

Power and Piety: The Discourse of Hegemony in the History of Christian Mission and Colonialism in Asia

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complex role of Christian missions in Asia from the 16th to the 20th century through Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Using a qualitative research method and literature study technique, the research concludes that missionaries served both as evangelists and instruments of Western cultural hegemony, supporting colonial power structures. While promoting colonial dominance, missionaries also created spaces for counter-hegemony by establishing educational institutions and social services, empowering local communities with knowledge to resist colonialism. Gramsci's theory of hegemony helps reveal how missionaries facilitated interactions between colonial power and colonized societies. These interactions contributed to a process that not only supported colonial domination but also challenged it.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Christian missions and European expansion in Asia represents one of the most complex intersections in the history of religious beliefs and political power (Yoo, 2023:37). This connection unfolded across cultural, political, economic, and social dimensions, creating intricate networks of interaction that defy simple classification. Christian missions, at their core, aimed to spread religious beliefs, which, both directly and indirectly, led to significant changes in the social structures of Asian societies. Yet, simultaneously, Christian missions functioned as partners to European colonial powers, aiding in their political and economic domination of Asian nations. From this perspective, the efforts of Christian missionaries in Asia appear paradoxical. Theologically, the Gospel's preaching emphasizes spiritual salvation and humanitarian work. Politically, however, the same preaching of the Gospel often acted as a tool for Western cultural penetration, serving as a channel for colonialism.

In certain regions, missionaries played a role as intermediaries in colonial expansion, facilitating contact with indigenous communities to help establish colonial administrations (Yoo, 2023:40). Their work in studying local cultures, languages, translating indigenous literature into European languages, and setting up schools had dual purposes: spreading Christianity and introducing Western values. This, in turn, indirectly paved the way for colonial rule. However, some missionaries also took a stand in defending the rights of indigenous peoples, opposing colonial exploitation. Interestingly, the educational institutions they founded later became breeding grounds for the independence movements that emerged in Asia during the 20th century (Stucke, 2011).

This study is developed based on the premise that the complex relationship between Christian missions and colonialism can be analyzed through the lens of hegemony. By employing Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, this research seeks to explore the complexities of Christian missions and their dynamic role in colonialism in Asia from the 16th to the 20th century. Gramsci's theory provides a more insightful understanding of how Christian missions not only supported colonial powers but also contributed to the emergence of resistance movements among colonized peoples. In this context, Christian missions functioned both as instruments of colonial domination and as catalysts for the development of resistance. As such, this study differs from previous research, which viewed the relationship between Christian missions and colonialism through a binary lens.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony—explaining how dominant groups maintain power through both coercion and consensus, primarily through culture and ideology (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2011:200)—illuminates the relationship between politics and the spread of religion. In the history of colonialism in Asia, Christian missionaries operated as part of civil society, either reinforcing or challenging colonial power. In other words, Christian missions functioned both as agents of hegemony and as forces of counter-hegemony. Therefore, Gramsci's theory offers a broader perspective than simply viewing missionaries as either supporters of colonialism or as independent humanitarian actors. From this

perspective, the significance of this research lies in its advocacy for an alternative theoretical framework to better understand the complexities of Christian missions' roles in Asia during the colonial period.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The literature on Christian missions and colonialism suggests a complex, multifaceted relationship between religious missions and colonial power structures. Scholars such as Stephen Neill and José Casanova have underscored how colonial powers leveraged Christian missions as a tool for cultural domination, with the goal of "civilizing" indigenous populations through the dissemination of Western values, including modernity, individualism, and secularism (Neill, 1966; Casanova, 2023:83-100). This perspective aligns with Kyo Seong Ahn's argument that colonial expansion created opportunities for missionaries to spread Christianity, while missionaries, in turn, played a role in legitimizing colonial authority (Ahn, 2022:330-347). The collaboration between colonial administrations and missionary efforts is further explored by Lars Peter Laamann, who highlights how Protestant missionaries adapted their methods to navigate the complex political conditions in Southeast Asia, often working in tandem with colonial interests despite operating under challenging circumstances (Laamann, 2022).

