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PRESBYTERIAN MISSION COMPOUND, AT NING-PO.

PCUSA China Mission map, 1921. Ningpo, located south of Shanghai, was part of the Central China Mission. From *Pen Pictures of the Central China Mission,* PHS.

Missionary Women's Outreach to Poor Women in China: Origins of the Industrial Class Strategy

By Thomas G. Nimick

Mary Morrison went to China as a missionary wife in 1860, but wanted to pursue her own outreach to poor Chinese women. She tried a variety of strategies without success and finally adapted methods developed in London to the situation in China. This became the "industrial class" strategy, which was then widely adopted throughout China. The recent emergence of a collection of Morrison's letters has revealed a fuller picture of the early development of this strategy in China.

When Mary Morrison went to China in 1860, even the most dedicated missionary had a hard time reaching out to poor women, who were caught in economic hardships and who scrambled just to make a basic livelihood.[1] Overpopulation and environmental degradation played a major role in their suffering. The population had swelled because effective government action to deal with periodic famines in the eighteenth century had greatly reduced the death rate. At the same time the spread of crops such as sweet potatoes, maize, and peanuts, which could be cultivated in more marginal land on hillsides, temporarily increased the overall food supply. The resulting environmental degradation by the late nineteenth century, however, had led to food distress. At the bottom of society, the increase in population had set off fierce competition for even a marginal living. In that social environment, poor women did not have time to listen to street preaching, to go to a street chapel, or to sit in classes to be instructed in foreign ideas.

Yet in April 1873, Helen Nevius reported to the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. that, using a strategy called "industrial classes" that had been developed by Mary Morrison, she was able to gather up to 116 women to listen to religious instruction.[2] At the end of the year, her husband John Nevius reported that her classes averaged over one hundred women twice a week.[3] By 1895, "industrial classes" were listed as a standard form of outreach to women in China.[4] The strategy of industrial classes for women was still being used in the first decade of the twentieth century in Nanjing.[5]

A good introduction to the nature of Morrison's "industrial classes" was provided in 1885 by Mary J. Farnham in Shanghai in a talk about missions entitled "Women's Work for Women":

> Another effective way of working is Industrial Classes. The extreme poverty of most of the women to whom we have access makes it impossible to obtain regular attendance for any length of time. I have never been able to get up a class, without some pecuniary inducement. A sewing class of from twenty to thirty women has been to me a very hopeful way of working; and though I have not been able to carry on one for any extended length of time, yet I think, with the help of a good native assistant, such a class may be made very useful. One of our best workers in Ningpo [Mary Morrison] has had a class of this kind for many years. I am unable to give any statistics, but I know many Christians have been the result of her labors in this way.[6]

Helen Nevius explained in her memoirs how she learned

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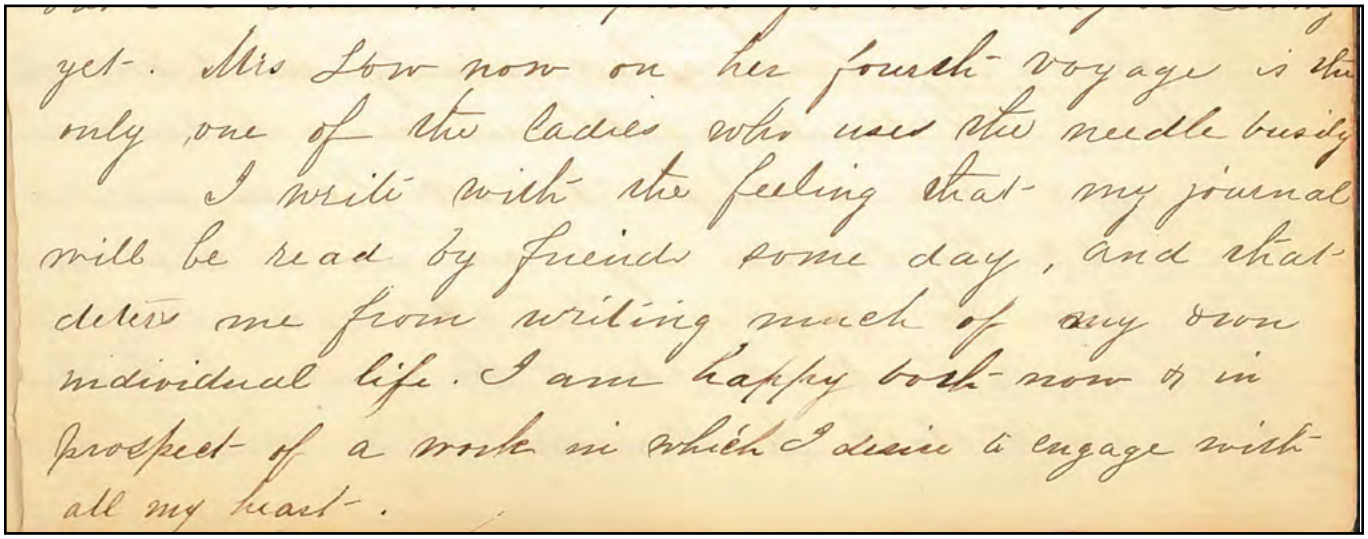
yet. Mrs Low now on her fourth voyage is the only one of the ladies who uses the needle busily
I write with the feeling that my journal will be read by friends some day, and that deters me from writing much of my own individual life. I am happy both now & in prospect of a work in which I desire to engage with all my heart.

