardly receptive of the IMC recommendations and the concept of the Rural Reconstruction Unit, a reservation that Butterfield even attributed to a possible anti-American bias on the part of the British Indian administrator.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Brayne was eager to tap into the vast resources offered by the networks of Protestant internationalism and its dominant American mainline Protestant and East Coast background. In 1935, he hoped to start a scheme in Punjab for what he called "better-living co-operative societies," applying to the Rockefeller Foundation for funds.⁷⁹ When the Rockefeller representatives turned him down, Brayne attributed this to the Americans wanting to "civilize people" their own way and claimed that the Rockefeller Foundation would not understand the self-help angle crucial to his scheme, while Butterfield complained that Brayne did not grasp the American rural sociologist's idea of the Rural Reconstruction Unit as a cluster of contiguous elements.⁸⁰

Japan: The Rural Community Parish, Protestant Internationalist Cooperation, and Imperial Rural Visions: In Japan, too, Butterfield was a catalyst for agricultural and rural missions. The National Christian Council of Japan's rural conference, held in Gotemba in July 1931, acknowledged what it called the "Butterfield plan," which included the idea of the contiguous "rural community parish" – the re-branded Rural Reconstruction Unit –, a scientific survey of rural life, and the rural training of missionaries and local Christians.⁸¹ The NCC of Japan took quick steps to implement these ideas after the conference: it established a rural committee, published a textbook for rural gospel schools, and employed a full-time rural secretary, the rural evangelist

⁷⁵Cf. Petty, *Fact-Finders' Report: India-Burma*, 112.

⁷⁶Government of India, *Abridged Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1928).

⁷⁷On Frank L. Brayne, see Clive Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes: Mind of the Indian Civil Service* (London: Hambledon, 1993), chapter 4; Vindhyeshwari Prasad Pande, *Village Community Projects in India: Origin, Development and Problems* (London: Asia Publishing, 1967), 135–146.

⁷⁸KLB to J. Z. Hodge, September 15, 1934, KLB/6/4: General Correspondence, 1934.

⁷⁹Frank L. Brayne to KLB, August 2, 1935, KLB/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/2; KLB to J. Z. Hodge, September 15, 1934.

⁸⁰Frank L. Brayne to KLB, November 25, 1935, KLB/6/5: General Correspondence, 1935–36.

⁸¹"Findings of the All-Japan Conference on Rural Evangelism, Kotemba, July 9–11, 1931," KLB/7/ Folder 6: Agricultural missions, 1906–1935.

Kurihara Yotaro who himself had been a missionary in colonial Korea.⁸² In 1933, the first “rural community parish,” as Butterfield had advocated them at Gotemba, was started as the Kawakami Rural Church in the Ehime prefecture in southwestern Japan, led by Southern Methodists. Similar enterprises by Presbyterians and missionaries from the United Church of Canada followed. The success of these experiments varied widely.⁸³ While the endeavor started by the Methodist Kawakami church in Ehime was plagued by poor planning, hilly land and infertile soil, the enterprise of the United Church of Canada, the Shinano Rural Community Parish in the Nagano prefecture, could claim considerable success shortly after its establishment. It was headed by Reverend Kimata Toshi, who had majored in rural work at Drew Theological Seminary in the United States. The parish covered a county with twenty-seven villages, and Kimata was in close exchange with local officials, cooperatives, and other agricultural associations. His program began with a health initiative, the introduction of home subindustries, and farmers’ gospel schools. The crucial aspect of his rural intervention was the pastor’s local embedding of himself and his schemes. The parish also received support through the gift of agricultural machines from another spearhead of rural reconstruction in Japan: Kagawa Toyohiko (1888–1960).

