

**Chinese Christianity:  
An Introduction to the Literature**

**G. Wright Doyle**

## Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b>	17
<b>Introduction:</b> “The Chinese Church in Context,” By G. Wright Doyle	19
<b>Reviews of Books, Presentations, and Articles</b>	
<i>A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume I: Beginnings to 1500</i> By Samuel Hugh Moffett	34
<i>A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume II: 1500-1900</i> By Samuel Hugh Moffett	39
<i>A Living Sacrifice: The Life Story of Allen Yuan</i> By Lydia Lee	42
<i>A New History of Christianity in China</i> By Daniel H. Bays: Part I	46
<i>A New History of Christianity in China</i> By Daniel H. Bays: Part II	49
<i>A New History of Christianity in China</i> By Daniel H. Bays: Part III: Conclusion	53
<i>A Protestant Church in Communist China: Moore Memorial Church Shanghai, 1949-1989</i> By John Craig William Keating	59
<i>A Star in the East: The Rise of Christianity in China</i> By Rodney Stark and Xiuhua Wang	65
<i>A Stone Made Smooth</i> By Wong Ming-Dao	71
<i>Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mingdao’s Stand for the Persecuted Church in China</i> By Thomas Alan Harvey	72
<i>After Imperialism: Christian Identity in China and the Global Evangelical Movement</i> Edited by Richard R. Cook and David W. Pao	75
<i>Asia’s Religions: Christianity’s Momentous Encounter with Paganism</i> By Lit-sen Chang	80
<i>Bold as a Lamb: Pastor Samuel Lamb and the Underground Church of China</i> By Ken Anderson	82
<i>China: Ancient Culture, Modern Society</i> By Peter Xiaoming Yu and G. Wright Doyle	83
<i>China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future</i> Edited by Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu	87

<i>China's Book of Martyrs: Volume I: The Church in China</i> By Paul Hattaway	108
<i>China's Next Generation: New China, New Church, New World</i> By Luis Bush, Brent Fulton, and a Christian Worker in China	112
<i>China's Urban Christians: A Light That Cannot Be Hidden</i> By Brent Fulton	115
<i>China's Reforming Churches: Mission, Polity, and Ministry in the Next Christendom</i> Edited by Bruce P. Baugus	122
"Chinese Biblical Studies: Issues in Understanding and Interpretation" By G. Wright Doyle	129
"Chinese Christian Unity, Indigenization, and the Role(s) of the Missionary" By G. Wright Doyle	135
<i>Chinese Christianity: An Interplay between Global and Local Perspectives</i> By Peter Tze Ming Ng	139
<i>Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities</i> By Fenggang Yang	145
<i>Chinese Theology: Text and Context</i> By Chloe Starr	149
<i>Christian China and the Light of the World: Miraculous Stories from China's Great Awakening</i> , By David Wang with Georgina Sam	170
"Christianity and China's Moral Crisis" By G. Wright Doyle	175
<i>Christianity and Chinese Culture</i> Edited by Miikka Roukanen and Paulos Huang: Part I: Confucianism	183
<i>Christianity and Chinese Culture</i> Edited by Miikka Roukanen and Paulos Huang: Part II: Chinese Religions	189
<i>Christianity and Chinese Culture</i> Edited by Miikka Roukanen and Paulos Huang: Part III: Contemporary Context	193
<i>Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present</i> Edited by Daniel H. Bays	198
<i>Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000</i> By Jean-Pierre Charbonnier	201
<i>Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou</i> , By Nanlai Cao	205
<i>Dead Women Walking: Women in Taiwan</i> By Jennifer Su	212

<i>Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity</i> By Lamin Sanneh	214
“Does This Help Explain the Recent Crackdown?” By Tony Lambert	219
<i>Faith of Our Fathers: God in Ancient China</i> By Thong Chan Kei and Charlene Fu	223
<i>Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience</i> By Carolyn Chen	233
<i>Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity</i> By Fenggang Yang, Joy K. C. Tong, and Allan H. Anderson	237
<i>God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions</i> Edited by Jason Kindopp and Carol Lee Hamrin	254
<i>Handbook of Christianity in China: Volume II: 1800–Present</i> Edited by R.G. Tiedemann: Part I	257
<i>Handbook of Christianity in China: Volume II: 1800–Present</i> Edited by R.G. Tiedemann: Part II	262
<i>Inside China’s House Church Network: The Word of Life Movement and Its Renewing Dynamic</i> , By Yalin Xin	267
<i>Introducing Chinese Religions</i> By Mario Poceski: Part I	272
<i>Introducing Chinese Religions</i> By Mario Poceski: Part II	278
<i>Introducing Chinese Religions</i> By Mario Poceski: Part III	281
<i>I Stand With Christ: The Courageous Life of a Chinese Christian</i> By Rongliang Zhang	286
<i>Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power</i> , By David Aikman	290
<i>Jesus Never Left China: The Rest of the Story</i> By Werner Burklin	293
<i>Mobilized Merchants-Patriotic Martyrs: China’s House-Church Protestants and the Politics of Cooperative Resistance</i> , By Timothy Garner Conkling	296
<i>My Dreams and Visions: An Autobiography</i> By Ted Choy with Leona Choy	304
<i>No Limitations: Brother Shen Xiao Feng – his story and writings</i> By Xiao Feng Shen, with Dr. David Hunt	307

<i>“Patriots” or “Traitors”?: A History of American-Educated Chinese Students</i> By Stacey Bieler	310
<i>Reading Christian Scriptures in China</i> Edited by Chloe Starr	311
<i>Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China</i> By Lian Xi	318
<i>Revival Preaching and the Indigenization of Christianity in Republican China</i> By Gloria S. Tseng	326
<i>Salt and Light: Volume III: More Lives that Shaped Modern China</i> Edited by Carol Lee Hamrin with Stacey Bieler	328
<i>Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame</i> By Jackson Wu	333
<i>Shanghai Faithful: Betrayal and Forgiveness in a Chinese Christian Family</i> By Jennifer Lin	343
“Sino-Christian Theology as a Comprehensive Way of Christian Studies” By Pan Chiu Lai	350
<i>The Chinese Church: The Next Superpower in World Mission</i> By Kevin Xiyi Yao	352
<i>The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ</i> Edited by Roman Malek	355
<i>The Chinese Puzzle: Putting the Pieces Together for a Deeper Understanding of China and Her Church</i> , By Mike Falkenstine	357
<i>The Coming Chinese Church: How Rising Faith in China is Spilling Over Its Boundaries</i> By Paul Golf, with Pastor Lee	360
<i>The Life and Ministry of John Sung</i> By Ka-Tong Lim	367
<i>Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity</i> , By Alexander Chow: Part I	375
<i>Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity</i> , By Alexander Chow: Part II	381
<i>True Son of Heaven: How Jesus fulfills the Chinese Culture</i> By David B. Marshall	388
<i>Wise Man from the East: Lit-Sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng): Critique of Indigenous Theology; Critique of Humanism</i> Edited by G. Wright Doyle, Translated by G. Wright Doyle and Samuel Ling	390
<i>Witnesses to Power: Stories of God’s Quiet Work in a Changing China</i> By Tetsunao Yamamori and Kim Kwong	393

## Table of Contents

### *Organized alphabetically by author*

- Aikman, David. *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003.
- Anderson, Ken. *Bold as a Lamb: Pastor Samuel Lam and the Underground Church of China*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.
- Baugus, Bruce P., ed. *China's Reforming Churches: Mission, Polity, and Ministry in the Next Christendom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014.
- Bays, Daniel H. *A New History of Christianity in China*. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2012.
- Bays, Daniel H., ed. *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- Bieler, Stacey. "Patriots" or "Traitors"?: *A History of American-Educated Students*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004.
- Burklin, Werner. *Jesus Never Left China: The Rest of the Story – The Untold Story of the Church in China Now Exposed*. Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word (a division of WinePress Publishing), 2005.
- Bush, Luis, Brent Fulton, and a Christian Worker in China. *China's Next Generation: New China, New Church, New World*. Kindle ed., ChinaSource, 2014.
- Cao, Nanlai. *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011.
- Chang, Lit-sen. *Asia's Religions: Christianity's Momentous Encounter with Paganism*. China H Horizon. Distributors: Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1999.
- Chang, Lit-Sen. *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng): Critique of Indigenous Theology; Critique of Humanism*. Edited by G. Wright Doyle. Translated by G. Wright Doyle and Samuel Ling, Wipf and Stock, 2013.
- Charbonnier, Jean-Pierre. *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*. Translated from the French by M.N.L. Couve de Murville. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007.
- Chen, Carolyn. *Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Chow, Alexander. *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

- Choy, Ted with Leona Choy. *My Dreams and Visions: An Autobiography*. Co-published: Winchester, VA: Golden Morning Publishing, and Paradise, PA: Ambassadors for Christ, Inc., 1997.
- Conkling, Timothy Garner. *Mobilized Merchants-Patriotic Martyrs: China's House-Church Protestants and the Politics of Cooperative Resistance*. Self-published, 2013.
- Cook, Richard R. and David W. Pao, eds., *After Imperialism: Christian Identity in China and the Global Evangelical Movement*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011.
- Doyle, G. Wright. "Chinese Biblical Studies: Issues in Understanding and Interpretation." *Colloquium on Chinese Biblical Studies*, 17-21 January 2009, King's College, London. (This article is a web-published review at [www.globalchinacenter.org](http://www.globalchinacenter.org) on 5 February 2009 of the conference proceedings.)
- Doyle, G. Wright. "Chinese Christian Unity, Indigenization, and the Role(s) of the Missionary." Review of *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Vol. 36, No. 1, January 2012.
- Doyle, G. Wright. "Christianity and China's Moral Crisis." *Christianity and Moral Construction in Modern China*, 7-9 November 2015, Beijing, China. (This article is a web-published review at [www.globalchinacenter.org](http://www.globalchinacenter.org) on 7 January 2016 of the conference proceedings.)
- Doyle, G. Wright. "The Chinese Church in Context: Crisis and Opportunity." Centre for the Study of Christianity in China. King's College, University of London, Oxford. May 2006. Revised August 2019.
- Falkenstine, Mike. *The Chinese Puzzle: Putting the pieces together for a deeper understanding of China and her Church*. Xulon Press ([www.xulonpress.com](http://www.xulonpress.com)), 2008.
- Fulton, Brent. *China's Urban Christians: A Light That Cannot Be Hidden*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015. Studies in Chinese Christianity.
- Golf, Paul, with Pastor Lee, *The Coming Chinese Church: How Rising Faith in China is Spilling Over Its Boundaries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2013.
- Hamrin, Carol Lee, with Stacey Bieler, eds. *Salt and Light, Volume Three: More Lives that Shaped Modern China*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011.
- Harvey, Thomas Alan. *Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mingdao's Stand for the Persecuted Church in China*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Book House Company, 2002.
- Hattaway, Paul. *China's Book of Martyrs: The Church in China: Volume 1*. Carlisle, UK: Piquant Editions, 2007.
- Keating, John Craig William. *A Protestant Church in Communist China: Moore Memorial Church Shanghai, 1949-1989*. Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2012.

- Kindopp, Jason and Carol Lee Hamrin, eds. *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004.
- Lai, Pan Chiu. "Sino-Christian Theology as a Comprehensive Way of Christian Studies." *Institute of Sino-Christian Studies News*, Spring 2011.
- Lambert, Tony. "Does This Help Explain the Recent Crackdown?" A summary of the translation by Tony Lambert of an important article published in Beijing in June 2010 by the China Social Sciences Press. The article is entitled: "An Analysis of the Reasons for the Rapid Growth of Christianity in Today's China". The translation is found at the OMF website.
- Lee, Lydia. *A Living Sacrifice: The Life Story of Allen Yuan*. Tonbridge, Kent, England: Sovereign World Ltd., 2001.
- Lim, Ka-Tong. *The Life and Ministry of John Sung*. Singapore: Genesis Books, an imprint of Armour Publishing, 2010.
- Lin, Jennifer. *Shanghai Faithful: Betrayal and Forgiveness in a Chinese Christian Family*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.
- Malek, Roman, S.V.C., ed. *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ*. Sant Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica & China – Zentrum, 2007. Volumes 3a and 3b. Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, L/3a and L/3b.
- Marshall, David B. *True Son of Heaven: How Jesus fulfills the Chinese Culture*. Seattle, WA: Kuai Mu Press, 2002.
- Ming-Dao, Wong. *A Stone Made Smooth*. Southampton, UK: Mayflower Christian Books, 1981.
- Moffett, Samuel Hugh. *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume I: Beginnings to 1500*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998 (second revised and corrected edition).
- Moffett, Samuel Hugh. *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume II: 1500-1900*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.
- Ng, Peter Tze Ming. *Chinese Christianity: An Interplay between Global and Local Perspectives*. Boston: Brill, 2012. Religion in Chinese Societies.
- Poceski, Mario. *Introducing Chinese Religions*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Roukanen, Miikka and Paulos Huang, eds. *Christianity and Chinese Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.
- Sanneh, Lamin. *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Shen, Xiao Feng. *No Limitations: Brother Shen Xiao Feng – His story and writings with Dr. David Hunt*. WorldServe Publishing, 2006.

- Stark, Rodney and Xiuhua Wang. *A Star in the East: The Rise of Christianity in China*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2015.
- Starr, Chloe. *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016.
- Starr, Chloe, ed. *Reading Christian Scriptures in China*. London & New York: T & T Clark, 2008.
- Su, Jennifer. *Dead Women Walking: Entangled in Addiction, Abuse, and Idol Worship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2007.
- Thong, Chan Kei, with Charlene Fu. *Faith of Our Fathers: God in Ancient China*. Shanghai: China Publishing Group Orient Publishing Center, 2006.
- Tiedemann, R. G., ed. *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume Two: 1800–Present*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Tseng, Gloria S. “Revival Preaching and the Indigenization of Christianity in Republican China.” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 38, No. 4, October 2014, 177-182.
- Uhalley, Jr., Stephen and Xiaoxin Wu, eds. *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe. 2001.
- Wang, David, with Georgina Sam. *Christian China and the Light of the World: Miraculous Stories from China’s Great Awakening*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2013.
- Wu, Jackson. *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2012. Evangelical Missiological Society Dissertation Series.
- Xiaoming Yu, Peter and G. Wright Doyle. *China: Ancient Culture, Modern Society*. New York: Strategic Book Publishing, 2009.
- Xi, Lian. *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Xin, Yalin. *Inside China’s House Church Network: The Word of Life Movement and Its Renewing Dynamic*. Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2009.
- Yang, Fenggang. *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1999.
- Yang, Fenggang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan H. Anderson, eds. *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*. Boston, MA: Brill, 2017. *Global and Pentecostal Studies*, Volume 22.
- Yao, Kevin Xiyi. “The Chinese Church: The Next Superpower in World Mission?” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3, July 2014, 296-302.

Zhang, Rongliang. *I Stand With Christ: The Courageous Life of a Chinese Christian*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2015.

## Table of Contents

### *Organized by Category and Historical Periods*

#### **World Christianity**

Sanneh, Lamin. *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

#### **General Surveys**

Baugus, Bruce P., ed. *China's Reforming Churches: Mission, Polity, and Ministry in the Next Christendom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014.

Bays, Daniel H., ed. *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Bays, Daniel H. *A New History of Christianity in China*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Charbonnier, Jean-Pierre. *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*. Translated from the French by M.N.L. Couve de Murville. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007.

Doyle, G. Wright. "The Chinese Church in Context: Crisis and Opportunity." Centre for the Study of Christianity in China. King's College, University of London, Oxford. May 2006. Revised August 2019.

Golf, Paul, with Pastor Lee. *The Coming Chinese Church: How Rising Faith in China is Spilling Over Its Boundaries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2013.

Hattaway, Paul. *China's Book of Martyrs: The Church in China: Volume 1*. Carlisle, UK: Piquant Editions, 2007.

Hamrin, Carol Lee, with Stacey Bieler, eds. *Salt and Light, Volume Three: More Lives that Shaped Modern China*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011.

Keating, John Craig William. *A Protestant Church in Communist China: Moore Memorial Church Shanghai, 1949-1989*. Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2012.

Malek, Roman, S.V.C., ed. *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ*. Sant Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica & China – Zentrum, 2007. Volumes 3a and 3b. Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, L/3a and L/3b.

Moffett, Samuel Hugh. *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume I: Beginnings to 1500*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998 (second revised and corrected edition).

Moffett, Samuel Hugh. *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume II: 1500-1900*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.

Ng, Peter Tze Ming. *Chinese Christianity: An Interplay between Global and Local Perspectives*. Boston, MA: Brill, 2012. Religion in Chinese Societies.

Stark, Rodney and Xiuhua Wang. *A Star in the East: The Rise of Christianity in China*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2015.

Tiedemann, R. G., ed. *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume Two: 1800–Present*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Uhalley, Jr., Stephen and Xiaoxin Wu, eds. *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe. 2001.

### **Longitudinal Studies**

Lin, Jennifer. *Shanghai Faithful: Betrayal and Forgiveness in a Chinese Christian Family*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.

### **The Chinese Context of Christianity**

Doyle, G. Wright. “Chinese Christian Unity, Indigenization, and the Role(s) of the Missionary.” Journal review of *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Vol. 36, No. 1, January 2012.

Falkenstine, Mike. *The Chinese Puzzle: Putting the pieces together for a deeper understanding of China and her Church*. Xulon Press ([www.xulonpress.com](http://www.xulonpress.com)), 2008.

Lambert, Tony. “Does This Help Explain the Recent Crackdown?” A summary of the translation by Tony Lambert of an important article published in Beijing in June 2010 by the China Social Sciences Press. The article is entitled: “An Analysis of the Reasons for the Rapid Growth of Christianity in Today’s China”. The translation is found at the OMF website.

Poceski, Mario. *Introducing Chinese Religions*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Xiaoming Yu, Peter and G. Wright Doyle. *China: Ancient Culture, Modern Society*. New York: Strategic Book Publishing, 2009.

### **Christianity and Chinese Culture**

Chang, Lit-sen. *Asia’s Religions: Christianity’s Momentous Encounter with Paganism*. China Horizon. Distributors: Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1999.

- Chang, Lit-Sen. *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng): Critique of Indigenous Theology; Critique of Humanism*. Edited by G. Wright Doyle. Translated by G. Wright Doyle and Samuel Ling, Wipf and Stock, 2013. (*Lit-Sen Chang lived from 1904–1996.*)
- Chow, Alexander. *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Cook, Richard R. and David W. Pao, eds., *After Imperialism: Christian Identity in China and the Global Evangelical Movement*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011.
- Kindopp, Jason and Carol Lee Hamrin, eds. *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004.
- Lai, Pan Chiu. “Sino-Christian Theology as a Comprehensive Way of Christian Studies.” *Institute of Sino-Christian Studies News*, Spring 2011.
- Marshall, David B. *True Son of Heaven: How Jesus Fulfills the Chinese Culture*. Seattle, WA: Kuai Mu Press, 2002.
- Roukanen, Miikka and Paulos Huang, eds. *Christianity and Chinese Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.
- Starr, Chloe. *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016.
- Thong, Chan Kei, with Charlene Fu. *Faith of Our Fathers: God in Ancient China*. Shanghai: China Publishing Group Orient Publishing Center, 2006.
- Wu, Jackson. *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2012. Evangelical Missiological Society Dissertation Series.
- Yamamori, Tetsunao and Kim Kwong Chan. *Witnesses to Power: Stories of God’s Quiet Work in a Changing China*. London, England, and Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, an imprint of Authentic Media, 2000, reprinted in 2006.
- Yao, Kevin Xiyi. “The Chinese Church: The Next Superpower in World Mission?” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3, July 2014, 296-302.

### **Conference Proceedings**

- Doyle, G. Wright. “Chinese Biblical Studies: Issues in Understanding and Interpretation.” *Colloquium on Chinese Biblical Studies*, 17-21 January 2009, King’s College, London. (This article is a web-published review at [www.globalchinacenter.org](http://www.globalchinacenter.org) on 5 February 2009 of the conference proceedings.)

Doyle, G. Wright. "Christianity and China's Moral Crisis." *Christianity and Moral Construction in Modern China*, 7-9 November 2015, Beijing, China. (This article is a web-published review at [www.globalchinacenter.org](http://www.globalchinacenter.org) on 7 January 2016 of the conference proceedings.)

### 1920–1949

Harvey, Thomas Alan. *Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mingdao's Stand for the Persecuted Church in China*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Book House Company, 2002. (This book mostly narrates Wang's earlier years, but also follows his life after he was released from prison in 1979 to his death in 1991.)

Lim, Ka-Tong. *The Life and Ministry of John Sung*. Singapore: Genesis Books, an imprint of Armour Publishing, 2010. (*John Sung lived from 1901-1944.*)

Tseng, Gloria S., "Revival Preaching and the Indigenization of Christianity in Republican China." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 38, No. 4, October 2014, 177-182.

### 1949–present

Aikman, David. *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003.

Anderson, Ken. *Bold as a Lamb: Pastor Samuel Lam and the Underground Church of China*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991. (*Samuel Lam lived from 1924–2013.*)

Bieler, Stacey. "Patriots" or "Traitors"?: *A History of American-Educated Students*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004.

Burklin, Werner. *Jesus Never Left China: The Rest of the Story – The Untold Story of the Church in China Now Exposed*. Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word (a division of WinePress Publishing), 2005.

Bush, Luis, Brent Fulton, and a Christian Worker in China. *China's Next Generation: New China, New Church, New World*. Kindle ed., ChinaSource, 2014.

Cao, Nanlai. *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Chen, Carolyn. *Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Choy, Ted with Leona Choy. *My Dreams and Visions: An Autobiography*. Co-published: Winchester, VA: Golden Morning Publishing, and Paradise, PA: Ambassadors for Christ, Inc., 1997.

- Conkling, Timothy Garner. *Mobilized Merchants-Patriotic Martyrs: China's House-Church Protestants and the Politics of Cooperative Resistance*. Self-published, 2013.
- Fulton, Brent. *China's Urban Christians: A Light That Cannot Be Hidden*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015. *Studies in Chinese Christianity*.
- Golf, Paul, with Pastor Lee, *The Coming Chinese Church: How Rising Faith In China Is Spilling Over Its Boundaries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2013.
- Lee, Lydia. *A Living Sacrifice: The Life Story of Allen Yuan*. Tonbridge, Kent, England: Sovereign World Ltd., 2001. (*Allen Yuan lived from 1914–2005.*)
- Lin, Jennifer. *Shanghai Faithful: Betrayal and Forgiveness in a Chinese Christian Family*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.
- Shen, Xiao Feng. *No Limitations: Brother Shen Xiao Feng – His story and writings with Dr. David Hunt*. WorldServe Publishing, 2006.
- Starr, Chloe, ed. *Reading Christian Scriptures in China*. London & New York: T & T Clark, 2008.
- Su, Jennifer. *Dead Women Walking: Entangled in Addiction, Abuse, and Idol Worship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2007.
- Wang, David, with Georgina Sam. *Christian China and the Light of the World: Miraculous Stories from China's Great Awakening*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2013.
- Wong, Ming-Dao. *A Stone Made Smooth*. Southampton, UK: Mayflower Christian Books, 1981. (*Wong Mingdao lived from 1900–1991.*)
- Yang, Fenggang. *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1999.
- Xi, Lian. *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Xin, Yalin. *Inside China's House Church Network: The Word of Life Movement and Its Renewing Dynamic*. Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2009.
- Yamamori, Tetsunao and Kim Kwong Chan. *Witnesses to Power: Stories of God's Quiet Work in a Changing China*. London, England, and Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, an imprint of Authentic Media, 2000, reprinted in 2006.
- Yang, Fenggang. *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1999.

Yang, Fenggang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan H. Anderson, eds. *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*. Boston, MA: Brill, 2017. Global and Pentecostal Studies, Volume 22.

Yao, Kevin Xiyi. "The Chinese Church: The Next Superpower in World Mission?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No.3, July 2014, 296-302.

Zhang, Rongliang. *I Stand With Christ: The Courageous Life of a Chinese Christian*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2015.

## Preface

Chinese Christianity has become a major field of study, for several reasons.

Since the 1980s, China has grown rapidly in almost every category of measurement, so that the Middle Kingdom now stands as a superpower ready to challenge, and even replace, the United States.

Likewise, from very small beginnings, since the 1970s the Christian presence in China has grown exponentially. It seems that there are more followers of Christ in China than in almost any other nation in the world. (At least this is true for Protestants, which has been the main focus of my reading.)

For more than two centuries, Chinese Christians have also repeatedly suffered almost unparalleled persecution. Many of the books discussed here tell stories of great heroism and indomitable faith in God, and they make for inspiring reading.

There is no single “Chinese church”; even if we restrict ourselves to Protestants, Chinese Christianity is almost as complex as China itself. We can read about rural and urban churches, large “house church” movements and individual “mainstream” congregations, theological conservatives and liberals, Pentecostals and traditionalists, intellectuals and uneducated peasants, theologians and ordinary believers, young and old—they are all here.

The following pages contain reviews of more than fifty books, plus some presentations and articles. These publications, though only a small sampling of the extensive—and constantly expanding—body of literature on Chinese Christianity, are representative of many more.

In coming months, I hope to add a few more reviews, but I thought it best to issue this collection now, at the beginning of an academic year.

In order to make the reviews helpful to students and scholars, I have tried to present the main points and arguments rather fully. Most of them, in fact, could be called book summaries, though I have also added some evaluative comments of my own.

Most of the reviews reflect my appreciation of the book, but a few are highly critical. The authors are well-known scholars, to be sure. In my opinion, however, they have failed to communicate accurately or fairly. I have sought to be as objective as possible, but also to warn unwary readers of what I consider to be poor scholarship or undue bias. You may judge for yourself whether I am guilty of the same faults!

This collection can serve as an auxiliary resource in courses on Chinese Christianity. Teachers can assign one or more of the reviews as supplements to the main textbook(s).

Researchers may find the reviews helpful as pointers to some books they have not yet read, or as reminders of the contents of works enjoyed long ago.

Anyone interested in Christianity in China will, I believe, profit from perusing these introductions to both major and minor works.

Naturally, since many of the books cover the same material, though from different angles and perspectives, you will find a great deal of repetition here. That could not be avoided. I have tried to let each review stand on its own. And, after all, everyone is dealing with more or less the same “facts” of history and of today’s Chinese Christians.

These facts bear repeating, however, for people who, like me, don’t remember everything they read, and the differing treatments of similar material will prove most instructive for those who desire a well-rounded understanding of Chinese Christianity.

This collection concentrates upon the history of Chinese Christians, though, of course, general histories and surveys also deal with the role and contribution of foreign missionaries.

I hope to provide another collection focusing on the missionary movement in China in the near future.

Your comments and criticisms are most welcome.

G. Wright Doyle

## **The Chinese Church in Context**

### **Crisis and Opportunity**

**By G. Wright Doyle**

Originally delivered at the Centre for the Study of Christianity in China, Oxford (now at King's College, University of London) May 2006; it was lightly revised in August 2019.

The rapid growth of Christianity in China over the past four decades has gained worldwide attention, and rightly so. Seldom, if ever, in the annals of Christian history have so many professed faith in Christ in such a short time from so few original believers.

In the vast hinterland where 800 million peasants dwell, isolated, tiny meetings in humble homes have multiplied into vast networks with thousands of churches and millions of members governed by strong leaders. Meanwhile, as urban migration has swelled the population of hundreds of cities, small Bible studies have mushroomed into a veritable forest of congregations, many of them comprised of intellectuals from the most prestigious universities.

Once-closed churches have been opened and now offer multiple services to standing-room-only crowds of Christians and eager seekers from all walks of life, every age group, and both sexes—contradicting communist propaganda that religious faith is the futile refuge of old women and their gullible grandchildren.

With such stunning growth have come both unprecedented opportunities and daunting challenges, creating a true crisis in the original sense of the term, and illustrated by the well-known Chinese character.

Let us consider, first, the context in which Chinese Christians find themselves, then the nature of the Chinese church, and finally some ways in which believers in China can turn this crisis into a moment and a movement that transforms not only their culture but takes the faith to the far reaches of the globe.

#### **Context of Chinese Church**

We can view the setting in which Christians find themselves from a variety of perspectives, but we shall just mention a few of them: (1) the historical legacy, including foreign connections, state control and even opposition, and the heroic response of Christians to opposition; and (2) the current context, including economic factors; religious pluralism; political pressures; and psychological environment.

#### **Historical Legacy**

Considered broadly, Christianity in China possesses a long history.

If recent findings are authentic, the Christian faith may have reached the Middle Kingdom as early as the second century. At any rate, we know that the so-called Nestorian church—which can more accurately be called the Persian, or Syrian church—sent missionaries, starting with fabled Alopen, to the Tang Dynasty court in the 7th century.

Franciscan monks were dispatched to convert the Mongols during the reign of Kublai Khan. Centuries after both they and the Nestorians had been banned and banished, Jesuits gained a foothold in Beijing, where they succeeded in persuading thousands of Han Chinese to accept the Roman Catholic religion. Some of these were officials of the court, and even one emperor can with some credence be called an “almost Christian.”

More Franciscans and Dominicans followed in their train, and all were gaining adherents until the “Rites Controversy” so angered the Emperor that he banned all Christian activity and forced Roman Catholic missionaries into hiding.

In 1807, Robert Morrison, an Englishman, arrived on the fringe of China to begin the arduous work of learning the language and translating the entire Bible into Chinese for the first time. Dozens of meetings were planned to celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of this momentous event.

Over the next 142 years, amidst national and local upheavals, famine, floods, anti-foreign movements, and rapid political and social change, both missionaries and Chinese Christians labored long and hard to spread the message of salvation through faith in Christ among China’s millions. Foreigners came from a number of Western countries—notably Protestants from Great Britain and the United States and Roman Catholics from France—and a variety of religious backgrounds.

Sometimes welcomed by the people, often opposed, especially by the educated Confucian elite who led society, they persevered until Christian congregations could be found all across the land. Their Chinese colleagues were indispensable partners, and usually took the lead in evangelism, though sometimes their vital contribution did not receive the recognition in the West that it deserved.

In the 20th century, a number of indigenous Chinese Protestant churches and organizations emerged, including the Little Flock led by Watchman Nee and the True Jesus Church with its communal living. Individual pastors like Wang Mingdao and powerful itinerant evangelists like John Sung gained thousands of converts, including many educated people. Though not unfriendly to Western missionaries, they demonstrated what a truly “Chinese” church—self-propagating, self-supporting, self-governing—would look like.

After the Communist victory in 1949, Chinese Christians found themselves in an entirely new situation. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants were forced to choose, either to join government-sponsored “Patriotic” movements, or to remain free of government control. In time, the screws were tightened, until only the official, state-recognized organizations were able to operate openly, and even these were gradually reduced in numbers and activities.

When the Great Cultural Revolution plunged the entire nation into chaos and confusion, in the mid-sixties and early seventies, even those officially-sanctioned entities found themselves under attack in the general assault upon all that was “old,” including religion. All churches were closed; pastors and priests shared prison cells; believers were hounded, harassed, hunted down and often beaten, imprisoned, or killed. But they were not alone in their suffering, for no one, not even the highest official, was safe from sudden attack and public humiliation. Everyone in the cities, and many in the countryside, went through more than ten years of terror.

Meanwhile, a number of observers on the outside pronounced Chinese Christianity dead. No news from within seemed to indicate that there was nothing to report, that faith had been extinguished, and the blood, sweat, toil, and tears of missionaries and Chinese Christians alike had all been in vain.

Nothing could have been further from the truth. Unseen by outsiders, the flames of faith flickered in the lives of those who refused to give in. Manacled old men in dank prisons, little old women in their shuttered homes, and a growing number of young believers tenaciously kept the faith, and even shared it, despite the cost.

Soon reports began to break through the Bamboo Curtain that, in fact, Christianity had not died. Indeed, it had not only survived, but seeds had been sown that would soon produce a rich harvest. In the darkest days when suicide was common, Christians alone seemed to possess a power to persevere, to praise God at all times, and to possess a peace that passed all understanding.

Thirty years later, we now know that one of the greatest periods of church growth in Christian history was about to take place, soon to burst upon the scene in what the frightened Chinese government called “Christianity fever.” In the words of Tony Lambert’s authoritative books, we now talk of “The Resurrection of the Chinese Church,” and “China’s Christian Millions.”

### **Foreign Connections**

With such a legacy, one might imagine that Chinese Christians would enjoy an assured place in society. To some degree, that is true, for more and more Chinese recognize the contribution which Christians have made to the good of the nation, and acknowledge their moral excellence, which stands in marked contrast to the general decay around them. Furthermore, the recent interest in, and acceptance of, things foreign, has produced an openness to Christianity as a force for modernization among many.

On the other hand, a major obstacle impedes full acceptance of Christianity by the government: its foreign connections.

Though Buddhism entered China from India, it has been so sinicized over the past fifteen hundred years that few consider it a foreign religion. Nestorian Christianity came only a century later, but for a variety of reasons, including its clear association with first Persia and then Syria, never gained acceptance as a “Chinese” faith.

The Roman Catholic missionaries who sought the favor of the Mongol court achieved significant success but were victims of the general rejection of foreign rule when the Mongols were expelled. At first, the Jesuits won the admiration, then the allegiance of prominent Ming and later Qing officials. But when the Pope decided against their interpretation of ancestor worship in the Rites Controversy, an irate emperor proscribed both the Jesuits and their Franciscan and Dominican detractors, on the grounds that no foreign ruler should interfere with China's internal affairs.

Worst of all, however, was the connection of both Protestant and Roman Catholic missionary efforts with the aggression of Western powers in the 19th century. Britain blasted open China's doors for trade, particularly the importation of the opium that was eating the heart out of the culture and its leaders. France, Germany, and even the United States gained one advantage after another in a series of one-sided wars and the resulting treaties, which the Chinese termed "unequal."

We can hardly imagine the resentment, even rage, which the memory of these events, constantly fueled by successive governments, engenders in all educated Chinese. They are taught that Christianity arrived with the gunboats and opium trade, and that is partly true. No matter that missionaries universally deplored, and sought to ban, the odious importation of opium. Too many of them, especially Roman Catholics who were backed by the French government, either sought or welcomed special privileges won at the point of the bayonet.

Thus, when the American government seeks religious freedom for Chinese believers, the Chinese counter with a renewed assertion of national sovereignty and accuse Chinese Christians of being allied with the United States and its perceived intention to "contain" China's legitimate expansion and even overthrow the Communist regime.

Which brings us to another aspect of the context in which the Chinese church finds itself:

For millennia, Chinese rulers have sought to control religious and ideological organization and activity. The First Emperor's notorious burning of the books and burying of Confucian scholars alive might be the most extreme example, but it set a tone of official orthodoxy and strict oversight of all ideologies that might pose a threat to the central authority.

Thus, Buddhist, Daoist, and Christian clergy, activities, and buildings have been variously supported, circumscribed, or even banned by different emperors over the course of the centuries. Even in Taiwan today, where religious freedom is total, all religious entities must register with the government.

The Communists continued this long tradition of state control, but with a new vehemence and passion, for their materialistic atheism became the new state orthodoxy that could brook no rival, and their claim to inaugurate the equivalent of the kingdom of God on earth allowed no competitors.

As we noted above, all religious bodies in China must belong to one of the "patriotic" associations that come under the Religious Affairs Bureau. Thus, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the parallel China Christian Council becomes the only legitimate expression of

Protestantism. Its clergy must be approved by the Communist Party cadre assigned to each church, and its first priority must be to promote socialism. Under the so-called “three designates” rule, they must meet in designated places, at designated times, and under the leadership of designated personnel.

Unregistered groups, whether openly-meeting “house churches” or “underground churches” that seek to elude notice, represent willful disobedience, and are accused not only of lacking patriotic fervor, but of being a threat to national security. All the more suspect are those which receive any sort of assistance from foreigners, who are assumed to be agents of Western, and particularly American, attempts to de-stabilize and even overthrow the Communist regime.

### **State Opposition**

For these reasons, almost since the beginning of Communist rule in China, the church has encountered state opposition. Permits to register may be refused, after potentially incriminating evidence has been submitted as part of the application process. Individual believers may find the doors shut to advancement. Leaders are rounded up, arrested, interrogated, often beaten, imprisoned, sometimes tortured, and not infrequently killed. This takes place even today, although repression tends to be cyclical and varies according to locale and the attitude of individual officials.

True, thousands of churches remain open and millions of believers gather for weekly worship. But Bibles can only be purchased legally from a Three–Self bookstore and the threat of dissolution or worse hangs over many thousands of unregistered congregations.

In fact, since the spring of 2019, a very harsh crackdown has netted hundreds of church leaders and sent others into hiding. Even Three–Self pastors may get into trouble, if they are too zealous for the faith and the growth of the church.

Despite such opposition, both foreign and Chinese Christians have carried on bravely, willing to endure suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Whether in times of widespread and extreme persecution, such as during the Boxer Rebellion and the Great Cultural Revolution, or when sporadic or even chronic local hostility has been directed at believers, leaders and laity alike have evinced courage worthy of the ancient martyrs of Christ.

Such is the legacy bequeathed to China’s Christian millions today. Now let us glance at other pieces of the complex mosaic that makes up the context of the Chinese church.

### **Current Context**

#### ***Economic Pressures***

Though Marx’s obsession with economics has proved inadequate as a diagnostic tool, we cannot underestimate the influence of economic factors upon Christians and those whom they seek to attract into Christ’s fold.

Let’s begin with the rural church. The World Bank estimates that over 500 million Chinese peasants live in poverty. They are absolutely poor, with not enough money for adequate food,

clothing, shelter, not to mention education or medical care. That is twice the population of the United States mired in disease, destitution, and despair of future improvement.

With little opportunity in the countryside, hundreds of millions have migrated to the cities and towns of China, in the largest movement of population in history. Thus, entire villages have been emptied of their able-bodied men and young people, as anyone who saw the movie, “The Road Home,” will remember.

The churches, too, have been decimated, as their best and brightest leave for jobs elsewhere. Moving into the urban areas, they are absorbed into city life. One poor man described it to me thus: “In the city, the big fish eat the little fish, and the little fish eat the shrimp.”

Church leaders constantly bemoan the seduction by materialism, modernization, and urbanization that threatens to accomplish what persecution could not, the adulteration of their once-pure faith by the love of the world and the worship of Mammon.

Urban churches are almost overwhelmed by a bewildering array of challenges, including unemployment for millions, as state-owned enterprises are allowed to go belly-up; lack of medical care, education, and even the necessities for those who can’t find jobs, or can’t afford to pay for services once provided, however minimally, by the state; dizzying wealth for many who are able, or well-connected, enough to profit from the truly stunning growth of China’s economy; incessant demands by employers who can replace you in five minutes; a fast pace that allows little or no time for reflection, Bible reading, or prayer.

Overall, China’s leaders worry day and night about widening gap between the rich and the poor—one of the largest in the world; the yawning discrepancy between rural want and urban wealth; and the social unrest that has developed from a still, small voice into an incessant rumble.

### ***Social Changes***

As men leave the village, despair stalks the women they leave behind to tend the animals, till the land, teach the children, and take care of all the affairs of the community. Alone among the nations of the world, China’s country folk commit suicide more often than do urbanites, and women kill themselves more than men. Christians are not immune to the forces of darkness pressing down upon their neighbors.

We have already noted some of the effects of economic growth upon the urban church, such as intense competition, constant pressure, and stress. To these we may add the attractions of Vanity Fair: entertainment, a vast array of consumer products and money to acquire the attractions; fashion, worldliness, and sophistication. In addition, there is the challenge of facing rapid social change, demolition of ancient neighborhoods and the construction of shining new high-rise apartment buildings, separation of the generations not only through the inevitable gap of cultures but also now distance and the rush to succeed.

We shall not be surprised, therefore, to learn of a tremendous moral collapse. A huge proportion of unmarried young people are sexually active, adultery is common, and the divorce rate has

climbed to unprecedented heights. More than half of China's married women complain of physical abuse.

The "one-child policy" birthed a number of unintended progeny, among them the phenomenon of so-called "little emperors" spoiled by the solicitous care of two parents and four grandparents. With millennia of teaching that bearing a son is the most filial act one can perform, who would have thought that young people, who are legally barred from marrying before their mid-twenties, would actually delay marriage, postponing having children until their careers are established, or even forego parenting altogether? No wonder social critics and even the government itself are worrying about an epidemic of radical self-centeredness.

Older Chinese complain that all that matters now is getting ahead. Those who must care for them counter that mere survival is often at stake. No matter how you explain it, no one denies that an obsession with material comfort and prestige has gripped China's millions in a way never seen before. Anything goes. Lying and cheating at work and in school are almost universal. Once you could walk the streets unafraid, but now violent crime of all sorts has spawned tension and fear, though foreigners are still generally safe.

But people are not just workers and consumers. Created for meaningful relationships, we languish without them. Across the land, an obvious loss of meaning and a corrosive relativism combine with a profound love-hunger that demands satisfaction. Western movies compete with those from Japan to foster a new romanticism, fed also by love songs by pop idols in Taiwan and Hong Kong, and now China itself. The human spirit will not be satisfied by possessions, position, prestige, power or even pleasure.

Globalization, accelerated by China's admission to the World Trade Organization, has transformed hundreds of cities in China, as it has enormously multiplied contact with foreigners. Arriving by the hundreds of thousands for business, education, and tourism, people from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, South East Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North and South America have brought more than their money and their expertise. New ideas and fresh ways of doing things have raised questions about China's tradition and culture in a way, and on a scale, that exceeds even the period from the Opium Wars to World War II.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Chinese, most of them educated but some coming from the lower classes, have gone overseas to study, do business, or simply see the sights. The resulting sophistication and broadening of perspective have stretched the horizons of both those who have gone and those they left behind, as letters, phone calls, and emails carry tales of a new world hitherto only seen in movies and on the television. Of course, many romantic notions of America and Europe are shattered by close encounters with the real thing, but the entire experience continues to reverberate throughout all strata of Chinese society in an ever-widening ring of impulses that will certainly shake the foundations of that ancient civilization.

Some of those who return have embraced, or at least been influenced by, Christian beliefs while overseas, and their impact is being felt in the church and the larger society.

## ***Religious Pluralism***

Now let us consider the religious context of today's Chinese church. Christianity has not been alone in its rapid growth and expansion. The same years have witnessed a resurgence of traditional religion, both rural and urban. For many, this means Buddhism in its Chinese forms. I have spoken to several ardent Buddhists from both the working and intellectual classes.

Much of what is called "Buddhism," however, really includes traditional Chinese religion, with its multiple gods and saviors, newly-furbished temples, domestic shrines, festivals, and rituals. One scholar told me that every section of China has experienced such a revival of what the government terms "superstition." A friend of ours said that their apartment was the only one in the entire high-rise from which the scent of incense could not be discerned during the fortnightly worship ceremonies.

After the massive campaigns about all things "old," who would have thought that we would see Confucianism as a revived state-supported semi-cult? But the government has begun encouraging the study of Confucian writings in special classical schools and, like the emperors of old, the head of state has visited Confucius' temple in Shandong.

Of course, Islam holds sway in certain areas, especially the strategic western provinces. The worldwide war on terror has provided more justification for a strict watch on potentially subversive elements in these areas.

As in dynastic times, a proliferation of sects, some of them millenarian, roil parts of the country. Falun Gong is perhaps the largest, best organized, and most familiar of these, but others, including pseudo-Christian movements like Eastern Lightning, seduce the unwary into a web of control and fervency that poses a threat not only to the church but to the larger society. Again, the government is quite concerned that one or more of them will turn into a modern-day version of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom that nearly toppled the Qing Dynasty in the mid-nineteenth century.

As the smiling images hanging from the mirrors of Beijing taxis demonstrate, the "worship" of Mao has become popular among the common folk. Leftists in the government and the academy have evinced a residual communism that has recently broken out into public meetings condemning reforms and calling for a return to doctrinal purity. Indeed, the government has committed "unlimited funds" to Marxist research, has required all party members to attend study sessions at which speeches of Mao and Deng Xiaoping are read, and has vowed to make China the world center of Marxism.

Since 2013, President Xi Jinping has moved the country back towards Maoism, and in 2019 launched a campaign to eliminate much public Christian presence.

## ***Political Pressures***

That brings us to the political context of today's Chinese church. On the one hand, we have noted greater openness and freedom for legal religious groups and expression. Unlike in the days

of the Cultural Revolution, the recognized religions are now allowed to meet, worship, study, publish materials, and engage in charitable efforts.

On the other hand, there is the increased pressure on unregistered churches of which we have spoken, with many church leaders being arrested in the past year. Heightened surveillance of foreign Christian activity, and particularly special attention given to work among students, has led to the expulsion of a number of foreign Christian workers. The government has evinced greater and greater intolerance of evangelism, and a growing hostility towards church growth.

Why is that? Perhaps they connect the threat of religious fervency with massive discontent with communist rule, and are afraid, as I said before, of collaboration among various groups, for Christian churches possess an organizational ability that clearly worries China's rulers.

Multiplying demonstrations, many of them large and violent, have led to stricter government reprisals, with the use of force becoming more and more common. Fearing loss of control in the countryside as well as in the city, Beijing has tightened its grip on several arenas, especially the information media. Newspapers, magazines, Internet—all have come under close surveillance and sometimes harsh suppression.

The result is a highly-volatile political climate, engaging the attention of the regime and spurring it to address disparities of wealth and inequities of administration. The fact is, however, that anti-corruption measures by the government, though meant to stem the rising tide of rage, will not work as long as the Party has a monopoly on power. No one knows how this is going to play out.

### ***Intellectual Ferment***

We turn now to the intellectual milieu in which Chinese believers find themselves. To say there is great ferment would be an understatement. Freedom to explore and discuss any and all issues in many contexts, including the Central Party School in Beijing, has spawned a jungle of competing ideological options, including Christianity. Western influences, such as modernism and post-modernism; traditional Chinese thinking, like Confucianism and Daoism; Communism—all these vie for the allegiance of the rising generation.

As a result, massive confusion reigns in the marketplace of ideas: Which way is best? The failure of other belief systems has left many thinking persons bewildered, groping for answers to the perennial questions in an environment shifting so fast hardly anyone can keep up.

Confucianism espouses fine ethics but has been exploited by those in power for two thousand years and has anyway never warmed the heart. Buddhism attracts high-minded souls, especially contemplative types, but cannot provide the theoretical foundations for a modern society. Despite its profound mystical strain and wise counsel for political leaders, Daoism fails to answer questions which press upon today's thinkers and decision-makers.

The Communist bosses hope that a return to the thought of Marx, Lenin, Mao, and Deng will reinvigorate a party demoralized by its impotence to control avarice and power-lust at all levels and confronted with the failures of the past, including horrific gratuitous violence and cruelty. They also hope to hide socialism's evident inability to produce the prosperity that it long ago

promised, and that the free market has delivered so spectacularly in recent years. Many former and present Communists admit that virtually everyone in the system knows it is bankrupt.

The masses and even intellectuals in their superstitious moments will practice popular religion, but no one looks there for solutions to economic, social, political, or philosophical problems. And Islam will always be limited to particular ethnic minorities, not least because Chinese love to eat pork!

That basically leaves secular humanism, with its empty atheism; romantic, hedonistic relativism; nihilism; and Christianity. No wonder thousands of China's finest minds, not to mention millions of its poor peasants, throng Christian meetings in search for light and life and love!

### ***Psychological Climate***

The mention of love brings us to the psychological environment of today's Chinese church. In my opinion, this dimension is the decisive one for the future of the church.

Chinese hearts and minds are laden with an onerous burden from the past. How can they cope with anger over innumerable abuses; the confusion, chaos, and futility of various political "movements" that have convulsed society since 1949; and mindless terror, including unspeakable torture, directed against tens of millions?

The government's one-child policy inflicted forced abortions upon unwilling women, causing incalculable physical and emotional damage. A friend of mine who is a physician, and whose wife had had at least one abortion, shook his head sadly when he commented upon how callously women have been treated.

The Tiananmen incident of 1989 will not go away, despite government-sponsored rewriting of history. Citizens of Beijing cannot forget the wanton killing unleashed upon them when the army crushed the students.

Imagine what government corruption does to people—both the venal officials who live off its illicit gains, and irate citizens who have no recourse to justice under a system that regularly robs them. How do you handle a chronically bad conscience or the rage that simmers for years on end?

Government crackdowns have affected millions of citizens and security personnel. Guilt for participation in abuse must take its toll in the hearts of those who are party to the perpetration of terror which has characterized the communist regime from its inception in the 1920s. In the Great Cultural Revolution, tens of millions of young people subjected their teachers, elders, and even parents to shameful treatment, including beatings, torture, and death. Continued police brutality crushes the souls of those who endure it, but also sears the consciences of those who mete it out to innocent victims.

Participation in abortion, envy, greed, betrayal of family and friends, hatred of enemies, increasingly common sexual license, abandonment of spouse and children— all must foster a feeling of guilt and shame that cries out for consolation.

And, despite the sustained economic growth of the previous decades, widespread anxiety over the future gnaws at the hearts of hundreds of millions caught up in the rush of events. Political uncertainty—who will be ruling China ten years from now? Economic uncertainty—will the economy continue to slow down? And social insecurity—what is my place in a society where everything is up for grabs, nothing is certain, and relationships built on the quid-pro-quo determine one's fate?

In other words, for many it is the best of times, but for many more—deprived of the “iron rice bowl” that guaranteed employment, housing, health care, and education from the cradle to the grave—it feels like the worst of times. Though the description of Shanghai in the 1930s—“a thin layer of heaven covering a thick layer of hell”—“may not now be quite accurate, since prosperity has spread to a far larger proportion of the population, nevertheless a high degree of angst plagues huge numbers of Chinese.

No wonder that one-third of China's children are said to be depressed, and that suicide has risen to epidemic proportions!

### **The Nature of the Chinese Church**

So, what is the nature of the Chinese church—and here I shall focus on the Protestants, with whom I am more familiar—embedded in this complicated context?

Right away, we must acknowledge the complexity of the church itself. There are the officially-sanctioned Three-Self Patriotic Movement churches, “house” churches that have registered with the government, unregistered but “open” house churches, and “secret” or “underground” “house churches,” as well as a plethora of small Bible study groups and informal associations of believers or seekers. Some of these groups may overlap with others, and relationships between and among them may range from cordial cooperation to hostile competition and even confrontation.

### ***House Churches & Underground Churches***

#### *Rural Church*

Beginning with the rural house churches, we have already noted explosive numerical growth, with perhaps 50 million believers associated in one way or another with Christian congregations. This has come about as a result of evangelistic zeal and heroic efforts, and has led, as I said at the beginning, to huge movements, though the recent persecution has decapitated some networks and forced a decentralization into smaller organizations.