Excerpt from the journal Mary Morrison kept during her voyage to China, between February and July, 1860. "I write with the feeling that my journal will be read by friends some day, and that deters me from writing much of my own individual life. I am happy both now and in prospect of a work in which I desire to engage with all my heart." (March 13, 1860.) Journal courtesy of Laura Bazeley.

about the strategy in 1864 from its originator:

> I was very much interested in Mrs. Morrison's industrial classes, which she was about commencing at that time. Once or twice a week she would gather women of a certain locality together for an hour or two, paying them a small sum, perhaps about two cents, for the time. While they sewed, she, or a native Christian, would read to, or converse with them; giving such instruction as they needed, in the rudiments of Christianity. The plan seemed to work well, and I think was adopted in other places also. It, of course, is suited only to women of the poorer class.[7]

Further information about the origin of this strategy has been hard to find, but with the emergence of a collection of letters written by Mary Morrison it is now possible to piece together how she developed the strategy from her multiple efforts to reach out to poor women.

The strategy had its roots in her eagerness to engage in missionary work. She first worked hard to acquire the necessary language skills. In her early days in China, she learned about the circumstances of poor women in Chinese society and she became passionate about focusing her efforts on them. Her first experiment with inviting women to listen to her was disrupted by the flight of families from the Taiping rebels. She then found poor refugee women were willing to meet with her because they had time on their hands; but her efforts came to naught when orderly life was restored.

She then tried to reach women by offering to teach them to read, but she had few takers and the efforts yielded no converts even among those who did learn to read. Amid her frustration, she happened to read one day about methods developed by women in London to reach out to poor women, and realized that some of their methods might be useful in China. With the help of Chinese women close to her, she was able to adapt the methods and create the first industrial class. The strategy worked. Because it fit the circumstances and needs of poor women in China, it became a regular part of the missionary outreach to women.

Mary Elizabeth Arms (1833-1917) embraced a calling to missionary work when she married William Thomas Morrison (1835-1869) on December 14, 1859.[8] The couple departed for the city of Ningpo on February 25, 1860.[9] As she wrote in her journal for the voyage, "I am happy both now and in prospect of a work in which I desire to engage with all my heart."[10] After some time in Ningpo she wrote, "Oh! Father I feel glad the Lord called me here; not for a moment have I wished I had made another decision and here I feel the need of this work more than I did at home."[11]

Mary's personal drive had been encouraged by her father, Stilman E. Arms, who pushed her to

cultivate strong intellectual interests.[12] She initially embraced a career in education and, with her younger sister Sarah, opened a school for girls in their hometown of Elizabeth, New Jersey.[13] After a time, Mary decided to obtain formal training at the highly regarded New York State Normal School in Albany. While there, she used her leisure time to attend lectures on geology, Galvanism, and balloon ascension.[14] At the end of the two-year course in January 1857, she graduated as a leading student and presented an essay at graduation.[15] Of her strong sense of drive she once wrote to her siblings: "Your sister may get to be incorrigibly lazy yet, but honestly I don't fear that, for I love to be employed, as well as ever."[16]

To do missionary work in China, the first step was language study. Mary began during the voyage. Her determination to learn is clearly expressed in her account of another missionary's wife:

> I was sorry to learn that Mr. B has not permitted his wife to study the language, because he feels that her chief duty lies at home…I am glad my husband did not hinder me. I would not be willing to live in China if I could not speak the language.[17]

In the fall of 1860 Mary wrote of her progress, "I feel that I am gaining though slowly and now that we have cooler weather I felt more like study. It must be a slow work at best."[18] In May of 1861 she wrote, "Oh! I do feel so weak when I come to talk. There is so much to be said and it is so hard to bring it out, in this strange tongue."[19] Finally in October 1862 she could declare:

> Though I have written much, I have said nothing of what peculiarly fills my heart, at this time. I am like a young fledging filled with delight in finding that I can speak so that strangers can understand me, but the more delighted that I can use my wings just at this most propitious, delightful time for labor.[20]

At the same time as she was learning the language, Mary also became aware of the circumstances of poor women and expressed sympathy for them. Within her household, she was particularly struck by the challenges faced by the Ah-boo, or wet nurse, for her daughter Mary. In order to get the job, the wet nurse had put her own child out to nurse with someone else and found out that the child was mistreated. She had snuck out without telling Mary and was distressed when Mary questioned her:

> She went then to Mrs. Green with her grievances and enlarged upon every little thing feeling that I was very unjust. Fortunately Mrs. G's woman who was present, was also by when I was speaking with Mrs. G. about Ah-boo and knew that I pitied her, so she spoke up for me and said I was a good person [and] that I had been inquiring of her whether her (Ah-boo's) wages were sufficient to support herself and three children…My Ah-boo is very poor, her husband has left her and she has three children dependent upon her. I feel sorry for her, and anxious to help her all I can.[21]

The challenges facing poor women, particularly in terms of economic competition, were even more acutely illustrated for Mary when she saw them competing vehemently for low level jobs in the production of tea. Her account comes from April 1861:

> The street here is about ten feet wide so of course the opposite side is very near us. There is a large building opposite where women go in great numbers to pick tea, that is, to pick out all the refuse and in that way they earn about ten cents a day. This morning there was a great commotion at the tea-house gate. Women came to pick tea as early as half past five and of course the gate was shut. Gradually the number increased till they became quite clamorous. At half past six the gate was opened and shut again and for a time there was a lull. About eight another group came more noisy than the first. They screamed to those within and finally kicked and banged after a very unfeminine fashion. After ¾ of an hour the gate opened and they rushed in pell-mell. Ah-boo said, there were already so many within they wanted no more. It seems to me a great pity that when there are so many who want work there should be so little to do.[22]

Despite Mary's sympathy for poor women, in her eagerness to do missionary work she still welcomed the opportunity in 1861 to oversee the girls' boarding school. "I went yesterday for the first time, and feel so happy in the prospect of having something to do."[23] The school had been founded by Caroline Hubble

Illustration of the Presbyterian mission at Ningpo from Helen C. Nevius's *Our Life in China,* 1869. "The Presbyterian mission-houses are in a suburb on the north bank of one of the two streams which here unite to form the Tatsieh, or Ningpo River" (p. 26), PHS.

