CONCLUSION

In what ways did missionary work and male self-making coincide during the late nineteenth century? What new insights can be gained from this study? Preceding Chapters have given ample evidence of the omnipresence, but also to the fact that it was a contested sight, of the theme of social advance among these workers. Instead of abandoning the hypothesis that their lives can be understood through the prism of self-making, on the basis that it rests on a reductionist assumption, we should say that it was a different kind of self-making, one with a logic of its own. If male advice manuals had been talking about the gains that could be made in the modern world by being dextrous and conscientious, the missionary world, at least during the latter half of the nineteenth century, pointed at the importance of the respectable (i.e. bourgeois) Christian marriage. Granted that faith missions emphasised the importance of evangelism and the need for unusual efforts to reach the still un-reached, they simultaneously understood (just like most other missions at this time) the Christian family to be an important means of Christianising the 'heathen'. Together with their children, husband and wife were supposed to become a tangible witness to the blessings of the Christian home (and the gains of Western civilisation). They were to observe the rules of Western propriety, making their house a sober, chaste, clean and well-furnished refuge in the midst of a chaotic idolatrous world; a place to be coveted by the native population. It was above all by emphasising this middle-class concept of the Christian home that the themes of social advance and self-reform did become integral parts of the life the male missionary. Whatever was his background, he was supposed to be in conformity with this pattern and to alter his tastes and his behaviour accordingly. Even the recruits of the IMA/C&MA studied in this book, who had been given little training and had not imbibed the humble lower middle-class air of the Missionary Training College, struggled to make this ideal their own. It is evident that this incentive towards being in conformity with middle-class patterns also produced other results; some of these men’s yearning to acquire for themselves a ‘priestly’ identity (within a religious environment that championed the spiritually endowed lay preacher) may be seen as another example of such a tendency.
To a considerable extent the seizure of such middle-class patterns, some of which were not only sanctioned but prescribed by the anonymous authority of Protestant missionary discourse, harmonised with the modest ambitions frequently to be found among such men and women. This close correspondence between desires and demands may explain, to a considerable extent, the relative invisibility of their prior working-class/rural *habitus*. Some of their ‘irregularities’—in particular relating to the division of work between the men and the women—have here been explained by reference to the order of rural life, but apart from that the ‘normality’ of the urban lower middle-classes prevailed. Is the concept of *habitus* of any use when trying to understand these people? It is decidedly of much help when we try to understand their increased commitment to Swedish cultural traditions while in China; to rehearse their ethnic identity was their habitual response to being forced to live in a radically alien society. Like many other missionaries they succumbed to the temptation (and the painful need) of turning their homes from models of Christian life into European refuges; they too found it difficult to alter their way of life and appear like the Chinese. Seen from a class perspective, it is wise to be thinking of their *habitus* as not only an innate ‘conservative’ tendency, but also as a mental state that incorporated the very concepts of change and advance. In rapidly industrialising Sweden, within which old customs and established ‘career paths’ were replaced within the new social order, members of the ‘lower orders’ simply had to prepare themselves for changes in order to survive. It is not unreasonable to assume that such a mood was an integral part of their *habitus* and therefore may have helped them to prepare for the reforms that were demanded of a missionary.

From what has been written above we may easily assume that their road to middle-class life met with few obstacles. Contrary to what has often been assumed, these missionaries did behave very similar to other, and much more respectable, workers in China. They should not be understood as farm-hands for which the garb of a Western missionary never was made to fit. The idea that these lay workers represented an inferior (or better) kind of missionary has therefore to be called into question. If they were odd it was since they tended to be a little more attached to old-fashioned ideals rooted in Swedish rural life.1

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1 Their ideal of manhood may be compared to the ‘fighting masculinity’ in early fundamentalism, see Bendroth, *Fundamentalism & Gender*, pp. 13–30.