Kagawa Toyohiko had laid the groundwork of Christian rural work in Japan in the late 1920s and early 1930s with his influential Kingdom of God Movement and the establishment of Peasant Gospel Schools throughout the country.⁸⁴ At the same time, the Japanese social activist and graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary had become somewhat of a celebrity in Protestant internationalism, especially after he toured the United States multiple times in the 1920s and 1930s.⁸⁵ As Kenyon Butterfield noted in 1931, Kagawa was to “be supported directly and liberally”⁸⁶ by the American missionary movement. Indeed, the NCCJ and Butterfield’s associates in Japan quickly sought to tie their rural endeavors to the influential Japanese reformer. In the prefecture of Hyōgo, the Presbyterian Harima Rural Reconstruction Mission run three comparably successful rural community parishes, engineered after Butterfield’s suggestions. A report of the mission in 1938 emphasized that Kagawa’s interest in rural projects was an important factor in their success, both financially – Kagawa’s fundraising in the West benefited schemes by the missions and the NCC – and professionally – through the impact of projects such as the farmers’ gospel schools.⁸⁷

⁸²Ira D. Crewdson, “The Evangelization of Rural Japan,” in *The Japan Christian Year Book*, 1933, eds. Edward C. Hennigar and Ebisawa Akira (Tokyo: Kyobunkwan, 1933), 109–124; Alfred R. Stone, “The Year’s Work in Rural Japan,” in *The Japan Christian Year Book*, 1934, ed. Roy Smith (Tokyo: Kyobunkwan, 1934), 81–91. On Japanese Christian mission in colonial Korea, see Emily Anderson, *Christianity and Imperialism in Modern Japan, Empire for God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), chapters 4 and 5.

⁸³Ebisawa Akira to KLB, August 14, 1934; Gurney Binford to KLB, September 14 and 18, 1934, both in KLBP/46/Asiatic Trip, 1931–34; Ralph A. Felton, *The Rural Church in the Far East: Studies Prepared for the Tambaram Meeting of the International Missionary Council* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission, 1938), 76–88.

⁸⁴On Kagawa’s biography, see Robert Schildgen, *Toyohiko Kagawa: Apostle of Love and Social Justice* (Berkeley: Centenary, 1988).

⁸⁵Robert Shaffer, “A Missionary from the East to Western Pagans: Kagawa Toyohiko’s 1936 U.S. Tour,” *Journal of World History* 24, no. 3 (2013): 577–621.

⁸⁶KLB to John Reisner, October 12, 1931, KLBP/45/Special Correspondence, John Reisner.

⁸⁷“The Harima Rural Reconstruction Mission,” 1938, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, International Missionary Council Records, 26.31.12/7.

As part of the efforts to implement Butterfield's recommendations, the National Christian Council of Japan planned to start a "Rural Life Institute" in the mid-1930s.⁸⁸ In 1938, another large All-Japan rural conference was held in Karuizawa. It was prompted by the visit of another American agricultural expert, Ralph Felton, head of the Rural Church Department of Drew Theological Seminary, whose survey on the rural church in East Asia was later published by the IMC in preparation for its World Missionary Conference 1938 in Tambaram, India. The conference in Karuizawa approved a proposal by Kagawa Toyohiko to affiliate the envisioned Rural Life Institute as part of Kagawa's own Musashino Noson Kenkyusho, a gospel school and rural center on the outskirts of Tokyo. The Institute was finally set up in 1939.⁸⁹

A significant impact on Christian rural reconstruction in Japan had the country's imperialist ambitions and advances in East Asia that accelerated and eventually escalated in 1930s.⁹⁰ In the 1940s, the focus of Japanese Christianity – which, as a minority community under social and political pressure, was far from immune to Japanese ultra-nationalist sentiments and imperialist ambitions – shifted from rural evangelism, reconstruction and reform in(side) Japan to expansionist Christian rural utopias. The Christian Rural Life Institute, initially the outcome of a confluence of international agricultural missions, Japanese Christian rural reconstruction efforts, and Kagawa Toyohiko's social reformism, was used as a training center for Japanese Christian families willing to settle in occupied Manchuria. Manchuria had been occupied and later transformed into a puppet state by Japan already in 1931, and in the late 1930s the Japanese government promoted and accelerated the agricultural colonization of the "Manchukuo" puppet state. Kagawa Toyohiko who, despite being hailed in the West as an ardent pacifist and "Japanese Gandhi," had a rather ambivalent attitude toward Japanese imperialism, advocated the idea of Christian settlement in Manchuria, guided by both patriotic feelings of imperial state-building and romantic and spiritual visions of Christian settlement in a "promised" and "uninhabited" land.⁹¹ Encouraged by the Japanese government, Kagawa eventually approached the NCC of Japan, which soon appointed Kagawa as chairman of a settlement project. Kagawa and the Council under its rural secretary Kurihara worked out plans for establishing a Christian