Cole in 1846, less than two years after the founding of the mission.[24] Working at the school had become a common way for missionary wives to serve.[25]

Even with the satisfying work in the school, Mary continued to think about the plight of poor women. In her first days in China she had learned about work done with women by Ruth Mills and Mary Farnham in Shanghai.[26] In addition, in December 1860 Mary wrote of Mrs. Knowlton of the Baptist mission, "For a long time she has met the women of their church and instructed them in the Bible. One of these days God grant I may be enabled to do something of the kind."[27]

Mary's first attempt to reach out to poor women in October 1861, just a little over a year after her arrival, did not get a full trial; her class was broken up before she could see any results. When she designed her approach, she knew from many experiences that curiosity could easily draw a crowd, but she needed a personal connection to establish a basis for trust. She started by working through a woman who had worked for her:

> I have been wishing for some time to see if I could not do something for the poor women here, in the way of instruction and months ago my design was to go to my old Ah-boo's house and see if I could not get the neighbors on the same court to join in a reading class. My hope was that after learning to read they would desire more instruction and so be induced to go to the chapel and keep God's Holy day.[28]

There was indeed some initial curiosity, but in response to her offer to teach them to read the women said they had no time and one wondered "what was the use of learning to read when

the rebels were coming."[29] Before she could see whether her plan would work, many families decided to flee the looming threat of the Taiping rebels and the class broke up. In December 1861, the city of Ningpo itself was taken. In the resulting chaos, city people fled to outlying regions and rural people fleeing local violence ended up living near the missionaries.

Mary's next attempts to set up classes for poor women were focused on the refugees from the surrounding regions. These classes worked better initially because the women had more time, but the classes could not be sustained when women returned to their normal patterns of life. The initial outreach to refugees housed by the mission in a nearby temple showed that women with time on their hands would listen to religious instruction:

> We read the Peep of the Day in Chinese and ask a great many questions about it and then pray with them. It seems to be just the book for them. They listen very attentively and we both enjoy it very much. How earnestly I am wishing that God may open their hearts, and convert some of them. One says she goes to the Chapel every Sabbath. They are all very ignorant and need to be taught and questioned just like very little children. It is so much better than I feared. God must have heard our prayers. I dreaded going very much because I feared being beset by their entreaties for missing friends etc. and being annoyed by their idle questions, but no: they are just as quiet and orderly as any class of grown country people at home. Any time soon is very fully and very happily occupied.[30]

The work seemed to go well. The women learned quite a few basic religious facts and seemed to welcome the meetings. But for the refugees nothing was settled: one day in March the refugees were moved to a different temple, where the classes were frequently disrupted by curious onlookers.[31] In April Mary reported that she had started to teach them to read in the Ningpo colloquial dialect using the Romanized alphabet that the missionaries had developed. She longed for them to respond to the religious teachings, but at least she was happy to have direct engagement with women.[32] In writing to her sisters, however, she expressed concern that there was no progress towards salvation: "As the weeks pass on, I begin to fear that the summer may pass, the harvest end, and they not saved."[33] After a time the class broke up when the refugees were turned out, "because we have no idea of keeping up a poor house for them and it is time they were doing something for themselves."[34]

In the midst of these events Mary felt she had evidence that her strategy of teaching women to read the Romanized colloquial might work. She had also been doing it with her servants.[35] Her wet nurse had embraced the lessons in hope that being able to read the Bible would bring her peace. In August of 1862, Mary reported that the wet nurse "has given her heart to the Saviour."[36]

Mary's strategy of reaching out to women through offering to teach them to read was finally fully tested with new groups of refugees from the surrounding country who flooded her immediate neighborhood. She started with the refugees living right across the street, and found that they welcomed her:

> I told them that I had come to "kông dao-li" literally "talk doctrine", the only expression which they have for talking about religion. They asked me to sit down and as I told them about the comfort which they could find in worshipping the true God and the hopelessness of help from their own idols they became interested and listened to all I had to say very attentively. One said we like to have you come because we have nothing to do here and we are so miserable that time hangs heavily. When I left I asked them if I should come again and give them more of this good news. Oh yes, said they "Come again" then said I, I'll bring a book and read to you, would you like that. "Oh yes said they"…I feel this is a sowing time and pray God to give me strength to go and teach them every day until they are able to go to their homes again. I go again this P.M. I can't tell you the half. It is a blessed privilege to be here now.[37]

As she met more groups of refugees, she tried several times to implement the strategy of offering to teach them how to read.[38] By January 1863, Mary had succeeded in establishing a class with a group of refugees from Sanpoh, and she was pleased that some of them had learned to read in the Romanized colloquial. Among them, her strongest

Chinese photographer.