However, this literature also reveals significant contradictions and ambiguities within the missionary-colonial relationship. Potana Rao introduces a perspective by acknowledging the positive contributions of Christian missions in areas such as education, healthcare, technological advancement, and the abolition of harmful social practices, as exemplified by William Carey in India (Rao, 2024:216-217). This view complicates the straightforward narrative of colonial oppression, suggesting that while missions were often intertwined with colonial objectives, they also contributed to societal development and social reform in the colonized regions. The dual legacy of Christian missions thus requires a theoretical framework that accounts for both their role in reinforcing hegemonic colonial structures and their potential to foster local empowerment and resistance. In this regard, the literature presents a compelling case for a more dialectical understanding of missionary activities, where religious missions served as both instruments of colonial control and sites for contestation and transformation.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a historical-comparative method, integrating historical analysis with cross-national comparisons to critically examine social phenomena across diverse temporal and spatial settings (Lange, 2013:3). This approach is specifically selected to investigate the discourse of hegemony in relation to the history of Christian missions and colonialism in Asia. To achieve this, a literature study technique is utilized, drawing upon an extensive range of materials, including books, journal articles, archival documents, and missionary writings. Through the detailed analysis of these sources, this study explains the dual role of missionaries as both instruments of hegemony and catalysts for counter-hegemony within the broader setting of Asian colonialism, spanning

from the 16th to the mid-20th century. In doing so, the research underscores the complexities of missionary activities and examines the interplay of religion, culture, and power within the colonial enterprise.

RESULTS

Antonio Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony

Gramsci's theory is valuable for analyzing the relationship between Christian missions and colonialism in Asia for several reasons. First, it helps explain how missionary activities contributed to colonialism, even though they operated independently of the formal structures of colonial authority. Second, it explains the peaceful transformation of religion and culture within the setting of colonialism, surpassing simplistic models of forced conversion and resistance. Third, it offers tools to understand how missionaries could initiate resistance against colonial power structures.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony describes how dominant groups maintain power not only through coercion but also through consensus (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2011:200). Power is not merely economic domination but also the ability of dominant groups to create worldviews, values, and norms that appear natural, inevitable, and beneficial to everyone. This process involves what he calls a "war of position," a long-term strategy of influencing culture and ideology to gradually reshape societal understanding (Gramsci, Buttigieg, Callari, 2011:217).

Civil society institutions play a crucial role in shaping and maintaining hegemonic control (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2011:202). Institutions such as educational bodies, religious organizations, cultural communities, and the media are used by dominant groups to control culture. Unlike state apparatuses that rely on coercion, civil society institutions work through persuasion and education, making their influence subtler but deeper. In Gramsci's view, religious institutions are significant because they often serve as guardians of traditional values while also acting as agents of social change.

Gramsci's concept of "organic intellectuals" is also relevant in analyzing the activities of missionaries in the context of colonialism (Gramsci, Buttigieg, Callari, 2011:137). Every social group creates its own organic intellectuals, whose task is to articulate and spread the worldview of that group. Thus, missionaries can be seen as the organic intellectuals of Western Christian civilization, tasked not only with spreading religious doctrine but also implicitly promoting Western cultural hegemony. However, their position is paradoxical, as they also played a role in developing local intellectual leadership through education.

Gramsci's view of hegemony as a dynamic process helps explain the complex and paradoxical role of Christian missions in the history of colonialism in Asia. Gramsci emphasized that hegemony is never achieved automatically but must be negotiated (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2011:163). This view suggests that missionaries could act as agents of Western hegemony while simultaneously creating spaces for counter-hegemony, i.e., resistance to hegemony. Missionary work in education and social reform produced unintended consequences that challenged colonial power structures.