⁸⁸Gurney Binford to Dear Friend, October 19, 1934 (copy for KLB); Gurney Binford to KLB, November 19, 1934; both in KLB/46/Asiatic Trip, 1931–34; William Axling, "Report of the National Christian Council of Japan," in *The Japan Christian Year Book*, 1936, eds. Fred D. Gealy and Ebisawa Akira (Tokyo: Kyobunkwan, 1936), 229–239, here 234; "Report of Meeting called by the Rural Missions Cooperating Committee at the request of Mr. Ebisawa, secretary of N.C.C., Japan, discuss the proposed Cooperative Rural Institute, 20 Sep. 1935" and "Revised Proposal for the Christian Rural Life Institute, NCC Japan," n.d., KLB/7/Agricultural missions, 1906–1935; "Christian Rural Life Institute, Japan, A Rural Training Center for all Japan," November 20, 1936, ABHS/29/20: Japan – Christian Rural Life Institute, 1936.

⁸⁹Ralph A. Felton, "The Experimental Rural Parish in Japan," and Ebisawa Akira, "Report of the National Christian Council," both in *The Japan Christian Year Book*, 1938, ed. Charles W. Iglehart (Tokyo: Kyobunkwan, 1938), 199–214 and 261–270; Ebisawa Akira, "Report of the National Christian Council," *The Japan Christian Year Book*, 1939, ed. Charles W. Iglehart (Tokyo: Kyobunkwan, 1939), 255–268. Cf. Anderson, *Christianity and Imperialism in Modern Japan*, 233.

⁹⁰Cf. Sheldon M. Garon, "State and Religion in Imperial Japan, 1912–1945," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 12, no. 2 (1986): 273–302.

⁹¹Anderson, *Christianity and Imperialism in Modern Japan*, 229–235; Bo Tao, "Imperial Pacifism: Kagawa Toyohiko and Christianity in the Asia-Pacific War" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2019), 155–191.

model village, and the first settlers, having been prepared for their task at the Christian Rural Life Institute, arrived in the colony in February 1941.⁹²

Government pressure on Japanese Christianity increased during the Second Sino-Japanese War and World War II. The National Christian Council was dissolved in mid-1941 when the Japanese government forcibly merged the various Protestant denominations into a union, the new Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan (Engl. “United Church of Christ in Japan”), which subsequently inherited the administration of the Rural Life Institute. Foreign missionaries, too, were not immune to Japanese imperial ambitions in the 1910s to 1930s, sympathizing, for example, with Japanese colonization (and evangelization efforts by Japanese Christians) in Korea, or downplaying the increasing militarization of Japanese society.⁹³ Their influence in Japan waned in the 1940s, however, and most, especially American missionaries, left Japan after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the start of World War II in the Pacific.

China: Christian Higher Education, Social Reform, and the Nationalist Government: As in India and Japan, there had already been individual agricultural missionary efforts in China in the 1910s and 1920s. In China, they were mainly located in the institutional confines of Christian education in the country. In 1921, the Canton Christian College had started a College of Agriculture headed by George W. Groff, and at the University of Nanking, John Reisner worked hard to put agriculture on the mission boards and other Christian organizations’ agenda.⁹⁴ To make a step forward toward coordinating these scattered efforts, the National Christian Council of China, advised by Kenyon Butterfield and the Institute for Social and Religious Research, discussed the idea of employing a rural specialist in the mid-1920s. Although the missionaries in the Council preferred to employ a foreign (meaning: American) specialist, they sensed that prevalent anti-foreign sentiments in China would make his work difficult.⁹⁵ Eventually, the Chinese Christian Chang Fu-liang, who had studied at Yale University and worked as a professor at the Yale Foreign Missionary Society (“Yale-in-China”) in Changsha, was appointed rural secretary of the NCC of China in 1927.