Strong organization at all levels enables both rapid growth and survival amidst frequent persecution. Migration to the cities, however, has robbed these churches of many of their members. Still others have fallen prey to sects and heresies, largely because of the lack of strong biblical teaching among illiterate congregations.

## *Urban Church*

Urban “house” churches have tended to be quite traditional, following the “Patriarchs” of the earlier part of the 20th century who left a legacy of firm commitment to orthodoxy based on a high view of the authority of the Scriptures and typical Chinese conservatism. Seekers and new believers from the educated elite have often found it hard to fit into these congregations.

Increasingly, however, more and more intellectuals have formed their own Bible studies and house churches, sometimes termed “emerging churches.” Bright, sophisticated, well-placed in society, many have returned from overseas, bringing the faith with them. In what can almost be called a wildfire movement among elite, including Communists, this new phenomenon holds the potential for the conversion of Chinese culture from the inside.

### ***“Culture Christians”***

On the fringes of the church, or completely outside its walls, are the so-called “culture Christians.” Scholars in the new centers for the study of Christianity in China examine Christianity from an academic perspective, looking especially for its relevance to the transformation of Chinese society. The Global China Center seeks to engage in dialogue with these highly intelligent and well-read seekers.

## ***Overseas Church***

We should not forget the large Christian contingent living outside of Mainland China, in Taiwan, Hong Kong, South East Asia, North and South America, England, Europe, Australasia, and even Africa and the Middle East. Some are Cantonese-speaking churches, reflecting Hong Kong’s status as a colony. More and more Mandarin-speaking congregations have sprouted up in recent years, as scholars have come abroad to study.

Many can testify to their energy, commitment, sophistication, and world-wide influence.

In *Megatrends Asia*, John Naisbitt identified the rise of China as the major development not only of modern times but of all human history. He further observed that the overseas Chinese play the leading role in this development and will continue to do so. I would add that the overseas Chinese Christians will be major actors in the emerging drama of the expansion of the Christian faith both within China around the world.

### ***Strengths***

What are the strengths of Protestant Chinese Christians? Most observers begin with their belief in the authority of the Bible and their adherence to its teachings, as traditionally understood. We must give due credit to their willingness to suffer, their typically-Chinese characteristic of relishing hard work, and their evangelistic zeal.

Lately, we have seen also a developing theological strength and depth, solid scholarship, and critical interaction with their own culture.

Overseas Chinese Christians have demonstrated adaptability. Their mobility, wealth, and multi-lingual competence have fitted them for the kaleidoscope of openings and lightning-fast changes of the 21st century.

### ***Weaknesses***

Lest we over-romanticize Chinese Christians, we should not ignore some of their weaknesses. These include a pietism which divorces the faith from everyday life and provides little equipment for reflection upon, dialogue with, and influence within, their society. Hierarchical organization often reflects the Chinese tradition of authoritarian leadership more than the servanthood of Christ, and pragmatism can lead to unnecessary compromise with moral and doctrinal laxity.

A focus on the worldly benefits of believing, such as peace and prosperity, opens the door for spurious “conversions” and much nominalism. One report states that “millions of Chinese Christians are one unanswered prayer away from apostasy.” Theological shallowness leaves them wide open, as we have seen, to the degradations of sects, heresies, and cults.

As David Aikman points out in his *Jesus in Beijing*, there is a preponderance of women. Though this speaks of the liberating message of the Gospel and grants new status and strength, it poses special problems. How are they to find Christian husbands? Where will tomorrow’s Christian families come from? How will the chronic shortage of elders and pastors be met? And how will the Gospel be communicated to men, who are likely to lead Chinese society in the future?

### ***The Official Church***

The government-sponsored church has also been growing and now numbers around 17 million, some of them in newly registered house churches. They are largely free to conduct worship and theological education, be active in social welfare projects, and engage in contact with approved foreigners.

On the other hand, the official church is under control of Religious Affairs Bureau and thus the Chinese Communist Party, whose representatives must approve personnel selection. In addition, they are legally forbidden to teach people under 18 (though some congregations defy this rule), to meet outside of designated places, or to evangelize or operate outside of designated areas.

Bishop Ding Guangxun’s “theological reconstruction” program diluted Protestant distinctives and promotes love as the essence of Christianity. He sought to drive evangelicals from the TSPM and to build an essentially “liberal” or “social gospel” theology, with influence from Teilhard and Whitehead. Many TSPM seminaries resisted this purge and most grassroots clergy and members remain theologically conservative. Furthermore, both government surveillance locally and domination of the top leadership nationally hamper the official church and drive a wedge between it and the unregistered churches, who have often in the past suffered persecution that has been at least indirectly instigated by the legal bodies.

The “sinicization” of all religions, including Christianity, ordered by the government recently has put further pressure upon the TSPM congregations to compromise their faith, under threat of severe penalties.

## **Conclusion**

We spoke at the beginning of a crisis—a moment of opportunity as well as of danger—facing the Chinese church.

## ***Challenges***

The church faces many daunting challenges, such as:

- Developing a theology which addresses uniquely Chinese concerns from a Biblical perspective.
- Avoiding syncretism and undue reverence for Chinese culture.
- Avoiding nationalism, which the government actively feeds under the rubric of true “patriotism.”
- Dealing with perennial Chinese weaknesses: authoritarian leaders; neglect of marriage and children; moralism; focus on worldly benefits; avoidance of necessary confrontation; obsession with “face”, including reputation, prestige, position; preoccupation with worldly success; failure to admit wrong and ask forgiveness of others; subjectivism in making decisions; and difficulty in cooperating with others (especially males).

## ***Opportunities***

At the same time, Christians are presented with amazing opportunities:

- Under the proper leadership, they may finally create a truly “Chinese” Christianity. To a great extent, this goal has already been achieved, for Chinese Christians number in the millions over several centuries, many have made great contributions to Chinese society, Chinese churches are now almost always led by Chinese, and Chinese theologians have made significant progress in the task of authentic contextualization.
- By contributing to obvious social needs and helping to solve urgent problems, they may not only win recognition for their good will but also point the way to a new and healthier society.

Rooted in a rich tradition, working together, and relying on God’s power, Chinese Christians could address drastic problems:

- Biblical teaching and positive examples could help stem the tide of family breakdown; divorce; and neglecting, or spoiling, children by showing that they have a better hope.
- Christians could challenge the pervasive lust for wealth and power.
- Endemic depression could be met by a loving community, faith in the presence and power of God, and looking forward to an eternal future with God. Believers in Christ have already begun to show practical concern for the plight of the elderly, disabled, orphans, and AIDS/HIV sufferers.
- The Biblical conviction that all of us are created in the image of God challenges the devaluation of women, either through abandonment of baby girls or in forcing women to act like men (i.e., succeed in the marketplace) in order to have worth.

- As in the Roman Empire, Christians can offer an alternative to rampant sexual license, which results in sexually-transmitted diseases, unwanted children, abandoned women, broken hearts, and broken families.
- With a radical transformation of its own ethos, the church could demonstrate another way, that of servant leadership, to counter the systemic abuse of authority at all levels of Chinese society.
- Authentic believers could function as salt and light as they live in, but not of, a world pervaded by corruption, including lying, cheating, stealing, and nepotism.
- In a reversal of the traditional contempt for rural folk, Christians in cities are starting to build solid relationships with believers migrating in from the countryside.
- As potentially violent rage towards the government rises to a boiling point, Christians can show how to submit to evil rulers even while promoting righteousness by word and deed.
- The Christian doctrine of the forgiveness of sins surely speaks to the crippling guilt that comes from generations of self-centered living, and to the resentment towards parents, friends, spouses, work associates, and authority figures who have betrayed or hurt millions of Chinese.

If Chinese believers can address the felt needs of their countrymen, and both proclaim and demonstrate before a watching world a message and a lifestyle that reflects the light, life, and love of God, they can not only participate in the transformation of their own nation and culture but share these blessings with the entire world.

**A History of Christianity in Asia  
Volume I: Beginnings to 1500**

**By Samuel Hugh Moffett**

Moffett, Samuel Hugh. *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume I: Beginnings to 1500*.  
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998 (second revised and corrected edition).

This review will focus on the sections dealing with Christianity in China.

At the outset, we should note Moffett's fluent, almost racy, style that makes the book hard to put down, even if you are trying to limit your reading to the Chinese sections. Open its pages at your own risk!

### **Nestorian Christianity**

Like others in the past few decades, Moffett concludes that Nestorius did not, as he was falsely charged, deny the deity of Christ, nor did he teach the existence of two "persons" in Christ, as charged by his arch-enemy, Cyril of Alexandria. He fell victim to political jealousy, his own theological vagueness, and popular outrage against his attempt to discourage the use of the term "Mother of God" to refer to Mary.

Nevertheless, his later followers, angry at the unfair treatment meted out to them by the victors in Constantinople, probably were "Nestorians" in the usual sense, emphasizing the full humanity of Christ without denying his deity. They would also have followed the practice of the Antiochene school of biblical interpretation, focusing on the plain, literal, and historical sense of the text rather than the allegorical approach favored by Origen and those who followed him in the West.

Moffett traces the sad history of the separation of the church in Persia (later to be called Nestorian) from that in the West and the unremitting internal theological wrangling and nepotism that split its ranks. What surprises us most, therefore, is that this church became such a potent missionary force in Asia.

Moffett describes for us what contributed to the later success of Nestorian mission among the Chinese:

"Its glad acceptance of hardships for the cause of Christ, its full-rounded blend of spiritual and practical missionary methods – evangelism, education, and agriculture – and its compassion for captives combined with evangelistic concern for captors does much to explain the almost unbelievable successes of Nestorian expansion across Asia in the next two centuries" (209).

To these successes we now turn.

### **The First Christian Mission to China**

The “Nestorian Monument,” dated 781 but discovered only in 1623, alerted the world to the arrival of missionaries in China from Persia in 635. The great Alopen was received warmly by the Tang Emperor T’ ai-tsung, who practiced religious toleration throughout his reign. A man of learning and the arts, he was happy to learn that Alopen’s was a religion of the book. He introduced him to the vast imperial library and ordered him to begin the translation of Christian scriptures into Chinese.

The emperor also ordered the construction of a Christian church in the capital from his own treasury, as he had done for Buddhist and Taoist temples. His son, at first also favorable to the Nestorians, began to favor Buddhism under the influence of his wife, who was later known as the infamous Empress Wu. This thoroughly evil woman later encouraged a Buddhist-led persecution of Christians, the first of many to come in the following centuries.

The Arab conquest of Persia did not at first hinder the growth of Christianity in China, for the caliphs tolerated Nestorians, even using some of them as emissaries and interpreters. Many more traveled on the Silk Road to and from China, and Nestorianism flourished with imperial favor – or at least the protection of powerful patrons. Moffett introduces us to fascinating and noble persons, like Issu the Nestorian priest and high-ranking general and Adam, “ a bishop and missionary-scholar so famed for his knowledge of Chinese language and literature that even Buddhist missionaries came to him for help in translating their own sacred books.”

Indeed, Adam may have “seeded Christian ideas into the variations of northern Buddhist belief as it developed in Japan” by assisting Japanese translators of Buddhist sutras. Among Adam’s own translations were some parts of the Bible: “the Gospels and portions of the book of Acts, Paul’s Epistles, the Psalter, and [perhaps], parts of the Pentateuch and Isaiah” (301).

Nestorian Christianity virtually disappeared from China by 980. The question is, Why? Moffett adduces several possible causes:

- Persecution: Nestorians were caught in the wave of officially-inspired persecution of all “foreign” religions, especially Buddhism, that resulted from “a rising tide of xenophobia and sectarian strife” that began in 840 and re-occurred intermittently thereafter (303)

- Syncretism, or “watering down the faith”: Examining all available evidence, he finds that there is no real “Nestorian” heresy in the documents which were translated into Chinese. Further, all the major tenets of orthodox Christian faith are included in these same documents. Still, Moffett finds that “some weight must be given to the charges of syncretism leveled against T’ ang Christianity.”

To allow readers to decide for themselves, he includes the introduction to the Nestorian Monument as an appendix, noting in italics terms that seem to come from Buddhist, Taoist, or Confucian writings. At the very least, we can see that some important Christian ideas are left out, and many non-biblical words and phrases are used to communicate Christian ideas.

In other words, Moffett believes that the Nestorians neither compromised the faith as much as they have been criticized, nor communicated it with as much Biblical clarity and precision as perhaps they could have.

- Foreignness. The Nestorian churches seem to have been composed mostly of people with Syriac names or of tribes from the outlying borderlands, and almost all their priests were Persian, not Chinese.

- Furthermore, “the social and cultural level of the church was inferior to that of China’s intellectual and political leadership and therefore failed to promise effective improvement for the life of the masses” (435).

- Reliance on the emperor. Moffett thinks that “the decisive factor... was the fall of an imperial house on which the church had too long relied for its patronage and protection. Dependence on government is a dangerous and uncertain foundation for Christian survival” (313).

### **The Mongols and the Recovery of Asian Christianity**

In a truly remarkable turn of events, Genghis Khan, who founded an empire that conquered much of the known world, including China, married one of three Christian sisters from a tribe that had been evangelized by the Nestorians (1). The other sisters married two of his sons, and one of those sisters became “the Christian mother of three imperial sons, an emperor (Great Khan) of the Mongols, an emperor of China,” and an emperor of Persia.

The Mongol conquest produced a 140-year Pax Mongolica over a huge empire that enabled free travel from Europe to Korea. This had huge consequences for Christianity in China. During this time, the first Franciscan missionaries came to China.

Reeling from the shock of the horrible slaughters inflicted by the Mongols on Eastern Europe, Pope Innocent IV sent Franciscan monks on a twofold assignment: To dissuade the Golden Horde from attacking the rest of Europe, and to preach the Gospel. He had hopes of an alliance with the Mongols that would outflank the Muslims.

After a tortuous journey, the pope’s emissary finally reached the camp of the Great Khan and were able to present the Pope’s letter. While there, he was “astounded to see himself surrounded by Nestorian Christians.” The Khan’s chilling reply “shocked the pope but it did not stop the missionaries” (409). For the next hundred years, they continued to brave the dangerous and arduous journey. William of Rubrick arrived in 1253 to find that a Nestorian Christian Kerait

princess, Sorhaktani, was the mother of the fourth Great Khan, and that other Nestorians held high positions in the court and the army.

William did not think much of the spirituality of the Nestorians whom he met, though those at the court were more biblically literate than the ones he had seen among the Uighurs. Still, they were superstitious, practiced sorcery and other non-Christian practices, and were guilty of widespread and gross debauchery and immorality. His debate with Buddhist and Muslims produced as little fruit as his extraordinary interview with the Great Khan, but he was able to baptize six Christian captives in the Mongol camp.

Moffett cites much evidence to support the claim of “the existence of a fairly widespread presence at the Mongol court and irregularly throughout the empire, most notably in the northwest and east” (445). In the dynastic rivalries that roiled the Mongol realms, however, the Christians always lost out, and their connection with defeated rebels did not strengthen their hand with the victors.

### **Christianity during the rule of Kublai Khan**

The two Polo brothers, with son and nephew Marco along, were the first Europeans to reach China proper. Kublai Khan, already ruler of much of the former Sung territories, received them kindly and sent them back to Rome with a letter asking the pope to send one hundred missionaries. None returned with the Polos, and the first Catholic mission arrived in 1294, after the death of Kublai. The Yuan dynasty was already waning.

Like others before them, the Italians found Nestorian communities in various parts of China. Even more amazing to them was the discovery of a Christian “kingdom” just north of the Great Wall. In fact, it was only a province, but the ruler was Prince George, an Ongut with the highest connections with the Khans by marriage. A Nestorian, he became a Roman Catholic after meeting missionaries sent by Rome.

Kublai Khan himself inclined towards Tibetan Buddhism, but tolerated Islam, Christianity, and Confucianism. Suspicious of Chinese, he governed through intermediaries, including powerful Nestorian Christian advisors (2).

The combination of a rebellion by a Christian prince and the influence of Kublai’s Buddhist wife and a Buddhist advisor and teacher led to his strong support of Buddhism and its rapid spread of that religion in China. For the first time, it began no longer to be perceived as a foreign import. Moffett speculates about what victory by the Christian prince might have done for the faith, noting that political defeat sometimes closes the door irrevocably.

## **John of Montecorvino and the Roman Catholics**

The first Roman Catholic missionary to reach China (1294), John enjoyed the favor of Prince George, though he had to endure the fierce opposition of Nestorians. He was later joined by others sent out by the pope, and together they baptized and educated many. (A church was given to them by an Armenian Orthodox woman in Beijing, sign of the presence of Christians other than the Nestorians in China.) Alas, those baptized usually did walk in the way of Christ, according to the missionaries' reports.

## **The Second Disappearance of the Church in China**

When the Mongol dynasty fell in China, all Chinese churches—Nestorian, Catholic, Armenian orthodox, Jacobite—disappeared. Missionaries stopped coming. Mongol Christians assimilated to Chinese ways.

As the Mongol rule weakened, Chinese rose in rebellion and regained mastery of their country. “China, as it has so often done, turned away from the world and turned in upon itself. The new China was to be isolationist, nationalist, and orthodox Confucian... To the Chinese, Christianity appeared as a foreign religion protected and supported by a foreign [Mongol] government. Catholic missions gave the impression of being even more foreign than the Nestorians,... for they received far more visible support from outside China...” (474). (How very current this sounds!)

The result: “Without foreign support a church that had become dependent upon it withered away” without even a memory of its existence (475).

Finally, the fierce Tamerlane (1336-1405) exterminated Christians (indiscriminately with others) by the hundreds of thousands as he cut a swath of blood and fire through much of Asia in a grand attempt to establish his empire. When his empire, too, collapsed, “All Asia north of the Himalayas was once more either Muslim or Chinese. If there were any Christians left, here and there, no one noticed them” (488).

Moffett's lively style, clear presentation, grasp of the grand sweep of both secular and Christian history, depth of research, and colorful details make this a history well worth reading.

### Notes

1. For a fascinating account of how the Nestorians had influenced these border tribes, and thus eventually the Mongols, see *Steppe By Step*, by Hugh Kemp.
2. Moffett takes at face value Marco Polo's claim that he was also privy to the Khan, despite the skepticism of other scholars such as Jonathan Spence. See Chapter One in *The Chan's Great Continent*.

## **A History of Christianity in Asia**

### **Volume II: 1500-1900**

**By Samuel Hugh Moffett**

Moffett, Samuel Hugh. *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume II: 1500-1900*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.

Only the sections on the growth Christianity among the Chinese will be discussed.

Samuel Moffett has presented us with a work that is comprehensive, yet concise; lucid, yet lively; balanced and yet not totally without an occasional, but mostly-controlled, bias; incisive, yet irenic – not a small achievement in a history of this scope!

Volume II begins with the arrival of the Jesuits in Macau and brings us up to the beginning of the immense changes that took place in the 20th century.

Chapter 5 (Once More to China: “Missionaries and Mandarins”) relates the rise and fall of the second major Roman Catholic attempt to reach China. The author tells how the early Jesuits, especially the great Matteo Ricci, won the esteem and the ear of China’s mandarins. Years of hard work, mastery of the Chinese classics, immense knowledge of Western science – all these led to the conversion of high-ranking Chinese scholars, and even the admiration of more than one emperor.

Moffett show his balance by including the stories of three Chinese believers, “the three pillars of the Chinese Church,” and by giving both sides a fair hearing as he reviews for us the long and sometimes bitter “rites controversy” that ultimately led to the expulsion of all Roman Catholic missionaries from China.

The issues, then as now, are complex. Moffett does his best to show why the Jesuits believed that the traditional ancestor ceremonies were merely expression of respect, not worship, and why the Dominicans, Franciscans, and several Popes thought they constituted idolatry. He does seem to favor the Jesuits a bit, however, as did the Emperor, and as do later Chinese and Western commentators, with some exceptions, including this writer.

(Although the Emperor and his eminent scholars probably did consider bowing to pictures of ancestors merely a mark of respect, the common people – among whom the Jesuits’ accusers lived and worked – clearly regarded them as acts of worship to departed spirits. The same

distinction may be found today in modern Taiwan, where the Roman Catholic Church now allows acts of reverence (“worship”?) toward ancestors.)

Chapter 10 includes a section on the Dutch in Taiwan (Formosa (Taiwan): *Gateway to China?* 1642-1661), which tells how Dutch missionaries made a substantial impact upon the aboriginal tribesmen whom they found in the countryside. That same group welcomed Presbyterian missionaries in the 19th century, and now comprise a large section of the Taiwan Presbyterian Church.

Chapter 13, “The Door to China Opens Again (1807 – 1860),” begins with the coming of Robert Morrison to China and ends with the failure, and religious impact, of the Taiping Rebellion.

Once again, Moffett displays critical charity as he evaluates the monumental achievements of the early pioneer Protestant missionaries, especially Morrison, whose translation of the Bible laid the foundation for all subsequent renditions. He notes both the involvement of some of them with the opium trade (Morrison later worked for the East India Company and Gutzlaff rode on Company ships – the only ones available) and their firm and vocal opposition to it.

As with the earlier Jesuit effort, Chinese converts played an essential role in the spread of the gospel, and the intrepid Liang Fa and others receive their due from the author (as they usually did from their spiritual fathers, despite later neglect in missionary reports).

The Chinese will never forget – or allow others to forget – that the gospel came with the gunboats; this sad fact is given ample treatment by Moffett, who acknowledges both the burden of this heritage and the obvious implication of some of the missionaries in European imperialism. At the same time, he records how the “opening” of China at the point of the bayonet was seen as the work of God allowing many to hear the saving news of Christ despite government opposition.

The leader of the Taiping Rebellion has been aptly called one of the most interesting megalomaniacs in Chinese history. His own writings, originally influenced by a book written by Liang Fa, constitute “theological anarchy, an explosive mix of Bible truth, Chinese mythological fantasy, and imperial egocentricity” (this being a good example of Moffett’s sometimes racy style). The rebellion began and ended in blood and fire, the smoke of which can still be seen and smelt.

Moffett concludes his survey of Christianity in China in Chapter 22: China’s Christians at Empire’s End (1860-1900). As always, he covers a lot of ground quickly without being unhorsed or failing to observe lovely flowers along the way. In forty pages, he tells the story of Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission; the “Roman Catholic Recovery”; increasing national influence of Protestants, especially those of the more “liberal” variety; the growth of a truly Chinese church; and the “Chinese Backlash,” which culminated in the horrors of the Boxer Rebellion.

A few quick notes:

Taylor's contribution was truly monumental and receives the evaluation which it deserves. Drawing heavily on A.J. Broomhall's seven-volume biography (see my review), Moffett confirms earlier judgments of Taylor's aims and his accomplishment. Like the other missionaries, Taylor and his followers relied heavily on Chinese helpers. He engaged in evangelism but sought also to train converts and establish an indigenous church. Firmly evangelical, he furthered ecumenical cooperation at every turn. While calling for a thousand men to go to China, he sent more women than men, and employed them in pioneer evangelism.

Roman Catholics rebounded from earlier losses, but did not grow as fast as the Protestants, being greatly hampered by their association with the French government, which used its power to guarantee special rights for Catholic converts, thus arousing the ire of nationalistic Chinese.

Timothy Richard receives special attention, as an immensely influential – Moffett claims he was the most famous – missionary. His turn from early evangelism to later immersion first in social work and then in education is well known, but Moffett – always seeking balance and peace – affirms that Timothy never forsook his childhood faith. According to the author, he and Taylor were not as different as is usually pictured.

Given the modern scholarly bias in favor of Richard – and against Taylor – I would question whether charity has trumped fact in this treatment of the two. Though Taylor and his colleagues definitely threw themselves into famine relief and medical work as much as anyone, their commitment to the Gospel was never in doubt, as was that of Richard. Still, Moffett carefully examines the charge of syncretism leveled at Richard and finds it unconvincing.

I greatly appreciated the fine balance shown by Moffett in his discussion of the more “evangelical” missionaries and those convinced of the usefulness of literature, education and social transformation from the top down. He observes that “the priority given to evangelism and church growth by conversion . . . proved to have important social consequences.” On the other hand, he highlights the abiding relevance of Richard's “effective church planting method.” Things are not always as black-and-white as they seem.

In a marvelous blend of conciseness and concrete detail, including touching stories, Moffett takes us to the end of the century when the Christian message was beginning to permeate China, with momentous consequences for the coming convulsions of the 20th century.

Although I am embarrassed to confess that I have not read the rest of this book, I am not ashamed to recommend it on the basis of the masterful survey it gives of the beginning of the modern era in Chinese Christian history.

## **A Living Sacrifice**

**By Lydia Lee**

Lee, Lydia. *A Living Sacrifice: The Life Story of Allen Yuan*. Tonbridge, Kent, England: Sovereign World Ltd., 2001.

With the death of Allen Yuan, one of the “patriarchs” of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese church, this biography, though written while he was still alive, takes on new significance.

In her Epilogue, the author writes, “The main purpose for writing this book was to get to know a man—an ordinary man who nevertheless magnified the grace of God. . . . Another purpose . . . was to record the history of a crucial period in the development of the history of the Church in China.”

In my opinion, she succeeded in both purposes.

Lee believes that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “the emphasis of Christianity . . . focused on the identification of the gospel with the indigenous culture and the alignment of the relationship between State and Church.” This is true enough, and the life and career of Allen Yuan form an ideal opportunity to study both of these processes in the Chinese church.

Wisely, she states that “a man dedicated to God also reflects his sense of mission as well as his blind spots through his life.” Thus, her portrait of Yuan includes both his successes and failures, his virtues and his shortcomings.

Her main point is that “With God’s presence, a seemingly insignificant life becomes uniquely significant.”

Yuan’s childhood did not bode well for his future life: An adulterous, profligate father engaged in constant conflict with an angry mother. Later, he was indulged by well-to-do grandparents and their servants, with whom mother and children lived for several years. The boy emerged with “a rather paradoxical personality . . . - he was cowardly and shy yet having a profound hatred of evil; pampered yet feeling unloved; inhibited yet having a strong personality; careless yet conscientious; innocent yet depressive. He was insecure and had no intimate friends.”

After a while, his father was able to send Yuan to a school where he learned both English and the Chinese classics. For a while he was passionately devoted to the nationalist cause, and absorbed the writings of Sun Yat-sen. When his youthful spirit could find no peace, he sought answers in Buddhism and Confucianism, but without success.

Two Christian teachers greatly influenced him, one of them a foreign woman married to a Chinese. Though they sent him to listen to the famous Wang Mingdao, he refused to accept a foreign religion. Finally, on an icy day in December of 1932, Yuan experienced the presence of God in such a powerful way that he repented of his sins, asked forgiveness, and submitted his life to Christ.

At once he began sharing the Gospel with friends, most of whom responded positively. After a period of instruction and a strict examination of his faith by Wang Mingdao, Yuan was baptized, but he still struggled in vain with indwelling sin and guilt, until a visiting charismatic preacher prayed for him and he was filled with the presence, power, and the peace of the Holy Spirit. At that point God's love flooded his heart. (Yuan was connected to the "charismatic," even Pentecostal, wing of Protestantism, but the author wisely does not emphasize that aspect of his life, for Yuan worked among, and influenced, all branches of "conservative, evangelical" Christianity.)

Yuan's later life followed the same course: Intense striving for holiness; radical reliance upon the Spirit of God; burning zeal for evangelism; and the kind of fierce ecclesiastical independence that marked his mentor Wang Mingdao. All of these would bring him into prominence among the Chinese Christians and trouble with the Chinese Communist government.

He relied on unsolicited donations for support and would not be bound by denominational ties just to have the "security" of a regular salary. "If we want to evangelise as effectively as the apostles did, we should imitate their methods." This dependence upon God alone lost him the help of a Norwegian missionary early in his ministry in Beijing but set him free from foreign entanglements and reliance upon the help of man.

As an evangelist, he used a variety of methods—such as singing hymns and beating a drum with his family outside the door of his church, as well as radio preaching—but he knew that only God can convict sinners and give true faith. His preaching centered on the core elements of the Gospel—forgiveness of sins, new life, following Christ—and did not dwell on secondary matters. Hard work, persistence, and patience finally bore fruit.

When the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was formed, and all churches were ordered to join, Yuan refused, for three major reasons: His church had always been self-governing and self-supporting. Christ was the head of the church, and so the church should not “form any worldly alliance.” Finally, the liberal theology of the TSPM leaders made cooperation, much less submission, impossible.

Though many in his church deserted him, he would not attend the compulsory political education classes for pastors. When a meeting was held in which he and others were invited to express their opinions, he boldly rebuked those who had caved in to the TSPM. As a consequence, he was branded a “right-winger.”

Warnings came from well-meaning friends and from the TSPM, and Yuan began to realize that he would be taken away soon. His courage failed him at times, but he finally decided, “I would rather suffer than conform. . . . I don’t believe God will give us a burden we are unable to bear.” He told his wife, “A Christian looking forward to the rewards in heaven should not be bothered about what happens on earth.” The noose tightened as co-workers were arrested. Yuan armed himself by reading the book of Job over and over again and received God’s peace in his soul.

His greatest struggle was the danger to his family should he be arrested, but he finally gave them up also to God’s care.

Trials aplenty awaited him during the coming 21 years in prison: Being given only one chopstick with which to eat meager rations; incessant interrogation (Yuan remained silent or gave simple, honest answers); betrayal and beatings by fellow prisoners; solitary confinement; physical abuse; hard labor; worry about his family; a life sentence.

God took care of him, however. Despite intense cold, hard work, and malnutrition, he never once fell sick. The Lord provided for his family and protected him from the ravages of the Cultural Revolution. A vegetarian diet and physical exertion strengthened his health. He never doubted God, nor did he resent his enemies.

Yuan was not without fault, of course. By Western Christian standards, he neglected his wife. He had a very short temper. Though he diligently supervised his children’s education and made sure that they were organized to do household chores, he seldom “took them out to play and did not know how to communicate with them. As a result, they were afraid of him.” Indeed, “family relationships were not high on his list of priorities.” In later years, he often spoke of some of his weaknesses with co-workers.

The author also introduces us to his remarkable wife, without whose loyal and courageous support Yuan would not have been able to serve, or even survive, much less succeed as he did. Yuan knew this and credited her with 80% of his effectiveness.

His perseverance under trial bore fruit after his release in 1979. Though never rehabilitated, he was able to carry on evangelism, meeting with foreign visitors, writing letters, and supplying taped sermons for seekers and believers in the House Church movement. Despite growing government harassment and pressure to join the TSPM, Yuan refused to cease from Gospel work until his death.

A very helpful chapter on his theology, and another on his friendship with Wang Mingdao, show Yuan to have been a man of faith in the Bible; reliance on the Spirit; focus on Christ; insistence upon a changed life as evidence of conversion; belief in the autonomy of the local congregation and strict separation of church and state; willingness to cooperate with other Evangelicals; a belief in the gifts of the Spirit but little enthusiasm for the extremes of the charismatic movement; a conviction that house churches, not denominations—and certainly not the state-ordained Three–Self church—were the true pattern for today.

What were some of the “secrets” of Yuan’s fruitfulness as evangelist, pastor, and leader—and prison survivor? Simple faith in God, very hard work, self-denial, frugal living, a truly outstanding and devoted wife; total dedication, and heroic courage.

Personally, I found *A Living Sacrifice* both informative and inspiring and commend it to anyone seeking a better understanding of the phenomenal growth of the church in China, as well as the continuing tensions between unregistered churches and the official church.

# **A New History of Christianity in China**

**By Daniel H. Bays**

## **Part I**

Bays, Daniel H. *A New History of Christianity in China*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Daniel Bays has given us the results of decades of study in a volume that is remarkably comprehensive, concise, and compelling. The Introduction explains that this history arises from the need to present the results of the significant research on Christianity in China of the past three decades. Kenneth S. Latourette's magisterial *History of Christian Missions in China* is 80 years old; Jean-Paul Charbonnier's *Christians in China*, though always fair to Protestants, focuses on the Roman Catholic experience.

The book provides both a broad sweep of the history of Chinese Christianity and sufficient detail to make the story interesting. In each chapter, for example, Bays names the individuals who drove the action; he also gives more extended vignettes of key institutions and movements.

We find a balance, too, between admirably objective discussions of controversial topics and people, and candid "in my opinion" comments, all of which must be taken seriously, regardless of one's point of view. In other words, Bays has tried to be fair without denying us the benefit of his mature judgment.

As Professor Mark Noll writes, "Readers interested in a solid historical treatment of the dynamic story of Christianity in China need look no further. This is the book."

### **Principal Themes**

The narrative traces two major realities: "The basic tension between 'foreign' mission and (Chinese) church" and "the always-present instinct of the Chinese state... to monitor and control religious movements; as a result, Christianity was usually not seen only, indeed not even primarily, as a 'religion' or belief system, but as a behavioral phenomenon which could cause endless trouble" (2).

Bays detects a "persistent, overriding dynamic" in Chinese Christian history: "The Chinese Christians were first participants, then subordinate partners of the foreign missionaries, then finally the inheritors or sole 'owners.'" This process was also always a cross-cultural one, "the result of which has been the creation of an immensely varied Chinese Christian world in our day" (1).

Two major themes which arise from this story are: first, “the notion that Christianity, when it is separated from its bonding with Western culture in a package we may call ‘Christendom,’ is perfectly capable of adapting to function in different cultural settings.” The other is “the remarkable flexibility and creativity in the Chinese relationship with Christianity (or perhaps ‘Christianities’)” (2).

In every chapter, the development (or demise, as the case might be) of institutional Christianity is woven into the fabric of China’s political and social history, with special attention to the ways in which the “foreign” flavor of the religion helped or hurt its reception among the people and their leaders. Both Protestants and Roman Catholics receive attention, though Bays mirrors Charbonnier after the arrival of Robert Morrison in 1807 by focusing more on the Protestant story. An appendix on the Russian Orthodox mission in China concludes the book.

In the modern period, both Establishment “liberal” efforts and those of “independent” and “conservative” (or “fundamentalist”) Christians receive attention, as do Pentecostals and what Bays calls “sectarian” movements.

### **A Few Reflections**

A survey of the contents of the book, which I started to write, would make this review much too long, and would violate the spirit of Bay’s volume, which is so wonderfully succinct. Perhaps it would be better just to offer a few observations and reflections.

In the modern period, it would appear to me that the author’s sympathies lie a bit more with those who tried to create the Church of Christ in China more than with those who refused to join. At the same time, he shows how vulnerable the institution-heavy “Sino-Foreign Protestant Establishment” (SFPE) was to criticism for its failure to turn leadership over to Chinese Christians and to changes in political and financial conditions in China and the West.

An expert on Christian higher education in China, Bays highlights the crucial role that graduates of Christian colleges played in the modernization of China, and he tries to note both the strong faith of many alumni and the political and social orientation of most. I think that he also honors the heroic efforts of Christian reformers, both Chinese and foreign, while honestly admitting, with John King Fairbank, the “limits of Christian reformism” and concluding that “Christian reform efforts of the ‘Nanjing Decade’ came to naught or very little” (127).

Likewise, the huge campaign of Chiang Kai-shek’s “New Life Movement,” which many missionaries supported, “was of no use in promoting needed social and economic reforms, and faded from the scene, with its Christian supporters losing face among liberals and progressive” (128).

Many readers will find his spirited account of the rise of independent churches and the careers of prominent leaders very helpful; he helps to explain, also, why these churches have grown more than those aligned with the SFPE. The story is relevant because these two alignments coalesced

(with some exceptions) into the present division between unregistered churches and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), Bays' treatment of which is highly illuminating.

As for the Roman Catholics, Bays displays great admiration for the ambitious program of Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits, while drawing repeated attention to the dominance of foreign clergy until very recent years and the problems caused by the accumulation of power, land, and wealth. He seems critical of the strong anti-communist stance of the Vatican, which has, along with Chinese nationalism, created a schism among Roman Catholics up to the present.

The description of Christianity in China today in the final chapter should be required reading for all who want to understand the complex phenomena of rural, urban, "official," unregistered, and "cultural" Protestant Christianity, as well as both wings of Roman Catholicism. Actually, the whole volume is now essential background for anyone who has anything to do with Christianity in China, even those who will not agree with all of the author's judgments.

Do not let the brevity of the book, or the limpid style of its author, keep you from noticing the depth, breadth, and sheer brilliance of *A New History of Christianity* in China. For this reader, every chapter brought new information and fresh insights. Even very advanced scholars in this field will find *A New History of Christianity* in China both enjoyable and enlightening.

# **A New History of Christianity in China**

**By Daniel H. Bays**

## **Part II**

Bays, Daniel H. *A New History of Christianity in China*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

The author divides the history of Christianity in China into eight periods, devoting a chapter to each, with an appendix on the Russian Orthodox Church and Ecclesiastical Mission in China. A few highlights:

### **The Nestorian Age and the Mongol Mission, 635-1368**

He notes, but does not presume to assess, the recent claim that Christianity entered China in the first century A.D. Clearly, “Nestorian” Christianity, which arrived in the seventh century, was a “remarkable combination of Christian ideas and concepts mixed with Daoist and Buddhist terms,” but “we still do not have a good grasp of the ‘religious content’ of Nestorian Christianity” (10).

As a result, Bays will not decide what really caused the extinction of the Luminous Religion (or Church of the East) in the Tang dynasty, though the absence of Han Chinese converts must surely have been a factor. Instead, “what was most noteworthy and portentous for the future... is the alacrity with which the Christian faith took on distinct Chinese characteristics,” a theme to which he returns often (11).

We are reminded that Nestorianism made a huge impact on some of the Turko-Mongolian tribes; that the mother of Kublai Khan, founder of the Yuan dynasty, was a Christian; and thus, that when the Roman Catholics sent missionaries to the Mongol court, they found Nestorians already present in numbers, resulting in vigorous competition between the two traditions. Why did Christianity disappear again at the close of the Yuan dynasty? “The elements of Christianity may have been so closely tied to the foreign presence that there was almost no influence on indigenous persons and institutions” (14). The foreigners, in turn, depended on support from the government; when it fell, so did their work. Finally, the Black Death in Europe and shifting geopolitical realities stopped the flow of missionaries from Europe.

### **The Jesuit Mission of Early Modern Times, 1580s-1780s**

The second era of Roman Catholic missions to China “constituted a key transition in the worldwide serial movement of the Christian faith to parts of the non-West. It was also an important part of the first cross-cultural experience of the West.” (18-19) Two major forces led

to this development: The Protestant Reformation and the Roman Catholic reaction to it, and “the rise of the first of a succession of seaborne empires beginning in the early 1500s,” which, in the case of China, meant the Portuguese incursions into Asia. “All agreed on the unitary nature of Christianity and European culture. This was ‘Christendom’” (20).

Bays begins with “Matteo Ricci, the Jesuits, and the Larger China Mission,” which followed several strategic policies, especially in the early years:

Accommodation and adaption to Chinese culture. Evangelization from the top down, addressing the literate elite, even the emperor if possible. Indirect evangelism by means of science and technology convince the elite of the high level of European civilization. Openness to and tolerance of Chinese moral values and some ritual practices (21-22).

He then turns his attention to “the real action,” which he considers to be the ways in which later generations of Jesuit missionaries scattered across China to create “local rural-based Christian communities” consisting mostly of commoners and low-ranking elites; these communities, and others like them, have persisted into the 21st century and were more the “faith of families” than the “religion of converts” (23-24). Of particular interest to Bays is the variety of ways in which Roman Catholicism took on the flavor of traditional Chinese religion and culture, a process which has continued, and one that has evoked some concern by Roman Catholic priests who were afraid that syncretism was taking place.

After a survey of different regions in which Roman Catholicism took root, Bays tells the story of the Rites controversy, in which his sympathies lie with the Jesuits, not the “rites haters.” The ensuing proscription of Roman Catholicism in China drastically reduced the number of missionaries, but did not eradicate the communities of adherents, who learned to live “on their own” throughout the “long eighteenth century” until renewed Western advances “opened the door” for missionaries and believers to practice their faith openly.

### **Protestants, Catholics, and Taipings, 1800-1860**

New actors entered the scene in the early 1800s, as Protestants began sending missionaries and expanding their mercantile empires. Bays gives brief but adequate sketches of the pioneer missionaries, most of whom concentrated upon translation of the Bible and production of other Christian literature in Chinese, along with evangelism. Very soon, they also composed substantial works of Sinology for Western readers.

The story of the Opium Wars and the “Unequal treaties” that opened China to foreign missionary travel and settlement makes sad reading, especially given the lack of opposition to these wars (though not to the opium trade) by the missionaries and sometimes even their cooperation with imperialist governments (though one wishes that Bays had shown how the missionaries usually attempted to mitigate the harsher provisions of the proposed treaties). Mostly, they were convinced that the treaties would work for the furtherance of the gospel. In the end, for better or for worse, Christianity was “embedded” in the treaty system.

As for the Roman Catholics, the new treaties allowed for the return of large numbers of European priests, who quickly began to re-assert control over what had become an indigenous organization, arousing strong opposition from Chinese believers.

Bays' evaluation of the Taiping rebels is quite interesting. On the one hand, he acknowledges that some of their beliefs and practices were bizarre and not considered orthodox by most missionaries, but on the other he believes that they should be considered "Christian enough" and points out the fundamental challenge they posed to the Confucian social order. He thinks that the Qing officials who saw the Taipings as a "Christian" threat to the entire Chinese governmental and "socio-political system" were correct. Their uprising was "the most important single event of these decades" and its influence persists to this day in the presence of "sectarian movements in the countryside" that "bear some resemblance to them" (61).

On a more positive note, Bays gives recognition to a number of prominent Chinese Christians whose work in evangelism and translation were invaluable.

### **Expansion and Institution-Building in a Declining Dynasty, 1860-1902**

"At no time in Chinese Christian history was the problem of violence being directed at missionaries and Christians" experienced more than during this period, "[y]et this was also a time when the young Chinese Protestant church and in different ways the Roman Catholic church as well, put down roots of community that constituted a solid foundation for the future" (66).

The number of Protestant missionaries exploded, reaching about 3,500 by 1905; so did the number and variety of missionary societies and the range of works they undertook. On the one hand, the China Inland Mission, founded by J. Hudson Taylor in 1865, concentrated upon the rural areas; on the other, many concentrated their efforts on the cities, where they built a vast infrastructure of educational and medical institutions. During the famine in North China in the 1870s, a number of missionaries engaged in famine relief efforts. Bays names Timothy Richards, of course, but, like many historians, passes over the sacrificial, even heroic, efforts of members of the China Inland Mission, represented by J. Hudson Taylor's second wife, Jennie. (He also seems to me to lean a bit too heavily on Alvyn Austin's problematic interpretation of the CIM in general.)

The Protestant missionaries were mostly united in their general evangelical theology and overall aims. Bays, along with others, believes that one of their convictions was that China needed "Christian" civilization, and that "Christian" really meant "Western." Between 1890 and 1920, more than 33,000 college-educated students joined, or were inspired by, the Student Volunteer Movement to go change China with the Gospel and their ideas of modern society.

Meanwhile, the Chinese elite of Confucian scholar-officials "did not like Christianity. They thought it was a seditious doctrine but had to tolerate it, lest foreign, especially French, political or military power be mobilized" (74). They saw the missionaries as direct competitors to their

own local prestige and power who often stirred up ordinary citizens. A major cause of resentment was the way many missionaries, especially Roman Catholics, were given formal or informal status equal to that of magistrates, and their converts were made exempt from temple taxes and legal prosecution. The “religious cases” that resulted vexed the Chinese government for decades.

The Chinese church grew, despite resistance from officials. Some converted to gain material benefits, others found a new socio-political identity in the growing church community, and some were attracted by the promise of moral renewal. Still others saw Jesus as a more “efficacious god” than the local idols.

The status of women rose, especially as more and more girls received education; women also were given scope for activities in the church. Bays introduces us to a number of leading Chinese Christians, only a few of whom received the recognition they deserved by foreigners at the time. Some of these became part of a group of reformers urging Western-style changes in society. They were spurred on by missionaries like Timothy Richard, Young J. Allen, and Gilbert Reid, and they were joined by a larger number of non-Christian Chinese with similar political views. After a brief ascendancy, they were repudiated and eliminated by the Qing government, which in the end also supported the savagely anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion.

Bays does not hide the role played by some missionaries in the havoc wreaked by victorious foreign troops after the rebellion was crushed, and he opines that their excessive hopes for radical reform led to disgust and even anger towards the recalcitrant Qing government. Is there a lesson here somewhere about priorities in Christian mission?

# **A New History of Christianity in China**

**By Daniel H. Bays**

## **Part III**

Bays, Daniel H. *A New History of Christianity in China*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

We conclude our review of Daniel Bays' *A New History of Chinese Christianity* with a survey of the last four chapters.

### **The 'Golden Age' of Missions and the 'Sino-Foreign Protestant Establishment,' 1902-1927**

“Ironically, the undoubted tragedy of the Boxer events in 1900 ushered in a period of more than two decades during which both the foreign mission enterprise in China and Chinese Christian communities seemed to flourish,” even as “the Christian movement . . . was sliding toward a precipice” (93). The defeated Qing government inaugurated a series of ambitious reforms, many of them inspired by Protestant missionaries and their urban converts, especially those educated in Protestant schools. Numbers of adherents grew, as did autonomy from missionary control.

Independent congregations, founded and led by Chinese, proliferated, despite the indifferent response of Western missionaries. These Western missionaries were not always sure whether the Chinese were ready to run their own churches and institutions, as the careers of Marcus Ch'eng (Chen Chonggui) and Cheng Jinyi illustrate.

What Bays calls “the ‘Sino-Foreign Protestant Establishment’” emerged by the dawn of the 20th century and was in place by 1915. Consisting of the recognized leaders of the Protestant missionary societies, it gradually grew to include a coterie of younger Chinese Christians, many of whom had been educated in the West. The flavor of the missionary contingent was rapidly changing from the predominantly evangelical group of the 19th century to a more liberal crowd, mostly from the U.S, who were fired with idealism of the Student Volunteer Movement, the Social Gospel, and the general optimism of the pre-World War I period.

These were joined by Chinese, many (though not all) of them equally liberal, who aimed not just for partnership with foreigners, but for a truly indigenous – that is, independent – Chinese church, one that would abolish denominational distinctions in a national church of China. This goal was achieved in 1927, and up to one-third of all Chinese Christians eventually were part of what became the Church of Christ in China. In the first three decades of the century, this SFPE engaged in both evangelism and social action, including political advocacy. The leading lights on

the Chinese side figured prominently especially in the latter, even as they advanced liberal theological views in what some called “Indigenous Theology.”

There were other actors, however, especially those missionaries like Jonathan Goforth and Chinese like Ding Limei, who engaged in vigorous and fruitful evangelistic endeavors. Dozens of new mission organizations, and even more freelance missionaries, many of them from the Holiness/Pentecostal movement, further diversified the Protestant landscape. “Revivalism as a missions strategy after about 1920 was more likely to be used by conservative evangelical groups and independent traveling evangelists than by the SFPE” (105).

Around 1920, the former consensus among missionaries broke down, as the “Fundamentalist-Modernist” controversy erupted. When the Church of Christ in China was organized, many conservatives refused to join. Things would never be the same among Protestant Chinese, even to this day. (Throughout this narrative, Bays evinces much greater sympathy for the “ecumenical” Protestants than for the conservatives, whom he seems to consider uncooperative and narrow-minded.)

At about the same time, the May Fourth Movement forever altered the intellectual landscape of China. All things old, including Confucianism and Christianity, were considered outdated and even superstitious, and all things foreign, including missionaries and their institutions, were labeled as imperialist. Chinese Christians joined in the call for local control of schools, hospitals, and church organizations as part of the raging nationalism, and some academic theologians sought to reconcile Christianity with Chinese religious traditions. In the general anti-foreign mood, those Chinese who had thrown in their lot with the SFPE did not escape being tarred with the “foreign” brush.

As the 1920s drew to a close, Roman Catholics still outnumbered Protestants and were being led more and more by Chinese, but Protestants were increasing at a faster rate, especially in the cities, but also in rural areas, where indigenous sectarian movements were gathering steam.

### **The Multiple Crises of Chinese Christianity, 1927-1950**

“In the first half of the twentieth century, the foreign missionary movement in China matured, flourished, declined, and died. In these same decades, a Chinese church was born, a church which today is growing very rapidly. . . [F]rom 1900 to 1950, Christianity forsook its foreign origins and put on Chinese dress. It was not an easy process” (121).

This fast-paced chapter opens with the scathing criticisms of the missionary enterprise in China by Pearl Buck at a major church conference. The widely influential report, “Rethinking Missions,” reflected liberal theology and “advocated an overhaul of missionary thinking, especially, on such questions as the exclusivity of Christianity” and “the massive financial crunch in the early 1930s” that hit the “expensive institution-heavy facilities, especially hospitals, schools and colleges” of the SFPE (123).

Not all missions were equally affected, however. More evangelical groups like the China Inland Mission (CIM) and Pentecostal revivalists continued to flourish and grow rapidly. David Adeney of the CIM worked effectively with students; the martyrdom of John and Betty Stam spurred a fresh wave of applicants to the CIM.

Meanwhile, the National Christian Council launched several projects aimed at rural reform which also foundered due to both the size of China and the “intractability of some of the rural realities that Christian reformers faced,” such as the stake which local elites had in the status quo. The same could be said for reform efforts in urban areas, in which the YMCA played a leading role, and which were stymied by “business and industrial power structures” (126).

Equally fruitless was the new Life Movement sponsored by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his wife. Its failure brought embarrassment to the many missionaries who had embraced it largely because of the Chiangs’ identification with Christianity.

The liberal churches associated with the Church of Christ in China sought social reform, while conservative groups aligned with the Bible Union of China pursued evangelism and church building. During this period, a variety of new and fully independent movements arose. Bays traces the expansion of the True Jesus Church, the Jesus Family, Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng) and his movement (the “Little Flock”), and the Spiritual Gifts Society, along with highlighting the growing number of outstanding individual evangelists. The author provides brief but compelling accounts of Wang Mingdao, Dora Yu and women’s evangelism, the Bethel Band and the “paradoxical” John Sung (Song Shangjie), and Marcus Ch’eng (Chen Chonggui), clearly one of Bays’ heroes (whereas his portraits of Wang Mingdao and John Sung are rather negative, perhaps partly under the influence of Lian Xi’s somewhat jaundiced treatment of this whole group. It should also be said that Song did not “stress” healing, though his prayers did lead to many miraculous cures. His emphasis lay, rather, upon repentance, faith, and holy living).