Furthermore, Gramsci introduced the concept of the “historical bloc,” referring to alliances of social forces that maintain hegemonic control (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2011:174). In Asia, missionaries occupied an ambiguous position within the phases of colonial history. Although generally aligned with Western imperial interests, they also developed independent relationships with local communities. Their position at the intersection of religion, culture, and politics made missionaries both critical to – and disruptive of – the colonial hegemony.

Gramsci also emphasized the importance of “common sense,” a worldview that is uncritical and largely unconscious (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2011: 51). Through education, healthcare, and social work, missionaries helped shape the worldview of colonized societies. “Common sense” was formed through Western concepts of modernity, while occasionally attempting to adapt elements of local culture.

Christian Mission during the Portuguese-Spanish Era

The early phase of Christian missionary activity in Asia coincided with the maritime expansion of Portugal and Spain in the 15th and 16th centuries, marking the beginning of systematic efforts to establish Western hegemony. The Christian mission was initiated under the *padroado* (Portugal) and *patronato* (Spain) systems. In 1494, Pope Alexander VI divided the territories of Asia and the Americas between Spain and Portugal, assigning them the mission of Christianizing local populations.

The protection of the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs under the *padroado/patronato* had a positive impact on Christian missions, as they funded all necessary expenses (Evers, 2014:67). These systems represented Gramsci’s concept of “hegemonic apparatus”, where religious and political authority were intertwined to create an institutional framework for extending power (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2011:201). The Iberian monarchs not only supported missionary activities but also utilized missionaries as agents of colonial expansion.

The Jesuits were the most prominent missionary order during this period. The Christianization mission began with the arrival of Francis Xavier (1506–1552) in India in 1542, followed by his missions to Malacca (1545), the Moluccas (1546), Japan (1549), and China (1552) (Thanh, 2019:400–426). Xavier’s work can be understood as the beginning of cultural negotiation and hegemonic penetration. His approach emphasized the usage of local languages and the adaptation of Christian teachings to the local cultural background, reflecting efforts to transform existing cultural systems.

The Jesuits employed the method of accommodation, presenting Christianity within the framework of local culture while gradually introducing European values. This approach favored consensus over coercion. Xavier’s success, as well as that of subsequent missionaries, was driven by their study of local cultures and their ability to spread Christianity in ways compatible with the intellectual and social traditions of the communities they served (Thanh, 2019:415). However, the success of the Jesuits eventually aroused the suspicion of Tokugawa rulers in Japan. Christianity was perceived as a threat, leading to the persecution and eventual expulsion of European missionaries in the 17th century.

Goa, the epicenter of Portuguese influence in Asia, served as a laboratory for hegemony. The establishment of educational institutions, the introduction of the printing press, and the development of Indo-Portuguese culture operated as tools for cultivating what Gramsci described as “conscious leadership” (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2011:49). Jesuit missionaries played a pivotal role in these developments, functioning not only as religious emissaries but also as scholars, diplomats, and cultural intermediaries. Through their efforts in translation, education, and scholarship, they significantly contributed to the creation of new knowledge systems (Henn, 2014:65).

In China, the missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) introduced Christianity in harmony with Confucian concepts, aiming to establish intellectual authority among Chinese elites (Duraj, 2024:37). Ricci did not only teach Christian doctrines but also deeply studied Chinese language and culture, producing scholarly works in Chinese. His approach illustrated how hegemony functioned through the transformation of Asia’s cultural frameworks. By engaging with local values, Ricci sought to foster an understanding of Christianity that resonated with the Chinese worldview.

However, the Portuguese-Spanish era also revealed significant tensions, exemplified by the Rites Controversy of the 17th and 18th centuries (Hinds, 2016:8). This theological and cultural debate revolved around the integration of local customs into Christian practices in regions like China and India. At its core, the controversy questioned whether indigenous rituals could be accommodated within Christian worship, underscoring the complex interplay between religion, culture, and missionary authority in Asia. While Jesuit missionaries, such as Matteo Ricci, advocated for cultural adaptation to facilitate conversion, other orders, like the Dominicans and Franciscans, resisted, viewing these practices as incompatible with Christian orthodoxy.