THE YU-YAO WOMEN'S CLASS.

Learning to read the Romanized Bible (Ningpo Dialect) and to sing from a Romanized hymn-book.

Illustration from Clarence Burton Day's *Old Ningpo: Bulletin of Ningpo Station,* 1919. This image, taken after Mary Morrison's time in Ningpo, shows a women's class learning to read the Romanized colloquial dialect of the region, PHS.

hopes rested on a young woman named A-Un:

> I went to see them regularly for four or five weeks twice a week and always came away deeply interested, nine were in the class when I began and now the married folks have all dropped out but the three young ladies and the boy of fifteen have learned to read in less than two months. A-Un the oldest is so interesting. She is more sedate [than] most China girls, there is such a maidenly dignity about her and so much intelligence that I love to teach her. The boy was sick awhile and got sadly behind, so I asked A-Un if she would not teach him, the next time he came, he too could read. They have all read the ten commandments and Lord's Prayer and now they are reading Matthew and the Peep of Day…Whenever I have time I read to and talk with them and they are very attentive. I do hope that A-Un may become a Christian, but she shows no interest in the salvation offered. She seems only delighted as yet with learning to read but I hope as she reads the precious Gospel for herself it may be, when I'm far away the Spirit may enlighten her heart.[39]

Not long after Mary wrote that letter, the refugees returned to their homes and the class ended. Still her hopes for a positive result were bolstered by a note from A-Un, written in the Romanized colloquial and expressing a desire to return for further instruction.[40] However, when A-Un returned to Ningpo to visit her mother, she told Mary that she no longer saw any use in reading because her husband and his family would not allow it. Mary explained that the reading was the means to offer her salvation, but A-Un turned that down as well. Mary was distressed that all the efforts had been for naught:

> Here thought I is the one whom I have esteemed most interesting and intelligent for whom I have labored and prayed for the last four months and now she deliberately throws from her eternal life! that class is all broken up and my toil seems almost in vain. Must I teach another set, with the same results?[41]

As illustrated in the above examples, by 1863 all of Mary's efforts with developing a strategy to reach poor women had come to nothing, even in the promising context of willing listeners among the refugees. The refugees had by then returned home, and any new strategy had to deal with the poor women's problem of limited time. In the midst of her frustration, Mary's fellow missionary Mary Rankin loaned her a book entitled *Life Work*, which described work with poor women in London.[42] Mary described how the book gave her the elements that became the industrial class:

> For weeks I had been thinking what plan I might adopt, which would induce a class of women to attend regularly, where they might become interested in Bible truth. At last the District meetings of the London Bible Women struck me, as being very nearly what I wanted. In those meetings, the poor women of a district, assemble in the Mission Room where work is furnished them, for doing which they are paid, and while they are sewing, the Bible is read to them.[43]

The key to the experiment was that it leveraged poor women's insistence on using time productively:

> There are a great many poor women here, who earn about four cents a day, for doing coarse shop work at their homes. So if I could give them two cents for two hours work, two afternoons in the week, they would certainly lose nothing, and they would hear more of Gospel truth, than they could learn in their whole lives at home.[44]

A Chinese Christian woman helped her decide what sort of work they might ask the women to do in a meeting:

> My woman who is a Christian, entered into the plan quite heartily. She said, "I'll tell you what will be excellent work, that is, buy native cloth and let them make men's stockings. They all know how to do that, and being simple coarse work, they could listen better, than if doing fine work."[45]

Writing in April 1863, Mary first named the strategy the "Industrial Class" and reported that the new strategy was successful well beyond what she had been able to accomplish before:

> The Industrial Class for Women has now had four meetings and I am perfectly delighted with it. The first time we had seven and the last nine…The women seem pleased and take hold of the work so readily. Men's stockings seems to be as natural work with them as darning stockings with us. And then two hours give us ample time to be sociable and yet to impress truth on their minds, as I have never been able to do in any other way before. I chose the simplest book I can find the Peep of Day. I read a chapter in it in Chinese and then question each one, as closely as I can. Then, when I am through, I say to my school teacher Mrs. Loh who lives in the Chapel building, suppose you take the chapter we have just read and talk it all over to us, perhaps we have not all understood. She does this in a very interesting way, and as she goes along, brings in the false notions which are entertained here on the same subjects. Then all chat awhile, then I question them again on the same things as they return all their needles to my needle-book and we close with prayer.[46]

After the experiment, Mary took a break in the hot summer months. She implemented a regular class beginning on September 15, 1863 with five women.[47] The numbers of participants soon grew, and by November she reported thirty women attending. At that point she had to cut back to deal with her husband William's illness. She wished she had been able to increase the number of meetings.[48] She wrote to her sister Sarah in December, "[T]he class of twenty-five women Sallie, Oh! there's no room for discouragement when I see their bright faces welcoming me, the improvement they have made in orderly behavior, and the attention they give."[49] At the turn of the year she wrote, "My Class meets tomorrow. The attendance still continues good, 27 last time. Oh! how I long to see the Spirit at work."[50]

Now that the initial class had taken hold, in early 1864 Mary set up a second class on the North Bank of the river, close to her house. It grew quickly and became part of her regular work.[51] She was able to handle both classes because a lot of the details were carried out by her helpers:

> Sarah says are you not doing too much, in having two classes? If you saw how I work them you would not fear. I can be present as much or little as I please. I generally am at each one only an hour…Here it is not essential as I have such efficient help. I simply buy the cloth in large quantities through a native assistant at Bao-kô-tah. Then I give it to Mrs. Lu and she and her mother have it prepared[,] purchase all needful thread needles and thimbles and they attend to all the details. They ring the chapel bell at 3 PM every Friday and distribute the work…I go from four to five and talk and question as hard as I can for ¾ of an hour. Mrs. Lu does a little before I get there in talking and after I am done she usually says something. This class works beautifully and as it is only three minutes walk it is not burden at all.
>
> The city class is more of a care. I have had a native woman to take charge there, but being inexperienced work is always coming short and there has been a lack of system. Recently I have had Mrs. Tsui go over on Saturdays to assist, hoping that as she is faithful and willing to do what I say, that she would soon have all the care.[52]

These "industrial classes" also proved sustainable. At the end of April 1864, Mary reported that the Chinese women helping her had been able to continue the classes when she took a trip to Shanghai.[53] One of the classes then had to be suspended when a helper needed to deal with illness in her family, but the class restarted without any problem as soon as Mary returned:

> I have been cheered by a full attendance of about twenty-five during the whole year. When I went to Shanghai for a month's absence, on account of my health, I left the class in charge of the native teacher's wife Mrs. Loh. When I came back I was quite grieved to find that owing to sickness in the family of Mrs. Loh the class had been suspended three weeks. I feared that it would be hard to reassemble them, however as soon, as a few learned that I had returned they all flocked back again. One rainy day seventeen were present, indeed I feel that the class in the city is now a pretty well established thing.[54]

In the fall of 1864, the classes proved easy to restart after the summer break: "We had twenty-two at the first meeting in the city and only four over here, there will no doubt be more next time on this side as but few knew of it."[55] In January 1865, Mary wrote to the Sabbath School in Elizabeth, which had taken on sponsorship of the class in the city, about the steady attendance of thirty women.[56] Classes even continued without a break when Mary fell seriously ill in the spring of 1865. Her Chinese helpers carried on with them as usual.

The "industrial classes" were outside of the budgeted activities of the mission, and with the success of the classes established, Mary needed to secure financial support for them. At the beginning, she had funded the first experiment for two months out of her own funds. Then, in the fall of 1863, money and pledges of support that she received from the Sabbath School in Elizabeth enabled her to put her plan into full operation.[57] "I have been very much pleased with the working of the plan and as I then shall have the Sabbath School money to fall back upon, it can launch out farther than I have dared to do, on our own private funds."[58] To encourage continued support, Mary thought that it would help the sponsoring organizations in America if they could see pictures of the Chinese helpers:

> Monday morning as it was only a short distance to the photographer's and a fine morning, I went with William to get Mrs. Tsui and Mrs. Lu's likeness taken. It succeeded very well. I believe I have not explained to you my idea. Sometime since I thought our Sabbath School would be much pleased to see the likenesses of the two women who help me in my classes, and then I thought perhaps I could raise something for the cause by procuring the negative and get copies printed at home. It seems to me, every one that can appreciate the work would like one. Mrs. Lu has charge of my

North Bank class and Mrs. Tsui of the one in the city.[59]

Her plan worked. After that, the classes benefitted from ongoing financial support from her family's church in Elizabeth.[60] In 1870, the founding of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church opened the door for Mary to get support directly from local missionary societies. She first gained such support from a church in Philadelphia in 1873.[61] In 1874, the Women's Society began publishing the connections between local societies and missionary efforts. For example, the aptly named Mary Morrison Mission Band, in the Elizabeth church, supported a young student in the Ningpo school. The "industrial school" was listed in 1874 without a specific sponsor,[62] but in 1875 it was adopted by the Auxiliary Society of Greensburg, Pennsylvania.[63] That support continued every year until at least 1891.[64]

In September 1864, the "industrial classes" gained recognition as an established part of the mission's work. For the first time, they were included in the mission's formal annual report: "Mrs. Morrison has two interesting classes of heathen women for instruction in the gospel. The larger of the two classes has been attended throughout the year by about twenty-five."[65] Still, Mary was unsure whether they would serve the original goal of leading women to become Christians. To her parents she confessed the difficulties of reaching the women once she had them in the class:

> [F]ather says, "I should think you would feel the need of special divine guidance in your classes." I can truly say that there is hardly an hour in the day, that my thoughts are not more or less prayerfully engaged for them. It has been specially so, all this Winter, and indeed it has always been since their commencement two years ago next April, the great burden of my desires. For two months while my plans were first developing, I prayed a great deal, and often lay long awake at night thinking about what and how I was to do. That God has kept up in me this constant spirit of prayer for my women is one great ground of hope that fruit will come to the praise of God's grace, though I see no special signs of it now and may never see them while I live. Often as I sit before them the tears involuntarily come to my eyes, as I think to myself Oh how hard your hearts are, what <u>would</u> I not give to break them.[66]

Mrs. Lu (seated), taught in the girls' Boarding School and assisted Morrison in the North Bank Women's class. Mrs. Tsui (standing) was superintendent of work in the Women's class in the city. She became a Christian while living with the Morrison family. Photograph courtesy of Laura Bazeley.