As in Japan, the agricultural turn in the international missionary milieu in China could draw from the groundwork of a particular native activist, the Chinese Christian Y. C. (Yen Yang-ch’u) “James Yen” (1890–1990).⁹⁶ Yen, along with other Chinese activists and reformers, had started a Mass Education Movement in 1923 that conducted large-scale literacy campaigns. A few years later, the Mass Education

⁹²Darley Downs, “The National Christian Council,” in *The Japan Christian Year Book*, 1940, ed. Charles W. Iglehart (Tokyo: Kyobunkwan, 1940), 232–237, here 234–235; Isamu Chiba, “The National Christian Council,” in *The Japan Christian Year Book*, 1941, ed. Darley Downs (Tokyo: Kyobunkwan, 1941), 233–240, here 236–237.

⁹³Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth*, 51. For example, William Paton to “Dear Friends,” December 7, 1936, PHS/RG 81/25/26: IMC, 1935; William Axling to John Mott, A. L. Warnshuis, and others, December 5, 1940, ABHS, microfilm collection, 320-3-2: Axling, Rev. William D.D., 1940–1941.

⁹⁴Randall E. Stross, *The Stubborn Earth: American Agriculturalists on Chinese Soil, 1898–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 98–100.

⁹⁵KLB to Galen M. Fisher, September 11, 1925; Galen M. Fisher to Leslie B. Moss, July 28, 1925; A. L. Warnshuis to Galen M. Fisher, September 9, 1925; Galen M. Fisher to John Reisner, July 1, 1925; Galen M. Fisher to KLB, May 4, 1925, all in KLB/25/Institute of Social and Religious Research/10; Galen M. Fisher to J. Reisner, October 1, 1926, KLB/48/I.S.R.R., Galen M. Fisher.

⁹⁶On Y. C. (Yen Yang-ch’u) James Yen, see Charles W. Hayford, *To the People: James Yen and Village China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

Movement turned its attention to the countryside where it added to the issue of village education other reformist economic, social, and cultural schemes to achieve a comprehensive program of rural reconstruction. The Movement and James Yen conducted their most prominent experiment in Ding Xian in northern China, about 200 miles south of Beijing. In this model county they introduced various schemes pertaining to rural life such as health programs, agricultural extension and the improvement of agricultural techniques, animals, seeds, or the establishment of cooperatives for farmers. What distinguished Yen from his reformist contemporary in Japan, Kagawa Toyohiko, was that while he considered himself to be a Christian, his were not necessarily meant as Christian endeavors but rather driven by a nationalist rationale. In both the Mass Education and the Rural Reconstruction movements, Yen worked together with non-Christian Chinese intellectuals and activists.⁹⁷

In the 1920s, the young Republic of China was plagued by unstable and competing governments and the shifting influence of regional warlords. When the Nationalist government of the Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-shek gained control of most of China in the late 1920s, it began to support reformist projects such as the Mass Education and Rural Reconstruction movements, not least as an effort to counter communist advances.⁹⁸ With Butterfield's appearance on the scene and his advocacy of agricultural missions and rural reconstruction, the Chinese missionary milieu and the NCC of China quickly turned to Yen and his associated movements. Agricultural missions joined more comprehensive rural improvement schemes, re-orienting their efforts toward the work of Yen and others and abandoning an earlier tendency toward specialization and a wide array of projects and training centers in exchange for a more homogeneous and comprehensive parish idea.⁹⁹ Kenyon Butterfield himself was rather impressed by Yen's work in Ding Xian that came close to the American's own community parish vision.¹⁰⁰

As elsewhere, Butterfield's visit to China was accompanied by a large rural conference, held in Hangzhou in the spring of 1931, which spawned a series of smaller "Butterfield conferences."¹⁰¹ The Hangzhou conference approved Butterfield's recommendations, and its reorientation toward comprehensive rural reconstruction was seen by commentators as Christian missions "beginning to cooperate with the socially reconstructive movements in China."¹⁰² After the Hangzhou meeting, the Chinese NCC

⁹⁷Hayford, *To the People*, 117–142; Kate Merkel-Hess, *The Rural Modern: Reconstructing the Self and State in Republican China* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 51–53, 132–134.

⁹⁸On the role of rural reconstruction and village and community development as a conservative and liberal alternative to the reformist and revolutionary changes that Communism promised, a narrative that became more prominent during the Cold War, cf. Nicole Sackley, "The Village as Cold War Site: Experts, Development, and the History of Rural Reconstruction," *Journal of Global History* 6, no. 3 (2011): 481–504; Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).