These debates, which ultimately led to papal intervention, underscored the intricate relationship between religious missions and cultural domination (Duraj, 2024:41). The controversy revealed the tension between accommodating local traditions and maintaining doctrinal purity, reflecting broader issues of authority, control, and the challenges of balancing cultural sensitivity with theological consistency within the Church’s global mission. The papal rulings not only shaped the strategies of missionaries but also reinforced the centrality of European ecclesiastical authority, often at the expense of local cultural expressions. This dynamic highlighted the complexities of cross-cultural evangelism and its enduring implications for the development of Christian communities in Asia.

This period also saw the establishment of lasting institutional structures, such as seminaries, public schools, and churches, which not only facilitated the spread of Christianity but also entrenched networks of cultural and religious influence. These institutions played a pivotal role in shaping Asian Christian communities, embedding European norms and practices that often marginalized indigenous expressions of faith. This phenomenon illustrates how hegemonic structures, once established, can persist and adapt, exerting influence even amid significant shifts in political power and societal transformation.

Christian Mission during the Trading Company Era

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Protestant trading companies like the East India Company (EIC) and the Dutch *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) marked a significant shift in the relationship between Christian missions and colonialism. In contrast to the Catholic powers of Portugal and Spain, these companies adopted a more pragmatic approach, distancing themselves from missionary activities. The EIC and VOC refrained from directly supporting missionaries, driven by both practical and ideological concerns. They feared that Christianization could provoke local resistance, potentially disrupting profitable trade relations and undermining their colonial objectives.

In India, the East India Company (EIC) maintained close ties with the Mughal Empire, leading to restrictions on missionary activities (Clulow & Mostert, 2018:59-64). As a result, British missionary William Carey, who arrived in Bengal in 1793, had to operate from Serampore, outside of EIC-controlled territories (Joice, 2021:99-103). Similarly, the EIC initially resisted Christian missions in Myanmar due to concerns about provoking local resistance. However, after Britain's victory in the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826), the EIC allowed American missionary Adoniram Judson to work in Myanmar starting in 1813 (De Jong, 2023:823-824). Christian mission schools in Yangon and Mandalay taught English and introduced Burmese youth to Western culture. Another missionary, George Boardman, established European-style schools for the Karen people, one of Myanmar's largest Christian ethnic groups (Hayami, 2018:256-257).

Protestantism was introduced to Sri Lanka in 1658 by Dutch missionaries following the VOC's victory over the Portuguese (De Leede & Rupesinghe, 2023:502). In 1739, Georg Friedrich Schmidt, a missionary of the Dutch Reformed Church, arrived and established a Dutch-language school in Jaffna, aiming to spread both education and religious teachings. The activities of the Dutch Reformed Church not only advanced the Protestant faith but also embedded Western values and practices that aligned closely with the VOC's colonial and economic interests, creating a lasting legacy of cultural and religious influence in the region.

In Indonesia, the VOC adopted a pragmatic policy toward local religions, carefully avoiding confrontations that might disrupt trade. Nevertheless, the VOC permitted the Dutch Reformed Church to establish schools in the Moluccas as early as 1607. Dutch missionaries, serving as intermediaries, not only advanced religious education but also introduced Western values that aligned with and reinforced colonial objectives. Christians were organized into the *Corpus Christianum*, a religious community structured around Christian systems and values, which became a tool for both spiritual governance and sociopolitical control in the colonial framework (End, 2018:67).

During this period, the linguistic work of missionaries played a pivotal role in negotiating hegemony. The translation of the Bible and Christian literature into local languages was not only for evangelism but also had far-reaching cultural impacts. For instance, William Carey standardized Bengali, Marathi, and Sanskrit, created dictionaries, and operated a printing press (Schirmacher,

2013:59–60, 103). In this way, missionaries, while aiming to preserve local languages, also introduced Western concepts, fostering a form of linguistic hegemony.