Bays makes the most of meager materials to follow the fortunes of the church during the Second World War, when Japanese occupation forced many to work under an umbrella organization, which others, such as Wang Mingdao, refused to join. During the war, the evangelical and Pentecostal movements grew, Chinese necessarily assumed leadership in all areas, Christianity was spread more widely throughout the nation, and the SFPE suffered further loss of vitality.

At the end of the war, when missionaries returned, there were many struggles over control, with Chinese understandably reluctant to return to a subservient role. Student work resumed, with the more liberal YMCA tending to support the Communist side in the burgeoning civil war, while the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship – with David Adeney again taking a major role – emphasized more evangelical themes. Churches mirrored this split, where the liberals connected with the National Christian Council, lining up with the Communists, and conservative groups tended to support the Nationalists, though not unaware of their corruption and incompetence.

During the war, Roman Catholics, with their large land holdings, were reluctant to irritate the Japanese. Afterwards, those same properties made them vulnerable to the anti-landlord

campaigns of the Communists, already alienated by the anti-communist stance of Pope Pius XII. Wartime collaboration between the American OSS and some Roman Catholic missionaries merely confirmed the suspicions of the new rulers of China.

### **Christianity and the New China, 1950-1966**

Like virtually all Chinese governments in the past, the new communist rulers insisted upon “monitoring religious life and requiring all religions, for example, to register their venues and leadership personnel with a government office. The repeated historical experience of sectarian popular religious movements . . . turning into anti-dynastic rebellions was sufficient to make all central governments instinctively vigilant of religion” (159).

What was new, however, was “a powerful central state that was capable of demanding their compliance,” and a Marxist ideology that sought “systematically to reduce the influence of religion in society,” believing that it would eventually disappear. The “centerpiece” of their policy was simple: “cutting all ties with their foreign former associates and foreign institutions, putting them under the jurisdiction of state and party bodies assigned to monitor them” (159).

The government found a ready-made slogan for this policy: “Three-Self.” Under the rubric of “self-government, self-propagation, and self-support,” the churches would be completely severed from all foreign connections. This had been the stated goal of missionaries for decades, of course, but had been unrealized, as we have seen, except in the case of the independent Protestant movements. Now the Chinese believers would be absolutely free from all foreign domination – though, of course, not free from government oversight and even control.

From 1949 to 1954, the Protestants were largely brought into the new “Three-Self Patriotic Movement.” The story is a bit messy, and does not make very happy reading, but Bays does justice to the complexity of the situation. With a very few notable exceptions, the leaders in the TSPM were the same theological liberals who had previously been prominent in the SFPE.

The Korean War greatly accelerated the process of breaking ties between Protestant Chinese and foreigners and intensified various anti-foreign movements by the government, which merged into campaigns to denounce and remove from leadership all except for a few totally cooperative Christian leaders.

Those who were attacked were charged with criminal, rather than religious, offenses, to prevent them from becoming martyrs. In the case of Wang Mingdao, however, his refusal to participate in the TSPM because of the liberal theology of its leaders led to harsh treatment that was largely spearheaded by the future head of the TSPM, K.H. Ting (Ding Guangxun). Later, Chen Chonggui, an evangelical who had supported the TSPM and served as a vice-chairman, was ruthlessly purged. The memory of these events remains fresh in the minds of many in the unregistered churches.

During this same period, Roman Catholics resisted the government’s efforts to control them and force them to join Catholic Patriotic Association. A systematic campaign of vilifying the foreign

missionaries as foreign imperialists, proclaiming religious freedom while denouncing all who, in their eyes, used religion to undermine the government, and imprisoning those who would not cooperate while providing incentives for those who did, resulted in the creation of a permanent split between the officially sanctioned CPA and a large “underground” contingent of Roman Catholics who remained loyal to the Pope.

The Great Leap Forward devastated the economy of China and produced a horrible famine; at the same time, most churches were closed in a rabid anti-religious campaign. Already, however, some Protestants and many Roman Catholics had begun to gather in homes, sowing the seeds of powerful movements. By 1966, it seemed that Christianity in China had almost died out.

### **From the End of the Cultural Revolution to the Early Twenty-First Century**

From 1966 to roughly 1976, the entire country was plunged into a maelstrom of insanity and violence caused by Mao Zedong’s struggle to regain control of the Communist Party. Christians suffered along with everyone else, though sometimes even more severely, as “all religions were abolished” in a “nationwide eradication policy” that seemed for a while to have succeeded. During this time, Protestants gathered, of necessity, in house churches. The salvationist and revivalist message continued the legacy of the conservative/evangelical missionaries and independent Chinese Christians. Their faith was also millenarian, “looking to the imminent return of Christ,” and it was “to an extensive degree Pentecostal . . . highlighting ‘gifts of the Spirit’ such as speaking in tongues, prophecies, and miraculous healings” – characteristics true of many of the rural churches even today (186). Quietly but rapidly, they grew in numbers.

During the era of “reform and opening” which began in 1978, both the TSPM and the Catholic Patriotic Association were reinstated, led mostly by the same leftists whom many believers had come to distrust and even despise. Despite this, Protestant church buildings, when reopened, were filled to overflowing. Needs for proper pastoral care were – and are – acute, and training resources stretched beyond their limits. The unregistered groups proliferated, as did the number of TSPM adherents, largely unhindered by the state, which had other, more important problems to tackle.

Bays skillfully describes how the growth of rural Protestantism and Roman Catholicism results from a fertile mix of spiritual hunger, social dislocation, political freedom, Pentecostal zeal, real miracles, and a great deal of similarity to Chinese popular religion. The product is a most amazing smorgasbord, ranging from “orthodox” evangelical/fundamentalist/Pentecostal groups to the wildest of cults, all of them reflecting the strongly pragmatic, utilitarian, and eclectic nature of Chinese religiosity. Roman Catholicism, still largely rural, is even more indistinguishable from popular Chinese religion, except for difference in ritual.

The wildfire growth of Protestant Christianity in the countryside began to slow in the 1990s, to be replaced by an almost equally rapid increase in the cities, especially among intellectuals. These new urban Christians are quite sophisticated and aware of recent trends in Western churches. At the same time, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of scholars are investigating

Christianity for the first time in Chinese history in a development that points toward a future in which Protestantism could become more potent in public life.

Bays closes this marvelous survey with several comments: Most Protestant Christians do not face persecution; Christianity will continue to grow, but perhaps not as fast as in recent decades; China will not become a “Christian nation.” But Chinese Christianity will form an increasingly important segment of the worldwide church.

**A Protestant Church in Communist China**  
**Moore Memorial Church Shanghai, 1949-1989**  
**By John Craig William Keating**

Keating, John Craig William. *A Protestant Church in Communist China: Moore Memorial Church Shanghai, 1949-1989*. Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2012.

This fine historical study traces the vicissitudes of a major Protestant church in Shanghai, from its beginnings in 1887 almost to the present, with a focus on its experiences during the first forty years of the communist era. Though ostensibly limited to a single congregation, the book ranges widely, and manages to place this one institution within the broader arena of Christianity in China in the past one hundred twenty years. Though Moore Memorial Church (MMC) is unique, the author manages to use its history both to explain its particular role as a large institutional urban church and to show how it fits into the overall story of Protestantism in China.

Specifically, he wishes to explore the relationship “between the Christian church and the government in China” (3). Over the thirty years between the imposition of communist control in the early 1950s and the more relaxed conditions of the 1980s (and since), “MMC has had to adapt its work many times, to suit the changing political circumstances,” (3) and the study of these changes can illumine the overall picture of church and state in China. The book’s “central concerns are how this one church has been able to find a way to work with a communist government and what this might reveal about the nature of religion and politics in China” (5).

In particular, the author wishes to cast light upon “the debate” between two distinct camps. There are those, mostly based on Hong Kong, who “are adamant that TSPM and the official church in China has ‘sold its soul’ in cooperating with the communist government and that the only true Christians in China are therefore those who attend so-called ‘house churches’ or ‘underground churches.’” The late Jonathan Chao is cited as a prime example. On the other side stand people like Philip Wickeri who hold that “the official church in China is simply doing its best to find ‘common ground’ with the government in order to enable it to survive.” Keating wants to show that “the relationship between church and state in China is extremely complex and nowhere as black and white as some of these writers suggest” (10).

MMC “has always been a prominent church. In part, this is because of its size and its location, in the center of China’s largest metropolis. On the eve of the communist victory, it was described by a foreign journalist as ‘The greatest mission church in the whole East, and probably in the non-Christian world’” (4). Fifty years later, MMC still stands at the center of “official” Chinese church life in Shanghai, and even the nation. Much has happened in between, however, and the story reflects, and illustrates, the general history of one form of Protestant Christianity in China—the large, urban, building-based, missionary-founded, clergy—dominated, institutional,

“ecumenical,” “mainline” Protestant congregations which play a crucial role in the “official” TSPM/CCC organization, and particularly in its interface with similar entities in the West.

### **Brief History**

MMC was built in 1887 and named Central Methodist Church. It was refurbished with a large gift from Mr. and Mrs. Lyman Royster Moore of Kansas City and renamed Moore Memorial Church, in 1900. In 1925, it was moved to its current location on Tibet Street and rebuilt with funds raised both locally and from overseas. From the beginning, MMC was “totally foreign run.” It also had a strong connection with the Nationalist government, with some of its leaders being close friends of the powerful Soong family and then of Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang, with both sides deriving benefits from this cozy relationship. That does not mean, however, that the church’s clergy always approved of, or expressed support for, what the KMT government did.

The new building soon “became a focal point for the Methodist movement in China,” assuming an importance it still retains (35) /Topped by a tall neon cross, the structure represented all that was modern and Western in booming Shanghai and attracted large numbers of people who were open to new ideas and interested in Christianity. Many became sincere followers of Christ.

An “institutional church” was defined in 1908 by Edward Judson as “an organised body of Christian believers, who, finding themselves in a hard and uncongenial social environment, supplement the ordinary methods of the gospel – such as preaching, prayer meetings, Sunday School, and pastoral visitation – by a system of organised kindness, a congeries of institutions, which, by touching people on physical, social and intellectual sides, will conciliate them and draw them within reach of the gospel” (45). MMC was founded as such an institution, in direct contrast to fundamentalists who concentrated upon preaching the gospel and Christian worship and prayer meetings. There was “a kindergarten, a nursery school, primary school, health clinics, language classes, occasional lectures, a reading room, kitchens, community organizations and many activities for students and young working people,” including a shoe-shine cooperative that taught boys how to make a living for themselves (46).

One group, called “the naughty and nice girls,” began as a class on finance and home management, but expanded into its own community center, with a “day school that eventually catered for up to 230 children, an evening school for men and women, a weekly skin and eye clinic, a sewing group and a Sunday school. They also had a small plot of ground in which they grew corn and vegetables to help feed visitors” (47).

When the Japanese began their vicious assault on China, MMC served as a haven for refugees and a base for caring for those impacted by the war. The Japanese occupied the building as soon as they marched into Shanghai soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, hoisting their flag above the cross, though eventually on a separate flag pole. Foreign funds were cut off, leaving the congregation hard pressed to continue the extensive social programs which had been part of the core of its ministry in the city. Later, missionaries were interned, and all humanitarian work ceased. Previous connections with foreigners were a great liability during this time.

After the war, the missionaries returned, and the church was repaired with the help of foreign funds. With the outbreak of the civil war, humanitarian aid once more came to the fore of MMC ministries. When the Communists gained control of China, however, all foreign missionaries were soon expelled, and connections with these foreigners, who were labeled “imperialists” at best and “spies” at worst, became a huge liability for all Chinese who had worked with them. They were accused of being accomplices with the missionaries in their part in Western domination of China.

To protect themselves, many Chinese Christian leaders, including some at MMC, joined in the general accusations against their former foreign colleagues; others kept silent. Some of the denunciations were hard to understand, given the previous close relationships which had existed. Under the leadership of Wu Yaorong and others, the Three–Self Patriotic Movement was formed, with the explicit goal of eradicating all foreign influence on Chinese Christianity. Though claiming to be “self-governing,” the TSPM was, in fact, under the governance of the Religious Affairs Bureau, itself part of the United Front Work Department.

Wu and others had also spearheaded the campaign to produce and promulgate the Christian Manifesto, which roundly rejected the foreign missionary project. (The Methodist Church, however, released a “patriotic covenant,” which was “even more revolutionary in tone than the manifesto” (92).) Some Christians, such as Wang Mingdao, refused to sign, while others did so either willingly or simply to survive. Watchman Nee sought to protect himself and his Little Flock by submitting names which had originally been used for a building project. Those who signed willingly were frequently also those who had previously been part of the ecumenical movement and who were in sympathy with much of the Communist program; the YMCA was outstanding in this camp and faced much less pressure as a result.

The TSPM not only cooperated with the government in accusing foreign missionaries and all who worked with them, but in denouncing all Chinese Christian leaders who would not join the TSPM, thus engendering bitter memories that have not gone away to this day. There was such persecution of unregistered churches and their leaders, in which the TSPM was an active party, even into the twenty-first century, that many cannot see the TSPM in anything other than the role of traitor to Christ.

The author wishes to show that not all Chinese Christian leaders who joined the TSPM were guilty of spiritual treason; in this he is surely accurate, though it seems to me that he leans heavily towards the side of downplaying TSPM hostility to unregistered churches in his attempt to set the record straight. Since the focus of his study is MMC, however, and since leaders of that congregation have not been as active in actual persecution of unregistered groups, perhaps his treatment is understandable.

The body of the book traces the ways in which MMC and the government related to each other in the Communist era, from the early days up to the 2000. In general, he finds that leaders and members of MMC tried to adapt to difficult situations in various ways, always seeking the survival of the church of themselves as individuals. He divides the period into six stages:

Adjusting to the new regime (1949-51); the call to realign (1950-58); a church under pressure (1958-66); a church closed (1966-79); reopening (1979-89); and the church today (1989).

He describes the different attitudes towards the Communist government found in both the missionaries and the Chinese leaders of MMC, and the different ways in which the government sought to bring the congregation firmly under its control. He also shows how some members of MMC tried to maintain affectionate ties with missionaries even after they had been driven out. He surveys different evaluations of the missionary enterprise, then and now, and notes a general softening of government attitudes toward the missionaries, who are now conceded to have done some good things for the people.

In general, precisely those institutions that had tried to engage in social work presented a great threat to the government, and were forced to curtail most, if not all, of these activities.

Beginning in 1958, “united worship” was required of all Protestant churches, which had been greatly reduced in number; this was part of a campaign to eliminate the vestiges of foreign denominationalism from Protestantism in China. Though the author insists that the content of sermons has never been controlled by the government, he does admit that in the “united worship” services there are “no prayers of intercession, no confession or absolution and worshipers do not exchange a greeting.” He believes that this “suggests that the official churches in China feel that these social elements of Christian worship are best avoided” (123).

After the opening and reform initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1979, MMC “once again played a central role in the re-opening of official churches in China,” being one of the first to be opened again after the Cultural Revolution. From the beginning, it was used as a showcase of “religious freedom” in China and a regular stopping-point for distinguished visitors from abroad, whom the TSPM wanted to impress. The neon cross was replaced and the building repaired. Attendance quickly grew, as it did all across China, and numbers at MMC soon surpassed pre-1949 levels. Various reasons for this vast increase in church attendance are surveyed; the author believes the main cause to be the greater political space given to the churches by the state after 1979. Others would attribute the revival to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Many people come because they are attracted to the foreign appearance of the building, the foreign music, and the generally foreign feel of the worship service. They associate Christianity with all that is best in the West and want to know more about this religion, which is no longer considered fully foreign but still retains a foreign flavor.

Though much has changed since 1949, much remains the same at MMC. The building, renovated and cleaned, stands as an impressive landmark in the city, and has been recognized as a prime example of 20th-century architecture. The impressive structure, with its stained-glass windows and Western appearance, continues to attract people of all ages. The music and worship breathe a distinctly Western air, despite the introduction of some recently composed (and very patriotic) hymns by Chinese writers. As before, the worship service follows a typical “Western” liturgical pattern reminiscent of the Methodist—Anglican tradition (Methodism grew out of Anglicanism, of course). Despite great similarity in worship within TSPM churches, denominational distinctive have since reappeared across the nation. The services and programs at MMC are led

by clergy, as in the past. Older members, who are dying off, preserve the memories of former days, and rejoice in the restoration of a full range of services, but especially the choir, of which there are now five. Music has always played a central role in the life of MMC, and never more than today.

Founded as an institutional church, MMC operates a variety of social and spiritual programs, and the building is in use seven days a week, even though the range of charitable works is much smaller than before, since the government is keen to preserve its identity as provider of all essential services. In some ways, it is a “typical” institutional church in China.

This study set out to examine the “relationship between church and state at one particular inner-city church,” and stays focused on that theme throughout. What about the present? The members of MMC are not “docile” slaves of the government, but neither are they rebels. The congregation does not, however, enjoy a relationship of “peaceful coexistence” with the state (247). The relationship between the two is “both complex and ever changing” (248). “The relationship with the state is still essentially a subservient one for all religions in China and MMC is not an exception to this rule” (219).

On the other hand, the author maintains that neither the view that the official churches in China are puppets of the regime, nor the view that “it is a genuine and appropriate response to the political situation in China” is correct. He agrees with Ryan Dunch that “the control and resistance model does not adequately explain the situation” (226). He concludes that “the people at MMC have had to operate under various restrictions and make compromises, particularly during the Mao era, but they are nonetheless genuine Christians, not communist puppets,” (228) though he does not hide the obsequious actions of some MMC clergy under communist rule.

In general, I believe that he succeeds in what he set out to do, by showing that not all members and clergy of MMC “sold their soul” to the Communists at every point, though he does not gloss over obvious instances of self-seeking subservience to the government. On the other hand, his study does not always give sufficient weight to the opinions of the “house church” advocates, though he cites them many times, nor does it adequately reflect the thinking and writing of those who have been following the developments of unregistered urban churches in recent years. It also seems to me that, despite valiant efforts to be objective, he has leaned towards the “official” side in his assessments at several points and has not afforded appropriate weight to the “unofficial” point of view. He usually discounts the opinions of people like Jonathan Chao (who had a PhD in history) and other critics of the TSPM, while taking at face value statements made by spokesmen for the TSPM, including the late Ding Guangxun, whom not everyone will consider reliable. Still, for the main period of his study, 1949-1989, he seems to be quite accurate in his descriptions and judgments about life at MMC.

The author is fluent in Chinese and spent a great deal of time interviewing current and former members and leaders of MMC. In every chapter, he skillfully sets the situation in Shanghai within the larger picture of China, the experience of MMC within the larger context of Protestant Christianity in China, and all of Christianity within the larger context of China’s shifting political

scene. He does a marvelous job of using the particular to illustrate the general, and the general to understand the particular. He covers both religious and “secular” history throughout.

He cites more than five hundred books, articles, internal publications and pamphlets, theses and dissertations, and electronic sources representing many different points of view. Despite my criticisms above, his use of this material otherwise largely fair, balanced, and judicious. Where he gives his opinions, he presents reasons for them, and usually makes a persuasive case for his conclusions. Even when you might disagree with him, you will do so with hesitation and respect. This is a superb work of history on a complex and important topic and deserves a wide reading.

For some thoughts on possible lessons to be learned for China ministry today from the history of MMC, see the companion article from China Institute.

**A Star in the East**  
**The Rise of Christianity in China**  
**By Rodney Stark and Xiuhua Wang**

Stark, Rodney and Xiuhua Wang. *A Star in the East: The Rise of Christianity in China*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2015.

This book “explores how and why this religion is growing at such a rapid rate and speculates on its future growth. After all, if the religion keeps growing at its current pace, in a decade there will be more Christians in China than in any other country in the world.” (Location 69, Kindle edition; all numbers in notes hereafter indicate the Kindle edition location).

**Chapter One: The New Religious Awakening in China**

Despite what appeared to be the near-extinction of religion during the Cultural Revolution, religious faith has been undergoing something of an explosion in the past few decades. Traditional faiths like Buddhism and popular religion (which are in fact hard to distinguish) have made a comeback, but the “rapid expansion of Christianity is something new in Chinese history. Thus, it may be more appropriate to call what is going on in China today a religious ‘awakening,’” rather than a revival of traditional religion (2).

The authors support their claims about the expansion of Christianity in China by referring to two very large surveys, backed up by field reports. Strict statistical analyses, conducted according to recognized principles of sociological research, make this book much more authoritative than others before it.

***The Decline in “Irreligion”***

Two problems have made it difficult to track the real number of religious adherents in China. One is that people may be unwilling to reveal to interviewers that they have religious faith, because of government anti-religious policies. The other, more important one, is that most Chinese “define religion as belonging to an organized religious group, rather than consisting of practices, such as praying in temples, or of belief. Hence, some Chinese say that they believe in Jesus Christ while denying that they are Christians” (5). Recently, however, more and more Chinese have been willing to say that they have a religion. (Things have changed since the publication of this book.)

Practicing Folk Religion: Chinese by the hundreds of millions practice folk religion, the “most basic form” of which “involves ancestral spirits” (5). We can say, therefore, that “traditional Chinese folk religion ‘has revived with great force’” (7).

The Revival of Buddhism: The number of people willing to admit that they are Buddhists has likewise risen, especially since the government has moved to legitimize this traditional faith in a variety of ways, despite its foreign origin.

Islam: Only two percent of China's population are Muslim, and they live mostly in the border areas, including Inner Mongolia and Tibet. Many of them believe that they are discriminated against by Han Chinese and by the government, and more and more violent attacks against Chinese have been launched in recent years, exacerbating tensions further.

Christianity: By far the fastest growth has taken place among those who identify as Roman Catholic (RC) or Protestant, or who participate in overtly Christian practices. Most probably, the total came to about 60 million in 2007.

## **Chapter Two: Christian Missions to China: 1860-1950**

This chapter recounts the familiar story of Western missions in China since the so-called "unequal treaties" made residence in China and evangelization in all parts of the country legal for foreigners, including missionaries.

The authors treat the usual topics, including early missionary efforts and results; the Taiping Rebellion; the roles of women missionaries; the Boxer Massacres; Christianity and Chinese nationalism; the effect of the Great Depression on missionary sending in the 1930s; and the impact of World War II and the civil war upon missionaries and Christians.

We learn some interesting facts, with supporting statistics, such as the preponderance of American and British missionaries; the high mortality and illness rate among missionaries before 1891; the much greater numbers of Christians in urban and coastal areas than in rural areas in 1918; the devastating effect of liberal theology on the number of missionaries sent out by "mainline" denominations in the twentieth century. ("Without the conviction that they were bringing priceless truths to those in need, the mission spirit quickly dissipated in liberal Protestant circles" (34).)

## **Chapter Three: Repression and Christian Resistance**

After the Communists came to power, they moved to impose control upon religious groups, including Protestants and Roman Catholics. The authors claim that Roman Catholics, because of their loyalty to the Pope, endured much fiercer persecution from the beginning of Communist rule, while the government "tolerated many Protestant groups for a few years" (43). Then came the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when all religious activities were banned and religious leaders and practitioners were brutally persecuted.

"Ironically, the persecution of Protestants may have been the single most beneficial event for the success of Christianity in China!" (43-44). The expulsion of missionaries made the church completely indigenous. "Gone too were the American liberal Protestant missionaries who weren't sure why they had come to China" (44). And—to the authors this is crucial—"given that religious conversion is the result of close interpersonal relations, to deprive a religious movement of a public presence and the capacity to make mass appeals has very little significance" (44).

The rest of the chapter traces the remarkable growth of Protestant Christianity in China since the 1950s, despite repression and sometimes brutal persecution.

They attribute the spread Christianity to the dynamic of conversion: “People tend to convert to a religious group when their social ties to members outweigh their ties to outsiders who might oppose the conversion, and this often occurs before a convert even knows much about what the group believes” (49). “To convert someone, you must be or become a close and trusted friend. In turn, when someone converts to a new religion, then that person usually seeks to convert friends and relatives, and therefore conversion tends to proceed through social networks.” (50).

That means that “the missionary enterprise consists of two essential stages or steps” (50). First, the missionary becomes the close friend with a local person, who may then eventually accept the new faith. That person then seeks to bring family and friends into the group of converts. The role of the missionary after that is to educate the converts in the tenets of their newfound faith.

“Because conversion spreads over networks of close personal relations, it is not a very visible phenomenon and, in the face of repression, can be conducted in secret. That makes it extremely difficult to detect or punish.” (50).

Anti-Roman Catholic persecution was especially crippling, with the death or imprisonment of large numbers of priests and bishops creating a severe shortage in ordained clergy. Because of its hierarchical structure, Roman Catholicism in China was thus hampered, whereas “the Protestants would seem to have a nearly inexhaustible supply of preachers” (56). Their churches thus “not only survived underground but grew” (57). Even the Little Flock Movement, though targeted by the government for extinction, survived and grew. Why? “They kept a very low profile and organized cell groups and home meetings at the grassroots level” (59).

Since Opening and Reform began in 1978, both official Protestant and Roman Catholic organizations have operated with relatively little interference (though since the book was published, cross removals and building demolitions in the Wenzhou area have made the atmosphere more tense). Even unregistered Protestants have enjoyed a great deal of freedom and space to worship and teach. By contrast, the underground Roman Catholics, who remain loyal to the Pope, have endured constant pressure and persecution. In both cases, believers hold to a conservative form of Christianity. “Why? Because persecution served as a potent selection mechanism” (72). Furthermore, these groups have “high member intensity,” which fosters growth through conversion of friends and relatives of the believers.

The result: Protestants outnumber Roman Catholics by about ten-to-one now.

#### **Chapter Four: Converting the Educated**

This chapter shows that educated Chinese are more likely to convert to Christianity and turn from Buddhism than those with less education: “[N]ew religious movements nearly always are based on elites,” because of a sense of spiritual deprivation; modernization and globalization have produced in China a “crisis of cultural incongruity—a conflict between the cultural assumptions of modernity and those of traditional religious culture,” leading to a sense of

spiritual deprivation that produces a tendency to turn away from Buddhism, the traditional faith, to Christianity (76). This is true throughout East Asia.

### **Chapter Five: Converting Rural China**

Confronting the fact that Christianity has also spread like wildfire in rural areas, the authors try to show that this has not been due to material or power deprivation, as many have assumed. First, the difference between rural and urban church growth are very slight. In other words, Christianity is growing quickly everywhere in China. Second, it seems that “it is the more affluent rural Chinese who are most likely to convert” (100). As for age, most rural Christians, like their urban counterparts, converted when they were young, not elderly. China does reflect the worldwide fact that more women are religiously active than men, but this has nothing to do with a sense of powerlessness. In short, the usual theory of material deprivation driving religious conversion does not seem to hold true.

What does emerge clearly from recent, and very rigorous, studies is the power of social networks in conversion. Most people become affiliated with a Christian church through the influence of someone whom they know well, and who has sought them out. Since social networks are stronger in rural areas, that explains why Christianity has grown slightly faster there, and why it appears to be more stable and vigorous.

### **Chapter Six: Future Prospects and Consequences**

The final chapter seeks to address three questions: 1. "How large will the Chinese Christian community become?" 2. "Will Chinese Christians splinter into a variety of denominations differing in their intensity and doctrines?" 3. "If Christians become a major presence in China, what difference will it make?" Here are their answers:

1. At current growth rates, in 2010 there will be 149.7 million Christians; by 2030, 294.6 million; by 2040, 579 million.
2. “Chinese Christianity is and will be separated into many denominations,” with different doctrines and different degrees of intensity in their commitment to the faith, to each other, and to evangelism.
3. As it is elsewhere, Christianity will make Chinese believers healthier and happier. The social impacts will include: greater material income, higher educational levels, lower child mortality rates. A free-market economy is not necessarily more likely to emerge, however. Nor is a more democratic society inevitable, unless the growing numbers of Christians in the Party exercise decisive influence in decades to come.

## **Evaluation**

### ***Strengths***

By and large, the authors do a very good job telling the story of Christianity in China since 1900 within the context of Chinese history. Their account is concise and largely accurate. Brief, vivid biographies of outstanding Chinese Christians, usually with photographs, fill out the narrative and highlight the major themes. Most of these are especially well written.

Aside from the basic helpfulness of its historical narrative, the great strengths of *A Star in the East* are three:

1. For the first time, we have solid statistical studies, yielding reliable numbers, for the history of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism in China. This makes the book immensely valuable for researchers and historians.
2. Their sociological approach helps us to understand just how the church has grown so rapidly, through social networks, which can point towards effective practices in the future.
3. They specifically and persuasively refute the common notion held by some urban Chinese church leaders and many in the West who claim that Christians must have more public space and a more public witness to grow and to influence society. Specifically, large congregations meeting in big buildings and engaging in public programs are not essential, or even helpful, for solid, lasting growth. Christianity expands, both in numbers and in societal influence, when believers meet in small groups, preferably in homes, where their transformed lives and relationship attract others and eventually leaven an entire culture.

*A Star in the East* provides a complement to Brent Fulton's *China's Urban Christians* and, like Fulton's book, is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand Christianity in China.

### ***Weaknesses***

No book is perfect, and this volume has some weaknesses. Some generalizations and even some specific statements appear to be incorrect, or at least to need careful qualification. For example: "Subsequent to the rise of Communist rule, [Roman] Catholicism has been the target of far more intense government opposition than has Protestantism" (14). "British General Charles 'Chinese' Gordon commanded [the] imperial army" fighting the Taipings (17). "Often, buildings were sacked and burned and sometimes the missionaries were injured or even murdered" (22). Beginning in the 1920s, there was "endemic friction" between Chinese Protestant leaders and Protestant missionaries (32). "For several years after coming to power the Chinese Communist regime ignored the Protestant churches led by Chinese" (43).

In discussing attacks on missionaries and Christians in the nineteenth century, they do not make a distinction between the hostility against Roman Catholics and Protestants. The former were resented for holding property; gaining treaty rights that granted equal social status, and real political power, to priests and bishops; being too closely tied to, and supported by, the French government; and constant protection of Chinese converts from lawsuits. The Protestants in the coastal areas were also guilty of intervention in lawsuits, the so-called "religious cases" that so riled Chinese officials.

They correctly say that the foreign legation held out courageously against vastly superior Qing firepower, but fail to mention that the imperial forces, apparently deliberately, restrained their attacks, probably aware of the inevitable foreign victory and the consequences for China of a massacre of diplomatic personnel. (See A.J. Broomhall, *The Shaping of Modern China*, Volume Two, 687-688.)

Their interpretation of the relative “advantage” of Roman Catholic missions in China because of its many similarities to popular religious practices and architecture would seem to be correct. Others would argue, however, that some of these similarities stem from non-biblical Roman Catholic customs, and that the resulting form of Christianity resembles folk religion so much that what we see comes close to Christo-paganism, not true Christianity.<sup>1</sup> The same might be said of a great deal of rural Protestantism, however.

Like some others, they do not adequately distinguish between the policies and practices of the China Inland Mission (CIM) and most “mainline” mission organizations. For example, the CIM was quicker to turn control over to Chinese Christians and experienced less conflict with their Chinese colleagues.

The biographical sketches of about Witness Lee, Watchman Nee, and John Sung gloss over some controversial questions. Though they state that Nee wrote many books, in fact he authored only one, *The Spiritual Man*. All other publications under his name consist of edited versions of his magazine articles and transcripts of his sermons.

More importantly, the authors deliberately downplay the role of “doctrine” in conversion, which they see as a sociological phenomenon. Though their case for conversions through social networks is powerful and convincing, we should not ignore that what we have seen in China is a vast movement of the Holy Spirit, working through the message of Christ and his Cross preached by courageous and dedicated men and women, often in a context of great suffering. The book does acknowledge the importance of healing miracles but does not address the efficacy of prayer.

Their definition of “Christian,” likewise, seems limited to the social affiliation of individuals, rather than one’s personal relationship with God. This is appropriate, given the sociological approach of the authors, but does not reflect biblical usage. More than semantics is involved here because, as many have observed, Christianity in China is increasingly “a mile wide and an inch deep.” That is why church leaders now agree that their greatest challenge is to nurture true faith, genuine hope, and sincere love in those who claim to follow Christ.

---

<sup>1</sup> For rural Roman Catholicism’s similarity to folk religions, see, for example, Richard P. Madsen, “Beyond Orthodoxy: Catholicism as Chinese Folk Religion, in Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu, eds., *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 233-249. Madsen, a Roman Catholic, uses the milder term “Folk-Catholicism.”

## **A Stone Made Smooth**

**By Wong Ming-Dao**

Ming-Dao, Wong. *A Stone Made Smooth*. Southampton, UK: Mayflower Christian Books, 1981.

This autobiographical account of the eminent Chinese House Church pastor, Wong Ming-Dao, follows the first forty or so years of his life. The book demonstrates the deep and life-changing effects of Christianity on this man, as well as his distinctive Chinese-ness. Wong tells the story of his ministry, beginning in his early twenties and ending the account right before World War II.

Wong Ming-Dao's early years show most strongly the depth to which his Chinese upbringing affected his life. His intense love for his mother is present from his earliest memories, as he fondly recalls the way she bought and then rented out rooms in their house to earn some income after her husband, Wong's father, died. Wong remembers the feelings of fear he had when he lived at a school across town from his mother and never knew, until his weekly visits home, whether she was dead or alive. As Wong got older, and then became a Christian, his love and sense of filial piety towards his mother did not decrease; in fact, his appreciation of her grew. His new God-centered beliefs, however, caused him to try to avoid having arguments with his mother out of respect for her opinions, but periodically he was forced to disagree out of a sense of conviction. These moments of tension increased for Wong after his marriage, since both his mother and older sister, for reasons not entirely apparent, were quite hostile to his wife. These interactions provide good insight into the mind of a Chinese Christian.

The bulk of the story, though, takes us through Wong's growing ministry, which began only in his very early twenties and continued to expand until the beginning of World War II, when the account ends. Many stories of faith are related, examples of how prayer and simple trust in God accomplished amazing things. Wong does an excellent job of intertwining the story of his own personal spiritual journey with the account of the growth of his ministry. It is clear that trials in faith greatly strengthened Wong's walk with God.

Specific chapters are devoted to various areas of Wong's life, including his relationship with his wife, his work on the *Spiritual Food Quarterly* (a magazine of Bible teaching that eventually grew in circulation to around fifty thousand subscribers), and his memories of his mother. These chapters, however, are also filled with the narrative of Wong's ministry experiences.

This book is an excellent resource for those seeking to better understand the Chinese psyche. The accounts of Wong's faith are inspiring, but the reader also comes away with a strong sense of what struggles Chinese pastors go through in all areas of life. Therefore, *A Stone Made Smooth*, if not the most focused of a Chinese house-church leader, is still a good all-around glimpse into the heart of a Chinese Christian.

**Acquainted with Grief**  
**Wang Mingdao's Stand for the Persecuted Church in China**  
**By Thomas Alan Harvey**

Harvey, Thomas Alan. *Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mingdao's Stand for the Persecuted Church in China*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Book House Company, 2002.

As an older Christian in Beijing told a Western reporter, "Understand two men, and you will understand Chinese Christianity." "Which two?" "Wang Mingdao and K.H. Ting!"

Thomas Harvey traces the conflict of these two men, and the movements they represent, from the first days of the communist victory in 1949 to the beginning of the 21st century. Though Ting (later head of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement – "TSPM") clearly won the first round, Wang Mingdao emerges as spiritual victor at the end of the story.

"Wang Mingdao's resistance, persecution, suffering, and perseverance have come to symbolize the faith of tens of millions who now worship outside state-approved churches," writes the author in his introduction to this finely-nuanced study of the issues involved.

The book does not seek to serve as a full biography of Wang, but it does introduce us to his refusal to submit his church to government control. It "explains and analyzes that resistance and the conflict it bred between Wang and the government," and "examines Wang's biblical and theological defense of his stand as well as the arguments leveled against it."

Why such a study today? Because the conflict continues, at least in some quarters. Most of China's Christians worship in churches which have not submitted to the demand to register with the government. The TSPM still sometimes assists in the government crackdown on those believers, while Ting labors to expunge all vestiges of Evangelical theology from TSPM seminaries. In other words, though Wang died in 1991, Ting struggles with his legacy to this day, and Wang's spiritual heirs continue their resistance.

Meanwhile, Christians in the West disagree. Liberals in mainline churches support the TSPM; many Evangelicals applaud the house church leaders who insist upon ecclesiastical independence.

### **Theological Issues**

Harvey's principal contribution—and it is a major one—resides in the careful delineation of the theological issues at stake in Wang's resistance to the pressures to join the TSPM. As Jesus and the early Christians experienced, Wang was charged with anti-government attitudes and actions. Specifically, his refusal to participate in the communist-controlled TSPM was labeled as "unpatriotic," "counter-revolutionary," and therefore "criminal."

In his early years, Wang had already castigated many Chinese and foreign church leaders for their “modernist” or “liberal” theology. He compared their views with the Bible, and found them lacking, even heretical. Other leaders were criticized for lack of spiritual life or venality in the service of Westerners, seeing church service as merely a secure job. This practice of sharp denunciation naturally aroused the ire of those whom he exposed and created enemies who would one day rejoice to see him fall. More conservative, evangelical, or “fundamentalist” Christians saw Wang as a courageous prophet contending for the truth.

After the Japanese occupied Beijing, they soon required all churches to join an association created, and then controlled, by the foreign force. They used the pretense of ridding the church of all “imperialist”—meaning Western—control. Since Wang’s congregation had from the beginning eschewed all formal connections with foreign Christian organizations, he simply ignored the Japanese summons.

Others feared for his safety and thought the church might be closed down, but the leaders supported Wang’s defiant stand. For some unknown reason, the Japanese did not press the matter, and the church remained open during the war.

Thus, when the communists took power and created the TSPM, Wang responded as he had before, confident that he would be able to preserve the freedom of his church. But, as Harvey shows in detail, the new government required absolute and total obedience. Anyone who “split” the nation, as they claimed Wang did by insisting that Christians differed from non-believers, opposed the building of a new and just society.

More than that, since “righteousness” was now defined by both communists and “Christian” leaders as fully participating in the United Front, in which the TSPM joined with other groups to pursue the policies of the new government, anyone who stood aloof from the TSPM was declaring himself “unrighteous.”

The logic is simple: “Political essence not only precedes religious essence; it defines it. Thus, duty to the nation defines duty to God.” Wang’s stance was thus “a betrayal not only of country, but of Christ and the church.” Wang would not accept this redefinition of the nature and duty of Christ’s church. He noted the liberal theology of leaders of TSPM and the idolatrous nature of totalitarian government, and he insisted that Christ alone must rule his church.

When Ting replied that he and other TSPM leaders also believe in God the Father, Wang was not satisfied. In Harvey’s words:

Wang’s demand that the Father can only be known through the Son and the Son only through a proper understanding of Scripture in accord with sound doctrine illuminated the theological divide in interesting ways. The demand that Jesus Christ and sound doctrine defined the nature of the church created problems for those who sought to establish the church on secular philosophical, social, or political foundations. The appeal of Ting’s amorphous First Person of the Trinity lay in the fact that it gave tremendous freedom to fashion Christianity according to a secular ideological framework. Wang’s emphasis that

the Father could only be known through the Son, not through creation, sundered that union.

In response to Ting's objection that Wang's insistence upon making distinctions between believers and non-believers "split" the nation and the church, Wang replied that he was only seeing of obvious facts. Furthermore, "The fact that his opponents used manipulation, coercion, and threat to force him and other Christians to deny this truth only revealed his opponents' true nature."

Lest we think these issues irrelevant today, we should consider: Bishop Ting still determines the theology of the TSPM; in recent years, he has conducted a purge of all Evangelical teachers from TSPM seminaries; and the State still requires all Christian congregations either to register with the government or to join the TSPM. Has anything really changed?

Yes, and no.

Wang went to prison for his refusal to join the TSPM, and almost all non-TSPM congregations were closed down. Today, thousands of these groups exist and meet, in defiance of government threats. .

On the other hand, leaders from house churches which do not join the TSPM or register with the government face fines, imprisonment, beating, and occasional death, and the chief instigators of this persecution, working through the police, sometimes include the TSPM and the Religious Affairs Bureau. Though the suffering is not universal, as during the Cultural Revolution, it is widespread, and has official sanction from the highest levels of the government, which still seeks to control religion. (Since I wrote this, the government has launched a nationwide campaign to abolish "house" churches.)

Though we cannot deny that the vast majority of those who attend TSPM churches are sincere believers and seekers, and that many of the TSPM pastors hold to the truths that Wang Mingdao believed, we cannot ignore the continuing participation of some members of the leadership of the TSPM in the same kind of suppression that sent Wang to prison for more than twenty years.

### **Wang's Legacy**

Harvey concludes his book with frank and challenging suggestions for a sane policy of religious freedom for the PRC; one hopes they take his advice! He reminds us that Wang Mingdao's legacy lives on in the lives of millions who see him as an example of faithfulness to the Gospel. On the other hand, by including in an appendix the heart-rending "confession" which Wang made after his first imprisonment, Harvey implicitly highlights Paul's warning, "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." If an "iron man" like Wang could falter out of fear (though he later recovered), what of lesser leaders? Are there lessons in Wang's autobiography, *A Stone Made Smooth*, which might illuminate his first failure and prepare us to withstand under pressure, as he did the second time? Before his showdown with Ting and the TSPM, he admits candidly that his resistance to the Japanese went against the natural fearful disposition of his personality. Clearly, only Christ can give strength in the day of trial.

**After Imperialism**  
**Christian Identity in China and the Global Evangelical Movement**  
**Edited by Richard R. Cook and David W. Pao**

Cook, Richard R. and David W. Pao, eds., *After Imperialism: Christian Identity in China and the Global Evangelical Movement*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011.

*After Imperialism* is the fourth volume to be published in the series GCC Studies in Chinese Christianity, following *Salt & Light: Lives of Faith that Shaped Modern China, Volumes 1-3*. Although I had little to do with the publication of this book, as co-editor (with Carol Lee Hamrin) of the series I should not commend it in these pages. Instead, I shall try to give an indication of its contents and respond to a few of the issues that the contributors raise.

Arising from a conference held in Hong Kong in 2008 with the theme, “Beyond Our Past: Bible, Cultural Identity, and the Global Evangelical Movement,” the book contains a dozen chapters from as many contributors. Half the authors are Caucasian, and the rest are Chinese, giving the collection a good balance of ethnic perspectives.

The editors believe that “Evangelicalism possesses assets with explanatory power able to address significant theological and cultural issues arising out of the churches in the global south,” including that of identity, the focus of this volume. They are also convinced that evangelicals should use both the social sciences and “thorough biblical inquiry” to investigate issues pertinent to Christian identity for Chinese; indeed, this is a major focus of several papers.

### **Historical Studies with Current Relevance**

The first section contains four chapters on “the history of evangelicalism, its continuing value..., and its future utility in an increasingly global church.” Douglas Sweeney opens with “Modern Evangelicalism and Global Christian Identity,” in which he traces the history of modern evangelicalism from the 18th century revivals to the present. He identifies the true identity of evangelicalism in its theology, which calls for constant evangelism. Noting evangelicals’ tendency to ignore history and downplay doctrine, he calls for a renewed awareness of evangelicals’ identity as both global and local. Contextualization is necessary but must be undertaken cautiously.

In “Missions, Cultural Imperialism, and the Development of the Chinese Church,” Ka Lun Leung appears largely to agree with the common charge that Western missionaries to China were willing agents as much of Western culture and even imperial expansion of the gospel. Leung believes that most conflicts between Christian teaching and the local culture are cultural and not truly religious, and that opposition to Christianity in China, in the past and in the present, stems not from rejection of its religious teachings but from fear of its being used as a tool by foreign

governments to undermine society and government. American Christians should take note of the latter reality.

For more than one hundred years, Chinese have faced two questions: How to reform the nation politically, and how to reform the culture. The government resists any pressure to reform politically but cannot stop the globalization—what Francis Fukuyama has called “Americanization”—of culture, which is creating an identity crisis in China and elsewhere. Leung calls for a local Christianity that preserves the core biblical message while addressing concerns of the Chinese people now.

Frankly acknowledging the close connection between 19th century Western missions and imperialism in China, Richard Cook seeks to answer three questions: “How can we as Evangelicals in the West today relate to our missions past? How can we identify with this past? How can we get beyond Western guilt stemming from imperialism?” The same three questions face Chinese Christians.

His studies have convinced Cook that “a complex context comprised of multiple factors influenced missionary behavior” in the age of imperialism, and that “the missionaries involved may be deserving of a better understanding of the sometimes-excruciating circumstances surrounding the decisions they made.” Specifically, when missionaries like Robert Morrison were asked to serve as interpreters for the British after the Opium War of 1840 (and later in 1860, when his non-missionary son John also interpreted), they faced a difficult choice. Should they insert provisions insuring protection for Chinese Christians who were being brutally persecuted for propagating the faith? Did they have an ethical obligation to do what they could to relieve the plight of their beloved brothers in Christ?

They thought so, and thus became inextricably involved in the “unequal treaties” mess that has forever tainted missions history in China. Cook does not necessarily endorse their decision, but he calls for a greater sympathy for their motives as we try to move on.

In the larger context of evangelicals’ involvement in society worldwide, Kevin Xiyi Yao surveys the situation in China in “Chinese Evangelicals and Social Concerns: A Historical and Comparative Review.” He opens with a brief introduction to the growth of Protestantism in the 20th century, tracing the rise of the two distinct camps which have marked the scene until recently: On the one hand, “liberals” both downplayed the saving work of Christ and the authority of Scripture and placed their emphasis upon “social transformation as the new goal of mission work.”

On the other, fundamentalists and evangelicals upheld traditional Christian doctrines and poured their energies into evangelism and the maturation of believers in the church. They did not entirely neglect the national crisis unleashed by the Japanese invasion, however, but pointed to the wars and chaos of the era as proof that human progress is myth and that social transformation will take place only when the Lord returns. Meanwhile, the only hope for China was for people to repent and trust in Christ and then to live lives that reflected the character of God. Conversion of individuals would “naturally” bring improvement to society, they taught.

In the past couple of decades, overseas Chinese Protestants, who are mostly evangelical, have begun to call for more social involvement. Meanwhile, the leaders of the new urban unregistered congregations (sometimes called “house churches”) have also begun to “exhibit some significant new features. In addition to a new openness to intellectual life and theological education, strong social and cultural concerns definitely distinguish these churches from the old generations and churches of the 1980s.” Today, three different approaches can be discerned:

1. A few churches hold to the old separatist convictions.
2. A few, influenced by Reformed theology, vigorously advocate human rights and political activism, understanding the church’s prophetic role in highly political terms and tying the human rights agenda closely to the church’s mission and calling. For this group, to live out one’s Christian faith is to defend religious freedom, fight for social justice, and push for political reform in China.” Though a tiny minority, because “of their popularity and celebrity status they enjoyed among overseas churches and human rights groups . . . they are often considered the spokespersons of the house churches in China” by American evangelicals.
3. By far, the majority of urban unregistered churches, however, firmly reject such a politicized and confrontational approach. Committed both to the Pietist theology of their forebears and also to a generally Reformed world-and-life view, they prefer to focus on the unique mandate of the church to propagate the gospel, spiritual growth of believers, and a “salt-and-light” approach to cultural engagement and social involvement. They reject the “Christendom” model of Western Christians and of the politically-minded urban church activists. Yao supports this last group as “[m]ore akin to the Chinese churches’ evangelical heritage, more relevant to their context and status, and more beneficial to their future.”

### **Biblical Considerations**

The second part of the book contains four chapters on various biblical issues more or less pertinent to Chinese Christianity. K. Lawson Younger, Jr., writes on “The Old Testament in Its Cultural Context,” showing why “contextual criticism” of Old Testament passages is essential for understanding their application to Christian identity.

Tremper Longman, III examines “Holy War and the Universal God” in the Old Testament and concludes that “the holy war texts in the Old Testament provide no justification for warfare in the present redemptive era.” Zealous advocates for assorted military “crusades” in the name of Christ should take note.

Writing from the standpoint of a Chinese living in Hong Kong, David Pao looks at “New Testament Conquest Accounts in a Post-Colonial Setting.” He reminds us that 19th-century missionaries benefitted from the “unequal treaties” signed at gunpoint, a legacy that still haunts Christianity in China. Careful examination of several passages convinces him that the New Testament provides no warrant for privileging one group over another, calls all of us to submit to God as the true Victor, and makes any distinction between colonizer and colonized “problematic.”

Frank Thielman responds to the frequent complaint that Western Christians have all too often preached a gospel of individual salvation only in “The Group and the Individual in Salvation: The Witness of Paul.” He freely admits the corporate element of Christian salvation but proves that in Paul’s message there is also a clear and fundamental component of the individual’s personal response to God through faith and obedience. In other words, “the individual is critically important in the soteriology of Paul.”

In another biblical study, Maureen Yeung examines “Paul’s View on Table Fellowship and its Implications for Ethnic Minorities” in “Boundaries in ‘In–Christ’ Identity,” with a particular focus on ancestor worship. Accepting Thielman’s assertion of the individual’s identity in Christ, she states that “the hard question is how this new ‘in–Christ’ identity relates to a person’s ethnic identity.” She concludes that “in–Christ’ identity can be attained only through justification by faith apart from works. This identity takes priority over ethnic identity.” With regard to ancestral worship practices, those that merely express neutral cultural traditions may be allowed, while “ethnic expressions should be abandoned if they are idolatrous or immoral.”

The final three chapters consist of “three cases studies of contextual theology.” From a perspective of anthropology and intercultural studies, Robert Priest looks especially at the word “dragon” as used in Chinese culture and in the Bible. He concludes that the translation of the Greek *drakon* as long (dragon) plunged Chinese Christians into a profound identity crisis, since Chinese see themselves as “children of the dragon.”

David Y. T. Lee argues for the validity of using “Chinese culture as an interpretative tool or communication vehicle” in an alliance with the Bible to understand and convey important biblical concepts. He follows Kevin Vanhoozer’s method which, while insisting that the Bible has “epistemic primacy,” also seeks to understand and communicate biblical ideas in terms of the local culture as well as the evangelical community of wisdom, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Carver Yu concludes the volume with a wide-ranging, challenging essay, “Forging Evangelical Identity: Integration of Models of Theological Education in the Global Context.” He clearly describes the loss of identity in post-modern culture, which has stripped away an enduring core for the self and replaced it with a concept of identity that is “a reflexive project, an ongoing story that proceeds by continually sorting out and integrating events in the external world.”