⁹⁹Chang Fu-liang to KLB, May 7, 1931; Chang Fu-liang to KLB, September 26, 1932; both in KLB/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/6; "Butterfield Report," Kuliang, August 20, 1932, KLB/17/IMC, 1917–1934/5. Cf. James C. Thomson Jr., *While China Faced West: American Reformers in Nationalist China, 1928–1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 51–58.

¹⁰⁰Hayford, *To the People*, 145.

¹⁰¹James A. Hunter, "Rural Social Service as Aid to the Evangelistic Work of the Church," *The Chinese Recorder* 71 (1940): 739–744, here 740.

¹⁰²Cited in Thomson, *While China Faced West*, 54.

reorganized its committee on rural work, led by Chang Fu-liang, and resolved to form a system of regional Christian Rural Service Unions, the first of which was started in September 1932 for North China.¹⁰³ The following year, the NCC of China held a “Ting Hsien [Ding Xian] Institute on Rural Reconstruction,” a large-scale national conference devoted to rural reconstruction guided by a synthesis of both Butterfield’s community parish and Yen’s model county. In 1934, the NCC’s Christian Rural Service Union in Jiangxi started a large-scale comprehensive rural reconstruction experiment in the county of Lichuan, led by the Congregationalist missionary George W. Shepherd, who had close ties to Chiang Kai-shek and was involved in his New Life Movement, and supervised for the National Christian Council by Chang Fu-liang. In many areas the Service Union cooperated with the local and provincial authorities.¹⁰⁴

While placing the church as the crucial actor at the center of his envisioned programs, Kenyon Butterfield was aware that private and religious initiative required cooperation with governmental and other agencies in order to be productive, something he had already advocated in his survey of Christian agricultural education in China in 1921–22.¹⁰⁵ The cooperation between the religious actors and the state in China – namely the Kuomintang government in Nanjing, strengthened after its successful Northern Expedition between 1926 and 1928 – in rural reconstruction was rather ambivalent and delicate in the 1930s, after the 1920s in China had been dominated by strong anti-Christian sentiments among intellectuals and politicians.¹⁰⁶ By working with the government, Christian and private rural reconstructionists had to compromise their vision of slow social and economic change with the more short-term ambitions and bureaucracy of a government still battling for political control. For the Nationalist government, on the contrary, rural reconstruction experiments often bore a claim to self-governance that clashed with governmental tendencies of centralization and control. Furthermore, there was a persistent (and not completely unfounded) anxiety about rural experiments harboring communists and – in more explicitly Christian cases like the Lichuan experiment – the unanswered question of how to integrate Christianity into often anti-imperialist, if not anti-Western visions of a reconstructed Chinese national culture.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, rural reconstruction was a fluid milieu in 1930s China. Chang Fu-liang moved from the National Christian Council to government employment in 1934, a fact that eventually hindered the NCC of China and the Christian rural reconstructionists to assume a leading and coordinating role in

¹⁰³“Rural Centers Sought in China,” *The Christian Century* 48, no. 33 (August 19, 1931): 1054–1055; “Rural Service Union of North China, Provisional Constitution,” n.d.; “The North China Christian Rural Service Union, Hopei Branch, Annual Report,” James A. Hunter, April 15, 1935; both KLBP/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/7.

¹⁰⁴Merkel-Hess, *The Rural Modern*, 137–139; Thomson, *While China Faced West*, 97–121. On Shepherd and the New Life Movement, see Federica Ferlanti, “The New Life Movement in Jiangxi Province, 1934–1938,” *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 5 (2010): 961–1000.

¹⁰⁵Butterfield, *Education and Chinese Agriculture*, 25–26, 54–59.

¹⁰⁶On the anti-Christian movements of the 1920s, see Jessie Gregory Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions: The Anti-Christian Movements of 1920–28* (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Cultural, 1988).