Overall, the trading company era marked an important transition in the relationship between Christian missions and colonialism. Despite occasional tensions with colonial authorities, Christian missionaries contributed to hegemonic processes through influence in education, linguistics, and culture. These efforts laid the groundwork for more systematic collaboration between missions and colonial administration in the 19th century.

Christian Mission during the Peak of Colonialism

The 19th century marked the peak of collaboration between Christian missions and colonialism within the broader civilizing project in Asia. During this period, religious missions evolved into key instruments of cultural hegemony. Missionaries played an increasingly critical role in propagating the notion of Western cultural superiority, aligning their activities with the objectives of colonial powers. This collaboration represented a significant shift from earlier periods, as missionary endeavors became more systematic and embedded within colonial administrative structures and ideological frameworks. On the other hand, colonial authority recognized the strategic benefits of utilizing missionaries to establish and sustain cultural hegemony, thus supporting their long-term political and economic interests.

Educational institutions played several key hegemonic roles during this period. First, missionaries cultivated a class of local elites who were well-versed in Western culture and could serve as intermediaries between colonial authorities and local societies. While these educated elites often maintained some ties to their traditional culture, they increasingly adopted Western values and ideas, thereby becoming agents of hegemonic ideology within their own communities. For instance, in Korea, Henry Appenzeller founded Pai Chai Hak Dang in 1885, which not only introduced Western values but also produced a generation of leaders instrumental in Korea's later social reforms (Stucke, 2011b:62–63).

Missionary-led efforts to create local elites represented one of the most significant manifestations of hegemony during this era. Institutions such as Serampore College (founded by William Carey in 1818, India), Anglo-Chinese College (founded by Robert Morrison in 1818, Malacca), St. John's College (founded by the Church Missionary Society in Agra, India), and Meiji Gakuin in Japan (founded by James Curtis Hepburn in 1886) served as centers for producing "organic intellectuals" for colonized nations (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2011:174). The curriculum in these missionary institutions prioritized Western systems of knowledge while sidelining or revising local intellectual traditions. Although indigenous languages and texts were taught, they were framed entirely within Western epistemological paradigms. This subtle operation of cultural hegemony through education exemplifies how Western dominance was consolidated through the dissemination of knowledge systems, which redefined both intellectual and cultural landscapes across Asia.

Christian missions also played a hegemonic role in the development of Western medical systems. In China, Peter Parker opened the *Canton Hospital* in 1835, introducing Western medicine and modern surgical techniques (Jiayi & Xiaoyu, 2024:26–27). Similarly, German missionary institutions established healthcare centers in Indonesia during the late 19th century, bringing Western medical systems to the Batak community in Sumatra. These efforts not only addressed local health needs but also served as a means of cultural exchange, fostering engagement with Western practices and values through medical care (Hutauruk, 2011:269–272).

While healthcare missions provided medical treatment as part of their evangelization efforts, they also displaced traditional Asian medical knowledge. Historian Michael Lazich described this phenomenon as a project of “seeking souls through the eyes of blind” (Lazich, 2006:59–86). From a Gramscian perspective, healthcare missions served to establish moral authority, which was essential for hegemonic control. These missions demonstrated the technological and scientific superiority of the West over Asia. Missionaries also trained local medical practitioners in Western techniques, creating a class of professionals shaped by Western scientific paradigms. This process exemplifies how technological hegemony was achieved through the transformation of professional and intellectual practices.

Subsequently, the translation of Christian texts in Asia went beyond mere linguistic conversion; it became a critical tool for cultural transformation. In Japan, James Curtis Hepburn translated the Bible into Japanese and published a Japanese-English dictionary in 1867. In China, Robert Morrison translated the Bible into Mandarin in 1823, while in Korea, John Ross completed the translation into Korean in 1887. Similarly, Dutch missionaries in Indonesia translated the Bible into various local languages, aiding the spread of Christianity among native populations.