In June of 1865, however, on the eve of Mary being compelled by William's illness to return to America, she reaffirmed her confidence that the strategy would make a difference:

> As to being more useful in my own land, I formerly questioned the matter a great deal, but since my tongue has been loosed and I have been able to tell the Chinese women in their own language the news of a Saviour, I have had no doubts nay rather I have thanked the Lord many a time that he brought me here. I think it is an inestimable privilege to have as I have had during the past year sixty women (30 in the city and 30 on the North Bank) weekly under my influence, who otherwise would never have dreamed that they even had a <u>soul</u>! The seed

Photo of Mary Elizabeth Arms Morrison taken later in life. Photograph courtesy of Laura Bazeley.

> sown too is God's seed and I know He will not let it all fall on stony ground.[67]

From its tentative beginnings, the strategy of the "industrial class" spread to other mission stations. Already in 1864, the most senior missionary in Canton wrote that he had learned of the classes and had hopes that they might yield women who could then serve as Bible women and visit homes.[68] It was also in 1864 that Helen Nevius first learned about the classes and carried the idea to Shantung. She embraced the method wholeheartedly and in 1874 she wrote a lengthy and glowing report about her use of it. In the report she explained the logic of being able to bring women in to listen only if she met their economic necessity. "This sum [30 cash (about 12½ cents)], small though it be, is a help to them in their extreme poverty, and I am quite aware that it rather than the spiritual lessons they may gain is the motive which brings most of them to me." But she went on to say that she had found no alternative strategy:

> I know of no other plan by which they can be taught. A visit or two now and then by a foreign lady to their own homes has comparatively little effect upon them, as far as giving them a knowledge of the Bible is concerned. This requires month after month, even year after year of the hardest drilling, before they have any clear and definite notions…having to pay them money for coming is a constant annoyance; the more so, that I am aware that some missionaries so entirely disapprove of it as to censure me severely for undertaking it. It is on the firm conviction which I feel that notwithstanding its disadvantages, it is for me, beyond all comparison, the most effectual way of reaching and instructing the women, that I can persevere in it…In concluding this long report, let me say that I feel that I have great reason for gratitude that for more than two years I have been able to continue the Industrial Class with only short intermissions and so much encouragement, and I ask the prayers of all kind friends for rich blessing upon it.[69]

The strategy proved durable as well. In the 1870s, after her husband's death, Mary returned to Ningpo and picked up the ongoing classes.[70] Mary also adapted the idea of the industrial class as a way to reach out to the mothers of girls in the day school.[71] The classes continued after she departed from Ningpo for the last time in 1876. In 1891 one of the ongoing classes had 57 women and the other 70.[72]

Mary Morrison's "industrial class" strategy emerged from her passion for mission and her sympathy for poor Chinese women. When frustrated with other methods to reach women, she realized how methods developed to reach poor women in London could be adapted to the situation in Ningpo. Her efforts flourished because they accommodated the needs of poor women who could not afford to spend time that did not contribute something to their difficult economic circumstances. Mary Morrison found a way to marry instruction with profitable activity. She funded the first efforts with her own money, and when they went well, she recruited support from outside the regular mission budget. Fitting the missionary effort to the people's actual circumstances led to a thriving program that was adopted by other missionaries throughout China. 𝒟

For Further Reading

Beaver, R. Pierce. *American Protestant Women in World Mission: A History of the First Feminist Movement in North America*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980.

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Graham, Gael. *Gender, Culture, and Christianity: American Protestant Mission Schools in China, 1880-1930*. New York: P. Lang, 1995.

Hunter, Jane. *Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.

Montgomery, Helen Barrett. *Western Women in Eastern Lands: An Outline of Fifty Years of Women's Work in Foreign Missions*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911.

Nevius, Helen S. C. *Our Life in China*. New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1881.

Notes

Key to letters from the Morrison Family Papers:

MEM Mary E. Morrison (MEA – Mary E. Arms prior to Dec 1859)
SEA Stilman E. Arms (Mary's father)
REA Rebecca E. Arms (Mary's mother)
SJA Sarah J. Arms (Mary's sister)
ALA Augusta L. Arms (Mary's sister)
CWA Clara W. Arms (Mary's sister)

[1] There is limited published biographical information on Mary Morrison. For a summary of her life, see the obituary prepared by her daughter: Mary M. Morrison, "Mrs. M. E. Morrison," *The Chinese Recorder*, 48, no. 11 (1917), 732-733. Mary Morrison's life supports the account of Presbyterian women endeavoring to supplement the efforts of men rather than challenging male roles, as argued in Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status*, 2nd edition (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 3-16. Her work and ideas support the more recent idea in the historiography of missionary women that they did not represent a hegemonic force but rather a negotiated interaction in which the influences flowed both ways in both intentional and unintentional ways. See Theresa Kaminski, "American Women Missionaries in the World," *Journal of Women's History*, 26, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 195-202; and Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo, "Introduction," in *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-16.

[2] Helen Nevius to Board, April 11, 1873, *Board of Foreign Missions Correspondence and Reports: China 1837 to 1911*, Vol. 11. *China Letters, 1873*, no. 28, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[3] Jonathan L. Nevius to Board, December 7, 1873, *Board of Foreign Missions Correspondence and Reports: China 1837 to 1911*, Vol. 11. *China Letters, 1873*, no. 93.

[4] *The China Mission Hand-book*, First Issue (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1896), Part II, p. 1, 196.

[5] *Historical Sketches of the Missions under the Care of the Board of Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church*, 7th ed. (Philadelphia: Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church, 1912), 34.

[6] Mrs. J. M. W. Farnham, "Women's Work for Woman," *Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal* 16, no. 5 (June, 1885): 218-219.

[7] Helen S. C. Nevius, *Our Life in China* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1881), 484-485.