¹⁰⁷Thomson, *When China Faced West*, 209; Merkel-Hess, *The Rural Modern*, 130–138. On the complex relationship between Social Gospel Communist socio-economic visions, see Susan M. Rigdon, “Communism or the Kingdom, ‘Saving’ China, 1924–1949,” *Social Sciences and Missions* 22, no. 2 (2009): 168–213. On the interactions between government, missions/Christianity, and (anti-)communism through the example of the New Life Movement, see Ferlanti, “The New Life Movement.”

the movement.¹⁰⁸ As Chang noted in 1937, the New Life Movement in Jiangxi run by the Nanjing government, where Chang was engaged after he had left the National Christian Council, checked all the boxes of Butterfield's rural reconstruction recommendations – except for the participation of organized religion, as it was “not possible to include organized religion in a government enterprise.”¹⁰⁹

Activists like Chang and James Yen not only worked with the Nationalist government, but also sought support from other sources. How James Yen emphasized the Christian undertones of his schemes varied depending on who his audience was. While he would downplay the religious aspects vis-à-vis non-Christian Chinese actors and the state, Yen readily cooperated with agricultural missions and Protestant internationalism, and was not shy to tie his schemes to Christian rural reform when fundraising in the United States, for instance.¹¹⁰ After 1934, Yen worked together closely with the Rockefeller Foundation in New York, which substantially funded Yen's Mass Education Movement.¹¹¹

While Kenyon Butterfield's visit had given a boost to rural reconstruction as a comprehensive topic among the missionaries in China, Butterfield himself, too, sought to partake actively in Christian rural work in the country, where Christian educational institutions were still heavily involved. One of the main educational institutions working on the Christian rural reconstruction effort was Cheeloo University (Shantung Christian University) in Jinan which had taken a lead in training rural leaders in the late 1920s.¹¹² When Butterfield toured China in 1931, the university authorities held a meeting with the American rural scientist and developed a program to further “ruralize” the institution.¹¹³ The following year, the university set up a rural institute to concentrate its rural efforts such as agricultural extension, a village service center, rural training, and mass education.¹¹⁴ A few years later, Luella Miner, a former dean at Cheeloo University, was eager to engage Butterfield in a more permanent role at Cheeloo, when the university authorities were discussing the future of the institution and considering an even greater emphasis on rural matters.¹¹⁵ Miner had high hopes in the productive “combination of [Butterfield], James Yen and Chang Fu-liang”¹¹⁶ for the benefit of China's (Christian) rural reconstruction effort. However, Miner's death in 1935 – as well as Butterfield's own passing in the same year – prevented a further collaboration.¹¹⁷ The highly dynamic field of rural reconstruction in China and

¹⁰⁸Thomson, *When China Faced West*, 93.

¹⁰⁹Chang Fu-liang, “Reconstructing Rural Life in China,” *The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin*, New York, no. 23 (June 1937): 1–4, here 2.

¹¹⁰Hayford, *To the People*, 83, 146; Merkel-Hess, *The Rural Modern*, 51–52.

¹¹¹Bolling, *Private Foreign Aid*, 55; Stross, *The Stubborn Earth*, 204; Merkel-Hess, *The Rural Modern*, 150–151.

¹¹²Li Tien-lu to A. L. Warnshuis, January 21, 1929, KLB/17/IMC, 1917–1934/4.

¹¹³“Report of Conference with Dr. Butterfield,” March 31, 1931, “Tentative Statement Regarding Principles and Projects in Cheeloo's Program for Rural Uplift,” n.d., both in KLB/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/1.

¹¹⁴“The Rural Institute,” *Cheeloo Bulletin*, No. 359 (June 4, 1932): 1–4.

¹¹⁵Bettis A. Garside to Board of Governors, Cheeloo University, September 5, 1935, KLB/13; Luella Miner to KLB, September 30, 1933, KLB/7/Agricultural missions, 1906–1935/1; KLB to L. Miner, October 23, 1934; L. Miner to KLB, August 21, 1934; both in KLB/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/7; L. Miner to KLB, August 29, 1935, KLB/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/1; KLB to L. Miner, October 17, 1935, KLB/6/5/General Correspondence, 1935–36.

¹¹⁶L. Miner to KLB, August 21, 1934, KLB/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/7.