The translation of Christian texts in Asia extended far beyond mere linguistic conversion. It became a pivotal tool for cultural transformation and engagement. In Japan, James Curtis Hepburn not only translated the Bible into Japanese but also published a Japanese-English dictionary in 1867, facilitating cross-cultural understanding (Osterkamp, 2024:111–112). In China, Robert Morrison completed the first Mandarin translation of the Bible in 1823, laying the foundation for the spread of Christianity in Chinese-speaking regions (Xian, 2024). Similarly, in Korea, John Ross finalized the Korean Bible translation in 1887, significantly advancing the growth of Christian communities there (Kim & Chung, 2024:4). In Indonesia, Dutch missionaries undertook the monumental task of translating the Bible into various local languages, enabling broader access to Christian teachings and supporting the indigenization of the faith (Chambert-Loir, 2021). These efforts not only promoted literacy but also reshaped local cultures through the integration of Christian ideologies.

The translation process was more than linguistic adaptation but necessitated the introduction of new concepts and categories of thought, reshaping the intellectual landscape of local societies. Missionaries often encountered the challenge of finding equivalent terms for complex Christian theological ideas, leading to the creation of new vocabulary and conceptual frameworks. As a result, these translations served not only as tools for

communication but also as powerful vehicles for transmitting foreign ideologies and reshaping local worldviews, embedding Christian thought into the fabric of indigenous cultures.

The dissemination of these translated texts through missionary printing presses facilitated the creation of networks for textual circulation and new forms of authority. These networks bypassed traditional methods of knowledge transmission, generating what can be called “cultural production” that prioritized Western textual frameworks (Gramsci, Buttigieg, Callari, 2011:340). Through the medium of printing, Christian texts became more widely accessible, accelerating the spread of Christian teachings and values. The books published by missionary organizations did more than propagate religious content—they legitimized Western ideological hegemony. As such, the processes of translation and printing became not just religious tools but also mechanisms for constructing broader cultural hegemony, reshaping local worldviews in the process.

Finally, in regions like Sarawak, Christian missions were incorporated into colonial policies under the Brooke dynasty during the mid-19th century. Rajah Brooke viewed missionaries as essential allies in promoting social and moral stability among the Dayak and other indigenous groups. For Brooke, Christian missions were not solely focused on religious conversion; they were integral to the broader goal of “civilizing” local populations and advancing Western values that aligned with his colonial objectives. By fostering Christian teachings, he aimed to reshape indigenous societies in a manner that supported colonial governance and furthered the expansion of European influence in the region (Ahmad, 2022:52–55).

However, in other regions, this integration of Christian missions and colonial policies faced resistance from both traditional religious authorities and newly educated elites, who began to challenge colonial practices. For example, graduates from institutions like Serampore College in India and *Meiji Gakuin* in Japan began to voice criticism against colonialism, revealing that hegemonic institutions could also serve as platforms for counter-hegemonic movements. Similarly, in Sumatra, students from the *Sekolah Anak Raja Narumonda*, a school founded by German missionaries for indigenous elites, resisted both colonial and missionary authority (Hutauruk, 2011:315–317).

Overall, the 19th century marked the peak of collaboration between Christian missions and colonialism, with missions playing a crucial role in advancing cultural, educational, and ideological hegemony. Missionaries were not only agents of religious conversion but also key instruments in the dissemination of Western values, education systems, and political ideologies. Despite pockets of resistance, the influence of Christian missions profoundly shaped the cultural and intellectual landscapes of Asia, often reshaping local traditions and worldviews. This legacy, forged through the intersection of faith and colonial power, endured long after the colonial era, continuing to influence social structures and identity in the region.

Christian Mission in the Era of Nationalism

The relationship between Christian missions and colonialism became increasingly complex during the late colonial period, reflecting the contradictions inherent within the hegemonic system. This era was marked by paradoxes that challenged simplistic narratives about missionary involvement in colonial power structures. While missionaries generally supported colonial frameworks, several began to critique the exploitation and injustice they witnessed, exposing the internal tensions within the missionary movement. These contradictions revealed that missionary actions were not monolithic, as many began to question their roles within colonial regimes and the impact of their work on indigenous communities.