He rejoices in the rapid expansion of Christianity in the global south, but questions whether Christianity will be able to withstand the onslaughts of post–modernity, including a narcissistic culture that seeks not “personal salvation but psychological well-being.” Theology and the authority of the Bible are being undermined; we must recover the idea of theology as a critique of culture and of the church. Education for Christian ministry should include careful cultural reflection, an awareness of history, and a clear sense of purpose. Reflecting the church’s nature as charismatic community, ministerial training must be personal, reflective, missional, and even properly Pietistic, in keeping with traditional Chinese notions of knowledge as more than the acquisition of information. The entire chapter deserves careful study.

## Evaluation

The comments above will indicate the overall value of this path-breaking volume; here I must confine myself to a few critical remarks.

Leung's assertion that conflicts between Christian teaching and the local culture are cultural, and not religious or moral, needs much more evidence to be convincing. In the middle section of biblical studies, one or two chapters will require "translation" by the reader into the Chinese context, since the authors spoke in general terms. Yeung's otherwise very helpful essay suffers from the common misidentification of circumcision and other Old Testament regulations as simply ethnic customs, whereas the real issue for Paul was justification by works of the Old Testament Law versus by faith alone.

Priest's "Who Am I?: Theology and Identity for Children of the Dragon" raises an extremely important question and makes a powerful case for using a variety of disciplines in cross-cultural communication of the Gospel, but suffers from several weaknesses, including setting up straw men; the same confusion about "ethnic" customs noted in Yeung; and a rather superficial treatment of whether *drakon* should be translated as "dragon." He would have done well to address such issues as: given the deceptive nature of the "serpent" in the Bible, might the positive connotations of "dragon" in Chinese culture actually pose a threat to faithful Christian discipleship? And: to what extent might the "dragon" as symbol of the Chinese state fit the image of the beast that persecutes Christians in the Revelation, at least in previous eras?

Several of the chapters would have been stronger if they had interacted with Lit-sen Chang's *Asia's Religions: Christianity's Momentous Encounter with Paganism* and with Carl Henry's extensive treatments of issues such as hermeneutics, culture, sources of theology, and the nature of revelation in Volumes 2-4 of *God, Revelation, and Authority*.

Even with these criticisms, however, one must admit that all the contributors have offered serious discussions of important topics for the vital subject of Chinese Christian identity.

## **Asia's Religions: Christianity's Momentous Encounter with Paganism**

**By Lit-sen Chang**

Chang, Lit-sen. *Asia's Religions: Christianity's Momentous Encounter with Paganism*. China Horizon. Distributors: Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1999.

Chang's treatment of the main Asian religions is a distinctively Christian one. In his discussions of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Zen, Hinduism, and Islam, he includes two chapters on each, the first constructed as an understanding of the religion from a Christian perspective, and the second a Christian critique of that religion. The first chapter in each set gives historical background for the religion, the various tenets and core beliefs involved, the major sources or writings on which the religion is based, and the influence it has had on the world.

The second chapter, that of criticism, compares the faith being examined with Christianity, and thus points out its failures. Everything is approached with the conviction that the Bible is the Word of God and that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation. When set against these truths, the problems of Asia's religions show themselves. Chang also points out internal failures, ways in which these religions do not work even without being compared to Christianity. What emerges from the book as a central theme are the various ways, all of them monumental, in which the people of Asia, ensnared by these false faiths, desperately need to hear the Gospel.

Chang's first chapter is helpful, explaining the different approaches to world religions that Christians have taken. This section helps the reader understand the author's perspective and shows, among other things, "the uniqueness of the Christian faith" that will become even more apparent throughout the book. The final chapters on "The True Way of Salvation" and "An Urgent Task of World Evangelization" end the book well, pointing out again Asia's great need for the truth of Christ.

Several forwards by various Christian leaders, including former Taiwan missionary James Hudson Taylor III, give more personal reflections on Chang's life and work, and the Appendix, "His Amazing Grace: My Life Story," is an inspiring account of the work of Christ in drawing Lit-sen Chang to Himself. After realizing that Chang was a prominent governmental and educational figure committed to Asian religions, the reader likely will be even more impressed with the strength of his arguments against these religions, as he is someone who knows them from the inside as well as from the outside.

This book provides not only a good overview of the major religions and world views prevalent in Asia today, but also a convincing argument against the efficacy of these religions to satisfy the souls of men, and the power of the Gospel alone to change people's hearts and to allow them to live with consistency.

Chang's volume should be read by any Christian who has regular contact with those participating in Asian religions or who simply desires to understand more about what these belief systems entail.

## **Bold as a Lamb: Pastor Samuel Lam and the Underground Church of China**

**By Ken Anderson**

Anderson, Ken. *Bold as a Lamb: Pastor Samuel Lam and the Underground Church of China*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.

The story of Samuel Lam is a very inspiring one. Brought up in a Christian home, he preached his first sermon at only age nineteen. He very quickly had a fast-growing congregation built solidly on his Biblical teaching foundation. He was, however, arrested in 1955, and again in 1958, when he was imprisoned for the next twenty years. During that time, in which he served first at an agricultural labor camp, then at a coal mine, he was able to keep God's love and truth foremost in his mind and always desired to share the Good News with his fellow captives.

After his release, he diligently began again to build his congregation, which soon grew to more than a thousand members despite threats from the Chinese government. He gained recognition throughout China as the pastor of one of the largest house-churches in the nation, as well as being noticed by the American media. He continues to minister to his flock in Guangzhou, even in his advanced age.

This biography of Samuel Lam, while not extremely well-written, is nonetheless a wonderful contribution to any personal library. The exemplary life of this man speaks for itself.

The book has several excellent aspects. One is that it gives a good understanding of Chinese ideology—that of Communists, of those trying to escape the system, and of those who simply disagree with Communism's tenets. Another highlight is the account of Samuel's imprisonment—the book does a wonderful job of showing Samuel's daily dependence on God in specific circumstances. It makes the idea of being joyful in suffering seem feasible by showing the struggles and doubts Samuel had before he was able to surrender them to the Lord. Also, this story points out the importance of being absolutely saturated with Scripture, since one may, like Samuel, not always have access to a Bible, and because God can put specific verses and promises into one's mind when a reminder of His Word is desperately needed.

This story of a modern-day persecuted saint teaches us much about ourselves and our relationship to God without ever attempting to preach. We can only pray that God would mold us more and more into His image, the way He has molded Samuel Lam.

## **China: Ancient Culture, Modern Society**

**By Peter Xiaoming Yu and G. Wright Doyle**

Xiaoming Yu, Peter and G. Wright Doyle. *China: Ancient Culture, Modern Society*. New York: Strategic Book Publishing, 2009.

The authors of *China: Ancient Culture, Modern Society* declare, “China has arrived, big time.” Their work offers a primer for readers who want to be informed about the world’s newest superpower with an accessible yet comprehensive text. As the authors, Peter Xiaoming Yu and G. Wright Doyle, hail from China and the United States respectively, their work is well-qualified to present China to American readers.

### **Section I: An Overview**

The first section introduces readers to five groups of Chinese people: mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese. These pages are packed with statistics and facts about China’s climate, population, and economy. The first chapter introduces China as the most populous nation on earth with the third largest geographical area. The details about China’s demographics, including a table of seven major dialects, reveal the immense diversity contained within the country.

Chapters Two and Three cover the history of two areas recently returned to the Chinese: Hong Kong, previously administered by Great Britain, and Macau, previously administered by Portugal. The authors provide excellent context for understanding these regions’ colonial heritage and offer thoughtful conjectures about their possible futures. The dominant question is whether distinctive institutions such as political freedoms in Hong Kong and Christian evangelicalism in Macau will influence China at large, or whether the mainland culture will overwhelm the remnants of European rule.

Chapter Four explains the strategic significance of the island of Taiwan, both for the colonial powers who encountered it in the 16th century and for modern China. The authors describe the island’s original inhabitants: the Aborigines, a small minority made up of nine different tribes that nonetheless hold political and economic clout in modern-day Taiwan due to their protected status and ancient culture. The chapter goes on to review the struggle between China’s Nationalist and Communist parties in the 20th century. While acknowledging the political tensions that continue to exist, the authors point out that profitable trading partnerships have created a mutually beneficial relationship that both parties would hesitate to disrupt, though recent developments threaten to undo this precarious situation.

Chapter Five highlights China's history of expansion via immigration, which has granted them cultural and political influence all over the world. The chapter ends by introducing a potential conflict between the growing conversion to Christianity among Chinese people living abroad and their attachment to their native homeland and heritage.

## **Section II: A Rich Heritage**

Written by Peter Yu, the "Heritage" section covers China's history, literature, art and crafts, medicine, holidays, and "marvels" or feats of engineering. The focus is on China's cultural and political history. Chapter Six begins with the Xia dynasty (2000 BC-1600 BC), while the discussion of literature begins with the earliest written record of Chinese poetry in the Western Zhou dynasty (1000 BC-700 BC). The two chapters on history are divided into modern and pre-modern periods, with the second chapter beginning in the 1300s. The modern period emphasizes China's economic development and technological advances.

Chapters Eight and Nine deal with Chinese poetry and prose. In the Han dynasty, the prime forms of literature were historical literature and "Fu" (a combination of rhyme, verse, and essay). Tiring of this form's restrictions, writers during the Tang and Song dynasties revolutionized China's literary scene from 618-907 AD and 960-1279 AD, respectively. This period became the "Golden Age" of Chinese poetry, widely recognized for both the quality and quantity of works produced. A selection of poems from the Tang dynasty forms an interesting contrast with selections from the Song dynasty. The most significant Chinese prose work is the Book of History—a document so old that its origins are shrouded in legend. This work spans Chinese history starting with China's mythical beginnings and continuing until 600 or 700 BC. There were several other prose works published at the time, notably including quotations compiled by the founders of Daoism and the disciples of Confucius. The permanence of these philosophical works derives more from the wisdom they offered than literary technique.

Chapters Ten through Thirteen review the visual arts and crafts in China. The chapter on art compares and contrasts Chinese ink painting with Western oil painting. The Chinese form emphasizes lines and strokes, as it derived from calligraphy. Rather than a practical craft, calligraphy should be considered "the world's first example of abstract art," because the writer communicates his ideas through the aesthetic expression of shapes. In the chapter on architecture, we meet the guiding philosophy behind Chinese designs: the principles of balance, symmetry, and reflection of the natural world. The Chinese emperors poured resources into their imperial palaces and tombs, but wars and the passage of time have erased much of their efforts. Sub-sections include details on typical designs for residences, temples, and gardens, including commentary on their broader cultural significance. The chapter on chinaware recognizes this craft's unique contribution in introducing China to the outside world. We learn that the differences in ceramic designs depend on the region of origin. Ceramic artifacts predate written history in China, dating all the way back to the Neolithic period.

Chapter Fourteen introduces the three great treatises of Chinese medicine. Unlike Western medicine, the Chinese conception of medicine was based in the philosophy of a person existing as a “mini-universe” floating between heaven and earth. The goal is to correct the imbalances between body systems, using techniques such as acupuncture. Western medicine has begun to supplant traditional Chinese philosophy, but traditional Chinese medicine remains a strong force in Chinese society and culture.

Chapter Fifteen describes the major holidays of the Chinese lunar calendar, as compared with the Western solar calendar. The final chapter in this section describes Chinese feats of engineering, including the Great Wall, the Grand Canal, the underground well system, several bridges—one as old as 7th century BC—the Dujiangyan Water Irrigation Project, and the Terra Cotta Warriors.

### **Section III: Belief Systems**

The third section, by Wright Doyle, compares and contrasts six religions currently influencing China today, with special emphasis on the origins of Confucianism and Daoism. Brief chapters on each of the traditional Chinese religions (Confucianism, Daoism, and folk or popular religion) serve as thorough introductions for readers unfamiliar with eastern faiths. Folk religion includes the relationship between earth and heaven, especially the ethical “mandate of heaven,” ancestor worship, mediums, local deified heroes, and the principle of yin and yang. Popular religion has persisted in China despite competition from Western religions and the major Chinese philosophical schools.

The section ends with one chapter for each of the universal religions: Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. The chapter on Christianity highlights the diversity of Christian experience in China with balanced analysis of Chinese churches’ strengths and weaknesses.

### **Today and Tomorrow**

The final section assesses China’s current status as a burgeoning world power and forecasts possible futures for the country, especially with respect to its relationship with the United States. The text divides between understanding current challenges that face China, such as education reform, and acquainting foreign readers with the Chinese people themselves.

In Chapter Twenty-Six, for example, Peter Yu highlights the history of education reform in China. The closest equivalent to modern schools appeared in China during the Zhou dynasty to teach aristocratic etiquette: the six arts of music, archery, horse riding, writing, mathematics, ritual, as well as the reading of the classics. Three hundred years later, Confucius led reforms of the school system, particularly among the lower classes. Then the Sui dynasty introduced the civil service examination, an insular system that prevailed until the modern era, with brief interludes for innovations such as the independent schools of the Shu Yuan movement and vocational schools introduced by Mongol invaders.

In the modern period, the civil service exam system fell under harsh criticism, so the People's Republic abolished the system and replaced it with Soviet-style schools. This approach to education continued until the 1970s, when the new Open Door policy allowed the educational community in China to interact with the wider world. Currently, Chinese education receives insufficient government funding, and dropouts are a persistent problem due to rising expenses, leaving the government to grapple with choosing between prioritizing elite schools or general education.

Chapter Twenty-Seven focuses on the Chinese people by illustrating those qualities that have endured throughout China's long history. Core characteristics include reverence for the past, pride in their country, preference for the group over the individual, focus on material prosperity over spiritual concerns, and social hierarchy among others. The authors also caution readers against misunderstandings that frequently arise between the Chinese and Western visitors.

Chapter Twenty-Eight stands out for its engaging approach to balancing commentary on the extremes of Chinese-American relations. It opens by describing China and the United States as "natural friends," listing all the reasons for goodwill between the countries. Then the chapter goes on to identify all the factors that make China and the United States "natural enemies." There are lively and evocative descriptions of the modern Chinese mindset, including extended metaphors based on a Chinese dinner party and the 2008 Beijing Olympics. These illustrations help the reader to feel as if he knows China personally even if he has never visited.

## **Conclusion**

Though published in 2009, this book remains an invaluable resource both for readers who have no direct experience with China, and for those with experience in a particular field who are seeking an overview of China from a broad perspective. Along with its detailed and thoughtful analysis, each chapter concludes with recommended reading lists for those who wish to use the book as a reference to jumpstart deeper research on a multitude of subjects. Finally, the book includes vivid maps and photographs that add to the sense of receiving a personal virtual tour through China.

**China and Christianity**  
**Burdened Past, Hopeful Future**  
**Edited by Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu**

Uhalley, Jr., Stephen and Xiaoxin Wu, eds. *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe. 2001.

This substantial volume includes eighteen papers from a conference on its title theme held in San Francisco under the sponsorship of the Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History and the Center for the Pacific Rim of the University of San Francisco in 1999.

Arranged in rough chronological order, the chapters cover a wide variety of topics by scholar-specialists from many fields. There was no attempt at the conference, or in this partial compendium, to provide a systematic, much less a comprehensive, overview of China's interaction with Christianity over the past several hundred years.

However, an introductory "perspective setting" essay and a concluding chapter suggesting future lines of study provide excellent brackets for this disparate collection.

Reflecting the Jesuit sponsorship of the conference, one-third of the papers deal with the Jesuits, mostly of the Ming and Qing periods, and more than half of the book reflects a Roman Catholic perspective. All the same, this Evangelical Protestant reader found at least two-thirds of the chapters quite helpful (though I must add that *Christianity and China*, edited by Daniel Bays, was even more useful).

The length of the book and variety of its contents preclude detailed description. In brief, the volume would be essential reading for specialists in the history of Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism, in China. More than that, however, I think that all who engage in cross-cultural ministry among Chinese would profit from many of these insightful, sometimes profound, essays.

A few recurrent themes struck this reviewer: Christianity has almost always been considered a foreign faith; usually, this has hindered its acceptance by Chinese. Those foreigners who have succeeded most in communicating the Gospel have taken the time and effort to learn the language and the culture, have lived among the people, have shown respect for the Chinese and the finer elements of their culture, and have displayed genuine love and concern.

Chinese have had various motives for accepting the Christian faith including, often, a desire for "salvation now" from disease, poverty, social injustice, and oppression. That is to say,

Christianity in China often looks little different from its pagan counterparts in folk religion and millenarian political movements.

Contextualization of Christianity among Chinese involves a wide variety of processes; requires immense knowledge, understanding, and skill on all sides; is fraught with many dangers, most notably syncretism and compromise; and usually fails to achieve its intended goals. On the other hand, Christianity has become a truly Chinese religion, with adherents among all classes who see themselves as both Chinese and Christian.

Protestants and Roman Catholics in China today confront a bewildering array of challenges and are marked by immense variety among themselves. These studies have contributed greatly to my own understanding of “China and Christianity.”

(You may skip the following synopses if you have already decided to buy and read *China and Christianity*. Otherwise, I recommend that you avail yourself of the many valuable insights offered by the volume’s authors by reading these summaries.)

### **Synopsis**

To offer a little taste of the banquet contained in its page 500+ pages, I shall briefly survey the main points of most of the chapters in the book.

The first chapter, “Universal Teaching from the West,” highlights the fundamental tension we face: Christianity claims to possess a message of universal relevance, even authority, and yet it has come to China from “the West.” John Witek, S.J., traces the history of various forms of Christianity in China, noting the ways in which it has both gained adherents and faced rejection as a threat to the social order.

Like many others, he believes that Christians must demonstrate their commitment to the welfare of society as part of the current transformation of China. He concludes with this hopeful statement: “There is no doubt that Christianity, despite its size relative to the population, has become an integral element in the history of China.” The prominence of “Christians” in the Republican era reinforces this claim, even if Sun Yat-sen’s Jesus was “a revolutionary leading a religious cause.”

Witek also advises that we study “the role of Christianity in Taiwan as well as . . . in Hong Kong and Macau during the past fifty-five-year period” for “insights into understanding Christianity in China’s future.”

### **A Brief Review of the Historical Research on Christianity in China**

Zhang Kaiyuan opens his chapter, “A Brief Review of the Historical Research on Christianity in China” with a quote from Francis Wei that should be memorized by all foreigners who seek to communicate Christianity among the Chinese:

“In interpreting the Christian teachings and institutions in terms of another culture the important thing is first of all to enter into the spirit of the culture.”

He goes on to trace the study of Christianity in China by Chinese scholars over the past 100 years, listing the most important works and their authors in a most helpful survey of literature. He is encouraged that scholars in China have now largely cast off “leftist” influences, so that they can undertake their research more objectively. At the same time, he calls for increased cooperation among scholars from all parts of the world.

Erik Zürcher describes how the Jesuit missionaries in China consistently portrayed their European homeland as a utopia ruled according to Christian laws and leaders. Their religion was thus presented as a civilizing force, similar, and even superior, to Confucianism. This idealized picture greatly influenced the perception of Chinese Christians, who concluded that their own country and civilization were inferior to that of Christianized Europe.

There is only one problem with this portrayal: Much of it was fabricated. When reality set in, disillusionment was not far behind. Fast-forward to the period after World War I, and you have a case of *déjà vu*.

### **Revelation in the Confucian and Christian Traditions**

Paul Rule compares “Revelation in the Confucian and Christian traditions.” One particularly pertinent observation follows from the way in which Christianity “fitted only too easily into the paradigms of Chinese popular religion” (he mentions various supernatural elements of both): “It was always, and still is today, elite culture which puts up the strongest barriers.”

That elite culture placed “the prime source of contact with transcendence”—and thus the source of revelation—in “the moral nature of humanity,” especially the writers of the Confucian classics. In other words, Heaven does not speak, as does the Christian God. True, later Jesuits sought to soften this contrast by appealing to natural revelation.

“In the end, however, what determined the reaction of those presented with the *Tianzhu jiao* (Roman Catholic ‘religion of the heavenly Lord’) was acceptance or rejection of a unique and definitive incarnation of God in Jesus.” “Was it historical fact, and if so, why unknown to the Chinese until now? Isn’t it unseemly for *Tian/Shangdi/Tianzhu* to become a man? . . . And should we worship a crucified criminal.”

“Today, again, the issue has arisen in the form of ‘Culture Christianity,’ with its admiration of the social and cultural utility of Christianity and the subtlety of its theology, but deep ambiguities about its truth claims.” Indeed.

### **Christianity in Late Ming and Early Qing China as a Case of Cultural Transmission**

Nicholas Standaert, S.J., studies “Christianity in Late Ming and Early Qing China as a Case of Cultural Transmission” in another chapter with pertinence for today’s encounter. Contacts between Europeans and non-Western cultures have been classified in various categories, such as “cultural” contact (very brief), “collision,” and “relationship” (“a prolonged series of reciprocal contacts on the basis of political equilibrium or stalemate”). Though he considers the Roman Catholic experience of this period different from all those types, the categories are interesting.

He notes that during this period “in the exchange the aspect of external power was relatively reduced,” there was a marked “predominance of the Chinese language in the exchange,” and it resulted in “raising some fundamental questions to Chinese culture which were fully developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and which are not yet resolved.” These include “Why did scientific and technological development stagnate in China and in the West? Why was Jesus Christ born in Judea and not in China? What does modernization mean for China?”

“Transmission between Europe and China can be called external, strategic, holistic, active, and cross-cultural.” That is, foreigners brought their religion from the outside, and emphasized Aristotelian philosophy more than the Bible; the Jesuits aimed to influence those in authority; they introduced not just religion, but science, technology, and arts and crafts; Chinese played an active part in the encounter; and thus, both sides learned from each other.

Particularly fascinating to me were ways that the Jesuits sought to “translate” their message: Pictures of the Madonna were made to look like Guanyin; church structure was adapted to fit Chinese social structure, in which the Jesuits tried to play the role of Confucian teacher as well; Jesus was put into the genealogy of Yao, Shun, Yu, and Confucius; “Confucian and Christian stories [were] juxtaposed to illustrate Confucian Christian virtues.”

Observers of the current scene will not be surprised to learn that, in those days, Chinese religious associations, including the ones organized by Roman Catholics, were “communities of effective rituals.” “A religion proves its worth by the immediate efficacy of its rituals. In most cases the proven efficacy of these rituals, the happy discovery that ‘they work,’ appears to be a primary motive for conversion . . . It was a community of mutual support, in the general fight against all kinds of fear (disease, death, demons, natural disaster.) The regular intervention of the supernatural, by way of miraculous healing, rescue from disaster, . . . revival from temporary death, etc., . . . was the way in which the efficacy of the faith was sustained.”

Or, to put it another way, a recent commentator on house churches in China today observed that “millions of Chinese believers are one unanswered prayer away” from abandoning the faith.

Some conditions in a culture favor acceptance of elements of foreign origin: The inner dynamism of a culture, for example. “Officials and scholars searched for concrete ways in which to save the country from decay. It is this preceding quest that fostered the unique interaction between them and the Jesuits. . . . Late Ming literati responded to the crisis and moral decadence of the society by writing and circulating morality books . . . Christian moral tracts that aimed at the same purpose were readily diffused by such literati.”

Another key factor is prior knowledge, which allows the recipient to fit new knowledge into familiar categories. The Chinese could thus accept astronomy but were uninterested in technology, since theirs was equally advanced.

Emotional-affective characteristics also play a vital role. “Both Western and Chinese sources indicate that Ricci’s natural gift of easily establishing interpersonal relationships must have greatly influenced the way in which he was accepted. There are other examples in which the

reduced distance between teacher and disciple favored transmission.” English teachers in China today, for example?

Patterns of transmission of knowledge influence the diffusion of new ideas. Network-building (*guanxi*) is central to Chinese society. The mobility of the educated elite during this period made transmission possible and opened new doors to the Jesuits as their converts moved to new locations. The role of women in the home as educators of the young also facilitated the spread of the new religion.

On the other hand, the threat of danger, even if it is only perceived, may hinder acceptance of new ideas. Christianity was seen as a challenge the social order, and thus rejected by many of the elite. The outsiders played a part in this: “Missionaries . . . may well overact towards certain aspects and pronounce more explicitly and more sharply their ideas in the new environment than they would in their original setting. This in turn asks for a reaction by members of the new culture.” A good reminder!

This chapter is rich in insights and concepts, as the author explores the complexity of cross-cultural interaction. I found it quite brilliant and recommend repeated reading of it for all involved in the current encounter between China and the West.

### **Chinese Renaissance: The Role of Early Jesuits in China**

Li Tiangang’s treatment of the “Chinese Renaissance: The Role of Early Jesuits in China” paints a fascinating picture of the influence of Westerners upon Chinese intellectual history. Briefly stated, in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, Jesuit missionaries, largely through their translated works, set in motion new trends in Confucianism that laid the foundation for modernity in China.

The reasons are many. Important for us is the fact that the Jesuits “understood Chinese culture even better than many contemporary Chinese,” and were thus, with the strong participation of their converts, able to shape the use of terms and help to redefine the essence of Confucianism.

The connection with modernity derives from the Jesuits’ own debt to the European Renaissance, with its emphasis upon scientific study of each field. “They shared the humanistic attitudes of the Renaissance,” and so they could speak the same language as the humanistic Confucian scholars.

In addition, they “raised the ideal of global culture through cooperation with Confucianism.” They also “participated actively in the transformation of Ming dynasty scholarship.” Their overt influence waned in later centuries, but the impact of their presence remains. Quite an achievement!

### **The Problem of Chinese Rites in Eighteenth-Century Sichuan**

Robert Entenmann’s study of “The Problem of Chinese Rites in Eighteenth-Century Sichuan” offers insights into the ways in which Chinese Christians reacted to the Papal prohibition of the worship of ancestors in “one of the most fruitful mission fields in China.”

The Jesuits had taught that ancestor-worship rites were essentially civil, not religious, but the Pope had listened to other arguments that regarded them as idolatrous. How did Chinese Catholics respond to the ensuing edicts that forbade traditional practices? Some of them quietly succumbed to the threat of persecution by their neighbors and conformed to tradition. Others, like Antonias Tang and Andreas Ly, sought to enforce the papal commands and root out all vestiges of what they considered to be superstition and idol-worship, especially at funerals.

### **Sino-French Scientific Relations Through the French Jesuits**

In his brief look at “Sino-French Scientific Relations Through the French Jesuits and the Academie Royale des Sciences in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” Han Qi shows how French Jesuits “from the beginning used science to interest Chinese scholars in Christianity.”

His conclusions: With their impact upon the development of science, especially mathematics and astronomy, “their influence in Chinese was to prove more effective in transmitting science than it was in making converts to Christianity.”

### **China in the German ‘Geistesgeschichte’**

Claudia von Collani’s chapter on “China in the German ‘Geistesgeschichte’” reminds us that cultural transmission was a two-way street even long ago. “Whereas the Jesuits brought to China curiosities, Christianity, and European science, China gave to Europe philosophy, which led to the Enlightenment, *Chinoiserie*, Chinese language, and Chinese chronology.”

She shows how books by Jesuits about China, as well their extensive correspondence with European scholars, helped to change the intellectual landscape of Europe away from a respect for revealed religion towards a confidence in human reason and morality. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, a universal genius, was largely responsible for this, but others such as Christian Wolff and outstanding Sinologists also played vital roles.

“The Russian Orthodox Church in China” explains that the Russians were always limited in what they could do in China because of their intimate association with, and even diplomatic service of, a neighboring power. Nevertheless, many missionaries delved deeply into Chinese culture and produced works of significant scholarship—something Protestant Evangelicals have usually failed to do.

### **China and Protestantism: Historical Perspectives, 1807-1949**

Jessie Lutz gives us a most helpful review in “China and Protestantism: Historical Perspectives, 1807-1949.” She notes that “[s]cholars have been slow to recognize the growth of an indigenous Chinese Christianity,” and seeks to rectify that lack. Another new development is the study of the Protestantism in China “from a new perspective, this time with greater attention to the Chinese side of the story.”

## 1807-1860

Lutz begins with the story of the intrepid missionaries who brought the Gospel to China in the early 19th century. While noting their many achievements, including translation of the Bible and wide propagation of their message, she also reminds us that “[m]ost of the initial conversions were accomplished by Chinese.” “Chinese not only had the advantage of language facility and acquaintance with Chinese mores, but they could travel freely in the interior.”

“More importantly, they had family and lineage as avenues of approach.” As the faith spread among lineage groups, “the Christian congregation became in some ways a surrogate lineage. The Protestant missionary’s concept of the centrality of the individual gave way before the primacy of family and social harmony.”

Chinese evangelists “relied heavily on conversations with small group in informal settings. Frequently they visited tea houses or engaged in discussion on a one-to-one basis,” though the acquisition of church buildings tended to introduce more formality.

Lutz analyzes the motives of those who converted to the new faith: Many “found the concept of a loving and forgiving Jesus attractive in the light of personal troubles and social disorder . . . They resisted the idea of original sin and continued to subscribe to the Confucian-Mencian concept of the essential goodness of human nature. But they readily acknowledged personal failings and they craved reassurance and hope.”

Others “were distressed not simply by their own inadequacies, but also by the widespread social and political breakdown surrounding them,” so they welcomed news of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Do we see here the seeds of the same fundamental moralism that characterizes much of Chinese Protestantism even today?

## 1860-1900

In the next era, that of “foundation building and expansion,” missionaries played a less active role in actual evangelism, which was carried out more and more by Chinese. Power and money still resided in the hands of the foreigners, however. Some outstanding Chinese Christians chafed under this situation and began to act more independently.

As time went on, “converts came slowly, while attrition statistics remained worrisome. Missionaries looked for other means to attract and retain converts. Some sought to appeal to Chinese scholars through translations of Western secular works, science demonstrations, Chinese language periodicals, and philanthropic projects. They hoped to persuade Chinese that Christianity was an essential component of a civilization with a long and respectable heritage . . . Other missionaries turned to education, social service, and medicine to supplement evangelism.” Does any of this sound familiar?

Opposition to foreign privileges and encroachments on the authority of local leaders finally found its most violent expression in the Boxer Rebellion.

## **1900-1925**

During this period of “Good Times; Popularity and Growth,” evangelical Christianity expanded, and the Social Gospel was introduced. Chinese involved with such organizations as the YMCA “believed that dedicated Christian individuals were the key to reform and they hoped to contribute to the reconstruction of China while also attracting Chinese to Christianity.”

As the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy split the missionary community, “Christian” education played an increasing role. Most Chinese students in Christian schools, however, sought mostly to learn English and Western science “as a means to power and wealth,” and that this was “separable from Christianity,” so they eventually “found other avenues for information about the West.”

In the end, these schools “nurtured a corps of Christian leaders who acquired influential positions in education . . . Most were characterized by liberal theology, committed to social reform, deep Chinese patriotism, and acquaintance with Western learning and mores.” Was this what the missionaries who founded the schools had intended?

Variety grew within the Chinese Christian community, however, as people like Wang Mingdao and John Sung spoke out for a traditional evangelical message without dependence upon foreign missionaries and attracted thousands of young converts.

## **1925-1949 “Hard Times: An Era of National and Social Challenges”**

These turbulent years were marked by decreasing missionary dominance and growing indigenization of leadership, evangelism, and pastoral work. The Anti-Christian Movement of 1926 created a crisis for both foreigners and Chinese believers but brought a deepening of faith in the latter. In the 1930s and 1940s, indigenous movements such as the True Jesus Church and the Little Flock gained adherents, even as independent evangelical bodies and sects “redefined Chinese Christianity as they incorporated elements from folk religion and Buddhism.”

“Christianity in all its variety had taken root in China and possessed the strength and techniques to survive decades of hostility and/or persecution.”

## **Protestant Christianity in China Today**

Ryan Dunch’s “Protestant Christianity in China Today: Fragile, Fragmented, Flourishing,” helps to penetrate the confusing variety of often contradictory reports about the Protestants in China. It, too, will be summarized in some detail.

“There are indeed deep complexities and contradictions within the Protestant experience in China. . . . while on the one hand the Protestant church is flourishing in China, it is at the same time both fragmented . . . due to the great diversity of theological, practical, and regional streams that make up the contemporary Protestant church, and fragile due to the limited role which the church, despite its growth, plays and can play in Chinese social and cultural life.”

He begins by noting that different “interested parties” define Protestantism in China according to their own interests and outlooks and settling for the “self-representation” of each group “as the chief criterion for inclusion” in his study.

He categorizes the main strands of Protestantism in China according to their historical origin: “the mission-founded churches, the indigenous Chinese Protestant movements of the early twentieth century, and the new Protestant movements that have emerged in the PRC since the 1970s.”

The mission-founded churches were marked by “relative richness of resources” producing “on the whole a well-educated population with a large representation among the modern professions.” Western connections and Western control over money created tensions between Chinese believers and the missionaries, and within the Chinese themselves.

These churches employed a professional, “educated clergy leading worship services in churches on Sundays, stressed preaching from Biblical texts, and featured some sort of liturgy . . . , and hymns consisting of Western tunes and translated Western texts.” These characteristics are still “evident today, especially at urban centers, where most congregations are descended from the pre-1949 mission-founded churches.”

Partly in reaction to these mission-founded churches, a significant number of “independent and indigenous Protestant sects” arose. Their common features included the mission-church background of many of their leaders, a “stress on the direct access of the believer to God’s word in the Bible,” and “considerable interpenetration of membership between the indigenous movements and the older missionary churches.”

The last, and latest, stream includes “some of the most energetic Protestant movements in China today,” which were “begun by Chinese Protestants with no institutional links to the older churches, under the conditions of suppression of all open religious activity in the latter stages of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).”

“They are heavily experiential and revivalist in emphasis, stressing direct personal experience of God, centered on literal reading of the Bible, spread by itinerant preachers with little in the way of formal education (theological or otherwise), but a great deal of dedication and enthusiasm. Suspicion of the state, and of the TSPM/CCC for its ties to the state, are characteristic, as is an other-worldly and often eschatological orientation.”

For a variety of reasons, including increased mobility among the Chinese middle class, “Institutional fragmentation has been a major trend in the history of Protestantism in China since the 1920s.” Such fragmentation has allowed, and been abetted by, the great number of Western groups which have sought to “conduct missionary work of some nature in China.”

Some of these efforts are open, such as English teaching. Many are secret, working directly with unregistered churches, “and not always on very sound missiological principles.” Example: One foreign group supplies laptop computers and scholarships for the study of English, to facilitate communication with English-speaking missionaries.

Demographically, Protestants are “most numerous in three distinct areas: the coastal provinces of Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Shandong, which were centers of missionary work before 1949; the provinces of the central China plain, particularly Henan and Anhui; and among the minority peoples of southwest China.” The newer movements seem to be “more numerous in central China.”

Most Christians are found in rural areas and composed of the so-called “four manys:” old people, women, sick, and illiterate. Women constitute 60–80 % of most churches. Recently, urban congregations composed of educated younger people have proliferated, however.

Is there anything we can call “Chinese Protestantism?” Dunch finds two “common orientations:” “an experiential emphasis and Biblicism.” He cites evidence to support the view that “many Chinese Protestants, particularly in rural areas, understand their Christian faith in terms drawn from Chinese popular religion. Jesus functions much like a Chinese deity and is a source from which to seek healing for illness and other supernatural help.” That accounts for the heavy emphasis upon healing, exorcism, and other supernatural manifestations in much of Chinese Protestantism, including the newer movements.

The Bible is considered the inspired Word of God, and “plays a central role in preaching.” On the other hand, the absence of commentaries and other aids to interpretation, coupled with indigenous methods of handling a text, have led to widespread use of allegory and “spiritual” interpretation of the Scriptures, “without regard to the context of traditional interpretations.”

The problem of indigenization of Christianity and Chinese culture has plagued Chinese believers for centuries, and Protestants for at least one hundred years. Dunch notes several different approaches: Some attempt to find parallels to, and support for, Christian teachings in the ancient Chinese classics. Others note the trend towards connecting with popular culture, especially through hymnody and song.

Still another definition makes distance from the Western missionary as the mark of the indigenous church, though this approach contains some major problems. The communists, of course, consider only those Christians (and their writings) which support socialism as indigenous.

Dunch comments: “The difficulty of defining indigenization can be traced, I believe, to the difficulty of defining Chinese culture,” with all its variety. Popular and elite culture split, as the elite characterized the former as superstitious and a barrier to modernization, creating an identity crisis persisting to the present. The default definition has become nationalism, and Chinese Protestants continue to struggle with the perception that theirs is a foreign faith, with connections to foreign—and not always friendly—powers.

Indeed, “the problem of indigenization is ultimately a matter of perception rather than ‘reality,’ since it flows from the subjectively experienced tension between Chinese and foreign identities among some sectors of the Protestant church in China; where no such tension is experienced, the question of indigenization is answered.” This sage remark agrees with my own experience

among Chinese Evangelicals, many of whom no longer see Christianity as a “foreign” religion at all.

Dunch, whose book on Protestants in Fuzhou highlighted their prominent role in society, looks closely at the present position of Chinese Christians in society. He shows, first, that “it lacks a well-developed awareness of its own history,” which means that Chinese believers do not see their religion’s deep roots in Chinese culture over the past 200 years. Even more important, what sense of history they do possess is “a separate history, not as one embedded in the history of modern China.”

The relationship of the church to the state in China is particularly perplexing. All Protestants “experience state pressure and intervention in their activities.” The TSPM, which conducts its affairs openly, does so under government scrutiny. Unregistered churches find themselves subject to harsher treatment, as is well known.

Furthermore, Chinese Protestants mostly lack an intellectual frame of reference for participation in society, since their faith focuses on private, or narrowly parochial, concerns. A strong Pietistic background has fostered the view that one should not think about “unspiritual” matters.

Dunch provides a very helpful discussion of “civil society” in China, and the role of Protestants, especially the unregistered churches, in creating such a realm outside the direct control of the state. Though the churches do not engage in politics, they affect the political scene in at least two ways:

- (1) They withdraw from what they consider to be a corrupt system, which they cannot change.
- (2) They devote their energies to personal and family renewal, seeking thus to reform society from the bottom up.

Moreover, by not entering into the political system, they implicitly deny the Communist claim to ultimate allegiance and total domination of the nation. Dunch does not rule out the possibility that these a-political Christians might exert influence suddenly and unexpectedly, as happened in Eastern Europe—which is just what the leaders in Beijing fear.

When we look at Chinese Protestantism in World Christianity, “it is striking how little is unique about” it. In particular, like Protestantism around the world, it is “an increasingly individualized faith.” The author cites scholars who view Pentecostal movements, with their “emphasis on the self,” as part of a religion seen as “commodities in a religious marketplace, oriented towards satisfying the needs of the religious consumer–self.” Observers of the American scene will find nothing strange here!

Dunch wonders how such an individualized, fractured Protestantism can “maintain an agreed core in the absence of an overarching authority structure.” Can international conferences, frequent conversations among leaders, and literature prevent further fragmentation?

He concludes that “Protestant Christianity has an established place” in China, as well as in “the transnational reality of Chinese culture, in the middle-class churches of Hong Kong and the overseas Chinese communities, and as a focus of interest and cultural inquiry among Chinese

intellectuals. . . . In the fluid mutations and recurring patterns which make up Chinese culture today, there is an undeniable Protestant element which will continue to develop in tense and dynamic interaction with that culture.”

### **Catholicism as Chinese Folk Religion**

For me, one of the most enlightening chapters, and one which fills out hints in others, examines “Catholicism as Chinese Folk Religion.”

Richard P. Madsden makes a good case that “Catholicism in China, especially in the rural areas where the vast majority of Chinese Catholics live, is as much folk religion as world religion.”

The early missionaries, led by Ricci, taught that all folk religion ought to be avoided. He coined the term *mixin*—“deviant belief,” now translated as “superstition, and sought to portray Confucianism as “an agnostic doctrine or moral wisdom, a philosophy that had already recognized the existence of the Supreme Being and that lacked only the revelation of the Gospel.”

Contemporary Confucian scholars, however, discriminated between “the heterodox religion of certain folk-Buddhist sects and the relatively harmless worship of ancestors and village gods.” Madsden believes that “Chinese Catholicism eventually assimilated elements of both kinds of folk religiosity.”

Chinese governments have almost always held to one “orthodox” view of religion, branding all others as “heterodox.” But Madsden quotes Paul Cohen to the effect that Catholic Christianity was itself considered heterodox by many of the literati, because of “its foreign origin, its fundamental nonadherence to [Sung and post-Sung] Confucianism, the miraculous content of some of its doctrines, and its suspected motives of political subversion.” Does any of that remind you of the current situation?

Late-Ming–early Qing “heterodoxy” can be seen in the White Lotus sect of Buddhism. Its stress on the need for salvation, worship of an “Eternal Mother,” and millenarian aspirations made it politically subversive. Some sects emphasized present salvation, including healing and exorcism, sometimes through *qigong*; others focused more on religious matters.

But all were voluntary associations which preached a universal salvation “irrespective of family or lineage or village. Women usually played an important role in these sects, they “built extensive networks of communication across long distances,” and they “drew members from almost all social strata.” Partly for this reason and partly because they lacked the opportunity to train their leaders openly, “the sects lacked a systematically educated leadership.”

All these features made them potentially powerful politically, and sometimes they “did indeed provide the impetus for massive peasant rebellions.”

### **Catholicism as “Heterodoxy”**

Likewise, Roman Catholicism in China took on many of the same features. After losing their status with the elite, they “focused their missionary efforts on uneducated rural people, whose

religious imaginations were imbued with the mentality of the folk religion.” After the missionaries were expelled, “there were no opportunities to train native priests.” Laypeople did most of the training, which “increased the possibilities for developments in doctrine and spirituality which would fit more closely with the characteristics of traditional rural mentalities than the foreign missionaries would have wanted.” Add to that the threat of state persecution and the need for secrecy, and you end up with a group that is forced “to think of themselves as in opposition to official authorities,” and thus “heterodox.”

This, in turn, “[p]ut pressure on them to shape their lives in similar ways to other religious groups that were so classified. One can see this influence in folk-Catholic beliefs, institution structures, and in a general attitude of Catholics toward the rest of society.”

Beliefs: “Chinese Catholic thinking seemed to be more dominated by the search for salvation than the quest for ethical perfection.” While not worshiping the “Eternal Mother” of Buddhism, they did develop an extraordinarily strong “devotion to Mary.” They “have their own magical waters and supernatural powers of healing . . . [and] apocalyptic visions.” They practice healing and exorcisms and have a strong sense of the imminent end of the present world order.

Structures: Lay leadership is predominant, which often leads to much more effective evangelism based on intimate contact with non-Catholics. Women play a prominent role.

Finally, they see themselves as not only independent of the state and its “orthodox” beliefs, but in some ways opposed to it.

### **Catholics and Communal Folk Religion**

Before the 20th century, Catholics had trouble fitting into rural communal society because of their opposition to most of its religious practices, but in recent decades they have begun to “blend in more fully into the fabric of family and village culture,” especially after the Vatican gave permission to engage in some form of “ancestor worship.”

“They honor their ancestors, not by offering sacrifices of food on the ancestors’ graves, but by praying fervently to them on the Feasts of All Souls and All Saints, by having priests say Masses for the Dead, and by offering Catholic prayer in front of their graves at the Qing Ming festival.” They celebrate “all the main festivals of the agricultural calendar” and engage in “many of the same customs, although they [give] them a somewhat different interpretation.”

Though alert readers will have noticed many similarities to the newer Protestant movements in rural China, no better contrast between Evangelical Protestant Christianity and Roman Catholicism in China today could be painted than Madsden does towards the end of his most illuminating essay:

For most rural Catholics most of the time, the faith is completely melded with the structures of family and village life. One becomes a Catholic by being born into a Catholic family in a Catholic village, not by making any faith commitment to a doctrine of universal salvation. Such Catholics seem indistinguishable in terms of mentality,

morality, and lifestyle from non-Catholic villagers, the only major difference being the performance of different rituals to make important events in the life cycle.”

What of the relationship of folk-Catholicism to the state? Catholics are, on the whole, peaceable and submissive to the government. “At other times, perhaps because they have been outraged by government persecution or perhaps inspired by rumors of visions and miracles, Catholics will rise up in opposition to established authorities, and sometimes these uprisings are coordinated over wide regions by the networks of the ‘underground Church.’ Therefore, even when Catholics are sincerely peaceful and law abiding, the government mistrusts them and tries to inhibit them. But this makes it even more likely that the Catholics will react negatively.”

My own observation: Almost every sentence in this chapter will strike a chord with observers of the Protestant scene in China and provide food for thought, not to mention grounds for anxiety.

### **From Past Contributions to Present Opportunities: The Catholic Church and Education in Chinese Mainland during the Last 150 Years**

The overview of Roman Catholic educational efforts in China by Jean-Paul Wiest traces the changes which have taken place over the course of time. The opening paragraph of “From Past Contributions to Present Opportunities: The Catholic Church and Education in Chinese Mainland during the Last 150 Years” neatly summarizes the earlier impact of both Protestant and Roman Catholic education in China and deserves quotation in full:

No history of China’s past 150 years would be complete without mentioning the role played by Christian schools in the modernization of the country and the reform of its educational system. Protestant and Catholic missionaries alike opened the way to new disciplines of study in sciences and technology as well as in medicine. They were the first to make music and athletics an integral part of curriculum. They popularized the study of foreign languages. Academically, they run [sic] outstanding private schools that ranked among the leading institutions of the country. Socially, they opened education to all strata of the Chinese society, including women. Morally, they were deeply concerned with character building before government schools began grappling with problems of probity and discipline. Spiritually, they nurtured the faith of millions of followers and trained a Christian leadership for their Church as well as the Chinese society at large.

Over time, three strategies have driven Roman Catholic educational policy: The first is to nurture the faith of Roman Catholic believers. The second, to try to convert non-believers through the medium of Catholic schools. The third focuses on “cultivating civil virtues” as part of the nationwide attempt to modernize Chinese society.

While the first of these has continued, and the second has proven to be a failure, the third “became the cornerstone of the educational strategy of the Catholic Church at the secondary and tertiary levels.”

Today, with both greater openness than in the first few decades of the Communist regime and the continuing restrictions upon religious schools by the government, Roman Catholics have found several ways to strengthen their own followers as well as to influence society.

By serving the needs of disadvantaged folk in the community (the elderly, the unemployed, the poor) through practical help and instruction, the Catholics have gained a positive image for themselves among non-believers. Equally important is the move to encourage more believers to participate in public education. Periodicals, conferences, and continuing education have equipped these adherents to make a more effective contribution to society and to present a Catholic point of view through informed, effective service and winsome character.

### **Christianity and China's Minority Nationalities**

“Christianity and China's Minority Nationalities—Faith and Unbelief,” by Ralph Covell, examines various factors which might make a people receptive or resistant to the Christian message. Though the number of minority people in China is relatively small, the areas in which they live comprise much of China's territory, and they have received a great deal of attention from Christians overseas.

Covell's summary and conclusion, reflecting the observations of a number of scholars, states that the variety of conditions which might lead a people to receive, or to reject, the gospel of Christ include “political, personal, practical, strategic, sociological, cultural, and religious or theological” situations present when the message arrives. Specifically, he believes that “the relationships among dominant and subordinate groups have played a major part in the resistance or receptivity to the Christian faith.”

If the Gospel seems likely to benefit a people, and particularly to give them a new sense of identity, those people will be more likely to welcome its messengers. Likewise, if the missionaries are sensitive to, and knowledgeable of, the culture of their hearers, they are more likely to win adherents. The new faith will be more readily received if it comes from people who are not seen as a threat to social order, offers liberation from spiritual oppression or economic poverty, provides new forms of recreation or beauty, seeks to win entire families rather than isolated individuals, and comes at a time of cultural or social weakness, even disintegration.

From the chart adapted from Charles Kraft on page 279, the reader will see at once how this decade offers a unique opportunity for the spread of Christianity in China, and why the field may be harder in the future.

### **Discussion on “Cultural Christians”**

Zhou Xinping, director of the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, provides an excellent “Discussion on ‘Cultural Christians.’” Some intellectuals in China categorize “three kinds of Christians in contemporary Chinese churches: The first kind are the so-called ‘elite Christians,’ who have a high level of education and theological knowledge.” They are few in number, however, so “the Chinese church still lacks these ‘elite Christians’ for reconstruction and development in China today.”

Second are the “so-called ‘church Christians,’” whose theology and piety are sound, but who mostly “have no academic concern for the destiny and significance of Christianity in China.” Finally, the “folk Christians” comprise the largest majority, especially in rural areas. They are mostly “charismatic” in emphasis, asking God for “personal salvation from trouble, illness, and

death, and also for a harmonious relationship in family and in community.” They lack much understanding of their faith, however. “Some of them only combined their traditional folk religions or local beliefs with the outer form of Christianity”—a theme we have met before in this volume.

In this context, Chinese intellectuals who are interested in, even attracted to, the Christian faith, but who do not want to identify with any of the above sorts of “church Christians,” have been called “cultural Christians.” Eager to study Christianity, and often quite knowledgeable, they yet usually do not belong to a church or even profess to be followers of Christ.

Recent decades have witnessed a huge increase in the study of religion, including Christianity, as a social phenomenon. Scholars from various disciplines, usually without theological training, investigate the history of Christianity, especially its “cultural value and significance . . . towards human beings, and . . . its historic and social function in the development of human society.”

These “Scholars in Mainland China studying Christianity” (SMSC), while appreciative of some facets of Christian teaching, are often quite critical of the current church in China. They seek something that will contribute to spiritual civilization in China, without necessarily intending to convert to this new faith.

Many SMSCs also want to understand Christian theology in the West as part of their own research in philosophy, religion, history, literature, etc. Since most church leaders have no time for such theological investigation, those outside the church often know more about Western theology than do “church Christians,” which creates a gap, of course. Once again, we see an attraction to the “cultural” side of Christian theology, rather than merely to its traditional dogmas.

There are different sorts of so-called “Cultural Christians,” and different responses to the term. Nevertheless, though they are few and still face misunderstanding, SMSCs are making a significant contribution.

1. They are both evidence of, and a further impetus to, a more favorable attitude towards Christianity in China. They serve as a “bridge between government and religious circles for mutual understanding and exchange.”
2. The SMSC movement “promotes political and cultural understanding of Christianity in the Chinese mainland,” so that now one may speak openly of the contribution of Christians to society.
3. They have contributed to “academic progress in religious, and especially Christian studies” by popularizing “Christian knowledge among the people.”
4. This movement “helps the inculturation and contextualization of Christianity in Chinese culture,” holding out the prospect of a truly “Chinese” theology.
5. Finally, by showing the role of Christianity in Western society, it points towards ways in which Christianity may take its part “in the process of Chinese modernization and its cultural reconstruction.”