¹¹⁷KLB to B. A. Garside, October 14, 1935, KLB/13/FEA&RE, 1919–1935/1.

many concrete experiments and schemes, whether Christian, secular, private, or governmental, came to a premature end in the late 1930s, after the Japanese invasion in China in 1937 and the outbreak of World War II had heavily affected the movement.¹¹⁸

IV. Conclusion

As this selective overview of Kenyon Butterfield's work in Asia, its diverse reverberations, and manifold rural and agricultural efforts have shown, the opportunities and limits of agricultural missions and Christian rural reconstruction were tied to numerous factors, including the delicate and often complex interaction between missionary, civil, state, and other actors. Examples such as the Ichalkaranji cooperation or the Shinano Rural Community Parish in Japan have shown that the success of missionary and Christian rural work in Asia depended on the employment and integration of capable and well-trained, both local and foreign personnel.

Indeed, one of the more tangible outcomes of the missionary shift to agriculture in the United States after the 1928 Jerusalem conference and Butterfield's survey work was an increased focus on the issue of agricultural training for (outgoing) missionaries, most visibly, for instance, in the establishment of a training course for agricultural missionaries at Cornell University. The course was held for the first time in 1930, jointly organized by the International Missionary Council and the Foreign Missions Conference of North America after the IMC's secretary A. L. Warnshuis approached the University.¹¹⁹ It was aimed at American missionaries on furlough back in the United States. While the class got off to a slow start and the initial reception by the mission boards was only lukewarm, by 1939 it had eighty participants.¹²⁰ Moreover, the example quickly spawned similar programs at other institutions, such as Iowa State University, Oregon State University, or the Scarritt College for Christian Workers. Even the U.S. government joined the movement in 1945 with the United States Department of Agriculture's Extension Service starting an "Extension Education Workshop" directed at outgoing missionaries. The course ran with much success into the 1950s and 1960s and showed how the pre-Cold War missionary development discourse transitioned rather smoothly into official U.S. foreign aid and development policies and technical assistance schemes after the end of World War II and the articulation of U.S. president Truman's Point Four program.¹²¹ Agricultural missions and Christian rural reconstruction were thus embedded in a discourse that went well beyond the missionary milieu, but interacted with and in many ways shaped what later became an international development discourse.

The professionalization (and secularization) of missionary personnel was a crucial part of this transformation, and Butterfield and the International Missionary Council further accelerated this development through their own schemes as well as through

¹¹⁸On the effects specifically on Christian rural reconstruction, see John H. Reisner, "The Effects of the Sino-Japanese Conflict on American Educational and Philanthropic Enterprises in China, V: Rural Reconstruction," report for the Institute of Pacific Relations, November 18, 1939, PHS/RG 82//70/1: Agriculture – China.

¹¹⁹A. L. Warnshuis to Ralph E. Diffendorfer, June 10, 1930; A. L. Warnshuis to Robert E. Speer, June 16, 1930; both in PHS/RG 81/25/21: IMC, 1930.

¹²⁰Cf. Kevin M. Lowe, *Baptized with the Soil: Christian Agrarians and the Crusade for Rural America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 56–61.

¹²¹Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 252–265; Brunner, "From Converts to Cooperation," 433–434; Fischer-Tiné, "The YMCA and Low-Modernist Rural Development," 229–231.

cooperation with existing projects in Asia. In China, Butterfield and the local National Christian Council sought to align their ideas with James Yen's education and rural reconstruction schemes, which were ostensibly secular and ultimately proved to be more adaptable and durable in the Chinese political and social landscape. However in India, they could build on earlier efforts that had professionalized missionary rural sciences such as Sam Higginbottom's Agricultural Institute or K. T. Paul and the YMCA's work.

The contemporaries in the missionary field were well aware of the rather smooth transition and continuities between pre-war informal and post-war formal "development aid." In Katpadi, for instance, the mission authorities were trying to establish contact with the American officials when the first technical assistance programs started on the subcontinent in the early 1950s.¹²² Manifold continuities grew out of the pre-war missionary discourse on the rural and transitioned into post-war schemes and engagements.¹²³ Agricultural experts from the missionary field like John Reisner or D. Spencer Hatch continued their advisory work in secular contexts such as the United Nations' newly established Food and Agriculture Organization, whereas Chang Fu-liang, for example, maintained his association with American rural development and was part of the Chinese-American Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction after World War II. James Yen founded in 1960 the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction headquartered in the Philippines.

