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Abstract

Evangelization is a cornerstone of Christianity. Yet, missionary work is shrouded in mystery, with the endeavor being met with a range of reactions. Missions are critiqued for cultural erosion, physical and psychological distress, and its ties to imperialism. Scholarship has focused on the cultural benefits of evangelization, such as education improvements and cultural fusion.

While the missions have been studied through formal documentations, postcards remain understudied as cultural artifacts of missionary representation. The purpose of this study is to interrogate the representations of proselytization, examining its implications through the lens of a common means of social exchange.

Visual rhetoric will be used to note how these depictions challenge and corroborate scholarly discourse. Visual rhetoric involves images, symbols, and optical elements to persuade perceptions and craft new understandings. Written rhetoric entails the use of language to persuade and create meaning.

Though limited by the card's Christian viewpoint, their perspective supplies scholars with an understanding of how religious groups respond to criticism.

The methodology was an in-depth analysis of the postcards regarding their rhetoric. This examination was compared with secondary sources to ensure the analysis was grounded in ongoing discourse.

The results suggest postcards depictions concur with scholarship concerning ties to imperialism, syncretism, and educational benefits. Certain postcards reflect an ecumenical shift. Future scholarship should address further depictions to gain a robust understanding of how missionary culture was represented by Christian groups at this time.

Resources



Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Michael Neal and my UROP leaders for their guidance during this research endeavor. As a student who was relatively new to the research process, I appreciate the support and knowledge that both the program and my mentor imparted to me.