## **The Catholic Church in Post-1997 Hong Kong: Dilemma in Church-State Relations**

“The Catholic Church in Post-1997 Hong Kong: Dilemma in Church-State Relations,” by Beatrice Leung, considers three issues: “Catholic educational and social welfare services; the political participation of Catholics; and the bridge-building effort of Hong Kong Catholics between China and the Vatican.”

During British colonial rule, and especially after 1949, the Roman Catholic church in Hong Kong cooperated with the government on a “contractual” basis by supplying essential social services and by offering a Christian-based and anti-communist educational program. At the same time, it tried to build a bridge between Roman Catholics in China and the Vatican.

Furthermore, the Roman Catholic church supported the efforts by the British to introduce a greater degree of democracy in the colony after the signing of the 1984 Sino-British Agreement on the future of Hong Kong. During and after the 1989 Tiananmen incident, Christians of all stripes joined to support the democracy movement in China, thus arousing the ire of the Communists.

In their desire to strengthen the Roman Catholic churches in China, both government-sponsored and “underground,” Hong Kong Catholics participated in the training of clergy, distribution of literature, and financial aid. Again, this sort of outside “interference” in “domestic” affairs displeased Beijing, whose leaders believed that “religion is employed by international subversive forces to ‘Westernize’ and ‘divide’ China.” (The same is true of similar Protestant activities, of course.)

The revival of Roman Catholicism in China since 1983 “was impossible without the aid of the bridge-building endeavor among overseas Catholics.”

After 1997, however, political and bridge-building activities have been at odds with the policy not only of Beijing, but also the new leaders in Hong Kong. Communists fear “the ability of religious organizations to promote, in the name of religion, a particular political view,” and thus seek “to curb any civil organization including religious organizations as a means to secure state control of the society.”

As in China, so it is in Hong Kong, where social service efforts by churches receive a warm welcome; nothing has changed in this respect since the handover.

As part of its generally anti-Christian stance, the new government in Hong Kong downgraded the status of all Christian church leaders and created a holiday commemorating the birth of Buddha. The latter move showed a desire to “stress the importance of oriental as well as Western religions.”

After 1997, Roman Catholics faced a difficult situation. Heavy government funding for educational and social service activities had created a dependency that rendered criticism of official policies hazardous.

Thus, the Roman Catholic church found itself in the dilemma of how to maintain a friendly relationship with the government in Hong Kong and in China while remaining true to official

Catholic teachings, which had by now included a stress upon the social implications of Christianity.

The dilemma was resolved with the response of the Catholics to the 1999 ruling of the Court of Final Appeal which allowed all Mainland children born of Hong Kong permanent residents to live in Hong Kong. When the new government appealed this ruling to Beijing, church-led protests broke out. Choosing rather to uphold principles of social justice, Cardinal Wu, backed up by his successor, then-Bishop Zen, challenged the government's stance.

Only the future will tell where this bold criticism of government policy will lead, but it does seem to have garnered a great deal of support for Roman Catholics in Hong Kong.

### **Christianity in Modern Taiwan**

In "Christianity in Modern Taiwan—Struggling Over the Path of Contextualization," Peter Chien-main Wang notes the slow growth of both Roman Catholics and Protestants in Taiwan. After pointing to the common claim that the progress of the Gospel among Chinese has been hindered because it is viewed as a "foreign religion" with connections to outside power, he laments the lack of attention given to the history of Christianity in Taiwan, especially since both Protestants and Roman Catholics have promoted contextualization.

Boldly, he states that "the slow growth of Christianity in Taiwan cannot be blamed on lack of contextualization."

To explain this controversial stance, he looks first at the relatively rapid advance of the Christian faith after 1949. He reports the observations of various scholars who have assigned various reasons for this early success, chief among them being the huge influx of foreign missionaries, most of them experienced workers from mainland China. They found a people who were quite unsettled by post-war conditions and were encouraged and sometimes aided by the Nationalist government.

Looking more closely, we find that most of the receptivity was among the refugees from China who came with Chiang Kai-shek, and among aboriginal peoples, whose lives were disrupted in the new era.

In the mid-1960s, however church growth slowed, and has remained level almost to this day. Wang cites several possible reasons for this phenomenon: The missionaries "did not have a thorough and thoughtful plan for the evangelization of local people" and "they did not encourage the laity, a truly indigenous leadership, or a self-supporting spirit." Seminaries "accepted many low-quality students," whose graduates could not serve effectively in a rapidly-modernizing urban environment.

As people migrated to the cities, they were not integrated successfully into churches. Meanwhile, an anti-Christian climate had arisen among the intellectual elite; affluent people "began to pursue material gains and no longer pursued spiritual satisfaction. At the same time, the traditional Chinese religions which lay strong emphasis on *Bao* (retribution) became popular as people

became wealthy or established.” (Perhaps the idea of unmerited grace would not appeal to such self-made successful people; nor would the promise of a better life after death.)

In response, Protestants began to study church growth theory and practice, inviting prominent pastors from other nations to come to share their ideas. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, have visited Korea to learn from Paul Yung-chi Cho, and still more have gone to Singapore to find out how to establish “cell churches” from Dr. Ralph Neighbor.

Nevertheless, the total of Christians of all sorts remains less than 4%, including baptized infants recorded by Presbyterians, Methodists, and Roman Catholics.

Next, Wang describes efforts by the Taiwan Presbyterian Church to contextualize the Gospel. They made a new translation of the New Testament into Taiwanese, the official language of the denomination, and they sponsored translation of the Bible into various tribal languages.

To ensure that foreigners could not control their churches, the Presbyterians categorized missionaries as “providers of expertise” without any administrative, financial, or supervisory authority.

Most of all, they have adopted a strongly political role in Taiwanese society. While the KMT was in power, they called for political reform and greater democratization. From its inception, they have supported the Democratic People’s Party with finances, manpower, preaching, and prayer. In one statement after another, they have promoted the independence of Taiwan as a separate nation. Indeed, “‘Making Taiwan a new and independent country’ has become the highest standard and goal of the Presbyterian church.”

The Presbyterians have also tried to formulate an indigenous theology, one which centers upon the social implications of the Christian faith and leads to further participation in politics. These activities they consider to be “participating in God’s politics of construction.”

In all of this, they have limited themselves to a “Taiwan-only” orientation, being concerned to construct a truly “Taiwanese” church as part of the overall program of creating a Taiwanese national identity. As the DPP has had to moderate its formerly strong backing of independence, the Presbyterians have found themselves in opposition as they advocate faithfulness to its original separatist platform.

Despite these attempts at political contextualization, the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan “has not experienced any significant growth for the past fifteen years.”

Roman Catholics have also been seeking to indigenize their methods and message over the years. The first group of priests who arrived from the mainland after 1949 spoke Mandarin, and thus naturally reached out to the new refugees from China’s civil war. At first, they concentrated upon providing the essentials of life, such as food, clothing, and education, so much so that some called Catholicism “powdered milkism” or “[baking] flourism,” and the church was known as “the flour church.”

Just as reliance on outside funds pointed to the “foreign” nature of Roman Catholicism, so did a failure to train and deploy native priests, and the use of the word “China” in its official name. A

close association with the Nationalist government—the very opposite of the Presbyterian position—also kept Roman Catholics from developing a strong presence among Taiwanese-speaking people.

After 1970, however, Roman Catholics in Taiwan actively sought to adapt to Chinese culture in a process they called “inculturation.” Theoretically, theologians tried to show similarity between Chinese cultural concepts (such as love, filial piety, etc.) and traditional Christian doctrines.

Practically, Roman Catholics have reversed the results of the famous Rites Controversy in China. In 1971, Cardinal Paul Yu Bin “formally promoted honoring of Heaven and the ancestors in the Chinese Spring Festival, saying, “Chinese customs may be incorporated in Christian celebrations.” While retaining the highest worship (*Latria*) for God, and the second highest (*Hyperdulia*) for Mary, Roman Catholics now allow “*Dulia*” for saints, angels, and ancestors. Thus, in a stunning vindication for Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits, ancestor-worship (“*jizu*”) has now been deemed merely reverent and not idolatrous.

These moves, along with church buildings that reflect traditional Chinese style, were meant to appeal to the local populace. Nevertheless, “[t]he promotion of cultural contextualization did not have any positive effect on the church growth. On the contrary the Church began to lose members in 1970.”

The decades of the 1990s saw a heightening of tension in Taiwan as the DPP, supported by the Presbyterians, pushed hard for a new national, fully “Taiwanese,” identity. The Roman Catholics have responded by changing their official name to “the Chinese Regional Bishops’ conference in Taiwan,” and Taiwan was allowed to have its own Cardinal. Old attempts at “inculturation” with Chinese culture have been replaced by an emphasis upon Taiwan culture.

As with the Presbyterians, so with the Roman Catholics, however: Neither “political contextualization” nor “cultural contextualization” has resulted in church growth.

The author concludes, “The judgment as to what kind of contextualization is best for the Church and for society must be left for future historians to make.”

To put the matter bluntly: This provocative article raises fundamental questions of missiology that deserve the attention of the best minds in all branches of Christianity.

### **Christianity and China: Toward Further Dialogue**

In his concluding chapter, “Christianity and China: Toward Further Dialogue,” Philip Wickeri names several key issues which kept surfacing in these papers: (1) Whether, and in what sense, Christianity can be considered a “universal teaching from the West;” (2) The relationship between Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism among Chinese Christians, which includes the matter of contextualization; (3) Christian contributions to Sinology; (4) The importance of popular Christianity in China; (5) “Christianity and Chinese cultures,” including the degree to which all theologies are, of necessity, “hybrids.”

He lists several issues deserving further study: Women in the Experience of Christianity in China, The Bible in the Study of Chinese Christianity, and Dialogue with Chinese Themselves—

a reference to the difficulty still facing Christians within and outside China in actually talking to each other in public.

Rereading this hefty volume increased my appreciation for its wealth of information and insights. I highly recommend it to all serious students of China and Christianity.

**China's Book of Martyrs**  
**The Church in China: Volume 1**  
**By Paul Hattaway**

Hattaway, Paul. *China's Book of Martyrs: The Church in China: Volume 1*. Carlisle, UK: Piquant Editions, 2007.

This volume records instances of severe persecution as recently as 2005, less than ten years ago. Memories are still fresh and painful for thousands of believers in unregistered congregations and among Roman Catholics who have not joined the Catholic Patriotic Association.

For another, we cannot understand today's Chinese church without knowing the rich and bitter history of sustained, systematic, and cruel persecution which has all too often marked the lives of Chinese Christians.

Furthermore, since my original review of this book, the government has launched a nationwide crackdown on unregistered churches. Many of these have been forced to disband, pastors and leaders have been arrested, some have been beaten, and it seems that the situation increasingly looks like what the book describes..

The author has done historians a service in bringing many hidden resources to light and in correcting the record of the past. Sad to say, the current government of China has not only suppressed many of these accounts, but in many cases has denied that martyrdom took place or vilified the Christians as enemies of the state. At least at the time the book was published, the murderous depredations of the hideous Boxers at the turn of the 20th century were lauded in official histories. More recent instances of persecution are usually either ignored or credited to alleged crimes by those who were beaten, imprisoned, or even killed. Hattaway believes that the truth must be told.

Then there are the abiding lessons which we can derive from recurring patterns in this moving collection of stories of those who paid a high price for following Christ and for sharing that faith with others in China. Some of those patterns are worth our consideration.

### **Reasons for Persecution**

By far the most common cause for violent attacks on Christians has been their foreign connection. Beginning with the "Nestorians" in the Tang and Yuan dynasties, continuing with Roman Catholics in the Qing dynasty and into the present, and then including the Protestants, both missionaries and Chinese believers have been tarred with the brush of foreign cultural, economic, and even military imperialism. Time and again, Chinese governments have lashed out against those they consider to be agents of unfriendly foreign powers, and often with justification.

We are all familiar with the ways in which, very unwillingly, missionaries were associated with the dreadful opium trade in the nineteenth century, and with the role that missionaries played in diplomacy (though they usually tried to mitigate the harsher provisions of onerous treaties which their governments wanted to impose on a defeated China).

What we may not know is just how aggressively the French government sought to “protect” Roman Catholic missionaries from all European nations, nor how vigorously many Roman Catholics pressed their “rights” to property, protection from legal action, and equal, even preferential treatment, for religious workers in dealing with government officials. Naturally, all this evoked fierce hostility from Chinese commoners and leaders alike.

Of course, most of the accusations against both missionaries and Chinese believers of working for foreign governments were, and are, utterly false, but that doesn’t stop those who dislike Christianity from digging up some cases, real or fabricated, from the past in order to make things hard on Christians today. It doesn’t help that a small number of missionaries in the past couple hundred years have worked for foreign governments.

Christians and missionaries also encountered the hatred and fear of adherents to other religions, including Tibetan Buddhists, Chinese Buddhists, and worshipers of ancestors and local deities. The educated elites correctly saw that Christianity posed a threat to their humanistic and rigidly hierarchical ethical and cultural system and instigated most of the riots against missionaries.

### **Mass Hysteria**

That brings us to another frequent phenomenon: Mass hysteria. It seems that Chinese people, with their strong group identity, can be easily mobilized into maddened mobs with murderous intentions. The Cultural Revolution exposed this tendency, as have violent anti-foreign demonstrations over the past couple of decades. The Boxer Movement drew much of its fuel from resentment against foreigners but could not have wreaked so much havoc unless large numbers of people had been whipped into a deadly frenzy that led to torture and death for thousands of Chinese believers and several hundred missionaries.

### **Courage and Commitment**

At the same time, however, we see countless cases of courage and commitment unto death itself. One stands in awe at the way in which Christians of all nations have refused to compromise their faith or cease from bearing testimony to their Lord, even in the face of the most awful treatment by heartless enemies. Roman Catholics and Protestants, Chinese and foreigners, men and women, young and old—the martyrs come from all segments of those who profess faith in Christ and inspire us with a courage that can only come from divine empowering and love for Christ and his kingdom. The reader will be repeatedly stirred and humbled by these stories of fortitude and faith.

### **Brutality and Torture**

At the same time, *China’s Book of Martyrs* is not for the faint-hearted. Even its restrained narrative contains enough details to give you bad dreams. Sadly, brutality and sometimes even

sadistic torture seem to be part of the “DNA” of at least some elements of Chinese police culture, even today. Torture exists in many societies, of course, and the early Christians faced no less from the cruel Romans in the blood-stained arena of the Coliseum. Still, it seems jarring to have the same ruling elite that produced, and gloried in, the lofty ethics of Confucius, refined arts of poetry, painting, and porcelain, and elaborate rituals of courtesy tolerate, much less condone, such inhuman conduct by those whom they had appointed as guardians of public safety. Perhaps we see here a major contrast between those societies which have been heavily influenced by Christianity and those which still operate according to natural human inclinations.

### **“Christian” Persecutors**

Some persecution comes not from the state or from ignorant mobs, but from other “Christians.” Cults and sects proliferate today, among which the worst may be the Eastern Lightning, which even now engages in kidnapping, drugs, sex, and torture to ensnare Christians. It was not too long ago that the Three–Self Patriotic Movement did not shrink from using the police to smash house churches, a fact which older members and leaders of unregistered groups have not forgotten, and something which has not been officially recognized or renounced.

### **“The blood of the martyrs...”**

Finally, we see how persecution only hardens the resolve of true believers in Christ. As it was at the beginning, so it is now: Christians count it an honor to suffer for the name and gospel of their Savior and Lord. Indeed, the “blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Many think that the huge numerical growth of both Roman Catholics and Protestants in China in recent decades owes a lot to the trials and tribulations which brave souls endured not too long ago.

*China’s Book of Martyrs* records the stories of about one thousand Chinese and foreign Christians who endured various types of suffering because of their faith and/or their determination to preach the gospel in China. By the author’s admission, not all were “martyrs” in the usual sense of the word, for many only died because they chose to go to China as missionaries, not from intentional violence. In some instances, perhaps, there has even been a bit of a “martyr complex” that has glorified suffering for Christ and even unnecessarily sought to provoke hostility. A few of the accounts involve people who have been credibly considered members of real cults, while others seem to overlook solid evidence of wrongdoing, rather than innocent suffering.

Still, Paul Hattaway has done an enormous amount of research in archives and published materials from around the world, including Europe. He cites his sources, making the volume useful for those who want to pursue individual cases further.

By permission of the publisher, the *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity* (bdconline.net) has posted a few stories from this collection, to give you a taste of the rich contents of this volume, which I encourage all students of Chinese Christianity to buy and read.

I went through the entire book in one month, thirty pages a day, five days a week. I must say that the cumulative effect of this daily dose of testimonies of martyrdom was not just sobering, but almost oppressive. We in the West are just not used to such prolonged exposure to pain and

sorrow. Perhaps we should study the Bible more carefully, read a bit more history, and look beyond our borders to places where blood is still being shed by disciples of Jesus. Those of us who live in the West may face similar challenges in the future; we would do well to ponder the courage, commitment, and even mistakes of those who have preceded us.

## **China's Next Generation**

### **New China, New Church, New World**

**By Luis Bush, Brent Fulton, and a Christian Worker in China**

Bush, Luis, Brent Fulton, and a Christian Worker in China. *China's Next Generation: New China, New Church, New World*. Kindle ed., ChinaSource, 2014.

This short book should be required reading for any Christian who wishes to participate in what God is doing among the Chinese.

Luis Bush opens by observing that the “great harvest” of new believers in China has come to an end. The year 2000 marked a “turning point, the dawn of a new era.” So much has changed since his last visit to Beijing ten years ago that he states, “This is indeed a new China in which a new Church has emerged in a new world.” The rest of the book seeks to substantiate that claim.

Since the opening and reform initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, China has been transformed into a major economic power. Urbanization and a rising living standard have combined to create a new middle class. Likewise, the Chinese church has exploded with unprecedented numerical increase. Recently, the center of gravity and growth of the church has moved from countryside to the cities, and its leaders face the challenge of seeking to be “salt and light” in every sector of society and joining the worldwide Christian community in fulfilling the Great Commission.

#### **A New China**

##### ***Urbanization***

In 2011, for the first time in its history, China had more than half its population living in cities. Rapid urbanization has created a huge income disparity, along with a “floating population” of 250 peasants. The pace of this massive migration will not lessen; within a few years, more than 80 percent of the population is expected to be living in cities.

##### ***A New Urban Under Class***

The huge cities which have literally sprung up from empty land have been constructed by laborers from the countryside. “Not only are these urban migrants building the infrastructure of today’s and tomorrow’s cities; they have become integral to the very functioning of urban life” (8). Nevertheless, despite the vital role they play, they lack legal status and thus access to social services, even as they are looked down upon by more sophisticated urbanites.

##### ***Media and Technology Influence***

With blinding speed, China has become one of the most technologically connected nations in the world, with more than 500 million Internet users. Cell phones—usually smart phones—are

ubiquitous, even among the poor, and are used for personal communication, accessing the Web, and “sounding off” on current issues.

Christians have taken advantage of the Internet to launch thousands of web sites, blogs, online journals, and other platforms for spreading their message, usually without government interference.

### ***Family in Transition and Chaos***

Urbanization and the one-child policy have led to shrinking families, with an expanding elderly population depending upon a small number of younger people to support them. Changing values have spawned an epidemic of divorce and infidelity.

### ***Youth Desperation***

Despite being pampered as only children and beneficiaries of China’s new prosperity, today’s young people feel alienated from their parents. More than half have contemplated suicide.

### **A New Church**

Though no one knows just how many Christians there are in China, we do know that they belong generally to three groups: The official Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), the rural unregistered churches, and the urban unregistered churches. For the most part, they all worship freely. In fact, recent years have seen the emergence of Christian bookstores, schools, conferences, and websites.

Despite widespread perception to the contrary, persecution of Christians has become rare in China. The likelihood of being harassed rises if foreigners are involved, if the group grows too large to fit into a house, belongs to a large network, or engages in political activity.

### ***The Changing Face of Chinese Christian Leadership***

Especially in the new urban churches, leaders include academics and entrepreneurs who have found Christ and seek to serve him in the marketplace. Women serve as pastors in many of the congregations in the countryside and far more women than men attend church in most regions of the country. This obviously poses numerous problems, such as the scarcity of Christian husbands for dedicated Christian women. Christian leaders are also increasingly seeking to express their faith in public, especially with acts of mercy to those in desperate need.

Alas, hardly any church leaders have the age and experience required to navigate the swiftly changing currents in society; they lack older role models and mature mentors, along with more integration into the world Christian community. They will need great wisdom as society continues to implode as a result of endemic me-centered worship of Mammon and a lack of any vital faith.

More and more, Christians are called upon to help others find their way in this “crisis of faith and morality.” Though still wary of potential political action by believers, some in the government are looking to educated Christians for wisdom and a new pattern of living.

## **A New World**

As China's economy and international influence grow, more than eighteen million Chinese have emigrated to other lands. Some of them are believers in Christ, eager to spread their faith. Others are open to new ideas, including Christianity.

At the same time, Christians in "host" countries must rise to this new opportunity.

"Language learning and much cultural adjustment on all sides will be necessary steps in ensuring that China's outward migration becomes both a great ingathering as well as a great blessing to the nations to which the Chinese are now going."

### ***A Clear Mandate for the Global Church***

In light of all these developments, the authors call for the worldwide church to mobilize a new generation to take advantages of the incredible opportunities we now face.

"The face of Christianity in China is changing. China's role in the world is changing. What happens next hinges upon the values, aspirations, and abilities of China's next generation. The next gen church in China does not feel indebted nor enabled. We must raise up a new generation from the 4/14 Window to transform China and the world. We are left without a choice—only an obligation. This is the time. This is the opportunity."

The book concludes with a helpful list of practical suggestions, acknowledgment that many Chinese Christian leaders are fully committed to meeting the challenge of the next generation, and an implicit plea for the rest of us to pray for God to enable them to succeed.

Everyone who loves the Chinese should read this book.

**China's Urban Christians**  
**A Light That Cannot Be Hidden**  
**By Brent Fulton**

Fulton, Brent. *China's Urban Christians: A Light That Cannot Be Hidden*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015. Studies in Chinese Christianity.

With decades of experience living in Asia, traveling within China, and meeting with both Chinese Christians and Christian leaders working within China, Brent Fulton has written the most authoritative and accurate book yet to appear on the urban Chinese church. As editor of ChinaSource Quarterly and co-author with Luis Bush of *China's Next Generation: New China, New Church, New World*, Fulton has already established himself as one of the leading experts on both contemporary China and on Protestant Christians in China.

His own wide reading, along with dozens of personal interviews, has been supplemented by years of extensive research conducted by ChinaSource, of which he is Co-founder and President. He notes in particular the invaluable input from Chinese church leaders that is chronicled weekly in Chinese Church Voices, an “online source for articles, sermons, and social media postings,” by Chinese Christians. As he notes, “the very existence of a vital online Christian community in China . . . is but one evidence of the immense change brought about through the past two decades of massive urbanization” (5).

### **Chapter One**

Bringing together two facets of China's recent dramatic rise—urbanization and the emergence of a significant and growing Christian community in the cities—the book aims “to explore how the church in China perceives the challenges posed by its new urban context and to examine its proposed means of responding to these challenges” (2). Fulton focuses on Protestant churches but acknowledges that parallels may also be found among Roman Catholic congregations.

At the outset, though he is fully aware of the pressures and restrictions upon public activities under which Christians must still operate in China, Fulton rejects the “persecution narrative” that dominates Western discourse about Chinese Christians. In doing so, he takes at face value the statements of Chinese church leaders that their main concern now is not persecution but the new urban environment in which they find themselves. He therefore describes major challenges confronting urban churches, all of which concern the need to adapt to the dramatically changed circumstances of today's world.

Since the publication of Fulton's book, the government has announced strict new regulations and unregistered congregations are facing a kind of persecution not seen in many years.

## Chapter Two: The Context for Change

“No other nation has urbanized as rapidly—or on such a large scale—as China” (6). In the space of 30 years, China has seen the kinds of transformation that took, for example, 100 years in Britain. In the process, the greatest human migration in history has brought more than 500 million people into cities, some of them huge.

Higher education has mushroomed, with millions more graduating from colleges and remaining in cities to pursue better jobs. The formerly tight-knit traditional Chinese family has changed beyond recognition, with most having only one child, and many family members living hundreds of miles from each other. An urban middle class has emerged, bringing millions more consumers into the market, along with a “consumer mentality” that extends even to the church. China’s megacities have become “gateways to the world,” as international businesses seek to enter the huge China market, Chinese students flood high schools and colleges in the West, and Chinese money is transforming national economies from America to Africa to Europe.

Formerly concentrated mostly in rural areas, Chinese Protestants have joined this migration to the cities and have gathered in new urban congregations with entirely different challenges to navigate. Meanwhile, the traditional churches in the cities have been overtaken by countless new ones founded by intellectuals, who have been turning to Christ by the thousands. Students returning from the West have formed their own groups. The state-sanctioned Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) has seen an influx of both rural believers and younger people, who have brought new life and energy.

Fulton describes the mostly negative impact of urbanization (and the one-child policy) upon families, including endemic pre-marital fornication, rising economic expectations toward a future spouse, the gender imbalance, and the aging of the population, which places a heavy burden on their children, single offspring of the one-child policy that ended only in 2015.

Economic changes are no less dramatic, as China tries to shift to a consumer economy and reduce the drain of inefficient state-run enterprises at a time of economic slowdown, a growing gap between rich and poor, and massive flight of capital out of the country.

Warp-speed economic growth at any cost has inflicted Chinese with an environment so degraded that some doubt it will ever recover. Air, soil, and water are being polluted beyond livability levels, severely testing the patience of the population and perhaps outpacing the efforts of the government to reverse the trend.

As elsewhere, urbanization has also spawned a bewildering array of new voices in the mostly open “marketplace of ideas.” As a consequence, all over China, Christians gather freely in groups both small and large, publish journals, and engage in a lively dialogue on the Internet and in other media.

Finally, China’s opening to the world community has brought foreign and Chinese Christians together in ways almost unthinkable three decades ago. Overseas Christians will have to change their role as the church matures, and Fulton gives very wise suggestions about how this can be done.

Since the rest of *China's Urban Christians* builds upon this foundation, the treatment of following chapters will be less detailed. Though the book is deceptively short, the limpid, lively writing conveys a great deal of information and insight in a very brief compass, and no review can do the rich contents justice.

### **Chapter Three: New Wineskins**

Today's urban churches can be categorized as comprised of:

1. Those associated with the TSPM
2. Rural migrant churches that have reorganized in the cities
3. Churches linked to the large Protestant community in Wenzhou, which has planted congregations throughout China
4. Traditional unregistered urban churches that meet in homes and trace their origins to the first half of the twentieth century
5. New urban congregations composed of younger, more educated people and led by educated pastors, many of them full time, though underpaid. Fulton focuses on this last group.

These congregations have moved from meeting in homes as small groups to gathering in rented spaces, either apartments or large commercial venues. Greater organization has replaced close fellowship and mutual accountability. Church leaders now rely more on advanced training and academic theological degrees for authority, rather than on spiritual maturity, gifts, and charisma. A much greater gap between leaders and believers has resulted.

A strong preference for Reformed theology, with its emphasis upon God's grace, has sparked personal and congregational renewal, as well as the plurality of leadership, but in some cases Reformed teaching has resulted in doctrinal rigidity and an over-emphasis upon political action. Renting property has brought higher visibility in society, which some value, while others question this sort of prominence. Larger church budgets have increased independence from outside and the ability to fund paid personnel, resources, and ministries, but have led to risks of mismanagement.

### **Chapter Four: A Shifting Battleground**

In contrast to former years when Christians were subjected to harassment and persecution, the spiritual "battleground" has shifted to "a battle for the spiritual vitality and purity of the church over and against the forces of materialism, secularism, and moral decline. In the words of one pastor, 'At present the main problem facing the church is not government persecution; in fact, this is unimportant to the church. No, the main problem is holiness. If the church is not holy, its witness is destroyed'" (48).

Materialism is widely seen by pastors as the most serious threat to the church today. There is a trend toward "religious consumerism," along with a consuming desire for wealth and status among young believers. Urban Christians "are in danger of being too materially satisfied to recognize their own spiritual hunger and too busy engaging in consumer activities to seek

spiritual fulfillment” (51). The so-called “prosperity gospel” has deceived many, and now extends to competition over which congregation can build the largest and costliest structure.

In a world of post-modern relativism, “Sunday Christians” attend church services in comfortable buildings but do not attend small group meetings, so that they “have neither an intimate relationship with God nor an emotional attachment to the church” (54). People go “church-hopping,” creating huge pressures on pastors to offer a lively and entertaining experience in a modern space. Secularism challenges the relevance of biblical faith to daily life, while millions of churchgoers leave their Christianity behind as soon as they leave the worship service.

As Fulton says, “the battle begins at home,” where marriages and families suffer from all the changes mentioned in Chapter 1. There is a massive crisis in the homes of professing Christians, who are subject to the pragmatic, self-centered, secular values around them, and don’t know how to apply biblical principles to their marriages.

The same goes for bringing up their children in Christian values. Immense social and economic pressures make most parents invest most of their time, effort, and money into getting their children into the best schools and ensuring that they succeed academically. Along the way, few children receive instruction in how to live, much less how to follow Christ; nor do their parents have time to teach or show them.

Finally, a rapidly aging population places a heavy burden upon the younger generation, who, again, lack the time and money to care for their aged parents properly.

Fulton shows how the Christian churches are responding to each of these challenges in a variety of creative ways, some of them quite risky. If they can succeed, however, their contribution to society will be great.

## **Chapter Five: Into the Light**

Everyone agrees that China suffers from a crisis of faith, as the old beliefs, including Communism, lose their former power and credibility. What will replace them, to form the kind of cultural and ethical core that Confucianism once provided?

As the Christian church moves from the margins of society into places of greater public awareness, many urban church leaders believe that Christianity must step into the gap, fill the vacuum, and eventually occupy the center in the marketplace of ideas and values.

This chapter, both concise and comprehensive like all the others, describes new ways in which Christians are making a public impact—in social services and charity, commerce and business, modern media, the academy, and even law and public policy. As we would expect, believers disagree about how much the church, as an organization, should project its presence into these spheres, but most agree that believers must serve as “salt and light” in their homes, the way they “do” church life, their jobs and professions, intellectual discourse across the full range of disciplines, and even, perhaps—though controversy on this point is sharp—law and politics.

Fulton offers extensive examples of creative, costly, and often courageous initiatives by Christians and their leaders in all these arenas, along with honest warnings from within the

church that they must not try to “run before they can walk.” The tendency to devote all attention inward is no more dangerous than ambitious plans to make a highly visible impression on society while the personal lives, families, and relationships among Christians fall far short of basic biblical norms.

### **Chapter Six: The Church’s Global Mandate**

Chinese Christians first began to organize for cross-cultural mission work in the 1940s with what is now known to Westerners as the “Back to Jerusalem Movement” (called by the Chinese themselves “The Preach Everywhere Gospel Band”). After 1950, these pioneers had to restrict their activities to low-key evangelism in Western China.

After World War II, Western missionaries transferred their energies to work among “Diaspora” Chinese in Asia and the West. An overseas Chinese church has grown up and matured, now fully committed to taking the gospel around the world. The Chinese Congress on World Evangelization, which began meeting in 1976, holds large conferences every five years to stimulate missions, with increasingly sophisticated, organized, and coordinated efforts around the world. Almost all Chinese Christians sent to different countries have limited their ministry to other Han Chinese, however. Many of those few who have gone to a different culture have usually found the challenges too great and have returned home without fulfilling their mission.

Since the 1990s, a new “Back to Jerusalem” movement, originating in the rural churches, has captured the attention of both Chinese churches and Western Christians. Actually, this is more a vision than a movement, but it has spurred a great deal of prayer, planning, and preliminary efforts in cross-cultural ministry. In the early stages, the unexpected difficulties of learning a new language, fitting into a foreign culture, and collaborating with other foreign Christians have cooled the initial enthusiasm.

Now, however, urban Chinese Christians have caught the vision and are increasingly communicating and cooperating with rural churches and with Christians from overseas to mobilize, train, send, and support cross-cultural Chinese missionaries. With their greater international experience, relationships with foreign Christians and Chinese Christians living overseas, and more abundant financial, human, and managerial resources, they can potentially tap the passion of the rural churches for a more sustained and effective missionary effort.

With his usual breadth and balance, Fulton describes the potential and the problems facing the plans, programs, and people engaged in this new enterprise, leaving the reader in no doubt about the difficulties they must surmount or of the certainty that God will use them for a great new wave of global outreach in coming years.

### **Chapter Seven: The Quest for Unity**

For more than fifty years, Christians in China have been divided, not only into the two main categories of Government–sanctioned (and controlled) TSPM, but among different streams in the unregistered church. Christians congregate according to social and educational background, different networks brought to cities from the rural churches, traditional unregistered congregations and the new educated churches, and theological distinctives.

Now, however, due to urbanization and a growing awareness that greater unity would bring many benefits, more attempts at communication, collaboration, and even combining into new denominational structures are creating both more unity and more division. Theological differences prevent both organizational unity and civil conversation, and the Chinese tradition of “imperial” leadership hinders those in charge from being accountable to each other.

In this chapter, the author skillfully profiles the manifold causes of division, the many benefits that more unity would bring, the various steps already being taken, and the remaining challenges.

### **Chapter Eight: Testing the Limits**

“Should Christians in China continue along their present trajectory, . . . political realities will likely become of greater concern in the days to come.” That is because “urban believers have sought to work out the implications of their faith within China’s rapidly changing social environment, this journey has taken them into areas that previously had not had a significant Christian presence” (126).

The “political realities” to which Fulton refers are, obviously, the remaining legal restrictions placed upon unregistered churches, the continuing hostility of the Party state to organized religion, and the real possibility that current opportunities could quickly close down whenever the Party decides that the church has become too much a threat to its monopoly of power and influence in society. Large organizations of any kind are suspect, but Christianity especially worries the government because of its past association with “imperialist” powers and the current ties the Christians maintain with Western, and especially, American Christians.

As a result, as the author points out, recent advances into social services, publication, media, online expressions of faith, education, connections with foreigners, and the construction of large church buildings could be quickly overturned. Indeed, the demolition of buildings and removal of crosses from TSPM structures in Wenzhou, though perhaps only a local phenomenon, show how suddenly relations between Christians and the government can turn sour.

Some Christians believe that a new “cold wind” may already be blowing, with uncertain consequences. The future remains unclear.

### **Conclusion**

“The relative social space and position afforded by the city represent, for the church, a double-edged sword” (135). As the public profile of Christians is raised, temptations to pursue a large presence could divide and dilute the witness of Christians, and a government backlash could easily tighten freedoms as in the past; persecution is not even out of the question.

Brent Fulton believes, however, that Chinese Christians know that their hope is set on the heavenly city; this motivates them to persevere in efforts to glorify God on earth.

**Evaluation: Required Reading**

Rarely do I dare to say that a book is a “must read,” but careful study of *China’s Urban Christians* certainly will be essential for anyone who wants to understand current Chinese Christianity, serve effectively among urban Chinese Christians, or pray for them with understanding.

**China's Reforming Churches**  
**Mission, Polity, and Ministry in the Next Christendom**  
**Edited by Bruce P. Baugus**

Baugus, Bruce P., ed. *China's Reforming Churches: Mission, Polity, and Ministry in the Next Christendom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014.

This solid volume grew out of a conference held in January 2013, but it includes both new material and revised papers from that meeting.

Its central thesis is that the large and growing church in China today urgently needs both internal church organizational development and a more adequate grounding in theology, and that both presbyterian polity and Reformed theology can meet these needs.

Disclosure: The present reviewer contributed a chapter, but neither he nor any other author receives any share in the royalties.

The Preface states the aims of the book clearly: to inform the reader about both the history and current conditions of Christianity in China, and in the process to challenge some widely held impressions; to guide Christians into more effective support for, and participation in, God's work among the Chinese; to inspire us to engage in various sorts of activity; and to present an argument for the pressing need for Reformed theology and presbyterian (small "P") polity in China's churches today.

The Introduction by editor Bruce Baugus presents about the best overview of the history and present conditions of Christianity in China that I have seen anywhere.

It includes a general description of the political, social, and economic situation, as well as insightful comments about church history. The author believes that Matteo Ricci's attempts at accommodation with Chinese culture "resulted in a syncretistic version of Roman Catholicism" that rightly bothered Dominicans and Franciscans (9), he asserts that the foreign missionary movement did not fail, but succeeded, in that the church that it helped to produce survived decades of turmoil and then vicious attempts to eradicate it entirely, and he shows how Western (especially American) evangelical and Pentecostal Christians—most of them young, inexperienced, and lacking theological training—in China have largely neglected the work of helping Chinese believers form strong congregations organized in accordance with biblical teachings. He acknowledges the great difficulties attending this effort but believes that it is "one of the great kingdom projects of our generation" (23).

Baugus explains why more and more pastors are turning towards presbyterian (small "P") polity, that is, rule by a plurality of elders and associations of congregations in larger networks. He also

explains why intellectuals and some “culture Christians” are adopting Reformed theology not only to support “healthy church development but for reconstructing China’s culture” (22). Like some other observers, however, he worries that “the potential politicization of the Reformed brand could harm the vital, ongoing work of church reform, and the subjection of the church and her mission to a culture-changing agenda could undermine it” (22).

The Introduction deserves to be printed separately and disseminated broadly. In fact, I felt that way about many of the chapters in this well-edited volume.

If you are not a Presbyterian, don’t let the “Presbyterian” focus of much of the book put you off. All the chapters discuss matters of prime importance beyond the confines of Presbyterian theology and polity. These include history, theology, church polity in general, conditions for ministry in China today, and the crucial question of contextualization/indigenization.

Limitations of space prevent full summaries of all the essays in the book; what follows, though quite long for a book review, is still selective and very limited. I really encourage you to read this important work carefully.

### **Part One: The History of Presbyterianism in China**

Chapter 1 surveys the history of Western Presbyterian and Reformed mission in China. The author, a Chinese, is quick to point out the very substantial contribution missionaries from this wing of the church have made in China, beginning with Robert Morrison. Many early LMS workers were Presbyterians. The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) began sending people in 1837, and eleven other Presbyterian denominations followed. Robert Nevius, Calvin Mateer, and Hunter Corbett were all American Presbyterians.

As liberalism began to affect Protestants in the West, more and more missionaries came to China with “modernist” theological leanings, including W.A.P. Martin, an American Presbyterian. Especially after the Boxer rebellion, in which hundreds of more conservative missionaries were killed, the proportion of liberal missionaries in China dramatically increased. Among Presbyterians, John Leighton Stuart serves as an example of this trend.

As a result, more and more emphasis was placed upon “Christianizing” China – through education, medicine, and political reform – and upon organizational unity, with a de-emphasis upon the gospel and upon traditional theology. Conservatives bucked this trend, of course, as the next chapter illustrates. Since the 1980s, while very few liberal Presbyterians have gone to China, many evangelicals have been active, including the late Jonathan Chao, and have helped to build what is now a strong Reformed movement among urban house churches.

Chapter Two is titled, “Watson Hayes and the North China Theological Seminary,” by A. Donald MacLeod. The NCTS “was the center for the propagation of the Reformed faith in the Middle Kingdom and explains that tradition’s vigorous and persistent influence there. In this drama no one was more significant – and subsequently more neglected – than its founder and

first president, the towering figure of Watson McMillan Hayes (1857-1944), protégé of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield" (59).

The school started when eighteen Presbyterian students walked out of the Union Theological Seminary of Shandong Christian (Qilu) University in Jinan, because Watson Hayes had been forced to resign, along with three other deans at the university. These students were theologically conservative, and they were protesting the liberal orientation of the seminary at the university. They wanted Hayes and other conservatives to teach them, so a new seminary was organized, the NCTS, with Hayes as its president.

This chapter tells the story of a remarkable missionary and theological writer and teacher, whose ministry was part of the evangelical movement that arose in opposition to the liberal takeover of "mainline" denominations and mission societies in the early part of the twentieth century. NCTS became the largest seminary in China, with a national influence as it trained evangelical students from all over China until it was forced to close by the Japanese.

Chapter Three is titled, "A Brief History of the Korean Presbyterian Mission to China," by Bruce P. Baugus and Sun-Il Park. The Presbyterian Church of Korea, formally organized in 1912, began mission work in China the next year. The PCK grew out of revival meetings that were held in Pyongyang in 1907. Not only "did this revival infuse Korean Presbyterians with great expectations from God and a spirit of personal evangelism and holiness," it also "placed prayer and missions at the center of Presbyterian life in the emerging PCK" (74).

The PCK sent three missionaries to work among Chinese in Shandong in 1913. "[F]rom this humble beginning sprang a century of outreach to China and the growth of what would one day become one of the most active missionary-sending churches in the world." (74) Taking advantage of a unique historical moment in Korea, intrepid Korean Presbyterian missionaries inaugurated a movement in Shandong, applying the principles enunciated by Nevius and founding a church that weathered both the war against Japan and the communist victory in 1949. Lessons from this history carry relevance for the church in China today, as do the sad developments in Korea of captivity to culture, materialism, and a "power Christianity" of an undiscerning church growth movement [that] replaces humble, patient, and persistent reliance on the means of grace" (95).

## **Part Two: Presbyterianism in China Today**

Brent Fulton opens with "In Their Own Words: Perceived Challenges of Christians in China," an informative essay that questions common notions that Chinese Christians are persecuted, needy, and poised to launch a massive move to evangelize the world. He also challenges the idea that the growing numbers of Christians in China will lead to a "Christian China." In fact, the reverse seems to be the case: house churches display a "tendency to absorb, and be absorbed by, popular religion than to replace it" (quoting Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, 242), and some urban churches have been neutered by materialism and diverted by the century-old quest to "save China" politically.

Relying on the large, and largely unfettered, Christian presence on the Internet in China, Fulton reports what Chinese church leaders themselves are saying about their situation and its challenges. The urban environment has brought both greater freedom for believers and churches and a harsh environment for disciples and congregations alike: “Busyness and distractions of the urban lifestyle, materialism, and postmodernism” are greater threats than government persecution, while a desire to increase numbers has led many leaders into superficial ministry (sound familiar?) (111-112).

The missions movement is growing, to be sure, but it is hampered by glory-seeking and insufficient training and support. Christians are beginning to serve as salt and light in the larger society and to engage issues of common concern, including the breakdown of the family. They are developing leaders who are much more “professional” than before but still hampered by traditional Chinese patterns of “imperial” leadership.

Fulton concludes by acknowledging that outsiders have much to share with Christians in China, but only if we avoid mistakes of the past. We can offer tools, examples, and theological resources. Most of all, we can develop friendships that are mutual and allow for mentoring healthy Christian living and leadership.

In “Why Chinese Churches Need Biblical Presbyterianism,” Luke P.Y. Lu makes a strong case that only presbyterian (small “P”) government can help Chinese break out of the “imperial” leadership model, and he calls for a commitment to truth that trumps pragmatism.

“A Few Significant Ones: A Conversation with Two of China’s Leading Reformers,” distills insights gained by editor Bruce Baugus from personal interviews. He records that they “advocate forming godly character, serving the needy and marginalized, boldly speaking the truth in love, and laying a strong foundation for the church so that the Reformed faith . . . can thrive in China for centuries to come.” These leaders are convinced that what China most needs are “strong, vibrant, and healthy biblical churches testifying to the gospel of Jesus Christ” (138).

They decry the shallow evangelism that calls for “decisions for Christ” rather than repentance of sin, deep reliance on Jesus alone for salvation, and faithful, biblically based discipleship within a local congregation over many years. They think that “[i]n the current era, church revivals are normally content with worldly values and structures” (150). Rather than focusing on political reform, they want the churches to “prepare godly citizens” (153). They do not think that future leaders of the church should be trained in seminaries overseas, but in China. They are looking not for ephemeral revival, but for “genuine reformation,” a process that could take several hundred years. The quote of “W” on page 155 is priceless.

### **Part Three: Challenges and Opportunities for Presbyterianism in China**

Chapter Seven, “The Social Condition of Ministry in China Today,” written by this reviewer, briefly describes the social environment of ministry in China in 2012 and concludes that there

are both significant obstacles to the spread of the gospel, especially by foreigners, but also encouraging opportunities for continued church growth.

In “China: A Tale of Two Churches?” Brent Fulton explains the history and current status of the relationship between the government-supported Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and unregistered (often called “house”) churches. The two now have a “tense, yet synergistic relationship.” Meanwhile, many of the newer urban churches have no ties to either the TSPM or the older house churches. I predict that many will be enlightened, surprised, and even encouraged by what Fulton presents here, especially the fact that most TSPM pastors preach an evangelical message.

“Two Kingdoms in China: Reformed Ecclesiology and Social Ethics,” by David VanDrunen, should be read by everyone who believes that Christians ought to have an impact on society. He fully agrees that believers should serve as salt and light, and that faithful disciples will gradually have an influence on all domains of culture, but he questions the emphasis many place upon the connection between Christianity and Western notions of human rights. While rejecting a pietism that neglects the duties of Christians to family, work, and the larger culture, he also challenges recent calls for Chinese Christians to build an “all-encompassing ideology” that would prescribe certain economic and political policies, matters upon which godly people will always disagree. He endorses the concepts that Christians in China “should seek the good of Chinese culture and society,” “peace, justice, and prosperity in China,” “the greater conformation of Chinese society to the norms of” God’s will as revealed in the covenant with Noah, and generally to “bless” China’s culture (220-221).

On the other hand, he urges caution in using phrases like “transforming Chinese culture” and building a “Christian China.” Gradual moral and conceptual transformation will result from careful and comprehensive application of biblical principles to all of life, but will never “redeem” any culture, including Chinese culture. In other words, “China can never be transformed into the redemptive kingdom,” which awaits the return of Christ, and thus “this sort of redemptive transformation is an improper and impossible goal” (222).

Instead, he calls upon Christians to build healthy disciples and congregations, free from interference by the government (he supports house churches, not the TSPM) and to train Christians in godly lifestyles at home, school, work, and throughout all of society. His approach seems to me to be close to that of James Hunter’s in *To Change the World*. There is much more in this weighty and important chapter, which deserves wide reading and careful consideration.

“From Dissension to Joy: Resources from Act 15:1-35 for Global Presbyterianism,” by Guy Prentiss Waters, argues that the Jerusalem Council provides both a historical precedent for dealing with church conflict and a prescription for the traditional presbyterian system of a hierarchy of ecclesiastical courts.

## **Part Four: Appropriating a Tradition**

This section provides guidelines and issues calls for more energetic and focused action by Reformed and Presbyterian churches outside of China.

Phil Remmers describes “The Emergence of Legal Christian Publishing in China,” calling it “An Opportunity for Reformed Christians.” This carefully-researched essay offers both information and insight into the state of Christian publishing in China today and is of general interest.

Editor Bruce Baugus gives an overview on “The State of Reformed Theological Education in China today” that will be helpful to anyone concerned for the effective training of pastors for Chinese churches, although many will not agree that the Western academic model is the best – or even a biblical – way to equip ministers of the gospel.

The final chapter by Paul Wang, “The Indigenization and Contextualization of the Reformed Faith in China,” like the other contributions, raises and speaks to matters of import for all who seek the development of a truly “Chinese” Christianity. Wang seeks a balance between a theology that stands firmly on “the fundamental truth revealed through Scripture,” rather than on our existential cultural and societal situation, and a “contextualized theology [that] will reshape the existential situation.” (296) He repeats Paul Hiebert’s call for “critical contextualization” that both accepts the transcendent authority of the Bible and the derivative binding authority of the ecumenical creeds and that “calls for the application of transcendent truth to particular social and cultural contexts” (296-297).

He rejects calls to abandon or relativize the theological heritage from the early church and even the formulations of the Reformation, for he believes that these faithfully restate the truths of the Bible. He does not believe that an appeal to a so-called “Eastern” or “Chinese” way of thinking, in contrast to some supposed “Western” approach, is a valid approach, for all human systems are antithetical to the gospel. Instead, we should seek to construct a truly biblical theology and world view, with full appreciation for what our forefathers have bequeathed to us.

Though I agree with almost all he says, I do question his assertion that Jesus was addressing a “problem of cultural succession” when he declared that he came to “fulfill” the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17) and that the growth of the Christian faith in China “will not abolish Chinese cultures but fulfill them” (294). Jesus was speaking about God’s special revelation in Scripture and in his teaching, not culture, and the use of “fulfillment” vocabulary raises thorny issues. More careful terminology is needed.

## **Conclusion**

The editor ends the book with a call for “wisdom, patience, and discernment” as we apply lessons from the past to current conditions. “Hasty and anxious actions are likely more damaging than helpful. In the end, we in the West are limited in what we can do and could easily do more harm than good” (303).

He is encouraged, however, by the growth of a truly indigenous Reformed movement in China, one that centers upon the doctrines of God's grace, the authority of the Bible in all matters of faith and practice, and the centrality of properly governed churches. He urges Reformed Christians to take advantage of current opportunities to contribute to this development.

There are two helpful appendices: Robert Morrison's 1811 Catechism and "The Appeal to Found the North China Theological Seminary."

**Chinese Biblical Studies:  
Issues in Understanding and Interpretation**

**By G. Wright Doyle**

Doyle, G. Wright. "Chinese Biblical Studies: Issues in Understanding and Interpretation." *Colloquium on Chinese Biblical Studies*, 17-21 January 2009, King's College, London. (This article is a web-published review at [www.globalchinacenter.org](http://www.globalchinacenter.org) on 5 February 2009 of the conference proceedings.)

A colloquium on Chinese biblical studies sponsored by the Center for the Study of Christianity in China, King's College, London, was held January 17-21, 2009.

Supported in part by a grant from the Bible Society, and convened by The Very Reverend Dr. Christopher Hancock, this symposium showcased some of the fine scholarship being done by Chinese around the world. One of the largest such gatherings in recent decades, it both marked the progress of biblical studies by Chinese and advanced the conversation in a number of key areas.

The scholars who presented papers came from a variety of locations (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the U.S.A., Israel) and represented a wide range of faith perspectives. As a result, discussions of each paper were quite lively, even confrontational, but always amicable. The sometimes-sharp exchanges resulted in greater mutual understanding and occasionally—at least in my case—changed opinions.

Though most of the papers were read in English, the discussions took place in Chinese, with interpretation into English. This format enabled native Chinese speakers to express themselves freely; English speakers to participate fully; and everyone to have time to think while the "other" language was being used. The process acknowledged that, while English is the international language of scholarship, we were, after all, talking about Chinese biblical interpretation.

