

"Scheduling the Blind and Deaf of China: Mary West Niles (1854-1931), Annetta Thompson Mills (1853-1929), and the Missionary Frame of Mind"

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Abstract: Mary West Niles and Annetta Thompson both came to China in the 1880s, but under quite different circumstances. Both ended up founding schools for handicapped children, one in Canton for blind girls, the other in Dengzhou and Chifu for deaf boys. The paper compares the two missionaries and their schools, then delves into the reasons for the near-coincidences in time and purpose. The discovery of new tools for helping the blind and deaf from earlier in the nineteenth century was an important incentive for their work. Another was a gradual shift in attitude among Presbyterians and others toward specialized charitable outreach. A third was the receptivity of the Chinese government to their sort of undertaking, which was greater in the case of the blind than the deaf. One important legacy of both enterprises was the training of Chinese personnel, who adapted the new techniques to Chinese language and circumstances. Traces of the old schools can still be found in China today, though in most ways the old has been left behind.