Despite these long-term effects and continuities, Kenyon L. Butterfield's work did not achieve the immediate impact he had hoped for in the 1920s and 1930s. While his idea of comprehensive rural reconstruction was not as innovative as he had imagined, his idea of contiguous units coordinated by Christian agencies was ambitious. The comprehensive nature of his Rural Reconstruction Unit (or Rural Community Parish) also made it highly invasive and thus difficult to implement. As Ralph Felton acknowledged already in 1938, Butterfield's schemes required a sufficiently large population share of the local Christian community as well as adequate political and social influence.¹²⁴ This was hardly given in India, China, or Japan where the role of organized and united (Protestant) churches was limited. While the National Christian Councils, Butterfield's main partners, assumed this role to some extent, their transitional character between foreign mission and national church impaired their impact. The 1920s and 1930s were an era of many debates on and of actual measures of church union in Asia and Africa. Furthermore, the nationalist and anti-colonial atmosphere in many Asian countries went often hand-in-hand with anti-Christian sentiments and the question of how to integrate Christianity into national culture. As L. J. Davies at Cheeloo University noted in 1931, missionary work in secular fields like rural reconstruction was often considered by non-Christian observers as "political propaganda" or "cultural invasion."¹²⁵

Inherent in these comprehensive visions of rural reconstruction was a universalism that was nourished by both "secular" progressivist-reformist attitudes of the era and

¹²²Charlotte C. Wyckoff, *Jothy Nilayam Journal*, no. 11, November 1952 (Madras: Ahura, 1952): 13–14.

¹²³For an example of the continuities and entanglements between Protestant missions and development aid in during the early Cold War, see Benjamin L. Hartley, "For the Relief of Human Suffering: The Methodist Committee on Overseas Relief in the Context of Cold War Initiatives in Development, 1940–1968," *Methodist Review* 6 (2014): 27–68.

¹²⁴Felton, *The Rural Church in the Far East*, 29–30.

¹²⁵"Report of Conference with Dr. Butterfield," March 31, 1931, p. 5.

religious convictions of the Kingdom of God realized in the present. Consequently, as Galen M. Fisher, a former missionary to Japan and Butterfield's colleague at the Institute for Social and Religious Research, remarked in 1925, Protestant internationalists like Butterfield were convinced that "there should be a universal formula to rural progress at home in America as well as in China or India."¹²⁶ This was a rather idealistic approach. As the experiences of missionaries trained in the United States showed, it was not a simple task to apply the knowledge learned in a North American context to the often quite different Indian, Chinese, or Japanese conditions and realities.

Comprehensive rural reconstruction schemes thus depended on the cooperation of a wide array of actors, from colonial and anti-colonial governments, to foreign missions and indigenous Christian communities, as well as the missionary bureaucracy, and Protestant internationalism and philanthropy. Successful rural experiments, therefore, could flourish only if they recognized and worked with what were already existing local efforts. Butterfield's visions had to build on the work of capable men (and rarely women) on the ground, be they locals like James Yen or Kagawa Toyohiko or missionaries like James De Valois or George Shepherd. Revealingly, one of the few places where Christian rural reconstruction visions could be partially realized in a comprehensive, Butterfieldian sense was in an imperialist and authoritarian context – in model Christian villages in Japan-occupied Manchuria during World War II. In many other places, the interwar period proved to be too short of a window – additionally complicated by economic crisis and political revolutionary turmoil – to implement comprehensive and lasting schemes. The missionary shift in the early twentieth century toward social and economic concerns was not only rooted in missiological and theological changes like the Social Gospel, but was accelerated and necessitated by particular demands and political transformations in the "receiving countries."¹²⁷ As such, the turn to agricultural missions was also a symptom of a crisis that Christian mission found itself confronted with in the late years of European colonialism as well as with a general secularization of many areas of life. On the contrary, the agricultural shift in Christian missions also shows the continuing entanglements between the religious and the secular until well into the twentieth century.

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¹²⁶Galen M. Fisher to KLB, November 17, 1925, KLB/25/Institute of Social and Religious Research/1.

¹²⁷Cf. Brunner, "From Converts to Cooperation."

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