Before looking at the contents of the papers, let us note some recurring themes:

- The constant Chinese focus on ethics. At least since the time of Confucius, Chinese intellectuals have sought to promote the cultivation of moral character.
- The emphasis upon serving the public. Up to the present, the ancient Chinese expectation that private virtue must result in public service has dominated ethical teaching and endeavor.
- The assumption that Chinese culture is invaluable, and perhaps even superior, and must be retained at almost all costs. Almost all the papers reflected the conviction that Chinese Christianity must be recognizably Chinese, and that any presentation of the Christian message to Chinese people, especially those with education, must be couched in terms which affirm traditional cultural concepts and values.

- The profound humiliation and disorientation, leading to confusion and an openness to new ideas, of the period from 1840 to 1949. Only recently have Chinese recovered a sense of pride in their nation; even still, however, the collapse of Confucianism has left a moral vacuum which opens minds to foreign concepts, including “Western” Christianity.
- The ongoing, and extensive, interaction between China and the West over the past two hundred years. Despite their veneration of Chinese culture, especially Confucianism, Chinese intellectuals, particularly since the early-1900s, have been wrestling with Western thought and institutions in their search for national salvation and intellectual renewal.
- The striking, and often unnoticed, impact of the Bible upon Chinese since its translation by Robert Morrison in 1823. Almost all of us were surprised at the breadth and depth of the Bible’s influence upon Chinese thinkers, including non-Christians, since the early 1900s.
- The ever-present danger of reading one’s own ideas into the biblical text. In various ways, we were reminded how hard it is to divest oneself of prejudice and pre-understanding and to go slowly and carefully through the process of observing the text, allowing the text itself to interpret itself, and then only moving to application to our current situation or comparison with other texts. (Several scholars present believe this to be impossible and advocate jumping immediately into some form of contextualization.)
- Not as a theme, but as a noticeable feature of the colloquium, was the almost total lack of interaction with the extensive body of evangelical scholarship, either in English or in Chinese.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Choong Chee Pang placed this colloquium into the larger context of Christian studies in China since the mid-1980s. Since the inception of Sino-Christian studies, Chinese scholars, who are more conversant with Western philosophy than with the Bible, have focused on theology rather than on the biblical texts. There has been a tendency, in fact, to relegate biblical studies to a minor branch of Western philosophy. The picture has brightened a bit in recent years, but a great lack of knowledge of the biblical languages among scholars within Mainland China significantly hampers solid research.

Dr. Choong challenged Chinese scholars to maintain an open mind, a spirit of humility, and awareness of the danger of reading “things Chinese into the biblical text.” He further urged serious study of the biblical languages as a prerequisite for full understanding of the Bible, as well as careful consideration of the varieties of Chinese contexts, since Chinese scholars in Hong Kong, Singapore, and the diaspora will differ in outlook from those in Mainland China.

Dr. Christopher Hancock, likewise, introduced a cautionary note by asking what, in fact, the word “contextualization” might mean, laying out five questions which must be answered before he could accept a proposed “contextualized” interpretation of the Bible, and pointing out ten different types of “contextualized” interpretations currently being undertaken. We need to be careful to understand what we are doing! He concluded with a key question, whether there is a “Word, in or over, the Bible’s words that speaks to our world?”

## The Papers

- Professor You Xilin's "Supra-familial Ethic and Its Origin, From Old Testament to New Testament" explained how Jesus' creation of a new family which transcended blood and clan, and even nation, likewise forged a new ethic, in which members of other families and races are now brothers and sisters, with a claim of love upon each other. This new ethic, in turn, makes possible modern society, in which the traditional family is replaced by membership in a large, mobile group of relative strangers, to whom we must act in a loving way. You believes that only this sort of thing can inform "modern universal citizenship."
- Haihua Tian presented her research proposal for "Biblical Interpretation in a Chinese Perspective." She believes that "the core of the issue for Christian studies in China is . . . the neglect of the contributions of both the Chinese cultural affirmation of humanistic value and the high academic studies of the biblical texts." The thrust of her paper was contained in her question, "How can resources in the Chinese context be utilized to interpret the Bible and to reflect upon Sino-Christian Theology?" The traditional Sola Scriptura approach is "not meaningful for Chinese, who are seeking a national and cultural identity. With their own cultural tradition and life experience, the Chinese should have their own way of reading and interpreting the Bible." A single-meaning approach, she holds, should give way to pluralistic understandings and cross-textual readings in the context of Chinese classics and other cultural expressions. Such a reading should aim at transformation of both texts, each of which is incomplete without the other.
- In "Chinese Cross-Cultural Biblical Interpretation," K.K. Yeo expressed his opinion that "in order for Chinese Biblical interpretation to contribute to global Christian scholarship and the church, . . . Chinese biblical scholars [must] have a better understanding of: (1) the nature of the Biblical text in relation to culture, (2) the significance of cross-cultural interpretation, and (3) the need to engage the Bible interscripturally with the Chinese classics." Yeo believes that cross-cultural interpretation is already seen in the Bible itself, and certainly in the Early Church, and that Chinese and biblical texts should be read together, so that the characteristic emphases of each might enrich our understanding of both textual traditions. His paper featured a brief outline of ways in which Confucian and Daoist scriptures might be read in parallel with the Christian Bible.
- John Y.H. Yieh brought to our attention the obvious, but often-neglected, fact that the Bible has had enormous impact on different readers and societies, sometimes with destructive consequences. "Interpretation and Consequence: Assessing the Impact of the Christian Bible in Chinese Contexts" opened with a brief introduction to three recent hermeneutical efforts: Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza's feminist-liberation-theological critique; Ulrich Luz's "History of effects/impact" perspective; and Fernando Segovia and R.S. Sugirtharajah's postcolonial criticism. After that, he examined ways in which different readings of the Bible affected Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864), Wu Leichuan (1869-1944), and Ni Tuosheng [Watchman Nee] (1903-1972). The bond among all six

approaches consisted in “the strong sense of social responsibility . . . All of them have tried to make the Bible meaningful, relevant and beneficial to their times.”

- G. Wright Doyle surveyed the reasons given for and against the use of either *Shang Di* or *Shen* to translate the biblical words for God (*elohim, el, theos*) in “Problems in Translating the Bible into Chinese: The names(s) for God.” He concluded that although *Shang Di* shares many of the attributes of the biblical God, *Shen* is a better approximation of the meaning of the biblical terms, not only because of a similar semantic range, but in order to express the concept of the Trinity which is found in a number of biblical texts.
- Liang Gong’s “Re-portrayal of Jesus’ Image by Chinese Modern Writers” demonstrated the vast and varied impact of the Bible upon early 20th-century Chinese writers. Regardless of whether they believed its message, many leading Chinese authors adopted themes from it—especially the central image of the suffering of Christ—to introduce “new cultural elements in the construction of new Chinese literature.” Though not “the object of worship,” he nevertheless was admired as “an outstanding personality, a kind of ‘noble, sacrificial spirit,’ a ‘great forgiving spirit,’” one who gave himself for the common good.
- Shi Wenhua: “Context and Text in Paul’s Message of the Cross” was a clear and powerful description of Paul’s “inversion” of contemporary values by deliberately preaching a message of social humiliation (the Cross), doing so without the elegant language and polished gestures expected of “manly” rhetoricians, and boasting in his humiliating sufferings. This paper struck me very powerfully, as a challenge to reconsider the ways in which Christians today try to gain power and prestige.
- Choong Chee Pang questioned the accuracy and wisdom of most Chinese translations of the Bible in “Re-considering Some of the Problems in Robert Morrison’s *Long* [drakon in Greek].” Pointing out the inconsistencies of the ways in which words such as Leviathan, Rahab, beast, monster, and drakon (English “dragon”) in the Old and New Testament are rendered in both Chinese and English translations, he argued for a transliteration of such terms, especially *long*, rather than an attempt at translation. For cultural, political, and linguistic reasons, Choong believes that such a move is imperative in today’s situation. When questioned whether even the positive connotations of *long* among the Chinese are perhaps part of the deceptive power of the “serpent” referred to in the Bible, he agreed that we must warn everyone not to worship the god of this world but held to his conviction that a different handling of *long* is necessary for now.
- “The Bible in the 20th Century China: Biblical Interpretation of Li Rongfang in the Socio-Intellectual Context of China,” by Prof. Archie Lee showed how Li Rongfang used the Bible in his “quest for answers to the pressing issues of the Chinese context,” seeking a way of “saving the nation by launching an ethics/moral revolution that replaces the traditional moral teaching with a new ethical configuration.” Unusually learned, he was well trained in critical biblical scholarship, but allowed himself to “adapt the text to the contextual demand for the nurturing of an independent selfhood for the salvation of the nation.” In this project, Li rejected both what he considered the “unscientific” and “superstitious” elements he thought he found in the Bible, though he still considered it a primary text with special authority. The core of his ethical system was monotheism and

the concept of the autonomous or “independent” personality (*duli renge*). In building a new ethical system, however, he did not ignore the essential role of religion, with its practices of sacrifice and worship, as did contemporary liberal Christians.

- Sze-kar Wan opened his paper on “Grace as Ethical Power: T.C. Chao Reading the Apostle Paul” with the assertion that “the tension between grace and ethics has been the defining problematic for Chinese Protestant intellectuals.” He goes on: “How can a Protestant project that detaches ethics from soteriology and insists on an acceptance of free grace from God square with a Confucianism that insists on perfection through self-cultivation?” T.C. Chao tried to bridge this gulf by constructing a Confucian interpretation of Christianity which effectively merged salvation and sanctification, reinterpreting Paul to exhibit him as a “Chinese sage whose writings embody the Great Dao,” a kind of Christian Plato, as it were. Like so many others, Chao sought, “first of all, the survival of Chinese civilization . . . , secondly the maintenance of a church that formed an insignificant minority in the sea change of China. He read Scripture . . . to . . . create out of the biblical text resources and tools for the church to participate in the arduous task of nation building.” This very rich paper included such stimulating thoughts as Paul’s excellent moral character, the requirement of virtue in order to understand the Bible, and the mysticism of Paul (though Chao’s interpretation of Paul differs substantially from that of Reformation and evangelical scholars).
- Zha Changping challenged us to develop a comprehensive understanding of time in order to appreciate what is going on in the Gospel of Mark, and indeed in all of the Bible and of life. In “The Concept of Time in the Gospel According to Mark,” he showed, among other things, how crucial in his Gospel is the idea of time in its various aspects. For example: Since the one to whom we give our time becomes, in some sense, our master, Jesus’ dedication of his time to God, and then to his enemies, expressed his utter submission to the will of the Father. Again: The rapid intensification of pace as Mark progresses, with units of time becoming shorter and shorter, heighten the effect of the narrative, moving as it does, inexorably, to that final climactic event, the Cross.
- Cathy Zhang Jing’s “*Metis, Logos, Jizhi* and Women—The Hermeneutical Significance of Mark 7:24-31” featured a fascinating overview of various ways to understand the meaning of the encounter between Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman. She first pointed out several possible contexts for this periscope, then explained how the Greek idea of *metis*—a clever saying which a person of inferior status could use to reverse the balance of power—resembles the Chinese tradition of *jizhi*. Finally, she connected these two with the situation of women in biblical times and in Chinese society, employing a feminist approach to draw out implications for women and men today.
- Xu Tao shared his research into a significant movement in his “Inquiring into the Unbiblical Doctrines of the Chinese Mentuhui (Society of Disciples).” Founded by an uneducated farmer (Ji Sanbao 1937-1997), this group claims to be the only true expression of Christianity, while at the same time holding teachings which diverge widely from historic Christian doctrine: considering Ji as the “Christ for the Third Salvation,” practicing divine healing to the exclusion of the use of medicine, predicting a date for the Last Judgment, and attempting to establish a new dynasty. This movement is

only one of many like it among the estimated 60-130 million people claiming some sort of “Christian” identity in China and, like the others, poses major challenges to both the church and to the government. A basic question is, “How does one determine ‘orthodoxy?’” Even more vexing: “Who has the right to make such a judgment?” In the past, “heresy” has been a tag affixed to movements that either the organized church or governments have wanted to eliminate.

- Liang Qichao (1873-1929) is a prime example of a non-Christian Chinese scholar whose thought was deeply influenced by the Bible, especially the Old Testament, as Cao Jian informed us in his “Men and Ideas of the Old Testament as Discussed by Liang Qichao.” Along with Darwinian theory, idealistic nationalism, and Confucian classics, the Old Testament hero Moses and the history of the Jews provided Liang with images for much of his early– and middle–period thought. Later, however, he decided that the impersonal Heaven (*Tian*) of Confucianism provided a better foundation for a modern state than the personal God of the Bible. In this way, he sought to “justify a place for China in the world of civilization,” and to show that “Confucius is now more admirable than Moses.” How fitting that the colloquium should conclude with this reminder of the intense desire for many Chinese intellectuals to validate their culture, while also taking the Bible seriously!

## **Chinese Christian Unity, Indigenization, and the Role(s) of the Missionary**

**By G. Wright Doyle**

Doyle, G. Wright. "Chinese Christian Unity, Indigenization, and the Role(s) of the Missionary." Journal review of *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Vol. 36, No. 1, January 2012.

For years, I have found the IBMR enormously valuable as a resource for the latest and best scholarship on the history of missions and world Christianity, but this issue holds particular value for all those who seek to understand the church in China today. No fewer than six major articles, including the lead editorial, deal with the history of Christianity in China, with pointed references to the situation today.

"If the quest of the church is for unity in Christ, the on-the-ground reality has been kaleidoscopic fragmentation. And the kaleidoscope is spinning with increasing speed," observes Dwight Baker in his editorial, "Unity, Comity, and the Numbers Game." What is true worldwide applies to the Chinese scene as well, despite obvious peculiarities of the situation there.

He asks rhetorically, "Who has measured the level of redundancy, competition, ill-coordination of efforts, and striving to establish organizational identity or 'brand' that this level of multiplication entails?"

To be sure, organizational diversity reflects the vast variety of gifts, abilities, and interests within the Body of Christ, so "diversity and fragmentation" may not be precise synonyms, but we must admit that "the ways these tensions have played out in mission practice and in the wider Christian movement have frequently been less than edifying." Several articles in this issue demonstrate that "the planting of the Protestant church in China provides an excellent case in point."

"Comity Agreements and Sheep Stealers: The Elusive Search for Christian Unity Among Protestants in China," by Gary Tiedemann, very helpfully traces the competing trajectories of movements towards unity and the dynamics of diversity from the mid-1800s to the present. He notes the efforts of mainline mission societies to cooperate in various large ventures, such as education and medical work; the role of the Student Volunteer Movement and the integrating effects of a shared "evangelical" theology; joint missionary conferences in Shanghai; and the regular publication of the *Chinese Recorder* and *Missionary Journal*.

The pace quickened after the electrifying speech of Cheng Jingyi at the Edinburgh conference in 1910, leading eventually to the formation of the China Continuation Committee, then the convening of a National Conference in 1922, the formation of the national Christian Council of China (NCC) and finally the creation of the national Church of Christ in China in 1927.

On the other hand, fragmentation also increased, driven by denominational determination to remain separate, the “fundamentalist-modernist” controversy beginning in the 1920s, the entrance of faith missions and holiness movements into China, the rise of independent Chinese leaders and churches, and the influx of a host of independent and “radical” missionaries from the West. Tiedemann very usefully describes these and the roles they played in organizational diversity, concluding that “despite the best efforts of the authorities in the People’s Republic of China to create one unified post-denominational faith, deep divisions persist to this day within indigenous Protestant Christianity.”

With this historical background, we can briefly discuss the other excellent articles in this issue of IBMR, beginning with Gloria Tseng’s lucid and illuminating portrait of the conflicting historiographical challenge posed by differing accounts and assessments of 20th-century Chinese Christianity in “Botany or Flowers? The Challenges of Writing the History of the Indigenization of Christianity in China.” Both the division of Protestants into government-sanctioned churches and unregistered (or “house” churches) and varying theological and ecclesiological assumptions make composing a balanced narrative quite difficult (though she has the courage to be undertaking such a project at this time!).

Tseng notes that “the history of the indigenization of Christianity in China in the twentieth century has three currents: (1) the ecclesiastical development of the Church of Christ in China, . . . (2) the emergence of Chinese Christian intellectuals associated with missionary colleges and universities, and (3) the emergence of independent preachers and their mass followings.” The first two of these share a similar cast of actors and a similar cohort of supporters among historians; the last group has evoked quite a different set of responses, both within China and among outside historians.

Three examples are given: Wallace Merwin’s “sanguine assessment” of “the ecclesiastical development of the Church of Christ in China” and the role Cheng Jingyi played; Samuel Ling’s critique of the Chinese Christian intellectuals involved in the May Fourth Movement; and Lian Xi’s study of popular Christian movements. Ling and Lian believe that the “liberal” unification project, which was closely tied to political involvement, did not succeed in fostering true indigenization; Lian believes that popular Christianity has assimilated too much from popular Chinese religion.

If we are properly to understand the current situation, we must acknowledge both the historical and theological conflicts which have led to it, Tseng concludes.

Narrowing the focus to one leading figure, Peter Tze Ming Ng portrays Cheng Jingyi as a “Prophet of His Time.” Like the previous contributors, however, Ng puts his portrait of Cheng on the wide canvas of the indigenous movements from 1900 to 1949 and the overall quest for indigenous Christianity. He shows why Cheng was such an influential person in the whole process, and why he deserves great respect as someone who saw the issues facing the Chinese church, issues which remain unsolved to this day.

Turning our attention back to the beginnings of Roman Catholic missionary work in China, Jean-Paul Wiest succinctly presents Matteo Ricci as the “Pioneer of Chinese-Western Dialogue and

Cultural Exchanges.” After describing Ricci’s education, training, and remarkable personal abilities, the author reminds us of Ricci’s “respect for the diversity of Culture,” his “promotion of mutual understanding,” and his status as a “pioneer of dialogue” between well-meaning Chinese and Western interlocutors.

Of particular relevance for us today are Ricci’s commitment to learning Chinese language and culture, his cultivation of deep friendships with Chinese scholars, and his immense labors to connect with Chinese culture in communicating his understanding of the gospel.

Jessie Lutz returns to the vicissitudes of the Protestant missionary endeavor in her article on “Attrition Among Protestant Missionaries in China, 1807–1890.” Drawing upon a wealth of sources, she uncovers the principal reasons for removal from service (death and disease) and delineates the different experiences of men and women on the mission field. Men lived longer and stayed longer, especially in the early decades. Women died earlier or left when their husbands died. Illness and death among children produced profound sorrow and discouragement, testing the faith of the best of them. Until medical and scientific knowledge uncovered the connections between sanitation and health, all too many succumbed to diseases such as dysentery, or suffered all their lives. When converts were few and opposition was intense, missionaries struggled with despondency—again, especially in the first period.

In short, “[m]ission work in China remained a costly and risky career.”

Finally, Australian scholar Ian Welch recovers the highly-relevant life of Lydia Mary Fay, missionary with the Episcopal Church Mission in China. Her career illustrates the trials and triumphs of hundreds of intrepid women missionaries to China. Though Fay walked a “path of lowliness and lowliness of service,” she persevered, refusing to become one of the statistics cited in Jessie Lutz’s article on missionary attrition.

As teacher and administrator in missionary schools, she evinced dedication and devotion, expressed through hard work over many decades. She expended the time and toil to learn the Chinese language so well that she evoked the admiration and trust of Chinese readers and editors. Above all, her character gave everyone an example of selfless service as well as patience under affliction, including lack of proper recognition by her male superiors in the mission.

## **Evaluation**

In addition to the broad survey of modern Chinese history contained in these essays, we are provided with three examples of superb Christian living and serving, reminding us that long-term usefulness requires hard work, courage, perseverance, and a host of other rare character qualities. I consider it a privilege to read about such heroic people.

Furthermore, the problems of unity and indigenization remain acute today. Though control of Chinese Christianity is in the hands of Chinese, and is thus in one sense “indigenized,” the complex task of allowing the gospel to take root in Chinese culture remains a daunting challenge. Ricci’s program was controversial in his own time and remains so today, but regardless of whether we adopt his strategy of accommodation, we must learn from his example.

These articles come from some of the most outstanding scholars working today. Their research and writing deserve our highest respect and close attention. Just to list their major publications would take too much space; I refer you to the journal itself. We are all indebted to their many years of tiring and diligent labor in libraries around the world, and to their carefully-crafted, succinct, and yet comprehensive essays.

I strongly recommend that you peruse this number of the IBMR, which is available without charge online at [www.internationalbulletin.org/register](http://www.internationalbulletin.org/register).

Having said that, in the interests of clarity and accuracy, I presume to make the following comments:

Two of the authors cite Alvyn Austin's *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832-1905*, which is often highly inaccurate and unreliable. In particular, the claim that "the CIM adopted an 'extensive' rather than an 'intensive' missionary strategy" has been convincingly challenged. Dr. Tiedemann's frequently-used adjective "radical" also needs further definition to be helpful.

Secondly, it seems to me that the essays on Christian unity presuppose a definition of "church" which may not be warranted by biblical usage. I realize that this is an extremely controversial subject, but I believe that we need to rethink our assumptions about the precise form(s) which Christian unity should take. Though visible unity of some sort is clearly commanded for both individual congregations and among Christians in any locale, any wider use of the term "church" must be carefully scrutinized, for most biblical scholars, and many theologians, would deny its application to a national organization or worldwide denomination.

Perhaps the search for Christian unity needs to be directed towards the congregation and the city rather than a larger organization, not only because of the biblical evidence, but also for a more practical reason. Larger networks necessarily provoke government intervention, either in the form of state sponsorship and potential control (TSPM, CPA), or opposition and possible persecution (unregistered or "underground") churches. There is also the historical reality of almost inevitable abuse, even corruption, when power becomes concentrated in the hands of a few people.

Those remarks aside, however, I believe that all serious students of Chinese Christian history should make it a priority to read these outstanding essays, all of which possess relevance for our understanding of today's situation.

**Chinese Christianity**  
**An Interplay between Global and Local Perspectives**  
**By Peter Tze Ming Ng**

Ng, Peter Tze Ming. *Chinese Christianity: An Interplay between Global and Local Perspectives*.  
Boston, MA: Brill, 2012. Religion in Chinese Societies.

This volume contains papers written by Peter Ng over a period of fifteen years, presented in chronological order of publication with the purpose of illustrating his own intellectual journey, “especially regarding the concept of ‘Chinese indigenous Christianity,’ and the rediscovery of ‘local Christianities’ and ‘the Chinese side of the story.’” His goal is to elaborate on the theme of “a new understanding of Chinese Christianity from a global-local perspective” (2).

His academic background in both theology and education led Ng to study the history of Christian higher education in China. He gradually began to search for new paradigms for understanding the interplay between Western and Chinese influences in the modernization of China and of education in particular. Eventually, the term “glocalization” was coined to emphasize this mutual interaction of East and West in the development of higher education and of Chinese Christianity in general. Local distinctives must always be kept in mind when studying any particular embodiment of the Christian faith.

Along the way, he discovered that we must “re-discover the Chinese side of the story” by mining Chinese-language sources, which have hitherto been scarcely employed in writing the history of Christianity in China.

Seeking to understand why the Three–Self concept, already known and practiced occasionally in the nineteenth century, did not “take off” in China, he discovered several obstacles, including a focus by missionaries on numerical growth rather than training of Chinese pastors, and the “empire-building” which created so many schools, hospitals, and other institutions that were too expensive to be supported by Chinese Christians alone.

Ng’s main goal is to develop an understanding of Chinese Christianity as “one typical model of World Christianity” (17).

The first four chapters “deal with various aspects of Chinese (Protestant) Christianity in global and local perspectives.” Chapter 1 surveys the “changing paradigms and perspectives in the study of Chinese Christianity among scholars from China and the West.” Entitled, “From ‘Christianity in China’ to ‘Chinese Christianity,’” it shows new opportunities for scholars in China to study the history of Christianity in their country; a new realization among Western writers that they must change to a “China-centered” paradigm, emphasizing Chinese sources, Chinese Christians, and the impact of Chinese culture upon Christianity; new materials from Chinese archives; a new awareness that Christianity contributed to the modernization of China;

and a new focus on the bi-directional nature of cultural influences, with the flow from China to the West now in purview also.

Ng and others have found the study of Christian colleges in China to be a fruitful example of this interplay between Chinese and Western cultures. (See also Daniel H. Bays and Ellen Widmer, eds. *China's Christian Colleges: Cross-Cultural Connections, 1900-1950*).

Their history points out the fundamental differences, even conflicts, between Christianity and Chinese culture as understood by the educated classes, who could not accept the exclusive claims of the Christian message and were all too aware that it “was a religion that changed customs, called into question accepted ideas, and, above all, threatened to undermine existing situations” (30). Christianity thus remained on the margins of society and “would never be reckoned as playing any significant role in the social life of China except as part of ‘anti-government’ or ‘revolutionary’ movements”—a condition that, to some degree, persists to this day, at least among leading Party officials. That is why, then and now, religious education in the schools was not approved by the government. Ng concludes, “Hence, the sociological and cultural perspectives were significant in the study of the history of Christian higher education in China too” (31).

Ng relates how he and fellow researchers have also come to appreciate the significance of indigenous Chinese Christianity, which Daniel Bays said was “the most important feature” of the period starting at the turn of the twentieth century (35). Denominationalism was not only foreign to the Chinese, but a positive hindrance to the indigenization of the gospel.

The introductory chapter ends with Ng’s proposal that “the term ‘local contexts’ should be reckoned as a qualifier of global Christianity” (39, 42). Thus, we should speak of “American Christianity” or “Chinese Christianity” as local expressions of “World Christianity.” He opines that Chinese Christianity will “turn out to be a new kind of Christianity, which is yet another local representation of ‘World Christianity’” (41).

Specifically, he believes that house churches did not arise just because of “resistance to the control of the Chinese government,” but as expressions of “a new kind of Christianity” (41). I would go further and say that house churches in China have reminded the world church of the only model given to us in the New Testament and a more effective way of living out what the Bible says about life in Christian community.

Chapter Two examines three instances of Christian higher education in China after the Boxer Movement and shows how this traumatic event turned out to spur not only an increase in both Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries, but also greater cooperation among previously independent missionary efforts in this field of ministry.

Chapter Three, “The Other Side of 1910: The Development of Chinese Indigenous Movements Before and After the Edinburgh Conference,” sketches the development of home-grown Chinese Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the former period, there were two stages. The first stage included the “Three-Self” movements initiated by the missionaries in the Mid-19th century in some parts of China,” including Amoy, Swatow, and the aborted efforts of

Charles Gutzlaff. The second stage saw the development of “indigenous movements started by local Chinese Christians in response to the Boxer Movement at the turn of the century” (69). Despite well-meaning efforts, however, other efforts by missionaries largely failed to bear fruit.

After 1900, however, Chinese took the lead, forming various organizations to build a truly local Christian church, which would eventually result in the formation of the National Church of Christ in China, formed by Jingyi Cheng (C.Y. Cheng) in Shanghai in 1927. Cheng, who had spoken powerfully at Edinburgh in 2010, receives approving treatment from Ng both in this chapter and in other places as a pioneer of, and spokesman for, indigenous Chinese Christianity. Under his leadership, the goal of a fully independent nationwide Christian body was realized in the formation of the Christian Church in China in 1927.

There were others, of course, not connected with large “Mainline” organizations, such as The True Jesus Church, Wang Mingdao, the “Jesus Family” led by Dianying Jing, and the “Little Flock” or Assembly Hall begun by Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng). Ng offers statistics to show that the combined efforts of missionaries and independent Chinese Christians were responsible for a dramatic increase in the population of Christians after 1920 and makes a good case that most of this growth resulted from the work of the indigenous Chinese groups rather than those connected with foreigners. After all missionaries left in the early 1950s, the church seemed to wither and even die, but the explosive expansion in the 1970s and 1980s occurred entirely apart from foreign missionary involvement, at least on the surface.

(Here we should note, however, the very substantial contribution of foreign Christians since the mid-1980s, though of course they have not worked openly as “missionaries.”)

Both the independent movements and the Christian Church in China sought release from Western control and the stigma that Christianity was a Western religion. At this point in history, the Chinese church has (largely) been delivered from the oppressive burden of Western denominationalism and Western control, something which Cheng and others envisioned more than one hundred years ago.

Chapter Four continues to study the interactions between globalization and localization, especially as seen in the history of Christian higher education in China. Another way of describing this complex relationship is the interplay between “internationalization” and “indigenization.” When Christian missionaries brought the gospel to China, they were introducing an international element into the local setting, and they were met with strong local responses, which resulted in various forms of indigenization.

When the Nationalist Chinese government came into power, it imposed regulations on Christian colleges that reflected China’s traditionally secular view of education. In the process of conforming to these new rules, Christian colleges had to reassess the nature of Christianity as one religion among many, and of Christian higher education as an arena for studying other religions as well as Christianity.

Ng further elaborates his theory of “glocalization” in this chapter, stressing that as a “world” religion, Christianity must invite locals into the process of forming a truly local expression of

this universal faith. Only thus will they feel respected as individuals and empowered to join in the task of creating a truly indigenous Chinese expression of Christianity.

The next seven chapters discuss “glocalization” through the stories of individual missionaries, missions scholars, and Chinese Christian leaders.

Chapter Five is an extended panegyric on Timothy Richard, whom Ng considers to be a prophet who saw far ahead of his time and dared to speak uncomfortable truths. Richard was, indeed, a man of great abilities, energy, and achievements, and he gained the respect of non-Christian Chinese leaders in his time and in ours. In that sense, he “succeeded.” On the other hand, Ng notes that China’s intellectuals, while accepting the modernization program of Western civilization which Timothy promoted, did not, by and large, accept the Christian foundation on which much of it rested, as Richard had hoped they would.

Ng lauds Richard for having a broad-minded attitude toward non-Christian religions, and charges Hudson Taylor with a “rigid and uncompromising” approach that prompts Ng to say that he “failed” in his mission to “Christianize China.” Several aspects of this assessment invite further discussion. Though Richard certainly remained faithful to his calling as a missionary, both at the time and since, some have questioned whether he maintained the same fidelity to the message of the New Testament. Like other more liberal missionaries, he switched his emphasis from a “gospel of love and forgiveness” to a “gospel of material progress and scientific advance,” believing that “China could find national salvation only through a massive program of Westernization and economic modernization” (121). Whereas others sought conversion of individuals, Richard “put forth his grand plan for the national conversion of China” through higher education (122).

Chapter Six, “C.Y. Cheng: The Prophet of Chinese Christianity,” mostly replicates the contents of Chapter Three.

Chapter Seven, “C.M. Wei: Bridging National culture and World Values,” tells the story of Dr. Francis C. M. Wei, who “became a channel for the cultural exchange between the Western world and China” (143). Along with T.C. Chao, Wei was also one of two outstanding liberal theologians. A distinguished scholar and academic, Wei was the first Chinese president of Huachung (Central China) University, now called Central China (Huazhong) Normal University. A strong critic of Western denominationalism, he was a leader in the National Council of Churches and in the World Council of Churches.

Wei believed that World Christianity must find expression in local cultures, and “attempted a new way of synthesizing Eastern and Western cultures, by interpreting Christianity in terms of Chinese culture (a process of localization) and by transforming Chinese culture with Christian world values (a process of globalization), hence demonstrating a vivid interplay between Chinese and Western cultures (the process of glocalization) and the construction of an ‘ideal, universal and ecumenical culture’” (165).

“T.C. Chao: Builder of Chinese Indigenous Christian Theology” (Chapter Eight) traces the career of Zhao Zichen, one of two prominent liberal theologians in the first half of the 20th

century. Starting out as a Methodist, Chao became an Anglican priest in 1941. His theology went through three stages: in the first period, he subscribed to the prevalent liberal theology of “mainline” denominations and emphasized Jesus as our moral exemplar and Christianity’s similarities to Confucianism. During the Japanese war, disillusioned by the atrocities committed by the Japanese, he turned to the Karl Barth’s neo-orthodoxy, affirming the sinfulness of man, the dual nature of Christ, his work on the Cross for our redemption, and the uniqueness of Christianity.

After the communists came to power, he saw them as liberators of the church from the scourges of Western denominationalism and foreign domination and became a major leader and spokesman for the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). In his later years, his focus on social reconstruction led him away from any commitment to the historic Christian faith. In all periods, his views were shaped by the social context which the church was facing.

Chapter Nine—“David Paton: Christian Mission Encounters Communism in China” describes the ways in which missionaries like David Paton and George Hood responded to the expulsion of missionaries after the communist victory in 1949. Heavily influenced by the writings of fellow Anglican Roland Allen, Paton believed that missionaries had failed to leave the churches they had founded soon enough, and had instead stayed on to rule them, not only discouraging, but also preventing, the development of truly indigenous Chinese churches.

Thus, the foreignness of almost every aspect of missionary-connected churches, the connection of Christianity with foreign imperialism, the control by foreign missionaries, and the continued existence of Western denominationalism earned unnecessary opprobrium for Chinese Christians. The forced departure of missionaries represented not only the judgment of God but also freedom for Chinese Christianity to escape from its Western captivity and fulfill the potential that earlier movements toward indigenous Chinese Christianity had already evinced.

Chapter Ten presents a balanced critique of Y.T. Wu (Wu Yaozhong), a founder of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, while Chapter Eleven is a sustained encomium on K.H. Ting (Ding Guangxun), who led the TSPM for many years and founded the China Christian Council. He praises Ting for building on the work of Y.T. Wu, in particular his efforts to separate the political functions of the TSPM from the Church-focused work of the CCC and his leadership in breaking out of the isolation from Christians in other parts of the world in which Chinese Christians had been held since the early 1950s.

Ng lauds Ting’s Theological Reconstruction campaign, which sought to “deliver” Chinese Christians from fundamentalist and conservative views, by “watering down” (Ting’s words) the doctrine of justification by faith, with its clear demarcation of believers and non-believers and the concept of hell as the destiny of the latter. Ting’s view of “the Cosmic Christ” and his emphasis on God’s love allowed him to state that God loves all Chinese and wants Christians to show their love for their neighbor by joining in the construction of a harmonious society under the leadership of the Communist Party.

The concluding chapter restates Ng’s thesis, that the concept of “glocalization” can help us understand both the importance of worldwide Christianity and the necessity of examining

various local expressions of it. He notes with approval the growing awareness among scholars that the stories of Chinese Christians must be told for us to understand the distinctive nature of Chinese Christianity.

As a collection of previously published papers, the volume contains a good bit of repetition, but it is not too distracting. More careful editing would have removed some duplicate passages and many egregious grammatical errors, especially the habitual violation of the English sequence of tenses that characterizes much writing by authors from Hong Kong.

This is a well-researched book from the standpoint of liberal, ecumenical theology. Its treatment of leading liberal Chinese theologians needs to be augmented by discussions of the same period from the evangelical side. Specifically, “The Critique of Indigenous Theology” by Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng), offers a helpful perspective.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Lit-sen Chang, “Critique of Indigenous Theology,” in *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng)*, edited and translated by G. Wright Doyle. Wipf & Stock, 2013.

# **Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities**

**By Fenggang Yang**

Yang, Fenggang. *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1999.

Though this book came out more than ten years ago, it remains relevant today. That is why I dare to write such a tardy review.

Don't let the subtitle put you off reading it. It's added for Yang's fellow sociologists, to declare his thesis, which is that "the Chinese Christian church [in America] helps its members to construct an evangelical Protestant identity, a conservative American identity, and a cosmopolitan Chinese identity."

Clearly written, tightly organized, well-documented, this volume helps us understand the multiple roles played by the Chinese church in America in the lives of its members. Along the way, we learn a great deal about the aspirations, struggles, and profound transformation of Chinese who become committed evangelical Christians in their adopted land.

Though most of his research and information deal with one congregation in suburban Washington, D.C., Yang draws upon wider sources to make significant generalizations that apply to immigrants from "Greater China" in other parts of the United States. It thus constitutes required reading for those who would understand this growing population of Chinese Christians.

## **Social context**

He places this phenomenon in its larger social, cultural and religious context, which is one of an "increasingly pluralistic American society." The American core culture—Anglo-Saxon Protestantism—"has been eclipsed amid various social movements and revolutions since the 1960s." Thus, "religious conversion becomes less an act of conformity to social pressures and more a matter of personal choice."

Meanwhile, "Chinese Protestants are establishing themselves in a time of restructuring of American Protestantism," when "mainline" denominations, with mostly liberal theology, are rapidly declining, while conservative evangelical congregations, especially those with no denominational affiliation, are rapidly growing.

Furthermore, "these Chinese immigrants come from various societies of third-world countries." Ethnic Chinese from various nations of East Asia have come to America to find a new home. "China as a modern nation-state has become stronger and stronger, but the reconstruction of Chinese culture and identity has become increasingly complicated and difficult."

## **Christian identity**

In this environment, Chinese believers construct a Christian identity. They are attracted to evangelical Protestantism for several reasons, including “the desire for religious interpretations about the meaning of life and the world,” as they long “for order, purpose, and rules.” Second, “conservative Protestantism . . . proclaims absoluteness, love, and certainty. The church has become a haven for homeless sojourners.”

Third, “in conservative Christianity, . . . Chinese find a good match for their cherished social-ethical values,” most of which derive from Confucianism. Finally, their Christian identity “provides a universal and absolute ground on which these Chinese can selectively reject or accept certain cultural traditions.” That is, biblical norms help them to affirm some aspects of traditional Confucian and Daoist ethics and philosophy, while rejecting non-biblical religious rites and beliefs.

## **American identity**

The church also enables them to construct a new identity as Americans. Living, studying, and working among non-Chinese during the week, they congregate with fellow Chinese believers on the weekends. In the process, they become part of the larger conservative-evangelical Christian sub-culture, which greatly influences their values. Like their fellow non-Chinese believers, they decry the rapid moral degradation of American society and seek to bring their children up in a way that affirms traditional Christian values, which they also believe conform to the best in their Confucian Chinese heritage.

This “Chinese ethnic church is independent but not really isolated,” because of the non-Chinese context in which its members live and because it “selectively networks with some non-Chinese Christian organizations and individuals.” Furthermore, “their becoming American does not mean giving up the Chinese identity. Instead, the church helps them to retain and reclaim Chinese cultural identity within American pluralism.”

One possible qualification to Yang’s observations in the 1990s may be that as white evangelicals in America become more and more liberal—theologically, socially, and politically—we can expect Chinese Christians to mirror that trend, though perhaps a bit more slowly.

## **Chinese identity**

Despite ethnic diversity caused by different countries of origin, Chinese Christians in America build a unity out of diversity. Their varied backgrounds force them “to redefine their identity and expand the meaning of Chineseness.” Specifically, they tend to conceive of being Chinese not in terms of citizenship in a particular nation (though that is important to many) but in terms of a shared culture heritage. They discard non-biblical religious traditions, but try hard to retain the language, Confucian moral values (such as thrift, hard work, and filial piety), some aspects of philosophical Daoism, and the celebration of Chinese New Year as a cultural (as distinct from religious) festival.

Within the overall mission of evangelism, they “set the priority principle of ‘Chinese first,’” and concentrate on sharing the Gospel with their compatriots, both in the U.S. and in Asia.

Constructing this new sort of Chinese identity is a continuous process, of course, and some are further along than others. Likewise, the “definition of Chineseness is not fixed,” so that everyone involved is engaged in an ongoing adaptation to changing situations.

One of those situations is the dramatic rise of China in recent years and its integration in the world economy, engendering immense pride in overseas Chinese and giving them more opportunities to connect with their cultural roots. Many Chinese Christians believe that China’s new superpower status fulfills God’s ancient plan to use the Chinese to carry the Gospel to the whole world.

### **Selective assimilation and selective preservation**

As the world economy relies more and more on information, the newer Chinese immigrants, who are generally quite well-educated, find increasing scope to assimilate into their host culture. At the same time, globalization enables them to maintain their Chinese identity, as they participate in the transnational interaction that characterizes today’s educated elites.

In sum:

They trust the [American] education system, so they send their children to public schools and prestigious universities; they trust the economic system, so they work hard and invest wisely to gain tangible rewards; . . . they do not trust the [American] media and entertainment industry for encouraging liberal moral values and unconventional lifestyles. Instead, [they] choose evangelical Christianity because its value system fits their desire for order and success. They choose to congregate in the evangelical Christian church because it provides material and social capital for Chinese immigrants and their children.

Lest this all sound completely worldly, however, we should emphasize that Yang discovered that spiritual reasons provide the major impetus for becoming Christian in America. Chinese choose to trust in Christ so that they may find true satisfaction in life, purpose for living, love, and a lasting relationship with God.

I wish I had read this study when it first came out! Yang helps to explain much that one sees in Chinese churches in America, including what seem to be the endemic conflicts that tear congregations apart.

My only question has to do with the degree to which Confucianism and philosophical Daoism mesh with biblical Christianity. Yang generally handles this sticky question well, but I think more careful study will be required to prevent the continuation of what many have considered to be the undiscerned assimilation of Christianity to Confucianism among Chinese almost from the beginning. Likewise, Yuan Zhiming’s easy equation of the Dao of the Laozi with the Logos of the Bible ignores some fundamental discontinuities between the two.

Nevertheless, I do hope that more people, both Western and Chinese, will read *Chinese Christians in America*. Yang's findings may well apply to extent also to the emerging urban Chinese church.

## **Chinese Theology: Text and Context**

**By Chloe Starr**

Starr, Chloe. *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016.

Dr. Chloe Starr has written a brilliant and insightful book with many virtues as well as some problematic points.

### **Strengths**

*Chinese Theology*'s strengths include writing that is both elegant and precise, clear and meticulous organization, tenacious adherence to its stated aims and emphases, careful definitions and distinctions at every point, and detailed analysis of key texts that illustrate central themes.

Starr, who is associate professor of Asian Christianity and Theology at Yale Divinity School, is an expert Sinologist who has read widely across several centuries of both secular and Christian Chinese literature. Her work displays a mastery of an impressive array of Roman Catholic and Protestant writings, an ability to spot pivotal issues, and a remarkable balance and civility of tone. She can explain complex controversies clearly and fairly, without hiding her own considered opinions.

### **Basic Approach**

This volume contains discussions of Chinese Roman Catholic and Protestant writings from the sixteenth century to the early twenty-first century. In her later chapters, she presents the work of both "Mainline" and "House church" writers, with sections on church and academic publications, popular hymns, and blogs by church leaders.

Starr adopts a distinctive two-fold approach to the subject of Chinese theology. That is, she bases her study on a close reading of key *texts* in their *contexts* (thus the subtitle, "Text and Context"). She focuses on texts because theology itself has been dominated by written texts, and Chinese reverence texts. Texts must be read in context to be understood, however.

Contexts for Chinese theological works include Chinese literary contexts, such as themes, words, phrases, and allusions to other texts, and a distinctly Chinese literary style and structure. Indeed, the book makes the major claim that Chinese have not produced a "systematic" theology precisely because their literary tradition does not feature systematic treatments of subjects like theology and philosophy.

Chinese society and politics form the other major context for Christian writers, especially "nationalism," broadly defined as a concern for the nation. The author highlights other dialogue partners during and after the composition of the text and theological debates at the time, including both Chinese and foreign discussions. She avers that a purely "Chinese" theology is hard to find, for all the writers are in dialogue with world church conversations.

Unlike most other treatments of Chinese Christianity, Starr highlights not just history but theology. By “theology,” however, she means, “speaking about God,” not just the usual systematic treatments with which we are familiar with in the West. She believes that because there is little systematic thinking in the usual “Western” form, we need to look in other places for discussions of God, man, and life in this world. At the same time, she does not limit herself to “theology,” but devotes extensive space to public religious policy and to history, that we may understand the contexts of these texts.

She sets out the overall timeline and understanding of Christian theology in China. Unlike in some parts of the West, theology has not been an academic discipline in China, where its study has located itself in churches and seminaries. The author, therefore, casts her net widely, especially in the post-1949 era, to include people who did not publish formal theological tomes but who did speak to matters of ultimate concern.

Starr’s understanding of Chinese literature shapes her treatment of what she calls “textual reading.” In the first place, especially for Chinese, texts are important in themselves and must be read. More than that, however, in China the reading of texts, especially the Classics, was meant to enable you to become a good person. There was a shared universe of allusions, themes, genres, etc., that shaped cognition and interpretation, even of the Word of God. Always, textual reading has been a collaborative process, with authors and readers engaging in an ongoing dialogue that resulted in changes in previous texts. Like the rest of Chinese society, reading was a relational activity.

## **Overview**

### **Chapter 1: From Missionary Writings to Chinese Christian Texts: An Introduction**

In this opening chapter Starr traces the evolution from missionary theology, first translated and then composed by missionaries, to localized Chin theology. She notes that enculturation has been going on all along. The creation of Chinese theology goes through three stages: 1. Jesuit missionaries translate existing Catholic works into Chinese, 2. As they gain facility in Chinese, missionaries write in a Chinese textual form, and 3. Chinese themselves write and think within their own heritage and tradition.

To illustrate this trajectory, Starr examines three texts: Michele Ruggieri’s catechism *Tianzhu shilu*, published in 1584; Matteo Rice’s revised catechism *Tianzhu shiyi*, issued in 1603; and Li Jiubiao’s *Kouduo richao* (*Daily Excerpts of Oral Admonishments*; 1630-1640). She likes the term “accommodation,” for it speaks of a “two-way making room for, or adaptation of, religious thought, liturgy, and method within a new philosophical house or religious casing. It implies a generosity, and hospitality, on the part of both the one making room for the metaphysical newcomer and the one accommodating Christianity to a new sphere of religious experience” (17).

She applies this to theology, with a particular focus on the fact that not only content, but literary form, played a key role in this process, and concludes that Chinese “theology does not need to follow—and indeed, cannot follow—the forms of other textual cultures” (39). The chapter as a

whole shows how sinicization of theology took place very early, as Chinese Roman Catholics wrote for each other and for a critical public, and as they took part in community life as Confucian scholars.

## **Chapter 2: The Christian Imprint: The Shaping of Republican-Era Theology**

In this chapter, one of three like it (the others being chapters 6 and 8), the author provides a masterful survey of the social, political, and ecclesiastical contexts of mainstream, elite Christian literary production in the early twentieth century. With comprehensive conciseness, she explains “the five background factors to the growth of Republican theology . . . (internal church developments, anti-imperialism, Christian education, elite social responsibility, and the effects of the Anti-Christian movements)” (42). After that, she describes “where theological texts were being produced and by whom” (42).

Two interacting factors in all this were, first, the question of identity: “Who are we, as Chinese Christians?” Can a person be both Christian and Chinese? If so, what does this mean? In the light of the 1911 revolution, the abolition of the Confucian educational system, the introduction of Science and Democracy, the rise of nationalism and the need to distinguish themselves from foreign Christianity and to become independent from foreign control, mainline Chinese Christians struggled to forge a new identity as both Chinese and Christian. Starr notes that some “left to join new, ‘Chinese’ churches,” but does not deal with their spokesmen, concentrating instead on the ones who remained “within the historic churches.”

The second factor was the rise of the modern press. “Rapid, cheap circulation of print media enabled Christian thought to be widely distributed and debated . . . The Christian press, in parallel with the secular press, shouldered the mantle of determining what China was and what the Chinese church should become” (43).

No summary can do justice to the ensuing analysis. Highlights: Church structures changed dramatically, as “separatist and coalition movements went in different directions.” The former founded independent churches and organizations. The latter sought to gain equality and then full independence within missionary-founded denominations and organizations. Everyone had to deal with the stigma of the connection between missionary activity and foreign imperialism.

Missionary-founded colleges turned out educated elites who plunged into the debates and church and society, Christianity and Chinese culture, and faced the need to form a truly independent Chinese church. Many of these went abroad for further study and returned with degrees from prestigious liberal Western seminaries and graduate schools. As liberal intellectuals, they felt a responsibility to participate in the building of a strong and modern China.

They also sought to build a new “Chinese” Christianity, seeing “Chinese culture, and Chinese society, as the ground for their work” (56). They “embraced Christian involvement in social and economic action, national education, and the reevaluation of Confucian ethics” (56).

In all this, “the periodical press emerged as a natural center of Christian activity during the 1920s and 1930s” (61). They urgently called for an indigenous press to inculcate Christian values in the youth and to counter the criticisms of opponents to Christianity. “A small group of liberal-

leaning theologians and writers who edited and contributed prolifically to apologetics journals and magazine defined the core features and values of their theological vision as they wrote. . . . Building on the thinking (and labor) of Social Gospel proponents in China like Legge, Richard, and Allen . . . they sought to build the Kingdom of God on earth” (65). Some were Christocentric; most did not accept biblical claims of miracles. This group rejected or wanted to redefine traditional Christian doctrines. At the same time, they did not deny the reality of the worldwide church, but in fact stressed that Chinese were part of an international body of believers.

Crucially for her thesis, Starr emphasizes that “[t]heology was not separated out into great tomes, . . . (although serialized articles were often republished as complete texts . . .) but was served up monthly, interspersed among other aspects of Christian life and thought, to a paying audience” (71).

In the next three chapters, Starr carefully analyzes key works by representatives of this elite group: Zhao Zichen, Xu Yongze, and Wu Leichuan. Because they fit the patterns just described, I shall be quite brief in my treatment of Starr’s description of these writings.

### **Chapter 3: Zhao Zichen and a Creative Theology: The *Life of Jesus* (1935)**

As noted earlier, “The Christians intellectuals and leaders who inherited the mission legacy and its rhetoric and chose to remain within historic denominations occupied a demanding, meditative position: interpreting Christianity through to China and on Christ into Chinese modes. . . . [They] often stepped in line with wider Chinese views rather than church expectations and they took their own stance on matters of theology, governance, and social need” (73).

Zhao Zichen was one of the leaders of this group. Having studied theology at Vanderbilt, Zhao, an ordained Anglican priest, taught philosophy and Christian at Yanjing (Yenching) University in Beijing, from which Peking University developed. A prolific writer, he penned more than two million characters during the course of his life, including many articles in English.

Beginning as a theological liberal, Zhao changed his views over time, especially after serving six months in prison. His later *Life of Paul* (1947, which reflects traditionally orthodox theological positions, contrasts sharply with the earlier, and more famous, *Life of Jesus*, 1935). Because of her interest in Chinese Christian theological texts as texts in context, and her great admiration for the ways in which Zhao employed traditional Chinese literary forms, the author devotes this chapter to an extensive analysis of the *Life of Jesus*.