A notable example of this shift is Charles Freer Andrews (1871-1940) in India, who joined the Cambridge Mission to Delhi in 1904. Initially supportive of the British colonial project, Andrews became disillusioned with the racism and mistreatment of Indians by British officials (David, 2018:299; Giorgiov, 2013:125-126). His growing solidarity with native students and support for India's political aspirations marked a significant turning point. Andrews began voicing anti-colonial opinions in newspapers and engaged actively with the Indian National Congress (David, 2018:300). His later activism in resolving strikes and supporting social movements signified a shift from missionary roles as colonial allies to participants in anti-colonial struggles. Andrews also developed close friendships with key figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, symbolizing his transformation from a supporter of colonialism to a critic of imperial power (David, 2018:300).

Similarly, American missionary Homer Hulbert (1863-1949) in Korea became a staunch supporter of Korean independence after witnessing Japan's imperialist actions. Arriving in Korea in 1886 to teach English at the Royal English School, Hulbert initially sought to spread Western education but soon became disillusioned by Japan's growing control over Korea. He criticized Japan's plan to make Korea a protectorate, viewing Japan's version of modernization as inferior to the Christian-based form of progress he advocated (Hulbert, 2014:25). Hulbert's growing discontent with Japanese imperialism led him to actively support Korean nationalists, culminating in his involvement with the Korean delegation at the Second International Peace Conference in 1907. This marked a significant shift in his role, as he transitioned from a missionary to an outspoken anti-colonial activist, advocating for Korea's sovereignty on the international stage (Hulbert, 2014:46-48).

These transformations in missionary roles represented a "crisis of authority" within the hegemonic system, wherein organic intellectuals began to question and challenge the very structures they had once supported (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2011:156). As missionaries like Andrews and Hulbert grew increasingly disillusioned with colonialism, their solidarity with local communities and their exposure to the realities of imperial oppression prompted a shift in their perspectives. These shifts highlighted how engagement with indigenous populations could lead missionaries to develop counter-hegemonic views, challenging the colonial narrative and embracing anti-colonial stances.

This rethinking of their roles within the colonial project illustrates the complexities of missionary work, where initial alignment with imperial power could evolve into active opposition to the very structures they had once helped to uphold.

Missionary-led education during this period had a dual impact, as it both supported colonial governance and fostered nationalist movements. Mission schools created a class of local elites capable of administering colonial rule, yet these institutions also introduced ideas of democracy, nationalism, and self-determination. The educational framework thus inadvertently laid the foundation for challenging colonial rule (Hammond, 2023:514-533).

For example, Yonsei University in Korea produced both colonial administrators and nationalist leaders. Similarly, St. Stephen's College in India became a center of nationalist thought, nurturing intellectuals who later played significant roles in the independence movement, such as Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed (1905-1977), former President of India, and Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (1924-1988), a nationalist leader who eventually became President of Pakistan. Mission schools in Malaysia also produced leaders who contributed to anti-colonial efforts, such as Tunku Abdul Rahman, a Malay nationalist and the first Prime Minister of Malaysia, who graduated from a Christian school in Penang. The complex legacy of missionary education underscores the paradoxical roles of Christian institutions in both supporting colonial power and fostering the rise of nationalism, revealing how missionary education could simultaneously reinforce and challenge imperial control.

A pivotal development during this period was the emergence of indigenous Christian identities that accepted yet transformed Western religious concepts. The indigenization of Christianity demonstrated how marginalized groups could reinterpret hegemonic cultural forms to better align with their own experiences and contexts.

In China, movements like the True Jesus Church (1917) founded in 1917 in Beijing by Paul Wei Enbo (1879-1919)(Lian, 2010:48), and the Little Flock (1920s) founded by Watchman Nee (1903-1972) in the 1920s, (Lian, 2010:155-156) introduced distinctly Chinese expressions of Christianity, challenging Western missionary authority while maintaining core Christian teachings. Similarly, in India, figures like Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) blended Hindu philosophical concepts with Christian theology to create a unique form of Christianity that resonated with the local population.