Syncretism

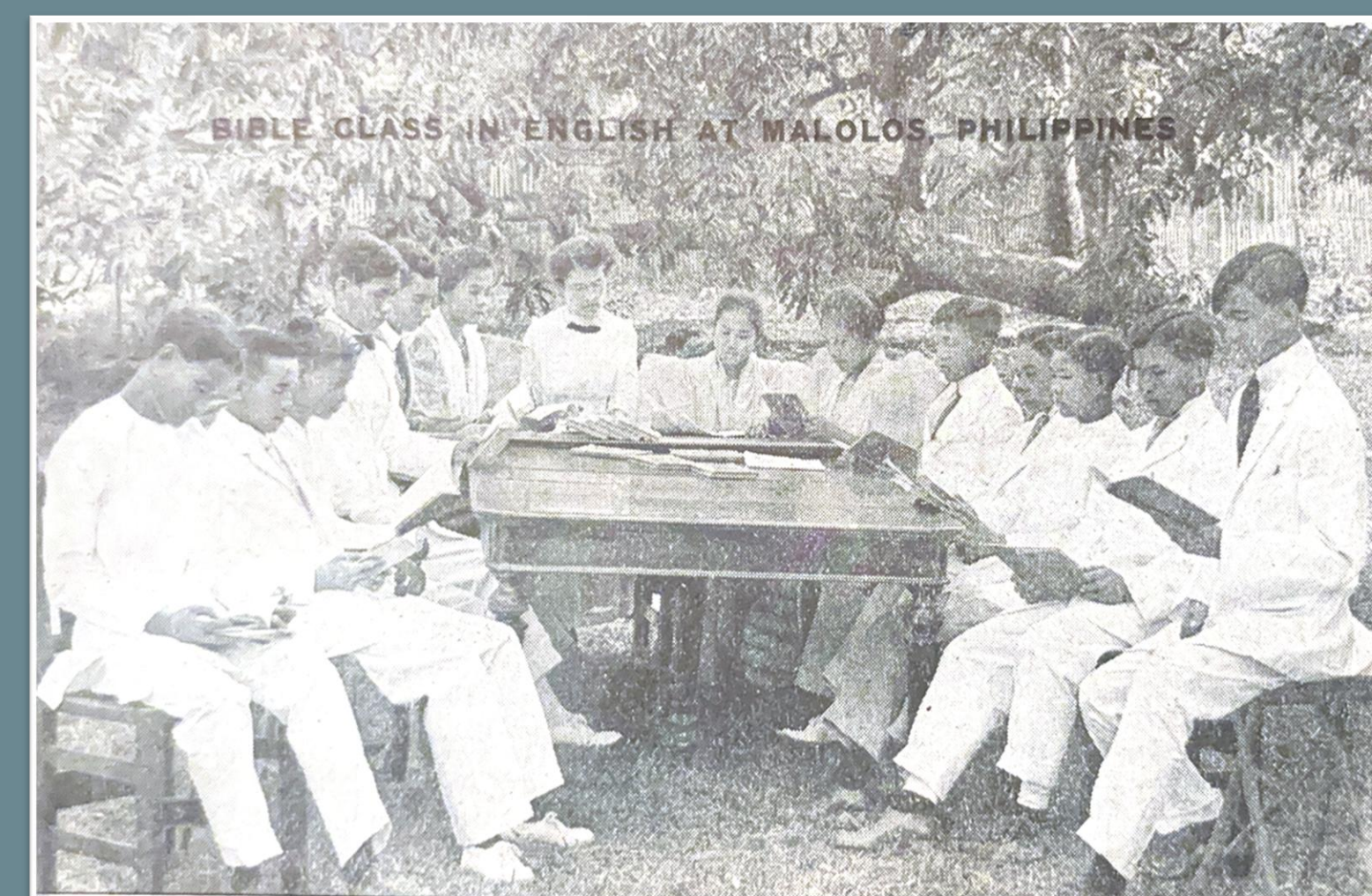


Father Marquette is positioned as a leader being blessed by his flock before his notorious journey. The native group have adopted a Christian style and appear comfortable.