The *Life of Jesus* is a historical biography written in the newer style that highlighted the subject as a moral exemplar and used biography to inculcate virtue. Zhao tries to fill in the gaps between Gospel narratives, imagining what might have happened. He sees Jesus as a man whose sense of mission, and even his character, developed over time. In the preface, he comments that “all that Jesus said, and did, was poetry, with the flavor of a novel,” and his book mirrors this perspective. It is filled with Chinese poetic images and phrases from the traditional literary corpus.

In his reading of the Bible, Zhao downplays the miraculous and the supernatural, highlighting instead the splendid humanity of Jesus. Jesus came, not to die and rise as Messiah, but to

enlighten the minds of the masses and liberate them from the tyranny of religious leaders. Eschewing military force, he gives his life away for the sake of the people.

Finally, Starr shows how Zhao drew upon the Chinese literary tradition of travel narratives, with their attention to the land through which the traveler journeys and its connection with the past, present, and potential future. “Even when his mind wanders to the goods the lands produce and . . . he returns to the question of what this all means under God, . . . Land and the heroes evoked by it are intertwined. Jesus’s imagination is caught by figures who obey God unconditionally, but the foreboding of a seemingly incomplete mission, by the possibilities of military power, by sacrifice” (94-95).

Zhao depicts Jesus as the founder of a “religion that could build on the humanistic and democratic aspirations of the youth movements. . . . The twin themes of liberation from political/imperialist oppression and of a rational, morally perfect humanity exemplified by Jesus espouse this approach” (96). The book “does more than just counter prevalent criticisms of Christianity: it provides a model for a constructive cultural engagement” (97).

Though Zhao later repudiated theological liberalism and gave up trying to integrate Christianity into a Chinese culture that he thought had imploded, Starr believes that the *Life of Jesus* still has value for contemporary Chinese Christians, some of whom have reopened the debate on the relationship of Christianity and Chinese culture.

#### **Chapter 4: The Public and Personal Faces of the Church: Xu Zongze’s *Sui Si Bi* and the *Shengjiao Zazhi* (*Revue Catholique*)**

“The Holy Church is a good mother who protects her children. . . . The priests of the Church are spiritual doctors, curing the pain of the people” (100).

“To spread the gospel in a country, the first thing necessary is to assimilate it with the people’s thinking and customs, only then can it enter deeply among the people and comprehend their psychology” (100).

These two epigraphs at the opening of the chapter illustrate the two foci of Xu Zongze’s writing: Roman Catholic teaching and the personal and social situations of the Chinese people. Starr first looks at his essays in the *Revue Catholique* and then at the “thoughts and jottings” that later became a regular feature in the back pages of the magazine. In each case, she finds Xu to be applying traditional Roman Catholic convictions to daily life.

Xu, a learned Jesuit priest with both Chinese and Western education, edited this leading Roman Catholic journal during the crucial 1920s and 1930s. His position and voluminous writings gained him considerable authority among his Roman Catholic readers.

Xu published doctrinal works and textbooks, compiled from articles he had written for the journal. Some dealt with theological topics; others treated psychology and social economics. In 1940, however, he issued a “curious scrapbook of ideas and comments in the Chinese *biji* . . . style of composition titled *Sui si sui bi*” (101). This chapter “sets the *biji*, or “thoughts and jottings,” in the frame of the “official magazine writings” (101).

In both the articles and the *biji*, we find a “deep social concern.” The first part of the chapter looks at the articles that discussed papal encyclicals that spoke to larger social issues, while the second part examines the *biji*, which addressed a larger variety of matters of importance to ordinary people. “Like the work of many of his Protestant peers, Su’s writing was in dialogue with mainstream society as much as with other theologians, and a prime aim was for the church to influence society, especially in the formation of morals” (102).

He worked within three sets of discourse: “Roman Catholic teaching, the new language of social science, and Chinese traditional values” (103). Starr’s exploration of the interrelationships among these three is fascinating and gives insight into the complex thought world of educated Chinese Roman Catholics and Protestants. Xu’s articles addressed matters like just labor laws, education, and marriage.

Xu’s *biji* receive more discussion, because they bolster Starr’s thesis that there is a “need to look beyond received doctrinal texts and forms in assessing Chinese theology” (127). In these jottings, Xu was able to range broadly, touching upon all sorts of topics, many of which are not overtly theological or even “Christian,” and yet all of which reflect the intersection of divine truth with daily life.

He believed strongly that Roman Catholic youth must learn both their own Chinese culture and official church teaching, and must see the connection between truth and life, both private and public. Indeed, as seen in the *biji*, “reading and ingesting forms the moral self” (127).

The author is to be commended for bringing this important Roman Catholic thinker and writer to our attention. Her wide-ranging treatment of his even more wide-ranging works not only introduced me to a major intellectual but also exposed me to delightful and sometimes provocative ideas.

### **Chapter 5: Wu Leichuan, *Christianity and Chinese Culture*, and the Kingdom of Heaven**

“The aim of religion is to improve society, and so all who believe in religion must directly or indirectly take part in political activities” (128).

Once again, the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter encapsulates the core of its contents. Wu Leichuan’s book, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* opens by defining religion as “a motivating force for progress in human society” (128). As a disciple of Western Social Gospel theologians who also wanted to contextualize his version of Christianity in Chinese culture, Wu continues to exercise influence. His earthly view of the Kingdom of Heaven and his conviction that Christianity must somehow help to “save” China fits nicely with the stated mandate of the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement and current calls for the “sinicization of Christianity.”

Wu was one of the most highly-educated of the elite Protestant thinkers in the early twentieth century, having earned the *jinshi* degree (the equivalent of a European Ph.D.) under the old Confucian educational system. He was thus a master of the “Chinese culture” which he wanted to meld with Christianity. He served as Professor of Christianity and then Vice-Chancellor of Yanjing (Yenching) University.

His Western sources included Social Gospel proponents Bishop Charles Gore's Halley Stewart Lectures (1927), Sherwood Eddy's *Religion and Social Justice* (1927), and the writings of Walter Rauschenbusch.

Like them, and in keeping with his Confucian background, Wu conceives of the Kingdom of Heaven (or of God) as entirely of this earth and this age. He rejects the supernatural, including accounts of miracles performed by Jesus. Though he agrees with evangelicals like Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng) and with the Nationalist New Life Movement that transformation of moral character among citizens must take place for society to be reformed, he does not believe in the necessity of the new birth or in prayer. The Holy Spirit is the same as the Confucian virtue *ren* (benevolence, humanity). Jesus was a revolutionary who came to train his disciples to participate in the revolution. He came to preach a kingdom based on *ren*, love; to debunk superstitions, and to liberate the people from corrupt officials.

Jesus lived a life of self-sacrifice coupled with a courageous confrontation with the forces of social evil. He aimed to become the ideal political ruler—the Messiah—of a new society, but failed when his disciples could not grasp his vision. He settled for sacrificing his life in the struggle against evil to inspire his followers to carry out his original plan. Alas, after his death they turned his goal of political salvation to inner personal salvation, thus betraying Jesus' legacy. Only Judas seems to have understood Jesus' plan from the beginning. He is, therefore, a sympathetic character.

Key planks in Wu's "platform" for the Kingdom of God, which largely agrees with Marxist doctrine, were the abolition of traditional family structures; the abolition of private property; land reform; economic control by the government; rural reconstruction; and moral education. Spearheaded by the church, these would transform Chinese culture into the Kingdom of God on earth. Wu reads the Bible to mean that the church must inculcate patriotism among believers. Starr comments, "Wu's reading of scripture engages as imaginatively with the text as Zhao Zichen, but without the acknowledgement that this has as much akin with fiction as biblical exegesis" (150).

In short, Christianity is the means to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth in China, which is the fulfillment of China and Chinese culture, as for all nations" (152).

## **Chapter 6: The Church and the People's Republic of China**

In this second "big-picture" chapter, Dr. Starr provides another brilliant overview of the dark days of Roman Catholic and Protestant believers in the 1950s through the early 1970s. During this time, the number of believers and of congregations dropped dramatically, until, during the Cultural Revolution, some opined that Christianity in China was dead and gone.

During this period, Starr avers, there were not outstanding theological tomes (155). She means, of course, none produced within China itself, for Zhang Lisheng and others wrote much in the United States, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and elsewhere. The period deserves more study than it has hitherto received, however, because "we find some of the most engaged grappling with the

relation of church and state and with the nature of an indigenous church, as well as truly pathetic accounts of resistance” (155).

The histories of Roman Catholics and Protestants vary widely because of their radically different organizational principles. Protestants had always, in theory at least, favored devolution of decision making and an indigenous Chinese church, and so some of them, at least, could sign the Christian Manifesto and join the Three–Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), while Roman Catholics faced excommunication if they elected to cooperate with the State-run Catholic Patriotic Association. Different decisions made by individuals and their leaders created conflicts and divisions that persist to the present.

Leaders of mainline Protestant denominations, moreover, steeped as they were in the Social Gospel and anti-imperialist convictions discussed above, tended to agree with many of the political and social goals, and even the religious policies, of the new government. Indeed, some of them believed at first that “the Communists, it seemed, had wrought a social liberation—salvation—for the people” (168). Leaders like Wu Yaozong and Zhao Zichen welcomed the TSPM; even the evangelical Chen Chonggui served as vice-chairman.

The key issue, from start to finish, was the church’s alleged complicity in foreign imperialism. Relentless (and still ongoing) government propaganda painted missionaries as active agents of aggressive foreign powers; any association with them, or failure to renounce their work and legacy, marked one as an unpatriotic traitor to the Chinese nation.

We should not be surprised that so little academic theology or even sermonic literature came out of this period, but Starr claims that “a theology of the Cultural Revolution does not seem to have emerged subsequently in post-Mao China” (160). There is “no body of works theologizing on the forces of destruction” comparable to secular literature that wrestled with the issues. “The two streams of writing to emerge on the Protestant side from the 1970s onward, theological reconstruction and Sino-Christian theology, are either in tune with, or tangential to, government narratives” (160). (I find this statement problematic, given the large body of writing about the experience of persecution by “house church” Protestants, with its often explicit biblical, and sometimes theological, interpretations of why people acted as they did. But perhaps I misunderstand the author here.)

The Korean War dramatically intensified the pressure upon Christians to renounce all ties to foreign governments and churches, and to enter fully into the fervent “patriotic” fervor and policies of the government under the slogan, “love country, love church,” which, significantly, still prevails. For theological liberals like Wu Yaozong, however, the formation of a New China under Communist rule itself seemed to be the work of God. He and others became enthusiastic supporters of the new regime. They sought, therefore, to “order the church’s affairs and foster a good working relationship with the state without compromising [what they considered to be] core beliefs” (181).

“Other Protestants, whose belief in holiness set Christians apart from the world, found a theological common ground with Roman Catholics at this juncture. Their leaders found genuine common ground in prison and labor camps” (182). Starr comments tellingly: “Since a high

heaven was needed, and ideally, a purgatory and hell too, for a strong climate of martyrdom, Protestant liberals with their Social Gospel theology of a Kingdom of Heaven on earth had much less incentive to die to secure a place in a perfect heaven; the legacy of the martyrs lives on among unregistered congregations” (184).

She concludes: “The church's strength lay in the proclamation of a variant worldview and in the fortitude demonstrated by its stubborn and unreasonable submission to this alternative ideology—a faith that undermines the proclamation of rational ideology by not acceding to its [atheistic] methodological premise. The ‘reasonable’ faith of liberal Protestants did not offer the opportunity for martyrdom in quite the same way, and their subsequent theologies have yet to deal fully with this period” (184).

### **Chapter 7: Ding Guangxun: Maintaining the Church**

“Can the the church only glorify God by placing itself in opposition to the nation and its people? Absolutely not!” (Ding Guangxun, 1954)

”It is Lamentable that many Christian leaders use the principle of obedience to man’s rules and submission to man’s authority to cover up their cowardice and failure. . . . How can such Christian leaders then escape the wrath of God?” (Wang Mingdao, 1954)

The epigraphs at the head of the chapter again crystallize its main themes. Hardly any modern Chinese Protestant leader has sparked as much controversy as Ding Guangxun, a bishop in the Anglican church and the head of the TSPM for many years. Starr believes that “Ding’s effects as a church leader were arguably greater than as a theologian, but his theology is highly pragmatic in orientation, and the two cannot be readily separated” (185). Some have hailed him as “the premier church statesman of the PRC era, a figure whose leadership of the authorized Protestant church and its national seminary . . . whose theological thought guided the church through much of that period” (185).

Ding’s close association with the government can be seen not only in his membership of the National People’s Congress and position as vice chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference for two decades, but his consistent support of most of the government’s religious policies. His active role in the imprisonment of Wang Mingdao added fuel to charges that he was more a tool of the Communists than a servant of God.

This chapter focuses on Ding’s early writings, from the 1940s and 1950s, which Starr sees as foundational to his later positions and as clear examples of the fierce debates over the relationship between church and state that dominated those years and persist to the present.

The first part of the chapter explores the early writings of Ding, who studied at Union Theological Seminary and worked for a while for the Canadian Student Missions Movement. He emphasizes the importance of witness to Christ, who is “the center of history.” His theology at this time is more Christ-centric than that of people like Wu Leiquan, and he places less faith in the ability of Christians to build the kingdom of God on earth.

At the same time, he is already voicing his strong support for the new Communist government and his criticism of the United States.

After his return to China in 1951, his language begins to take on “a much more sino-centric focus,” and he becomes more strident in his condemnation of foreign influence in China and especially in the Chinese church in the previous 100 years (194). Along with Westerners like David Paton, he lists some of the major offenses of foreign missionaries and their organizations. He also identifies the policies of the PRC with the will of God, and asks, rhetorically, “If we cannot love what Jesus loves, how can we claim to love Jesus?” assuming that Jesus “loves” the new government and its programs. “As citizens of China we should love our country and be at one with its people. To be worthy of the trust of the gospel we need to think what they think, love what they love, hate what they hate. Our Lord Jesus acted thus” (195).

Ding is motivated by his understanding of the Christian faith, “national pride, and Socialist convictions” (196). He minimizes differences between Christians and the masses of ordinary Chinese who do not believe in Christ. God is at work in and through all people. Christians have no monopoly on truth. The doctrine of justification by faith can exaggerate the distinctions between believers and non-believers, and can cause us to overlook the good deeds that all people can do. “Liberation,” that is, the 1949 revolution, and the New Socialism were not ‘God’s punishment or judgment, but an act of God, showing God’s love for China” (199).

On the other hand, in 1957, he published an article in which he challenged the Communist charge that religion, including Christianity, was an opiate of the people and proposed Christian revelation as an alternative to dialectical materialism as an epistemological principle.

He saw the TSPM as an opportunity for Chinese Protestants to be liberated from the confusion, competition, and control associated with previous foreign missionary domination and denominations, and as a way to preserve freedom for the church within the Communist state. Of course, as an Anglican, he would have no theological problems with a state-sponsored church, or with a church nominally or even really subservient to the state: Witness the Church of England.

Ding and Wang Mingdao famously debated the role of the church in the world. Starr sees Ding as engaged in a search for “an adequate form of accommodation” with the state (200). She treats Ding lightly and gently criticizes the human rights organization ChinaAid for refusing to realize that “the state cannot continue indefinitely to condone illegal activity,” (201) bypassing the question of why unregistered congregations should be considered illegal in the first place.

She posits a false dichotomy by saying that Wang called for “a life lived to please God and not other humans, whereas for Ding Christ’s salvation restores relations between humans as well as with God,” as if Wang’s writing did not expound this theme also, and in great detail (203). She does explain why Wang thought Christians must obey God rather than government if the latter required them to sin, and clearly admires his willingness to suffer for his convictions. She is much less sympathetic with his criticism of those who decided to remain in the state church.

Starr points out that for Wang and others in the TSPM “the overriding issue for the Chinese church was the ongoing resolution of its colonial legacy in China and the institution of a

‘Chinese’ church and Chinese theology.” For Wang, however, the issues were faithfulness to the Scriptural teaching that Christ, not the government, was the head of the church and a commitment to traditional orthodox Christian teaching on sin and salvation. He excoriated Ding and others who had espoused the Social Gospel as either heretics or unbelievers, a criticism that Ding (and perhaps also Starr) simply cannot stomach. Still, Starr admits that the theological gap between the two was wide and deep. Wang tried to keep politics separate from religion, and Ding saw them as inextricably entwined. Starr quotes a 1984 speech in Tokyo by Ding that manifestly rejects Wang’s doctrine of original sin, salvation by grace through faith in Jesus alone, and Wang’s call to pursue holiness and not love the “world,” that is, the things of the world like fame, wealth, and popularity.

In a bold move, the author suggests that Karl Barth may provide a way out of the seemingly irreconcilable positions of Wang and Ding. Barth, who refused to condemn Communism, insisted that those living on the outside of the Communist world simply cannot understand the responses of Christians behind the Iron Curtain to the new Communist regimes. Likewise, Starr suggests that outsiders cannot understand, nor should they judge, the different ways in which Chinese Christians chose to relate to the Communist government.

She notes that Barth’s anti-Nazi stance in Germany corresponds to Wang’s insistence on the independence of the Christian church, and that Barth’s affirmation of the duty of the church to be present in society shows “the value of working together with the state to keep Christ present in the civil and church communities” (210). We might also note that, with Ding, Barth was a lifelong Socialist, had no theological objections to a state church, and repeatedly asserted the lack of any ontological differences between believers and non-believers.

After the Opening and Reform that began in 1978, Ding had access to outside theological resources. The ones he chose to deploy for his own use were liberation theology, process theology, and the work of Pierre de Chardin. His view of the “cosmic Christ” bolstered his opposition to the dichotomies between belief and unbelief maintained by Wang and evangelicals. Starr notes the changing emphases of his theology in response to shifting political and ecclesiastical contexts. She calls for Chinese Protestants to “re-evaluate honestly what Ding, Wang, and others actually said and wrote . . . and then to set these aside in the attempt to bring a genuine unification based on the present situation and present concerns in the church.”

## **Chapter 8: State Regulation, Church Growth, and Textual Profusion**

This chapter “analyzes some of the burgeoning categories of Christian writing and thinking that have emerged in various media since the period of Reform and Opening began in 1978” (213). Within a variety of types of church organization, Starr discerns three categories of Christian writings: “the essays and expositions of official church theologians, the writings of other Christians and pastors, and the scholarship of academic Christians” (213). These three have “prospered in separate phases and in different institutional settings, often with quite distinct readerships” (214). But there is “much more cross-over between church and academic theology than is usually allowed for in discussion: in personnel and in subject area” (226).

Starr provides another excellent description of the overall political, social, and economic developments that affected religious life. She sees two continuing features: “The first was cycles of repression and relaxation, a component aspect of religious experience since at least the Tang dynasty, and the second were structural adjustments in the economy that caused a creaking of the entire system and tested the limits of political and religious freedom” (218). The government’s obsession with the threat of foreign subversion through religion persisted, as various regulations sought to limit the contact between Chinese and foreign Christians. In addition, the Party-state must guard zealously its legitimacy and authority by restricting religious expression in general and suppressing “bad” religion in particular. That is why outside condemnation of its actions rarely impacts policy.

While people “attending registered churches, small devotional groups, or Bible study groups and living as Christians in their workplaces are now able to integrate their faith and lives in ways unimaginable even as late as the early 1990s, “for Christian groups whose presence or actions are not contained within the boundaries of the regulations, a different type of existence and relation to the state pertains” (222).

Furthermore, there emerges a class of “Protestant political and legal activists who challenge the basis of the regulatory order itself” and continue to press their claims to constitutional rights, and underground Roman Catholics who insist upon their obligation to maintain relationships with the Pope (222). Government regulations and restrictions do not limit numerical growth, but do directly impact the ways they express their faith.

The Internet and the proliferation of home meetings have limited the ability of the government to restrict religious expression, while the mere existence and even growth of religion, especially Christianity, is an ideological “headache” for the Marxist government.

Within this overall context, Starr now turns to “contemporary theological writings” (224).

*Official Church Theologies*: Starr traces the publications of both official Roman Catholic and Protestant leaders, especially as seen in their journals. These speak of the church’s duty to work with the state, internal administration, and—for Protestants especially—“Theology with Chinese characteristics” (228). Shen Yifan, Wang Weifan and Ding Guangxun are key figures here. Starr once again highlights the complex thoughts of Ding, including his program of “Theological Reconstruction” in the 1990s, which aimed to integrate Christian doctrine and practice with the goals of the Socialist state. Significantly, few outside the Nanjing Seminary leadership have written in support of this campaign.

*Academic Theology* received a powerful impetus when secular Christian studies programs began to appear in departments of philosophy and history, and then in other departments of elite universities. Investigation into “Christian philosophy, intellectual history, literary criticism, and cultural studies, with occasional offerings in the more controversial areas of biblical studies and church history,” engaged the energies of a growing body of scholars (213). Journals, conferences, edited volumes, ambitious translation projects, E-networks, and monographs have proliferated since the small beginnings of the late 1990s.

The result: “Secular academics in state universities have been pivotal to the greater acceptance of Christianity in China by politicians and officials as well as in academics, and their teaching of a new generation of scholars of Christianity and academic theologians has provided the foundation for the broader development of Chinese Christianity—and ultimately for the strengthening of academic Christianity in the church, too” (232).

The rise of so-called Sino-Christian theology within this overall development has generated a great deal of interest. Led at first by men like Liu Xiaofeng and He Guanghu, the movement now includes many other distinguished scholars, including Zhou Xinping and Yang Huilin, to whom Starr devotes the next chapter. Key issues have been the relationship of academic and church theology, the relationship of Christianity to other faiths, the very nature and definition of “theology,” the uniqueness of Christianity and its relationship to Chinese culture, and the place of “theology” within the academic curriculum.

*House Church Leaders and Writers*: “The church sector that has experienced the most dynamic growth over the past few decades has been the independent or unregistered sector of the Protestant church, despite being targeted by legislation” (234). These Christians may be roughly divided into rural house church believers together with their urban offshoots and the new urban churches attended by highly-educated Christians. The former hold to a traditional interpretation of the Bible and a pietistic stance towards the world, while the latter engage boldly with society, including politics, social issues, and intellectual debates. These dare to “articulate theologies of power and patriotism” (236).

Finally, the author notes two major developments: Church growth has come largely from conversion, so that fewer Christians feel bound by loyalties to earlier debates and divisions, and “it is becoming increasingly acceptable to be both Chinese and Christian. Christianity is at last shedding its reputation, among the populace if not politicians, as an alien religion” (239).

### **Chapter 9: Yang Huilin: An Academic Search For Meaning**

“Christian studies in secular universities, especially in the inter-disciplinary studies of humanities and social sciences, have been obviously more influential to the Chinese spirit than those in the church-based theological seminaries, and also more influential to Chinese society from a long-range perspective than religious practice, to be frank. So when it is contested whether academic or collegial Christian studies can be still categorized as ‘theology,’ the true question is rather whether and how to have a ‘non-religious interpretation of Christianity’” (240).

This chapter demonstrates the breadth of Starr’s definition of “theology” as “talking about God.” Yang Huilin, a prominent figure of the Sino-Christian Theology movement, does not profess faith in Christianity. Indeed, he is a card-carrying member of the Communist Party and professor of comparative literature and religious studies and former Vice-President at Renmin (People’s) University in Beijing, one of China’s premier institutions. He, like others in this movement, are “social insiders” whose impact, as the epigraph above claims, reaches beyond the academy and into society. Indeed, these academic “theologians” will, in time, probably become a force in the new urban intellectual churches, so they deserve the attention of Christians.

Beginning as a scholar of Medieval Christianity, Yang has extended his studies to literary/critical theory, philosophy, and theology, both Medieval and modern. His writings evince wide erudition and subtle thought, and have been quite influential in the Chinese academy. English translations of his works have gained him an international hearing also. “Yang’s work has played an important role in the reinterpretation of China’s disparaged Christian history. His writings traverse various eras and disciplines and a vast range of thinkers, demanding of readers a giddy grasp of intellectual fields” (241).

He focuses on textual interpretation, especially intercultural interpretation. In keeping with her theme of textual readings and their contexts, Starr focuses on this aspect of Yang’s overall program, especially his views on Scriptural Reasoning.

Starr believes that the Sino-Christian Theology movement is a form of “contextual theology for the global, post-Marxist setting of Chinese academia, providing . . . a critique of methodological assumptions in the humanities from the vantage point of theological studies” (243). These scholars, like their forebears, seek to benefit their nation. Like the rest of the country, they are still dealing with the scars and wreckage of the Cultural Revolution—a pertinent point which I believe needs further exploration. These people remember the confession sessions, reading Mao’s *Little Red Book*, and reporting one’s thought daily to the Great Helmsman, and they recoil at any resemblance to these practices in Christian gatherings.

Deeper still, they remember the ways in which language was distorted and manipulated to justify violence and treachery, so they are seeking “a theoretical means of codifying how meaning functions,” as a contribution to society as a whole (245). In short, they are engaged in a search for meaning, and even a search for the meaning of meaning. Yang conducts his search mindful of “the constant imperative to dialogue and to understand” (245).

With admirable clarity, Starr highlights some of Yang’s recurring themes:

1. Humanities scholars in the West have been constantly probing the question of meaning, too.
2. This question is now the central problem for Christianity.
3. The question of language lies at the root of the quest for meaning.
4. Humans cannot know or properly speak about the Ultimate (here he invokes Barth’s insistence upon the finitude of human language).
5. The continuing uncertainty about the legitimacy of Christianity among religious beliefs in China.
6. The need for Christianity to define its own core beliefs.
7. The impossibility of assimilating Christianity with any indigenous Chinese belief system.
8. The critical role of translation, especially of the 1919 Union Version of the Chinese Bible, in understanding and communicating Christianity in China.

Yang proposes a kind of “Scriptural Reasoning” that combines literature and Scripture in the process of respectful “deep listening” to texts from belief systems other than our own. The goal is to “improve the quality of disagreement” (249). It employs the “‘interrogative mood,’ an open-ended hypothesizing beyond the common strictures of and interpretation of the Chinese classics

into English and for a non-Chinese audience was itself an act of Scriptural Reasoning,” (253) for Legge looked to the Chinese commentators themselves for insight into the meaning of their own texts. At the same time, he remained true to his own Christian convictions and did not shrink from criticizing what he considered to be shortcomings in Confucian teaching. Yang appreciates Legge’s “deep familiarity with the Chinese heritage” and the fact that his interpretations and translations remain superior to modern attempts (257).

Questions about Yang’s approach remain, of course, and Starr poses some very penetrating ones about Chinese Scriptural Reasoning that deserve attention. She affirms, nevertheless, the value of this approach for Chinese Christians, who can learn from the historical and literary studies, as well as from the challenges, of Sino-Christian Theology.

In a review of Yang’s *China, Christianity, and the Question of Culture*, I note that Chinese, European, and North American academics seem lamentably unaware of American evangelical theology, and especially the monumental achievement of Carl F. H. Henry’s six-volume *God, Revelation and Authority*, which addresses almost all the issues that concern Yang and his peers.

### **<sup>3</sup>Chapter 10: Visible and Voluble: Protestant House Church Writings in the Twenty-First Century**

“The growth of unregistered churches, which now surpass state churches in number by some margin, is one of the remarkable stories of modern China. This brief final chapter expands on the discussion in Chapter 8 by presenting an initial survey of the writings of three Christians—Lu Xiaomin, Wang Yi, and Yu Jie—who are committed to the house churches out of theological allegiance or who like Jin [Mingri], see the state church as irrelevant to the future of Chinese Christianity” (263).

In keeping with the social and political emphasis of most writers she has examined so far, Starr singles out Protestant urban public intellectuals with a strong bent towards social and even political action. “One striking fact of the new urban house-church movement is the interconnectedness of its leaders: with each other, with overseas Chinese and overseas Chinese churches, and with the wider society” (264).

She begins the chapter, however, with a brief study of an illiterate female hymn writer, Lu Xiaomin. Probably millions of Christians are singing her songs in both registered and unregistered churches within China and Chinese churches throughout the world.

Lu’s lyrics represent “a type of enduring acceptance of state persecution, a ‘suffering servant’ model of Christing living. . . . This theology places a high premium on personal holiness and testimony” (264). Recordings and remixes of her songs have spread around the globe; the documentary about her, “The Canaan Hymns,” has made her testimony well known among Chinese Protestants everywhere. She voices the struggles of the unregistered churches, as well as

---

<sup>3</sup>Review by G. Wright Doyle in *Church History and Religious Culture*, Vol. 95, No. 4, pg 201; see <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/18712428-09504021>)

their sense of mission to take the gospel to the entire world. “These are genuinely inculturated hymns, with a folk lilt, Chinese harmonies, and an imagery that blends rural China with biblical themes” (265).

Importantly for Starr’s focus on the social and political context and national orientation of Christian writings, Lu expresses “yearning for the Chinese as a nation.” Some songs call for revival to spread across the land; others “call on the church to make China God’s home. In both cases, the revival of China as a nation and of China as a Christian nation are intertwined” (267). God and country are intermixed.

Lu’s hymns pulsate with a strong eschatological fervor as well as a powerful missional call to take the gospel back to Jerusalem. Starr properly notes that the theology of these songs “is rooted in the praxis of worship and prayers,” and reflects the formative power of these songs, reminding us of the role of Chinese literary texts in the formation of moral character.

Next, Starr turns to the voluminous and wide-ranging writings of Wang Yi, “preacher, pastor, blogger” (268). Before his conversion in 2005, Wang already stood among the most influential public intellectuals in China, and his fame and impact have only spread since then. His followers on the Chinese blog *Weibo* number over ten thousand. He writes on a plethora of topics, from constitutional law to the imperative for Christians to try to have children, in a variety of genres, including film reviews, biographical interviews, essays on the house churches, and book-length collections of his essays on both personal salvation and the kingdom of God.

Like most Chinese writers, he views writing as “a means of perpetuating the self.” After conversion to Christianity, he “saw his individual life as a writer and his corporate ideals now linked in Jesus” (271). He now employs the written word in “the mission of renewing culture through our faith, and pastoring the earth with the gospel” (271). He constantly has to ask about his motives: “Am I writing for Christ?” (271)

Wang identifies “four themes in his own writing that chime with Chinese intellectual concern: ‘the theme of exiles and the meaning of wilderness; . . . from Buddhism or pantheism to Christianity and monotheism, the theme of freedom; the theme of salvation; ‘from death to resurrection,’ the theme of life” (272).

Yu Jie, a political dissident and pastor, has undertaken a three-part publishing program: three volumes of biographies of Chinese Christians (two with Wang Yi), and two other series on “Christ and the World” and “Christ and China.” “The project as a whole intends to envision, and play its part in realizing, a transformation from ‘humanity as the root’ to ‘God as the root’ within Chinese culture” (272). He and Wang believe that as multitudes of individuals come to life-changing faith in Christ, that will lead to the “reconstruction of society, which develops into social transformation” (272).

Starr states the obvious: “The social activism and interest in moral regeneration of these Protestant intellectual leaders, and the parallels with the ideas of progressive reformers of the early twentieth century, have not escaped notice” (273). Wang and Yu chose as subjects for their biographical interviews men who had “committed to an open ministry, rooted in the church

while facing out toward society, and . . . possessing such quality of action that their lives would change public understandings of Christianity” (273). Many had been involved in the Tiananmen demonstrations, the utter despair and disillusionment that followed the government crackdown, and the realization of new hope and life through faith in Christ.

Note: In 2019, Wang Yi was arrested and charged with “subverting the state,” a crime with a very severe penalty. He is not likely to be acquitted or released.

All those whom Starr mentions believe that the church should not withdraw from society, but maintain a public witness, even to the point of seeking registration as legal entities, though outside the confines of the TSPM, which they consider to be irrelevant and dying. The state-sponsored body’s “attachment to power” has robbed it of spiritual vitality. They believe that for “house” churches, on the other hand, “the current battle is no longer a spiritual one over faith but a struggle with the government over civil society and the place of the church in that future society” (277). Starr affirms the “role of the church in political struggle and democracy advocacy,” but expresses concern that “the views of [these Christian intellectuals] do not seem to allow for any future for the (former) registered church in the broader church economy” (277).

Despite the recent repressive moves under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, the author believes that Chinese Christians will continue to be a public voice for civil society and that they will continue to express themselves in writing. She is glad, however, that “a healthy disinclination persists to mimic anything that even remotely resembles a tome of Western systematic theology” (278).

With characteristic clarity and conciseness, Starr wraps up this very dense monograph in a brief *Afterword* that highlights the major themes:

- “The relation of church to state, and the locus and nature of authority, has been one of the central issues of modern Chinese theology” (279).
- A “second prominent aspect of twentieth-century Chinese Christian thought [is] nationalism,” which has often included a strong anti-foreign element (279).
- “Chinese theology is not ‘theology’ at all,” in the usual “Western” sense (280).
- “The Chinese theology explored in this volume comprises elements of biblical theology, constructive theology, contextual theology, and liberation theology,” especially liberation theology (280).

This volume has highlighted “the text as a defining aspect of Chinese theology and textual context as an important base in reading any Chinese theology.” Three drivers for understanding have been “an interest in language, translation, and transmission;” “the writers’ use of classical Chinese texts, or their dialogue with canonical tradition,” well into the middle of the twentieth century; and “the use of specific Chinese writing genres in which Christian texts are composed” (281).

“The theology surveyed here has deliberately engaged with China’s cultural heritage(s) and indigenous philosophical and religious traditions as a central element in its own construction. . . . [The volume] has concentrated precisely on those texts that actively reflect not just on God, but

on God as explored through a range of Chinese social, philosophical, or literary frames of perception” (282).

Such “an approach has inevitably left unexplored, and undertheorized, alternative channels of Chinese theology, including more influential ones in numeric or ecclesial terms . . . [T]hese texts that engage with broader (non-Christian) traditions of Chinese thought or ritual have, in the postimperial period at least, tended to come from elite, liberal-leaning writers in the historic denominations” (282).

Starr hopes that her focus on this stream of Chinese Christian thinking will “open up new conversations and comparisons with other Chinese theologies.” She does not claim that the title of the book means that it has been comprehensive, but “is merely a preference for the more succinct abstract noun” (282).

“Nationalist sentiments notably cut across church boundaries, as examples from Lu Xiaomin’s hymns and elements within the academic Sino-Christian theology movement show. If the cause of China has been central to a spectrum of recent Chinese theologies, the notion that China could, if it wished, create a theology that eschewed its common Christian heritage or be formed without foreign influence has been debunked through the volume by the emphasis on the foreign links and interactions of the writers considered” (285).

## **Evaluation**

The positive comments at the opening of this review indicate the high regard which I hold toward both Dr. Starr and her book; the survey of its contents should convince the reader of the depth and scope of *Chinese Theology*. In what follows, I shall register some concerns I have, but with no intention of minimizing the importance and groundbreaking nature of her contribution.

### *Selective definition of “Western” theology.*

On the one hand, many observers have noted the relative lack of “systematic” theology written by Chinese. Starr’s understanding of China’s literary tradition provides helpful insight here, though another major factor must be the incredible social pressures put upon seminary professors and pastors, who simply do not have the time to write as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and many others did.

On the other hand, Starr’s characterization of “Western” theology as “systematic” seems to ignore books that did not take the form of a systematic and comprehensive treatment of the usual topics of theology, but that have, nevertheless, shaped Western Christianity. One thinks of almost all of Augustine’s enormous output (except the very brief *Enchiridion*); Luther’s works (except the *Larger Catechism* and his biblical expositions); and Jonathan Edwards’ discussions of free will, original sin, the religious affections, etc. None of these men wrote a “systematic theology,” and yet all stand as among the premier theologians of the Western church.

In personal correspondence, the author has told me that the question of whether Chinese theology will ever be “systematic” was never the central theme of her book. That is true, because she set out to talk about “texts and contexts,” not systematic theology. On the other hand, by

seeming not to consider this huge corpus of works by Western Christians, Starr limits her sample in a way that enables her to support her claim that “a healthy disinclination persists to mimic anything that even remotely resembles a tome of Western systematic theology” (278). She is right, of course, but perhaps the statement needs some qualification.

### *Selective treatment of Chinese theology*

As she candidly states in both the *Introduction* and the *Afterword*, Starr intentionally passes over large tracts of “speaking about God” by Chinese Christians. She is aware of this wider literature, but wants to focus on a particular stream of “theology,” which is broadly defined as that which is produced by men who have been leaders or spokesmen in mainline denominations and the academy and who have used their Chinese social and political context, along with their literary and culture heritage, as starting points, and even paradigms, for talking about God. Almost all of these have been either theologically liberal or, if evangelical, very concerned about the central issue of the relationship of the church to the state.

In other words, this does not purport to be a comprehensive treatment of Chinese theology.

From that standpoint, my criticism, stated in a shorter review published by ChinaSource, that the book neglected evangelical writers, including those outside of mainland China, was both irrelevant and unfair. Dr. Starr has graciously accepted my apology for this unfounded charge.

In the next few paragraphs, therefore, I am not criticizing her book as she meant to write it, but simply noting that the result of her treatment could be, for many readers, a skewed and very incomplete picture of indigenous Chinese theology. Commendatory comments on the back cover may confirm the impression that this book adequately discusses Chinese theology as a whole, rather than only a thin slice of it.

In the first place, readers should know about the existence of the truly “systematic” biblical and theological works of Jia Yuming, Zhang Lisheng (Lit-sen Chang), Wang Weifan, Zhou Lianhua in Taiwan, and more recent writers like Wu Daozong, and Guo Wenchi. Zhang, in particular, wrote in a style that was thoroughly “Chinese, and as one who had until his conversion hated Christianity and had been deeply committed to traditional Chinese religions.”

We should also be aware of the works of extremely influential figures like Wang Mingdao, Watchman Nee, and a host of contemporary evangelicals, many of whom write in a way that resembles Western sermons, articles, and books. Starr makes it clear that she knows about theologians other than those she has chosen to analyze, of course. They are simply not the focus of her study.

Aside from Yu Jie, who lives in the United States, there are the writings and video productions of Yuan Zhimin, also a very public intellectual (whose theology, to be sure, has come under some criticism), and of Li Changshou, whose extensive publications have had an impact on the house churches in China from which hymn writer Lu Xiaomin comes (and whose theology has also been sharply criticized).

More importantly, thousands of urban intellectual house church leaders, even those of Reformed persuasion, have little or no desire to contest the religious policies of the state. They consider worldliness, materialism, broken marriages, hedonism, and similar forces to be a far greater threat to the church. Perhaps a study of their sermons, articles, and blogs would yield fruit.

For a twentieth-century Chinese critique of the views of Zhao Zichen and Wu Leichuan, we can consult the *Critique of Indigenous Theology* by Zhang Lisheng. (See G. Wright Doyle, editor, and translator, *Wise Man from the East: Zhang Lisheng (Lit-sen Chang): Critique of Indigenous Theology*. Pickwick Publications, 2013).

A few other comments:

Though she tries to be scrupulously fair in describing actions and ideas of people like Wang and Ding, and mostly succeeds, it seems to me that Starr evinces a bias toward mainstream denominations and approval for a state church, perhaps reflecting her British background. Could the same background also perhaps be seen in her preference for Legge's choice of *Shangdi* as the proper translation of the name for God? Legge was a vastly learned man, to be sure, but were those who disagreed with him such poor Sinologists and biblical scholars (which Legge was not) that they could not make a strong case for using the term *Shen*?

The chapter on Chao's *Life of Jesus* can only be described as beautiful and made me want to read the book. On the other hand, many will probably not agree that his *Life of Jesus* "provides a model for a constructive cultural engagement" (97). Ever since the Reformation, evangelical Protestants have maintained that we must see culture through the lens of Scripture, and not Scripture through the lens of culture.

Is it really fair to characterize Xu Zongze's traditional view on the roles of husbands and wives in marriage as misogynistic and grounded not in the Bible but natural law and common sense (107)?

Though her call for reconciliation between like-minded Christians in unregistered churches and the TSPM is absolutely correct, the real theological gap between Wang, Ding, and their successors must be acknowledged as a standing obstacle. As Thomas Harvey has shown in *Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mingdao's Stand for the Persecuted Church in China*, Wang's imprisonment and torture did not stem from a merely personal spat, but from the murderous hostility of Ding and others who held to a fundamentally different vision not just of the relationship of church and state, but of the nature of the gospel itself. In the 1950s, Ding slandered Wang as a counterrevolutionary and failed to respond to his biblical reasoning, including its clear distinction between believers and unbelievers, in direct opposition to the universalism of Ding and the TSPM.

Even after the Opening and Reform of 1978, and into the 2000s, Ding and other TSPM leaders actively abetted, and often instigated, government persecution of those who met as unregistered churches. In other words, it wasn't just an honest difference of opinion as to whether Christians should cooperate with the state church, but of relentless harassment of those who would not join. Ding's Theological Reconstruction campaign, likewise, led to the expulsion of evangelicals from

the seminary in Nanjing. In light of these realities, many readers will think that Starr is letting Ding off too easily in her well-intentioned effort to respect those who chose to work with the TSPM.

The deepest issue addressed by the book is whether, as Harvey writes, “the church should construe modern existence and gain its distinctive insight by which to engage secular society through the Word of God,” or whether, as with the main Protestant figures discussed by Starr, including the critics of Wang Mingdao, “secular reason, culture, conscience, and national progress form the critical lens.” (Harvey, *Acquainted with Grief*, 132). In other words, is the whole project of starting with Chinese culture and contexts a good one?

Despite the foregoing questions and comments, in the end, I reiterate my earlier praise for *Chinese Theology*, which elegantly introduces an important strand of Chinese theology within the highly illuminating paradigm that recognizes the central role of texts and their contexts.

**Christian China and the Light of the World**  
**Miraculous Stories from China's Great Awakening**  
**By David Wang with Georgina Sam**

Wang, David, with Georgina Sam. *Christian China and the Light of the World: Miraculous Stories from China's Great Awakening*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2013.

David Wang has given us an extremely important look at the new urban “house” (that is, non-TSPM) churches in China. Though published before the recent increase of pressure upon Christians, the book reflects fundamental realities that remain true. The author, a veteran observer and self-described “missionary” to mainland China, clearly knows whereof he speaks, and he writes with clarity and authority.

Wang introduces us to seven representative leaders of urban unregistered congregations in different parts of China. With their varying backgrounds, unique stories, and particular emphases, they comprise a composite picture of the “third wave” of China’s rapidly growing Protestant Christianity. English names are used throughout.

Joe is an orthopedic surgeon and pastor in Wuhan, and Ruth balances business, family, and leadership of a church in the same industrial complex. Abraham pastors a large congregation in Shanghai. Caleb and Daniel combine the roles of businessman and pastor in Chengdu and Wenzhou. Paul is a pastor in the southern coastal city of Xiamen, while Benjamin works in a church in Shanghai. Most have roots in the massive movement of God in rural areas and are now seeking to navigate the new conditions faced by immigrants to the cities.

These brisk narratives of the trials and triumphs of remarkable people and striking demonstrations of God's power in answer to prayer possess their own intrinsic merit, of course. What catapults this well-written volume out of the "miraculous stories from China's Great Awakening" (the subtitle) genre and into the "must read" category, however, are the many observations of current Protestant Chinese Christianity, coupled with keen insights into both significant strengths and serious weaknesses. Wang and his co-writer Georgina Sam avoid ponderous pronouncements and ominous warnings, while boldly offering both evaluation and wise counsel for leaders in a fast-changing environment.

Here are a few of their findings and recommendations, culled from a much larger inventory. The whole book deserves careful reading. Several common threads bind their narratives together:

- The people whose stories are told have all witnessed the mighty power of God to heal, deliver from demons, and work amazing changes in situations in answer to faith-filled, persevering prayer.
- They hold to the Bible as the inerrant, authoritative Word of God, and seek to restrict their preaching and teaching to what is emphasized in the Scriptures.

- Though in varying ways, they have all experienced the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in their own lives, some of them quite dramatically.
- Like believers everywhere, but perhaps even more so because of the fierce struggle to make a living in China, they have endured serious tests to their faith in God's provision of daily bread. Some have had to make hard ethical choices as they realize they can no longer engage in deceit or corrupt business practices; others have had to abandon a secure or even wealthy lifestyle to follow their sense of God's leading in ministry. Always, however, they have found that God is faithful and that all their needs have been met.
- God has guided each of them through prayer, the Word, the counsel of others, and subjective promptings of the Holy Spirit, especially when they have waited upon him, often with fasting.
- They focus their energies upon evangelism and building up the Body of Christ through teaching, small groups, prayer, and personal attention to individual needs.
- Some of them also engage in more public initiatives, including attempts to meet pressing needs in society, especially after the great earthquake in 2008. More and more Christians are starting NGOs to work within the system in a legal fashion (though this has become more difficult in recent years).
- Many churches are taking the Great Commission seriously in a new way and training a second wave of missionaries to work among people of different cultures, having learned from the generally unsuccessful attempts of the first eager evangelists who started out on the road "Back to Jerusalem" without proper preparation or support.
- They have known pressure, even some mild persecution, from the government, but they have not run away; rather, they have stayed with their flock and sought to lead their people through difficult times. Most are trying to build good relationships with government officials. They have not chosen to imitate what they consider having been the rather confrontational approach of the Shouwang church.
- Pressure from the government and internal challenges have reminded them that true leadership flows from character and communion with Christ, not natural ability or ceaseless activity. Reacting to the events of the past sixty years, "the modern Chinese person can tend to be cynical about leadership and hold very minimal respect for authority. . . . [T]hey generally feel less obligated to be submissive or committed to anything or anyone" (149). They see that the church needs leaders with integrity, humility, and love, not ambition and self-promotion.
- Increasingly, they are discovering that wholesale imitation of Western churches, with their big buildings, sophisticated organization, professional worship services, and highly educated pastors, has often led to a loss of spiritual vitality. The former pastor of a very large congregation which was shut down by the government has learned that "I shouldn't be copying Korean pastors, Western pastors, or anyone else. . . . We need to continue purifying ourselves and continue the path of the previous generations that experienced explosive growth in the past 60 years. And if that means suffering, then we will learn those lessons too" (140). As a consequence of government suppression, "the church has begun to grow in numbers again. . . . This time, though, the increase did not come about because of one large, impressive, flashy service. Rather, it is the fruit of the smaller,

multiple gatherings around the city that are being led by different co-workers," as the pastor now spends his time nurturing others to lead (141). They are also training rank-and-file members to exercise their gifts in the church, rather than relying on paid professionals to do it all.

- In a return to their "roots," they are rediscovering the unique energy and warmth of smaller meetings, especially home gatherings. Large premises now seem to be something of a liability, soaking up time, money, and attention, and serving as obvious targets of unfriendly officials. (This was even before the cross removals and building demotions in 2015.)
- They also see more clearly the dangers of close association with Western—especially American—churches and leaders. That is even more true since the book was published, of course.
- They lament the lack of emphasis upon godliness, prayer, sensitivity to the Spirit, and concentration upon the Bible that characterized the former rural church leaders, and they share a common concern for the quality of the crowds who are flocking to urban church meetings. As Christianity becomes a bit trendy among the young urban elites, these leaders see a marked fall-off in devotion to Christ, willingness to sacrifice, and zeal for sharing the gospel with their friends and families. Instead, a rising materialism and worldliness has dulled their taste for God's Word, prayer, and spiritual things in general. They have become typical consumers, ever seeking the best "deal" in churches and the most attractive "brand" of pastors.

"For the church in China today, the toughest external battle is not against communism or atheism. The fiercest fight is against complacency brought on by the ever-growing wealth and ability to enjoy a lifestyle of comfort and ease" (182). One of the leaders agrees: "It's hard for people to overcome the temptation to keep buying and acquiring things" (182). As savvy consumers, even Christians "try different churches as if they were trends and fads" (148).

- Women far outnumber men in most churches. Some possible reasons include: Lack of teaching about how to share one's faith in a natural way at home and in the workplace, men's natural reticence in general, distractions of work and career, huge family pressure for the son to make money and succeed, and the perception that Christianity "is for women and children. It is not masculine." This is especially true of the rural Christians (71). Some also believe that Christianity is presented as a solace for the weak, a message that does not immediately appeal to most men.
- Women lead many congregations also. The usual pragmatism of Chinese has led to a lack of grappling with passages about male leadership in the Scriptures. As one result, the predominance of women only increases, and many sisters are left without Christian husbands.
- Perhaps following the example of the legendary hero Yu, who tamed the Yellow River, many Chinese pastors neglect their families in order to concentrate upon what they consider to be their duty to advance the Kingdom of God. Some, like the great evangelist John Sung, do not realize their error until they lie on their deathbed. One of the pastors interviewed in this book, however, though formerly obsessed with his work, because his

church has been prevented from meeting as a large congregation, is "able to spend more time with his wife and children. . . . The church's shutdown . . . has led to an enriching time for them all, and they've drawn closer together as a family unit" (141).

Christian China evinces a clear preference for unregistered congregations rather than the TSPM. The author points to the "justification by Love, not Faith" doctrine of now-deceased Bishop Ding Guangxun, the almost total reliance of paid clergy, the lack of emphasis upon evangelism, and the intimate connection with the government.

For me the biggest problem with this book involves the title, *Christian China and the Light of the World*.

True, the burden for worldwide evangelism appears in the very first chapter and recurs occasionally later.

But "Christian China" does not figure as a concept in the text. One must assume it was chosen by the marketing people, who wanted to appeal to those who imagine, or hope, that China will someday, perhaps soon, become a "Christian" nation.

David Aikman, who wrote a foreword to this volume, raised this possibility in *Jesus in Beijing*, but was careful to nuance the idea by talking about a "Christianized" society, that is, one in which Christians and Christian ideas are so pervasive that they exert a wide-ranging and perhaps even profound impact. He explores the question of a "Christianized" society further in *One Nation without God?: The Battle for Christianity in an Age of Unbelief*, as I have in *Christianity in America: Triumph and Tragedy*.

First of all, in biblical terms there are only Christian individuals or churches, but never Christian nations.

Second, we must ask, "How long will it take for Chinese Christians to become numerous and influential enough in all sectors of society to transform the many fundamental cultural values and practices that are not consistent with the Bible and the Christian faith?" To the extent that the USA is "Christianized," we must remember that the early colonists and their children were heirs to 1,600 years of Christian history, and to at least a thousand years of Christian influence on British law and society.

Furthermore, if Wang and those whom he interviewed are correct, Christians in China today have only begun to work out the implications of biblical concepts and standards in the family, churches, and ordinary life. Much more work would need to be done for Scriptural principles to inform other domains of society and culture, such as law, education, medical care, the arts, philosophy, political theory, and government.

I think we should be very cautious here, lest we encourage Chinese and foreign Christians to attempt shortcuts and end up with very superficial results, as has already happened with evangelism and church life.