Ramabai's Arya Mahila Samaj promoted education and women's rights, marking a significant intersection of religious and social reform (Anagol, 2017:62). Likewise, Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929) synthesized Christian theology with Indian ascetic traditions, making Christian teachings more relatable to Indian audiences (Mukherjee, 2017:2). These indigenous movements represented significant cultural shifts, reflecting the capacity of subaltern groups to adapt and modify dominant cultural forms in ways that resonated with local identities.

The late colonial period also saw a push for institutional autonomy and the rise of indigenous leadership within Christian churches. These efforts were often

marked by tensions with both conservative missionaries and colonial authorities, reflecting the complex relationships between religious independence and political aspirations.

In Indonesia, the establishment of the *Hatopan Kristen Batak* (HKB) in 1917 signified a movement toward religious and cultural autonomy. Though rooted in Christian teachings, the organization increasingly distanced itself from missionary control and became a symbol of opposition to the Dutch government, demonstrating an anti-colonial stance (Hutauruk, 2011:315–317). Similarly, the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (Philippine Independent Church), founded in 1902 by Gregorio Aglipay, blended Catholic traditions with Filipino nationalist aspirations, challenging both Spanish colonial rule and the Roman Catholic Church's authority (Smit, 2024:24).

In India, the rise of the South Indian Church, particularly through the efforts of V.S. Azariah, marked a significant milestone in the push for indigenous church leadership. Azariah advocated for Indian-style worship and the development of local leadership, making Christianity more culturally relevant to the Indian context (Wang, 2020:283–309). In China, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, founded in the 1950s, aimed to establish a self-sustaining, independent church free from Western missionary control (Yilu, 2020:26–33). Despite initial resistance from missionaries, the movement gained momentum in the wake of rising Chinese nationalism, demonstrating how religious autonomy became intertwined with political independence.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the 16th century to the mid-20th century, Christian missions in Asia served both as tools for evangelism and as instruments of colonial hegemony, establishing Western cultural dominance over Asian nations. The era of Portuguese and Spanish influence marked the beginning of Western hegemony in Asia, followed by the activities of trading companies, and later, the establishment of colonial rule. In the 19th century, Christian missions became integral to the colonial project of “civilizing” Asia, aiming to establish cultural hegemony and reinforce colonial control.

By the end of the colonial period, the relationship between Christian missions and colonial power had become more complex. Missionaries, while initially supporting colonial structures, began to criticize the exploitation they witnessed. They founded educational institutions that, while promoting Western values, also nurtured anti-colonial nationalism.

The use of social theory, particularly Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex relationship between Christian missions, colonialism, and indigenous resistance in Asia. By applying this theory, scholars can better analyze how missionaries acted as both agents of Western cultural dissemination and as catalysts for local resistance. Social theory highlights the paradoxical role of missions in fostering both colonial control and anti-colonial nationalism. It is crucial to examine the ways in which educational institutions and social services established by missionaries empowered local communities, enabling them to challenge colonial authority and

contribute to independence movements. This approach enriches the historical understanding of the intersection between religion, power, and social change in Asia.

FURTHER STUDY

Based on the limitations of this study, future research could explore the long-term impact of missionary activities on post-colonial Asian societies, particularly how educational and social services contributed to the development of local leadership and nationalist movements. Additionally, more focused case studies on specific regions or missions, such as those in India, China, or Southeast Asia, could provide deeper insights into the localized experiences of mission-driven hegemony and resistance. Exploring the intersection of missionary work and indigenous religious practices could also offer a better understanding of the adaptability and transformation of Christianity in Asia during the colonial period. Finally, comparative studies between different colonial powers, such as the British, Dutch, and French, could reveal variations in missionary influence and its effects on cultural hegemony in Asia.

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