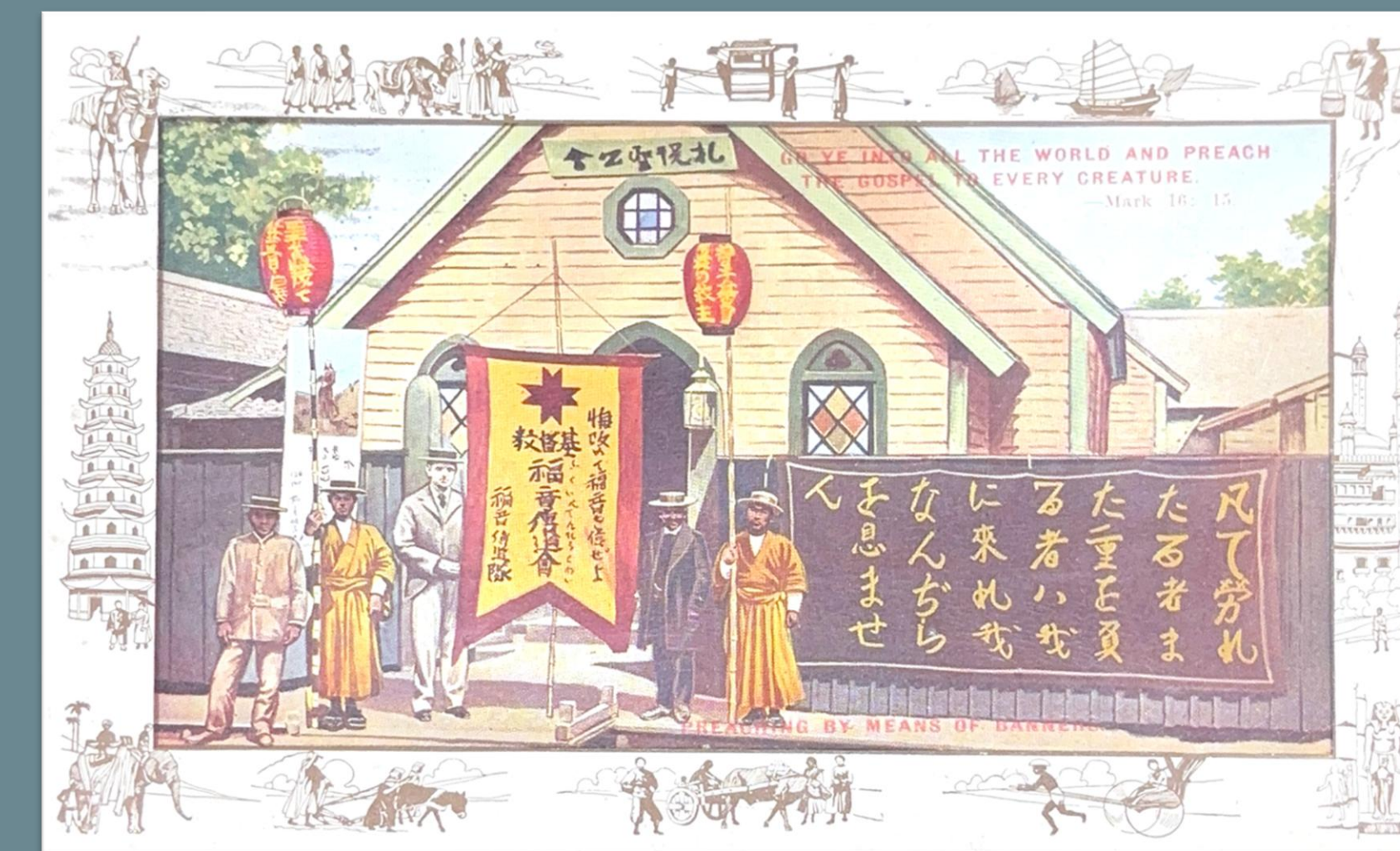


The "Coming of the Cross" directly points to the arrival of the cleric and Christ. The natives appear trusting of the cleric, grasping his hand and pointing to the Cross with reverential awe.

A National Mission



The Methodist church leads a Bible class in English. The Philippines was a U.S. imperial territory. This evangelical effort was tied to the American hope to promote cultural integration.



Mark 16:15 is quoted, situating this mission's motivations with the Christian faith as opposed to American expansionism. Similarly to the Catholic approach, this Protestant mission has allowed the cultures to fuse.

Educational Endeavors



The African students receive their First Communion with a reverential demeanor.



Supplies arrive to the convent, leading to joyous celebrations.

Methodology:

A qualitative approach was adopted and observational data was acquired. The locations were selected based on availability. Nonetheless, an array of places were chosen—the Philippines, Africa, the Americas—to ensure representative conclusions.

Postcards were collected through archival database and online sellers. The rhetoric was analyzed through guidance from discourse in the field of religious studies.

Three aspects of missionary work were examined: syncretism, imperialism, and educational changes. This did limit our scope. Yet it directed and deepened the analysis. Themes were extracted based on prior scholarship on missional work.

Eight cards were examined individually and imputed into an archival database. Following this, the cards were compiled into an exhibit where the larger question of how evangelical efforts were displayed in the twentieth century was dissected.

The primary focus centered on the cultural, religious, and educational implications within each card; based on the attributes of an image, codes were formed. These codes related to consistent thematic trends, enabling deeper conclusions to be formed.

Results

- The cards were broken down into three categories: Syncretism, National Missions, and Educational Endeavors.
- These cards substantiated the leading role of the clergy while highlighting positive interactions between diverse cultures.
- The ties between imperialism and missionary work are confirmed. In the Philippines, the Bible classes were held in English to further deepen assimilation to American culture.
- The postcard relating to the Chinese group reveals a different facet to the issue: the Protestant mission is motivated by their faith, though a commitment to American culture can be discerned.
- The educational component of missional work is displayed as being joyful and reverential. The White Sisters point to the female's approach to conversion.

Implications

- Syncretism** → addressed how clergy guided this process, becoming dominating figures even as they welcomed other traditions. This glorification is connected to the ecumenical shift in the twentieth century, touching on the Church's commitment to interfaith peace.
- National Mission** → postcards related to American presence in a foreign land focus on assimilation, a commitment to preserve American ideals, and a hope to spread the Word of God. Cultural fusion could still be discerned.
- The Educational** → Underscores the maternal and nurturing ideals of missionary work, connecting evangelization with beloved familial goals as they rear the African children in the faith.