[8] For the wedding, see *New York Observer*, January 5, 1860, p. 10.

[9] Mary E. Morrison, Journal of her voyage to China in 1860, entry for February 25, 1860, Morrison Family Papers, in the possession of the family and used by permission.

[10] Mary E. Morrison, journal of her voyage to China in 1860, entry for March 13, 1860, Morrison Family Papers.

[11] MEM to SEA, REA, and CWA, October 15, 1860, Morrison Family Papers.

[12] A number of records spell her father's name "Stillman," with a double "l", but here I will follow the spelling that she used in her handwritten materials and in handwritten records from the First Presbyterian Church of Elizabeth, New Jersey, where he served as ruling elder. He was in the first regular class at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, had studied medicine at Yale, and practiced medicine and then "surgical and mechanical dentistry" in New Jersey. At that time it was known as the Rensselaer School. See *Biographical Record of the Officers and Graduates of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 1824-1886*, Henry B. Nason, ed. (Troy, N.Y.: William H. Young, 1887), 175. As a student in 1826 he had participated in an investigation of the geology and fauna along the newly opened Erie Canal. He spoke to the group about the geological principles. See George W. Clinton, "Journal of a Tour from

Albany to Lake Erie, by the Erie Canal, in 1826," published in *Buffalo Historical Society Publications*, vol. 14, Frank H. Severance, ed. (Buffalo, NY: Buffalo Historical Society, 1910), 281, 303. See also David I. Spanagel, *DeWitt Clinton and Amos Eaton: Geology and Power in Early New York* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 124.

[13] Elias D. Smith, *The School Interests of Elizabeth: A City of New Jersey, U.S.A.: 1664-1910* (Elizabeth, NJ, 1911), 69. Mary Morrison also frequently mentioned this school in her letters.

[14] MEA to SEA, September 27, 1856, Morrison Family Papers.

[15] *The New York Teacher*, VI, no. 5 (February 1857): 248.

[16] MEM to sisters, April 5-8, 1864, Morrison Family Papers, emphasis in the original.

[17] MEM to SEA, January 6, 1864, Morrison Family Papers.

[18] MEM to sisters, September 26-29, 1860, Morrison Family Papers.

[19] MEM to SEA, May 27, 1861, Morrison Family Papers.

[20] MEM to SEA and REA, October 3, 1862, Morrison Family Papers.

[21] MEM to REA, March 14, 1861, Morrison Family Papers.

[22] MEM to SJA, April 15-27, 1861, Morrison Family Papers.

[23] MEM to family, March 30, 1861, Morrison Family Papers.

[24] Actually she had been permitted to set up a school in Canton in 1845 while she was waiting to move to Ningpo. See M.S. Culbertson, "Journal," entry for September 13, 1845, Matthew [Michael] Simpson Culbertson Papers, 1843-1860, BANC MSS 70/122 z, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. She established a girls' boarding school in Ningpo in November of 1846. See Divie Bethune McCartee, "'The Man as He Regarded Himself, Dr. McCartee's 'Reminiscences,'" in Robert E. Speer, ed. *A Missionary Pioneer in the Far East: A Memorial of Divie Bethune McCartee, For More Than Fifty Years a Missionary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1922), 90.

[25] Mary Ann Loomis, wife of Augustus Ward Loomis, took it over in 1847 and Mary Rankin, wife of Henry Van Vleck Rankin, took it on in 1849. See William Rankin, *Handbook and Incidents of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.* (Newark, NJ: W.H. Shurts, 1893), 48. See also "Diary of Henry V. Rankin," in Rankin Family Papers, RG 176, box 1, folder 14, Presbyterian Historical Society. In 1856, Juana McCartee, wife of Divie Bethune McCartee oversaw it for a short while. See Helen S. C. Nevius, *Our Life in China*, 67. Richard Quarterman Way and his wife took charge of it later in 1856 and oversaw its merger with Miss Aldersey's school in 1857 at her retirement. Richard Quarterman Way to Board, January 29, 1857, *Board of Foreign Missions Correspondence and Reports: China 1837 to 1911,* Vol. 4-5*, Incoming, Ningpo Mission, 1854 - 1864*, no. 98. There are many sources concerning Mary Ann Aldersey. For a quick introduction, see J. Reason, *The Witch of Ningpo: Mary Aldersey* (London: Edinburgh-House Press, 1940). The school passed back to Mary Rankin in 1858. See Henry Van Vleck Rankin to Board, October 11, 1858, *Board of Foreign Missions Correspondence and Reports: China 1837 to 1911,* Vol. 4-5*, Incoming, Ningpo Mission, 1854 - 1864*, no. 167. It went briefly to Mrs. Danforth before it came to Mary Morrison.

[26] MEM to SJA, August 25, 1860, Morrison Family Papers.

[27] MEM to SJA, December 11, 1860, Morrison Family Papers.

[28] MEM to SEA, REA, and sisters, October 19-November 4, 1861, Morrison Family Papers.

[29] Ibid.

[30] MEM to SEA and REA, February 18, 1862, Morrison Family Papers. The view of Chinese as ignorant children who would benefit from the knowledge and understanding brought by missionaries was a common attitude in the period. Contrast it with Mary's later willingness to accept suggestions from Chinese Christian women. The work to which she refers is *The Peep of Day or, A Series of the Earliest Religious Instruction the Infant Mind is Capable of Receiving* by Favell Lee Mortimer.

[31] MEM to SEA, REA, and sisters, March 4, 1862, Morrison Family Papers.

[32] MEM to Mrs. Mary Rankin, April 9, 1862, Morrison Family Papers.

[33] MEM to sisters, April 14, 1862, Morrison Family Papers.

[34] MEM to SEA, REA, and sisters, April 29, 1862, Morrison Family Papers.

[35] In MEM to SEA, REA, and sisters, August 14-15, 1862, Morrison Family Papers, she said, "This week I commenced teaching the servants to read again as before."

[36] MEM to SEA, REA, and sisters, August 1, 1862, Morrison Family Papers.

[37] MEM to SEA and REA, October 3, 1862, Morrison Family Papers.

[38] See for example MEM to SJA and ALA, November 12-19, 1862 and MEM to SEA and REA, and CWA, December 8, 1862, Morrison Family Papers.

[39] MEM to SEA and REA, and sisters, January 19, 1863, Morrison Family Papers.

[40] MEM to SEA and REA, and ALA and CWA, February 18-19, 1863, Morrison Family Papers.

[41] MEM to SEA and REA, March 11-21, 1863, Morrison Family Papers.

[42] MEM to SEA and REA, March 11-21, 1863, Morrison Family Papers. L.N.R. [Ellen Henrietta Ranyard], *Life Work, or the Link and the Rivet* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1862) told the story of mission work by women to women in the poor districts of London. They used several strategies:

Bible Women, Clothing Clubs, and the Industrial Kitchen. This connection to the mission community in Ningpo is in addition to, and perhaps predates, connections to Mrs. Lord of the Baptist Mission, Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission and R. H. Graves of the Southern Baptist Mission. On those links see Valerie Griffiths, "Biblewomen from London to China: the transnational appropriation of a female mission idea," *Women's History Review*, 17 no. 4 (October 2008), 528.

[43] MEM to Sabbath School, First Presbyterian Church in Elizabeth, July 13, 1863, Morrison Family Papers.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] MEM to SEA and REA, SJA, ALA and CWA, April 18-20, 1863, Morrison Family Papers.

[47] MEM to SEA and REA, September 8-15, 1863, Morrison Family Papers.

[48] MEM to SEA and REA, November 5, 1863, Morrison Family Papers.

[49] MEM to SJA, ALA and CWA, December 5, 1863, Morrison Family Papers.

[50] MEM to SEA, REA, and sisters, December 22, 1863, Morrison Family Papers.

[51] MEM to SEA, REA, January 23, 1864, Morrison Family Papers.

[52] MEM to SEA, REA, and sisters, March 6, 1865, Morrison Family Papers.

[53] MEM to SEA and REA, April 25, 1864, Morrison Family Papers.

[54] MEM to Sabbath School, First Presbyterian Church in Elizabeth, August 27, 1864, Morrison Family Papers.

[55] MEM to SJA, October 3, 1864, Morrison Family Papers.

[56] MEM to Sabbath School, First Presbyterian Church in Elizabeth, January 2, 1865, Morrison Family Papers.

[57] MEM to SEA, REA, and sisters, June 1, 1863, Morrison Family Papers. In earlier letters Mary had mentioned that she had personal investments that she had her father allocate to charitable causes, such as the rebuilding of the "Colored Church" in Elizabeth after it burned down. See MEM to SEA, REA, and sisters, July 18-26, 1861, Morrison Family Papers.

[58] MEM to SEA, REA, and sisters, June 18, 1863, Morrison Family Papers.

[59] MEM to SEA, REA, and sisters, April 20, 1865, Morrison Family Papers.

[60] First Presbyterian Church of Elizabeth, NJ: Sunday School Missionary Association treasurer records, 1858-1873. Presbyterian Historical Society.

[61] *Third Annual Report of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church*, (Philadelphia: Sherman & Co., Printers, 1873), 38.

[62] *Fourth Annual Report of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church*, (Philadelphia: Sherman & Co., Printers, 1874), 52-53.

[63] *Fifth Annual Report of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church*, (Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmead Printer, 1875), 63-64.

[64] *Twenty-first Annual Report of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church*, (Philadelphia: Press of the Jas. B. Rodgers Printing Company, 1891), 47.

[65] Samuel Dodd, "Annual Report of the Ningpo Mission," September 30, 1864, *Board of Foreign Missions Correspondence and Reports: China 1837 to 1911,* Vol. 9*, Incoming, China Letters, 1869 – 1870*, no. 192.

[66] MEM to SEA and REA, February 20, 1865, Morrison Family Papers, emphasis in original.

[67] MEM to SJA and SEA, June 5-14, 1865, Morrison Family Papers, emphasis in the original.

[68] MEM to sisters, March 7, 1864, Morrison Family Papers.

[69] Helen Nevius, "Report of Mrs. Nevius' Industrial School," *Board of Foreign Missions Correspondence and Reports: China 1837 to 1911*, Vol. 11. *China Letters, 1873*, unnumbered report.

[70] MEM to Board, December 2, 1872, *Board of Foreign Missions Correspondence and Reports: China 1837 to 1911,* Vol. 10*, China Letters 1871-1872*, no. 342.

[71] MEM to Mary Morrison Mission Band, First Presbyterian Church in Elizabeth, February 10, 1874, Morrison Family Papers. See also *Women's Work for Women*, vol. V, no. 11 (January, 1876), p. 366.

[72] *Historical Sketches of the Missions under the Care of the Board of Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church*, 3rd ed. revised (Philadelphia: Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church, 1891), 45.