Then there is the very painful fact that even mature "Christian" nations have, ever since Constantine, so mixed religion and politics that both are corrupted, with the organized church

seeking to use the state to consolidate or advance its own power and prestige, and the state regularly manipulating religious leaders and language to clothe its purely secular projects in sacred terms, thus mobilizing naive believers to give ultimate loyalty to the state and to join the "crusade" of the day.

The problematic title aside, *Christian China and the Light of the World* is an excellent description and evaluation of "house church" Protestantism in China today and should receive a wide and thoughtful readership.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> For some possible implications of the experiences and lessons contained in this book, see: <http://www.reachingchineseworldwide.org/blog/lessons-from-chinas-house-church-movement-reflections-on-christian-china-by-david-wang>.

## **Christianity and China's Moral Crisis**

**By G. Wright Doyle**

Doyle, G. Wright. "Christianity and China's Moral Crisis." *Christianity and Moral Construction in Modern China*, 7-9 November 2015, Beijing, China. (This article is a web-published review at [www.globalchinacenter.org](http://www.globalchinacenter.org) on 7 January 2016 of the conference proceedings.)

### **Christianity and Moral Construction in Modern China**

About forty scholars gathered from all over China to attend an important conference on "Christianity and Moral Construction in Modern China," November 7-9, 2015, at Renmin (People's) University in Beijing, co-sponsored by the Christian China Research Center in Los Angeles, led by Dr. Daniel Liling Li, and the Institute for the Study of Buddhism and Religious Theory, Renmin (People's) University of China. Dr. Wei De-dong, Director of the Institute, informed us that they hold a class annually for leaders of all religions. Furthermore, there are more than fifty faculty teaching religion at Renmin University.

#### **Address by Professor He Guanghu**

Professor He Guanghu gave the opening address, setting the tone for the entire conference by graphically describing the deplorable state of Chinese society, calling it a "heart disease" that requires nothing less than a "new heart" and a "blood transfusion" that can bring new life to Chinese people. "We have too many selfish people. Our hearts are bad. So, we can't change society to make it strong. We need new heart, a new person, a new society. Heart disease needs religious treatment."

#### ***China's Moral Situation***

Modernization started with the opium war. In the late Qing, James Hudson Taylor and other missionaries poured out their lives for China. In the twentieth century, there was a moral revolution. The New Life movement tried but did not succeed; New Confucianism wants to absorb the good parts of Christianity.

Later in the twentieth century, the government sought to destroy religion. Now our society is built on lies, leading to stealing, which produces moral degradation. The Cultural Revolution was a disaster, for it destroyed men's hearts.

Twentieth-century society is a moral cesspit. Countless examples prove this point. The disease is like cancer like; it grows and grows, one person by one person.

#### ***Medicine for the Illness and the Power of Religion***

Christianity can infuse a new energy into society. The Roman Empire also had moral cancer because of bad religions. Christianity came and changed individuals and then the whole society,

saving the civilization for another 500 years. In fact, it created a new civilization, which led to Christian culture, western culture, starting in the eighth century.

We hope that China will have a new culture, continue our ancient culture. Christianity might be able to give it more life.

Why? Christianity speaks of love, like other religions, but it has a foundation, a greater goal. It is based on faith in a transcendent God. This is our highest desire. Christianity can save individuals, giving them a new heart and life. It brings a “blood transfusion” into the soul.

### **Address by Dr. G. Wright Doyle**

Wright Doyle delivered the keynote address on the theme of the conference, “Christianity and China’s Moral Reconstruction.” This paper was intended as an overview of 1. China’s current moral morass; 2. Qualities which any religion must possess to make a positive contribution to this crisis; and 3. The ways in which Christianity meets these qualifications.

### ***China’s Moral Crisis***

Everyone agrees that China now faces a dire ethical and moral crisis. On the one hand, there are no generally accepted ethical standards for conduct; on the other, the moral conduct of most of the population has plunged to new depths of depravity. The Cultural Revolution, Opening and Reform, modernization, industrialization, urbanization, and globalization have contributed to this breakdown.

Selfishness rules; relationships are breaking down; corruption is endemic; the social fabric is unraveling; and there is little sense of God.

### ***What Any Religion Must Have to Make a Difference***

To offer any substantial aid, a religion must: Have clear and authoritative ethical standards, expressed clearly in an accessible canon of literature, and illustrated by examples of virtuous men and women; have a clear and realistic of human nature, both its good and evil aspects; provide a way to personal peace and moral transformation from the inside; foster meaningful community and harmonious social relationships in the family and extending to the whole society; provide the motive and power to love the unlovely and forgive enemies; offer compelling motives for ethical behavior; be adaptable to Chinese society, and be compatible with globalization; lead to consistent care for the environment; and create a relationship between people and a transcendent God.

### ***The Potential of Christianity***

Though Confucianism and Buddhism feature some of these characteristics, they lack others. Christianity alone appears to possess all the required qualifications: an authoritative, accessible Bible with clear ethical teachings, and a long history of exemplary followers of Christ, including Chinese; an appreciation of human nature as created in God’s image and systemically corrupted by sin; both the doctrine and the power of the Holy Spirit that bring inward peace and moral transformation; teaching and inner power to build loving and just relationships; God’s grace and

Jesus' example as motives, and the Holy Spirit as power, to love the unlovely and forgive those who have hurt us; full indigenization into Chinese society over the past two hundred years (longer for Roman Catholics); a worldwide reach that has been both a driver and beneficiary of globalization; a doctrine of creation as good that impels us to steward God's world; and a relationship with God as Father.

Christianity has weaknesses, too, which are briefly discussed, but these are not enough to outweigh its strengths.

### **Dr. Daniel Liling Li's Concluding Remarks**

Newspapers and magazines recently have been publishing more and more articles on China's moral problem. Someone has recently described Christianity as a major contributor to Chinese culture's moral improvement.

Moral self-control issues from one's faith.

The Chinese government worries about religious organization, even as it appears to oppose faith.

*Christianity and Chinese tradition:* Question: What is the essence and best of Confucianism and traditional culture? Nobody knows. Tradition and foreign exchange will naturally lead to convergence. We can't control this development, so we need not worry that Chinese tradition will disappear; it will always be part of Chinese Christianity.

*Cultural changes come from the margins:* Christianity has come in from the margins into the mainstream in the past 15 years. The main thing is not quantity but quality. We must influence intellectuals, for they lead society. More intellectuals have become Christians recently.

Modernization is not questioned, and in fact is our new local god. Morality involves the individual as the basic unit. Christianity influences the individual. Our laws do not reflect modern values. Christianity can motivate individuals to do what is right, regardless of consequences.

At the same time, every Christian must live in a small group. Social morality and law go together. China has little civil society, so it relies on government action and power only. Christianity can contribute to the development of civil society.

*Globalization:* Chinese are everywhere. Chinese behavior while living and traveling overseas has not been a good advertisement for Chinese culture.

*Universal values:* Some object to the idea of universal values, and to any one system claiming that it is the best, but it is okay to say your faith is best, as long as we also allow others to believe something else. In other words, when we talk about universal values, we should allow others to believe that their view is also the best.

### **Other Papers**

The following report gives only a brief synopsis of some of the other papers, all of which were of high quality and addressed the question of Christianity and China's Moral Construction from a

variety of perspectives. Rather than going through them singly, I shall organize them by topics where possible and summarize the total contents.

To protect the authors from being misrepresented, I will not name them, because: (1) All papers were delivered in Chinese, but my notes are in English; (2) My notes are incomplete, both for each paper and because some excellent presentations are not included in them; and (3) They almost certainly contain errors of translation. The full conference proceedings will be published as a book in 2016.

### ***Christianity and Personal Virtue***

Virtue must flow from the heart. It is not just a matter of outward behavior. Virtuous actions can only come from a virtuous heart, and such a heart can only result from a true faith. Thus, contrary to what secularists and most Chinese believe, we can't separate ethics from theology!

### ***Grassroots Christians' Moral Standards***

Extensive observation of rural Christians revealed that Christianity does influence their moral standards and behavior.

Testimony: A very bad man noticed that his wife meekly withstood his abuse. He went to church to find out why. Then he received the Spirit and totally changed. Later, he became a zealous evangelist. Formerly stingy, he became generous and charitable, helping poor people.

Prayer: They often pray for others, not just for themselves, and their petitions are not just instrumental prayer! They sang a song, "Jesus is the Great Physician." A man with headaches repented of his sins and was healed. So, even prayer is an ethical matter.

They also engage in ethical teaching about human relationships, including marriage, etc. Then they call people forward to repent. One meeting consisted of three days of repentance. There were prophets who could see into others' hearts and discern their sins. Specific sins were required to be confessed.

These Christians were entirely merged into the local society. Religion and society were inseparable for them.

The researchers also noticed that there were anonymous offerings for pastors, evangelists, and church workers. Preachers get a low salary, but they still stay on to serve. The church has many good people; it's because of their faith!

Their songs also contained ethical concepts. They sing of asking God to help them to live a better life, not based on material benefits, but to love God. This is better than Daoism.

### ***Christianity and Ethics in Taiwan***

Christians belong to different denominations and their ethical concepts also differ according to denomination.

The religious affiliations in Taiwan are: Buddhists–28%; Popular religion–12.9%; Yi Guan Dao–2.4%; Protestant–4.7%; Roman Catholic–0.9%. Most believe in popular religions. Fifty percent have a home altar and god shelf.

Among Protestants, Presbyterians comprise 35%, Independent churches 13%, Baptists 9%, Ling Liang Tang (Spiritual Food Church) 7.7%.

Ethical standards: Charismatics are most conservative. More education makes one less conservative. Those who are baptized and serve in church are more conservative in their ethical standards as are those who evangelize others.

Among Protestants, charismatics are the most conservative ethically for the following reasons: They hold to a conservative theology; they possess sectarian strictness and seriousness; they emphasize small groups. The next most conservative group are local church members. Presbyterians are the most liberal among Protestants.

Roman Catholic doctrine is most conservative on private moral issues, but Roman Catholic members are the most liberal.

### ***Christianity and Economics***

Several papers dealt with the relationship between Protestant Christianity and capitalism, including the question of economic ethics.

A new economic system came naturally from the Protestant Reformation: capitalism. Later, however, capitalism left its Puritan roots and developed into unrestricted selfishness.

The Reformation exerted a great influence on economics ethics. Calvin overcame the distinction between sacred and secular. The Bible is to help us see the world in its entirety. The Puritans said we should glorify God and enjoy him forever; thus, we can enjoy this life. All professions can be callings—a common calling for all Christians and a special calling to show each person what he should do for God. God looks at the heart of the worker not just the work. To serve God, we serve his world and the people in it. Thus, to serve employers is to serve God.

The Puritan view of money was different from laissez-faire capitalism. It was not libertarian, but emphasized our responsibility, right now, to consider how we should steward our money. The 10th commandment tells us not to covet, but to use money to help others. Elders must seek to help young people start a business; that is why stocks were invented.

Christian economics ethical theory can help China's economy grow, with a new heart.

Human capital is essential, and it must include moral character.

The Protestant Reformation led to a huge change in the economy. Workers are more efficient if you give them a sense that their work has ethical value. This is the basic idea behind the Protestant work ethic: Hard work is done for or God, and laziness is a sin.

The entrepreneur has a creative mind to create new things. In the Protestant view, the world is our monastery. All we do is holy to God.

Universal education also derives from the Protestant Reformation.

German education comes from Luther, who said we should have universal education, that is, public schools. In Germany, Protestant areas were richer than Roman Catholic sections, because more people could read the Bible. Calvin also started a school.

Schleiermacher launched a critique of capitalism. Progress and prosperity came from individual expression. But hearts had become bad. Schleiermacher himself participated in society. Moral motives were important to him. He thought that most people were only interrelated in personal profit and loved pleasure too much. This followed Enlightenment thinking.

God is faithful, as shown in all his dealings with his people and Jesus. This produced moral change in them. Law and worship build a personal relationship with God that leads to moral behavior.

The Ten Commandments were developed in the New Testament into positive commands, which should influence our marketplace behavior. Thus, the Old Testament has vital economic and social ideas for us now.

### ***Christianity and Traditional Chinese Culture: Confucianism, Christian Ethics, and Medical Ethics***

Medical progress has brought many new problems and questions.

The main principles now are: respecting the person's individual autonomy and freedom, doing no harm, benefitting others, justice, i.e., to be treated equally with others. Confucianism respects personal moral autonomy, but not his personal autonomy. Christianity respects both.

### ***Confucian Influence on Rural Christian Worship***

Rural Christians speak of Confucian virtues in their songs, which are still based on Jesus. Thanksgiving songs also include Confucian ethical values, however. Conclusion: The local church is already Chinese.

### ***Christianity and Modern China***

Christianity exerted a strong influence on Chen Duxiu and New Confucianism. Chen found that Jesus had a lot to offer Chinese. The church did not, he thought.

Christianity had a structural influence on the philosophy of He Ling, a New Confucianism leader. He also separated the church from Jesus. He wanted to use Western philosophy, combined with the "spirit" of Christianity, to construct New Confucianism. Religion can furnish motivation for ethics, he believed. Confucianism is insufficient and needs Christianity to fill it out. He accepted Weber's thesis.

Question: If you destroy the church, how can the spirit of Christianity be communicated to the world?

Both Chen Duxiu and He Ling were influenced by the New Culture movement.

The Anti-Christian movement came from the USSR and the desire to abolish the influence of American Christians on China.

### ***The Role of Christianity in Society: Christianity, Personal Freedom, and Democracy***

In China, personal freedom is now popular, but it is being opposed now by the new left and traditional culture. How can personal freedom deal with China's ethical situation? Will it be extinguished?

The original idea of the Leviathan, or big government, was that it could help people; later, kings used the people and abused them.

Personal freedom can bring material benefits, but also trouble to society, such as pollution, moral decline, etc. It can't solve the problems of individuals or groups.

Many scholars now think that Democracy isn't good for China. It is conciliatory, but during elections, it just tries to please the electorate. For example, in many democratic nations, you can't criticize homosexuality or feminism. Pastors can't refuse to marry gays. Luther removed marriage from the status of sacrament and turned it over to the state, making such laws possible.

Personal liberty and law: Should China pursue personal freedom? Confucianism is too optimistic about human nature and moral capability. The Enlightenment's use of reason has become rationalism.

Christianity can contribute to the structure of knowledge, but it can't save China. Christianity doesn't build a nation. That is the work of government. The church must use soft power. Luther said that government power is bad but given by God. No use of violence to resist government is permitted for Christians. We should only use words of truth and love, and prayer.

### ***Christianity and Yunnan's Tribal People***

The missionaries reduced their language to writing, translated the Bible, and taught the people to read and to sing. Why is Christianity growing so much in Yunnan? Most of the increase is taking place among the Lisu and other tribes.

They use Christian songs in government-approved public holiday meetings, as well as dance, including tribal dances. In other words, the Church now brings all aspects of culture together.

The suicide rate is high among tribal people, but less among Christians. (Mostly men commit suicide.)

There are many refugees from China near Burma. They left China to protest abortion. Overseas Christians give them clothes, etc., which the local church distributes. Christians care for the young, old, weak, sick, and dying.

There are many Christians also in border areas, and there they are creating Christian cultures. In fact, they create international and cross-cultural societies; Christianity is growing everywhere.

The government has found that Christianity brings better people and a better, safer society, so the government permits it, and prefers it to Buddhism, especially Tibetan Buddhism. Moral change

is a major reason for church growth, and the government recognizes this, so it gives Christians space.

In general Christians are found mostly among marginalized people. At the same time, we find Party members believing in Christ and leaving the Party.

### ***Christianity and Harmonious Society***

Conflict and violence are on the rise now, though there are some hopeful signs. For example, the Oxford Consensus was signed by representatives of different parties (Christians, Confucianists, liberals, new left) who sat down to talk to each other—a first!

Harmony is a core Christian concept—reconciliation with God, then with others. In his 1996 book, Miroslav Wolf speaks of exclusion and embrace—“Theology of Embrace” (Yongbao shenxue). How can we relate to the “other?” We start from ourselves, then relate to others. We must accept the differences between us and give the other space. This shows the love of Christ. Confession and forgiveness are essential. We must first want to embrace the other before we can work towards righteousness. Forgiveness is essential. Forgiveness assumes admission of wrong and that both sides want to pursue a better relationship. It also presupposes that we won’t let the past offense determine what we will be in the future.

Therefore, we can talk about this as a matter of public ethics, not just personal.

### ***Contemporary Chinese Christianity***

The number of professing Christians is high, but the quality of individual believers is low.

### **Responses to the Conference**

This sort of honest dialogue is really useful.

Moral renovation in China requires many parties to make it happen. But ideas eventually do make things happen.

Individuals live out their life in an environment that either encourages them or discourages them. Social structure and law are important.

The problem: There is no trust in society now. Can religion help create trust?

## **Christianity and Chinese Culture**

**Edited by Miikka Roukanen and Paulos Huang**

### **Part I: Confucianism**

Roukanen, Miikka and Paulos Huang, eds. *Christianity and Chinese Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

This important volume contains so many insightful chapters, with such immediate relevance to all who seek a better understanding of a vital topic, that it deserves extended treatment. The book is divided into two parts; in this review, I shall limit consideration to the first, “Christianity in Relation to the Chinese Religious Tradition,” especially those parts which compare and contrast Confucianism and Christianity. (For some thoughts on a few ways in which Confucianism influences contemporary Chinese Christianity see “The Greatest Threat to the Chinese Church” at [Chinainstitute.org](http://Chinainstitute.org).)

“The Goodness of Human Nature and Original Sin: A Point of Convergence in Chinese and Western Cultures,” by Zhao Dunhua, tackles the perennial problem of how to relate the Christian doctrine of original sin and the Confucian theory of the goodness of human nature. Unlike most writers, Zhao argues that they are “(1) logically noncontradictory, (2) theoretically complementary, and (3) in practice, playing a similar moral role.”

They are noncontradictory because (1) Confucianists have generally believed that the essence of human nature is good, while its “sensuous elements” can be quickly turned toward evil. Likewise, (2) Christians have taught that man as originally created by God, though the Fall has tainted us with a deeply-rooted tendency toward sin. The two traditions, in short, are not that far apart.

They are complementary in that they emphasize different realities. Christians have historically focused on the difficulty that humans have in exercising their free will in a good direction; it is hard to do what is right, though God demands obedience and, in principle, free will implies the ability to obey. Confucianism, on the other hand, believed that morally good actions flow from a fundamentally good heart; the problem is that “unnatural or pervasive conditions and accidental ignorance” can thwart such good intentions. If you combine the absolute moral standards of the Christian God with the Confucian belief in the natural inclination of men toward what is good, you can arrive at a balanced view.

They play the same role in individual and moral life because both Christianity and Confucianism “stress the necessity of perfecting human nature and urge people to meet some moral demands,” which include both purifying one’s own mind and committing oneself to a social career.

Not surprisingly, the response by Miikka Roukanen, though agreeing that both sides can and should continue to engage in dialogue, insists that there are some significant differences to be

overcome. For example, Christians agree that human nature was created good, but believe that we are now incapable of obeying God without supernatural help (grace) from God, working in us by the Holy Spirit. We can neither clearly understand God's moral imperatives, nor perfectly follow them.

Unlike Confucianists, Christians also distinguish between soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) and ethics. We all stand "before God" as convicted rebels, and cannot save ourselves; in that sense, we do not have free will. In fact, the "kernel of original sin is not a moral reality; it is unbelief, lack of faith . . ." Unless God intervenes to grant repentance and faith, we cannot be reconciled to him and thus the process of moral transformation cannot even begin. Even that process—called sanctification—is a gift from God.

Several other chapters deal with the relationship between Confucianism and Christianity. Zhang Qingxiong, in "Sin and Evil in Christian and Confucian Perspectives," begins with an excellent overview of the Christian doctrine of sin and evil. He digs deep enough to find the heart of the problem: man's alienation from God because of unbelief, turning from God toward self, living a man-centered life, which brings evil and suffering into the world.

The Confucian documents which he examines teach that evil and suffering result from the ruler's failure to obey the will of Heaven, which can then lead to a revolution and change in dynasty. But there is no concept of "original sin" in Confucianism; the emperor, while considered "Son of Heaven," is only a man, whereas Jesus is God. The emperor is willing to take responsibility for the sins of the people, but he does not provide atonement.

According to Zhang's reading, Confucius believed tyranny to be the greatest calamity that could befall a people. In other words, evil is the consequence of man-made disasters, whereas in Christianity, evil results from the fundamental perversion of the human will. Thus, there is no salvation in Confucianism, for there is no personal God who can intervene to bring forgiveness or inner moral transformation; it all depends on human self-cultivation. Nevertheless, with the idea of Heaven, there is a "religious" dimension to Confucianism.

Diane Obenchain offers a helpful critique of Zhang's use of selected sources in his description of Confucianism. She suggests some interesting comparisons and contrasts between the Chinese and Hebrew concept of the role of the king as the "son" of God/Heaven, and she contrasts the Ruist (Confucian) stress upon moral cultivation with the Christian insistence upon the necessity for God to transform sinners to conform to the original image in which they were created.

Also responding to Zhang, Svein Rise uses the doctrine of the Trinity, in which there is a "unifying love that flows from the divine persons' identities as divine beings," as a powerful antidote to the human tendency towards the tyrannical use of power. He agrees that Confucianism recognizes some sort of divine power—Heaven—but points out that only a Trinitarian God can transform us and evoke our worship.

Professor He Guanghu's essay, "The Compatibility of Christianity with Traditional Chinese Religions," includes a section on Confucianism, in which he states his belief that *Tian* (Heaven)

“comprehends everything justly” and in other ways greatly resembles the Christian God. Heaven, he avers, is also absolute—eternal, infinite, unconditional, etc.; and heaven is holy and righteous.

In a long response to He, Paulos Huang carefully distinguishes among different groups of Confucianists who have opposed Christianity, showing their varying reasons and reactions, based upon the different Confucian sources which they choose to employ. His concise survey of traditional and modern Confucian responses to Christianity is required reading for all who want to understand this complex and vital subject.

His detailed analysis lays bare the complexities of the situation, in which various scholars may use the same words, such as “transcendence,” or even “Confucian,” in remarkably different ways.

He warns that “we should not jump to the conclusion that the Chinese God (or Heaven or Sovereign on High) and the Christian God are the same merely because they both have the feature of transcendence, since their understandings of transcendence differ in many other respects.” Indeed, “features of God’s nature held in common between the two traditions are only contact points in the encounter.”

He finishes his fine response with these words: “The important thing is to correctly establish the position and function of various contact points; otherwise people may be misled by the appearance of similarities and ignore the essential differences.” In effect, though without saying so, he thus disagrees with Professor He’s case for fundamental similarities between Christianity and Chinese religions.

Wan Junren argues that “Western Christianity as a religious culture more easily enters Chinese culture than do other religious cultures,” and thus “can easily become an organic part of Confucian-dominated Chinese culture and produce a corresponding cultural influence on the spiritual world of Chinese society.” To support and illustrate his case, he studies Matteo Ricci’s missionary work in China “in order to focus on the cultural relation between religion and morality,” since Christianity and Confucianism “share the same goal of making morality secular by different routes.”

Professor Wan specifically disagrees with Samuel Huntington that there is a profound clash between Christianity and Confucianism or that there is a basic affinity between Islam and Confucianism.

He does not argue from the number of converts to Christianity—there are more Buddhists than Christians—but from “Chinese intellectuals’ reactions to foreign religions. . . . I will take ‘Chinese culture’ rather than ‘Chinese society’ as the context of Christianity entering China.” He focuses on Ricci, because he “understood the ethos of Chinese culture that was to be the dialogue partner of Christianity, and thereby found an effective way of enabling Christianity to enter China.” Ricci realized that “missionary work is a matter of culture rather than politics,” and thus decided to “do missionary work through Chinese intellectuals, since intellectuals hold the power to influence the areas of knowledge, culture, and politics.”

He further decided to “approach local Chinese culture and its deep spirit” in a “rational and indirect way.” Chinese political theory called for rule by righteous and knowledgeable leaders. Confucianists sought, therefore, to cultivate both their virtue and their knowledge to “be given the cultural privilege to influence politics and become candidates for political leadership.” Ricci understood that he must enter the Confucian world to influence it with the Christian message. His approach was “cultural, spiritual, or moral – ethical rather than political.” He showed his respect for Confucianism by learning its literature and adopting its etiquette. Perceiving the religion is an aspect of culture, he sought to connect with Chinese culture, especially the dominant stream, to make a lasting impact. Wan believes that this is the only way Western missionaries could ever succeed in entering China, “an Eastern, nonreligious or super-religious secular cultural kingdom.”

“Confucianism is essentially an ethic of morality concerned with society and human ethics. This is why Chinese intellectuals have always sought unification between knowledge and action and have sought to take social responsibility with morality and knowledge.” Ricci understood this, and “through a humanist connection between religion and culture, he started a dialogue between the Chinese Confucian ethics of morality and the Western Christian religion of God” (9).

He first “realized the religious feature of Chinese Christianity.” There “was a Heaven that was concerned with the human world . . .” “Second . . . Chinese people, especially ancient Confucians, emphasized the reward and punishment of Heaven, and there existed an idea of a world to come in China.” These three gave Confucianism “a transcendental religious characteristic; thus, Confucianism could also be considered a religion.” Ricci could start a dialogue with this.

But he also said Confucianism was a “nonreligion, since idol worship remains in Confucianism . . . it lacks a professional religious clergy and official liturgy, and there is no doctrine of creation, etc.”

The first allowed him to engage in dialogue; the second allowed him to maintain the need for Christian missionary work.

Ricci entered into the discussion of whether human nature was good, and he agreed with Wang Yangming’s view. Because man was created good, his nature was essentially good, though he had fallen into sin and needs salvation. He also acknowledged that Confucianism has always had “a transcendental ideal spirit of moral perfectionism.” Christians believe such moral transformation must come from God, whereas Confucianists says it relies “on the human search for morality and ethical practice.” Both are seeking human perfection, however.

Similarities between Christian religious ethics and Confucian morality include: benevolence and love, reverence for perfect men and for God, appreciation for political ceremonies and Christian obedience to the state, Confucian loyalty and forgiveness and Christian righteousness and mercifulness, unity of knowledge and morality, and the idea of immortality; etc.

Wan believes that dialogue is needed now, not conflict of civilizations. Christianity has played a role in modernization: the market, politics, freedom, etc., but like Confucianism it has been

criticized. After two world wars, however, we see that a world without God will fall into disaster and disorder. People in China are looking to Christianity again. Likewise, Confucianism has experienced revival in China. It has played a part in recent modernization and is playing a role in social and cultural customs. Thus, both beliefs offer ethical religious culture to modern social life.

The last chapter we shall consider here is the comparison and contrast of Christian *agape* (love) and Confucian *ren* (benevolence), by Lo Ping-cheung. Drawing upon Anders Nygren's famous *Agape and Eros*, he first reviews the contrast between those two kinds of "love." Eros—the fundamental Greco-Roman notion—is acquisitive desire and longing; concerns upward movement; is man's way to god; assumes man can save himself; is egocentric; seeks to gain its life; is the will to get and possess; is primarily man's love; and is dependent on the quality, beauty, and worthy of its object: "Eros recognizes values in its object . . . and loves it."

Agape on the other hand, is sacrificial giving; comes down [from God]; is God's way to man; is God's grace, bringing salvation; is unselfish love; lives the life of God; is freedom in giving, which depends on wealth and plenty received from God; is primarily God's love, even when we imitate it; is sovereign in relation to its object, directed towards the evil and the good. "Agape loves—and creates value in its object."

Turning to Confucianism, Lo chooses to study Neo-Confucianism, because, though it is not a religion in the full sense, it has a religious dimension, character, import, or sentiment. The great medieval Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi is the representative of this school of thought and belief, whose delineation of *ren* matches some features of agape. It is the mind both of Heaven and of human beings, producing both physical and moral life; it gives rise to love (*ai*); is impartial; is considerate (*shu*); it is the pattern after which we should shape our lives. *Ren* is "the fundamental motif of Confucianism."

Po believes that Christian theology must be done in context; in China, that means the context of Confucianism, especially Neo-Confucianism. He states that there is a connection between divine and human love in Christianity, though of course people can only imitate God as they depend on his grace to do so, in response to his love for them. In other words, Jesus is not only exemplar, but Savior.

In Confucianism, while we should pattern our lives after the *ren* of heaven, as in Christianity, it is assumed that we shall be able to do so without the aid of heaven, since we partake of the essential nature of Heaven by nature. Thus, *ren* is quite different from agape. Po concludes with a call for further dialogue on this vital subject.

In his response, You Bin agrees on the similarities between *ren* and agape and the need for dialogue, but questions whether *ren* "is as metaphysical a concept as agape in Christianity." He thinks that while theology must operate within a given context, it is also "the logos of God," and thus "should transcend any locality and temporality and be a universal enterprise." He concludes, however, on a different note: Christianity has often tried to create a synthesis with itself and a prevailing philosophy or world view, so perhaps "the dialectic between agape and *ren* . . . would bring the power of life for Chinese contextual theology!"

## **Evaluation**

In the first place, we should take note of the sophistication and solid scholarship of these papers; Chinese thinkers are coming into their own as interpreters of Christianity within their cultural context.

Second, it is clear that there are many important points of contact between Christianity and some schools of Confucianism, and that these are worthy of further exploration.

Third, fundamental contrasts between the two thought-and-belief systems mean that any synthesis will be hard to achieve.

Finally, respectful dialogue opens up possibilities for mutual understanding and respect and enables us to learn important new truths.

I cannot recommend this book too highly; the other chapters deserve careful attention, which I hope to provide in coming installments.

## **Christianity and Chinese Culture**

**Edited by Miikka Roukanen and Paulos Huang**

### **Part II: Chinese Religions**

Roukanen, Miikka and Paulos Huang, eds. *Christianity and Chinese Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

“Since the reforms of the 1980s every major religion has experienced development in China,” writes Gao Shining, author of a chapter on Christianity and popular religion in China. Since her chapter was, to me, the most provocative, I shall discuss it first, though it comes later in the volume.

#### **Chinese Popular Religion**

Gao believes that folk religion is deeply rooted in Chinese culture, especially in rural areas. Its content is very complex and includes polytheistic elements, such as “longing for the blessing of ancestors, preferring death to life, believing in fatalism and preordained fate (karma), test and verification of [the gods’] irritability, and yin and yang.” “Its impact is . . . much greater and stronger than that of “Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Catholicism, and Protestantism,” and it has absorbed elements of various religions, thus becoming very “formidable” in its own right.

In recent decades, and “especially in the rural areas, the speed and scale of its development are much faster and larger than is the case with Buddhism and Christianity.” Evidence for this sweeping assessment includes: a proliferation of temples; “erection of luxury tombs”; the building of “ghost palaces and hell-buildings” to attract tourists; more and more activities centered on ancestor religion, including the revival of the power of clans and family; and fondness for the use of certain “lucky” numbers, such as “8.”

Folk religion is “rooted in the subconscious of the masses,” and has become an integral part of Chinese culture, along with other non-Christian religions. Gao helpfully points out that “in addition to . . . universality, decentralization, and spontaneity, Chinese folk religion has the two strong features of utilitarianism and pragmatism,” which influence “how Chinese people react to other religions,” including Christianity.

Folk religion exerts a “many-layered impact” on Chinese Christianity. The rapid spread of Christianity in the 1980s followed upon the virtual eradication of all religious practice during the Great Cultural Revolution, when the gospel filled a “void of faith” once occupied by traditional religion. One attraction of the new faith was its low cost: Christians do not have to spend so much money on lavish funerals and religious ceremonies as they did before!

On the other hand, rural Chinese Christianity has been deeply affected by the utilitarianism and pragmatism characteristic of folk religion. “Thus, many of them believe that God will grant everything asked for by the people, and those people who are suffering from sickness especially

hope to be healed by God.” In some areas, more than “60 percent of Christians are converted . . . because of [healing from] sickness.”

For these folks, the Bible becomes a “protective talisman;” Jesus is a bigger “god” than the idols; “Hallelujah” has become a “magic word that can get rid of evil.” At the same time, “many rural Christians neither understand nor care about Christian doctrine. . . . What they are interested in is whether miracles can happen.”

Second, “all kinds of superstition influence Christianity,” such as the belief that “visible evidence” will accompany salvation, legalistic rules like setting certain days for fasting and abstinence from killing chickens or cutting one’s hair, the color yellow being banned as unlucky, etc.

Third, new forms of religious practice, such as singing “spiritual hymns” on certain occasions, often with the belief that this will automatically bring the fullness of the Spirit, which can be sought also by harming oneself. In such conditions, heresies and sects proliferate.

These and other non-biblical beliefs and practices are so deep seated that they will not be easily eradicated from a church with few educated and trained pastors.

Perhaps we should reassess the high estimates of “Christians” in China. For a brief discussion of some other implications for Christian ministry among Chinese, see the series of articles, “The Greatest Threat to the Chinese Church,” on the China Institute website.

## **Daoism**

He Jianming takes the religious pilgrimage of the famous 20th-century author Lin Yutang as a case study in the “dialogue between Christianity and Taoism.” Brought up in the home of a Christian pastor in a rural village, he grew up in what he called a “strict Christian family,” and imbibed the faith of his parents as a boy. Interestingly, though, what he noticed about his father was his love for his congregation; his important social role in the community; and his love for “all the new and modern things, which were called ‘new School’ knowledge.” He observed also that his father was both a Christian and a Confucianist, with no sense of contradiction between the two. Lin was also unusually close to his mother, whom he loved very much.

Furthermore, he was moved by the “beauty of the mountain and water in his home village.” Conscious of the loveliness of nature, he felt that God was “omnipresent.” Of course, the practice of folk Taoist religion was the local custom, so “it was also natural to be influenced by local Taoist culture at the same time” as Christianity impacted his young mind.

As a youth while he studied in a church school, Lin became aware that the new ideologies of the early 20th century were at odds with traditional superstitions, as well as with Christian theology. Because his teachers did not teach Chinese philosophy or folk religions, which he had come to revere, he rejected the church. He was “unwilling to give up Chinese legends and Taoist culture,” nor did he like “theology or philosophy, since both . . . were characterized by church or scholastic exclusiveness.”

As a result, he left the church for several decades and became what he called a “gentile.” In fact, he was a humanist with a profound admiration for the simple naturalism of Daoist philosophy, which he considered to be compatible with modern knowledge.

Late in life, he returned to Christianity, since humanism did not answer the hard questions. The author notes, however, that Lin never ceased being a Daoist. He believed that the teachings of Jesus about humility were similar to the ethical instruction of the *Dao De Jing*, and the simplicity of life taught and exemplified by Jesus had much in common with Laozi’s philosophy. In fact, he “constantly emphasized the identification between Christianity and Taoism.” Even his understanding and practice of Christianity were unusual, since he attended no church, joined no denomination, and refused to try to persuade others to believe in Christ.

It would seem to me, therefore, that from the standpoint of orthodox Christianity, Lin Yutang did not so much return to Christianity as to a Daoist-Christian synthesis that was more Daoist than Christian. As presented in this chapter, Lin’s reconversion to Christianity was more a return to an idealized childhood village, where nature, Daoist simplicity, his mother’s love, and “Christian” charm all intermingled, without conflict or contradiction. On a more sophisticated and detailed scale, Lin’s approach can be seen today in Yuan Zhiming, who, in *Lao Tzu and the Bible*, likewise argues for the virtual identity of the *Dao* of the *Dao De Jing* and the Logos of the Bible, though, unlike Lin, he holds to orthodox theology and is a zealous evangelist.

## **Buddhism**

Lai Pan-chiu offers the reader some “Reflections on the History of Buddhist-Christian Encounter in Modern China,” which consist mostly of a historical sketch of various sorts of interchange between the two faiths. He notes that there has been little real “dialogue” between the two religions, for a variety of reasons. Matteo Ricci believed that Buddhism was mostly just superstitious, and other Roman Catholics and Protestants have taken a similar view.

For their part, many Buddhists have considered Christianity too shallow and superficial, with nothing to offer a true mystic.

On the other hand, there have been some “constructive and open-minded dialogues,” such as those between Timothy Richard and Yang Wenhui in the 19th century; the attempts to harmonize the two faiths by Xu Songshi and Zhang Chunyi in the 20th century; and the work of Ludvig Reichelt, who founded Tao Feng Shan in Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, Buddhists in the 20th century sought to modernize their religion to compete with Christianity, and even, especially recently in Taiwan, to adopt some Christian tactics to make it more attractive to contemporary Chinese. But this is not a real dialogue.

The author believes that Buddhism and Christianity share some similarities that might foster genuine interchange, such as Nirvana and the kingdom of God as “symbols for the ultimate state.” He thinks also that Buddhists should “re-examine the prejudice that the doctrine of Christianity is naïve and defective, and that its spiritual discipline has nothing to be recommended.” In the past, all too often “each side failed to understand the thought system of the other with an open mind.”

He agrees with He Guanghu that “the most fundamental barrier to communication between Christian theology and Chinese religious philosophy seems to be that they hold two incompatible views on the ultimate reality or origin,” but that “the contradiction is not absolute, and it is not as serious as imagined.” Furthermore, the concept of complementarity can be found in both traditions, and that some features of Mahayana Buddhism can be useful in explaining Christian doctrines.

In response, Jorgen Skov Sorensen questions whether “harmonization, ultimate unity, and synthesis evolving between the two religions” should be “an actual goal of the dialogue,” though he agrees that greater understanding and respect are worthy objectives of conversation. Jyri Komulainen adds that we must be careful to acknowledge that both religions are very complex. He calls for a recognition of two Christian principles—“the fullness of the Divine Love revealed in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9)” and that biblical affirmation that “God has not left the world without knowledge of him (Acts 17:27-28; Rom. 1:19-20).”

### **Conclusion**

These excellent chapters point out the necessity of all those who are interested in Chinese Christianity to take the relationships between it and other faiths very seriously. Obviously, the traffic has gone both ways, as Christians have, both intentionally and unconsciously, absorbed ideas and practices from outside the Bible.

## **Christianity and Chinese Culture**

**By Miikka Roukanen and Paulos Huang**

### **Part III: Contemporary Context**

Roukanen, Miikka and Paulos Huang, eds. *Christianity and Chinese Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

The second section of this fine volume deals with Christianity in the context of modern Chinese society.

“Comprehensive Theology: An Attempt to Combine Christianity with Chinese culture,” by Zhuo Xinping, emphasizes the priority of “seeking similarity” as the “precondition and basis of constructing a comprehensive theology,” so that “real Chinese Christianity can be developed.” Zhou accordingly traces the past century of attempts to find contact points between Christianity and Confucianism, especially, of which he lists several.

He closes, however, by stating that “the more important and urgent issue is how to comprehend Christianity within the new cultural system that is being formed in contemporary China and how to make Christianity contribute more actively and positively to this construction of the new Chinese cultural system.” We see here the assumed priority of contemporary Chinese society: Christianity will be a handmaiden to its development.

In “Contextualization of Chinese Christian Theology and Its Main Concerns,” Yang Huilin poses three areas “for the study of theology in the Chinese language.” The first area notes the differences between the Chinese language and the languages of Western theology, Greek and Latin. Yang believes that no language is adequate to express the truth of God, but Chinese might have some advantages. Second, the faith must be extended into the humanities to take root. That will involve investigation of theological hermeneutics, theological ethics, and theological aesthetics.

Finally, Yang calls for careful study of ways in which Christianity has related to modern Chinese culture and society, including popular religion, economic change, and political systems. He notes, for example, the influence of popular religion on at least rural churches and its important role in rural village society.

In his response, Thor Strandenaes agrees that academic scholars in the humanities in China will exert great influence on the contextualization of Christianity. He also calls for close attention to grass-roots Christianity, so that the spiritual needs of laypeople are kept in mind. Furthermore, he reminds us that Chinese Christians must not forget the church universal in their efforts to contextualize. Not only can they learn from others, but they can also teach Christians elsewhere.

Li Pingye asks, “How do Social and Psychological Needs Impact Christianity in China?” The twin facts of the rapid growth of Christianity in China in recent decades, coupled with a much

slower resurgence of “local religions such as Taoism and Buddhism,” Li Pingye asserts, “compel us to consider why Christianity has developed so rapidly in contemporary China from a viewpoint of the relationship between Chinese traditional customs and foreign culture.” Chinese culture is characterized by “humanist secularism,” she begins. Thus, any new religion must respect “Chinese traditional culture, folk customs, and Chinese authority.” Though “this worldly Confucianism” dominates the elite and forms the ethical basis for society, folk religion remains powerful among the people, whose spiritual needs continue to seek satisfaction in religion. For millennia, both Confucian rationalism and a collectivist, even autocratic, mentality have suppressed individual thought and feeling. Since the reforms began, people have seen that without some sort of faith, morality is impossible. Furthermore, extreme “pragmatic utilitarianism” permeates Chinese society and affects all religions.

Enter Protestant Christianity, which, unlike Roman Catholicism, puts more power into the hands of laypeople, values everyday occupations, and promotes modernization. Its identification with the more developed West is no longer a threat, since Christianity is now perceived as a Chinese religion. Rural folk, seeing it as more “useful” and spiritually satisfying, turn to Christianity in droves. Meanwhile, in the cities, intellectuals find in Christianity the answer to many questions and the peace of soul that they have been seeking.

Christianity in China faces problems, however, if it is to become truly Chinese. It must learn to live with the dominant Marxism, Confucianism, and resurgent Buddhism and Daoism of modern China, “unite with local culture and be accepted by local people psychologically,” and “modernize itself so as to fit the requirements of the time.” Errors, heresies, and pragmatic utilitarianism must be combated with better-educated clergy. Above all, it must not seek to dominate other religions or the nation.

Even if one does not fully agree with Li, I believe that this chapter is, as they say, “worth the price of the book.” But so are several others.

“Eliminating Five Misunderstandings about Christianity in Chinese Academic Circles” is still necessary, says Wang Xiaochao, considering the continuing ignorance and prejudice among Chinese scholars.

1. Jesus must be seen as an historical person whose career and teachings are fundamental to Christianity.
2. People must realize that, contrary to some interpretations of Edward Gibbon, Christianity did not cause the fall of the Roman Empire (and is thus not a threat to the renascent Chinese Empire).
3. Medieval Christian theology must be recognized as a dominant partner in conversation with Greco-Roman philosophy, not a passive victim.
4. Christianity did not produce the so-called “Dark Ages” of medieval Europe. New studies have shown that this was “a bright time for literatures, arts, religion, and philosophy.”
5. Christianity’s relationship to humanism must be clearly understood, lest it continue to be portrayed in China as an enemy of human dignity, reason, and values.

In his response, Choong Chee Pang agrees with Wang's analysis and emphasizes that Christianity is still largely misunderstood by Chinese scholars. To overcome this obstacle, more of them need to become acquainted with the Christian church, acquire knowledge of biblical Greek and Hebrew, and greatly increase their understanding of both the Bible and Christian theology.

"The Faith of Chinese Urban Christians" is examined insightfully by Gao Shining, in a case study of unregistered congregations in Beijing. Her surveys have highlighted key features of urban Protestantism, which differs markedly from rural Christianity.

1. It is pluralistic, with many kinds of meeting points, containing people from many professions and all ages. Teaching focuses on the Bible as a source for solving problems, especially those related to family life.
2. The structure has been changed, with more members who are young, educated, and male.
3. Church activities are "richer," especially compared with the Three-Self church, featuring more meetings of different sorts; more lay participation; more varied meeting formats; a variety of activities outside of Sunday worship; and fervent love.
4. In contrast to the rural churches, where miracles attract most newcomers, the urban churches grow through (a) family influence, as parents transmit their faith to their children, (b) "suffering, unhappiness, and difficulties in life," which drive them to find meaning and help in the Bible, Christian fellowship, and direct encounters with the Holy Spirit, (c) other people's influence, as believers serve as "salt and light" in society, attracting others by words and deeds that possess a distinctive flavor and winsomeness in a very hard world. Furthermore, younger people, adrift in a dog-eat-dog society, are often engaged in (d) spiritual seeking. They are finding meaning, purpose, and hope for themselves and even their nation in Christianity.
5. Today's urban Christians find that their faith brings a new and strong sense of identity. They are members of the family of God and of a local congregation of believers. As such, they possess a new power to handle difficulties, are happier, and evince better behavior than others. They are also very zealous to evangelize their family, friends, and neighbors.
6. Of course, they also live in tension, for they are members of a very non-Christian society. Those with strong faith stand firm, while others tend to compromise their faith and ethics under pressure from those around them. Overall, however, urban Christianity "has already become an important power in the reconstruction of Chinese social morality."

In a brief but quite valuable response, Zhang Minghui makes several important observations. The proliferation of unregistered meeting points results partly from the ridiculously small number of authorized Protestant churches in Beijing. Their doctrine resembles that of the TSPM now but might not later if rural Pentecostalism or the charismatic movement come to dominate the meeting points.

Most Christians "are not involved with politics and do not have strong links abroad; nor do they create problems. But that may not always be the case." (One thinks of the imbroglio over the Shouwang Church in the past year; this essay was written in 2003.) The preaching at the meetings points tends to be better than that found in the official churches.

He believes that “Christianity can serve as an ethic for the new urban middle class; it gives a sense of respectability, plus it has an empowering capacity . . . Christianity also promotes the ethic of moderation . . . [and] a strict Christian lifestyle brings good health and appearance, and promotes hard work and good manners, all of which are an advantage in professional life.” In his opinion, Christianity “has been put into the place that was left empty by the decline of Confucianism.” He includes that we should remember that Chinese urban Christianity has grown without much input from Western missionaries. “It is based on the initiative of individual Chinese Christians who want to spread the gospel.”

The final chapter in this section discusses “The Position of Religion in Chinese Society.” Li Quiling first examines “the basic attitude of the Chinese common people to religions,” and finds that popular religion is 1. Utilitarian, 2. A “nonpious faith” that is “like a commercial relationship of exchange,” in which the god is worshiped who can confer the greatest benefits, and 3. Pluralist, and therefore tolerant and inclusive.

He then turns to the basic attitude of the dominant Chinese ideology—Confucianism—to religion, and he finds that it assumes that religion plays a primarily social function of upholding order and the authority of the state.

Finally, Li looks at the attitude of Chinese Authority to religions.

1. Rulers stress the role of religion to educate people to be filial and loyal.
2. They are very cautious about the possibility that religions might harm kingship, ruling secretly.
3. Chinese authorities strictly control religions and have never allowed religions to override political power. Accordingly, former President Jiang Zemin promulgated a principle “to actively lead religions to adjust to socialist society,” reflecting “basic state policy of China in dealing with religious issues.”

Responding, Frederick Fallman largely agrees. When religion is kept private, it is tolerated. The new studies of religion in China focus on its social function. Even “cultural Christians” talked of how Christian ethics could “save China.” Perhaps the Confucian *Tian* (Heaven) is not identical with the Christian God, however.

Finding one’s identity in a faith can be tricky, since the state demands total loyalty. Thus, persecution is always possible, if a religion is perceived as threatening to the state. On the other hand, Christianity could be seen as “a resource for constructing a new worldview for Chinese society.”

In his pithy and powerful response to Li, Birger Nygaard observes that Christian theology can easily be taken captive by zealous missionaries who don’t realize how much their message resonates with folk religion, intellectuals who see the faith as a “philosophical addition” to Confucianism or some other system, and political rulers who want to use religion for their own ends.

He reminds us that Christianity sees no distinctions among classes and could unite these three groups of people who are so often separate in Chinese society. He calls upon Western

theologians to reconnect with the spirit world of the Bible in order to listen to and assist rural Chinese Christians. Echoing Diane Obenchain, he agrees that Christianity often brings healing, meaning, care for others, fairness in economic practice, and political safeguards that allow wholeness to flourish.

In conclusion, you can see why I think this book should be read by all those who want to understand *Christianity in China* and encourage its healthy growth.

**Christianity in China**  
**From the Eighteenth Century to the Present**  
**Edited by Daniel H. Bays**

Bays, Daniel H., ed. *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*.  
Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.

The twenty chapters in this collection of essays fall into four sections, entitled: “Christianity and the Dynamics of Qing Society,” “Christianity and Ethnicity,” “Christianity and Chinese Women,” and “The Rise of an Indigenous Chinese Christianity.”

Though the book does not claim to be a comprehensive survey, there’s something here for almost everyone. Do you want to know why Chinese often reacted violently to both missionaries and their converts? Several authors detail the complex web of factors, including resentment provoked by the special privileges granted to adherents to the foreign religion, especially its Roman Catholic form. The resulting rage and counter–actions included murder (or was it suicide?), theft, riots, and lawsuits—some pages look as if they came out of the local police register.

Perhaps you wonder why some groups accepted the Gospel more readily than others. Chapters on “worldly” motives behind large-scale conversions by members of minority groups shed light on the problems of Taiwan’s “mountain” Presbyterian churches today and dispel the notion that the Hakka are a naturally “resistant” people. Christians in Taiwan will also find interesting the chapter on Pentecostal and charismatic churches there.

What makes a “successful” missionary? Individual sketches, as well as descriptions of missionaries and their work in many chapters, highlight certain qualities: hard work, excellence in the language, living among the people, practical assistance, and a manifest love for those they came to serve. From the flamboyant, peripatetic, and controversial career of Karl Gutzlaff to the steady labors of Samuel Pollard, we see the value of hard work and suffering in winning the confidence of the ever–practical Chinese.

I was impressed with how seriously Roman Catholics in general, and some Protestants also, took the need for solid instruction of candidates for baptism, for example. Encouraging also were indications of ways in which foreigners quickly began to employ talented and dedicated Chinese in evangelize and education.

The book contains sadder stories too, of foreigners who seemed distant, proud, and domineering. A common theme was the unwillingness of many to grant full responsibility and authority to Chinese co-workers. Another dark hue included the power of the purse, especially when controlled by donors thousands of miles away. For much of this period, the connection between gunboats and the Gospel cast a shadow over the entire missionary enterprise and hampered the rise of true indigenous Christianity. We continue to labor under that onerous legacy.

Women constitute a huge proportion of the Chinese church. Several treatments of individual Chinese women as well as of schools and organizations shed light upon the ways in which Christianity affected women in China. Feminism seems to undergird most of these reports, which means they must be interpreted in the light of Biblical teaching on the value and roles of women in the home, church, and society.

Sometimes missionary work brought unintended consequences. Though some single women missionaries went to China zealous to raise up independent professional women who would transform society, most wanted to inculcate “traditional” values associated with being a wife and mother. Without knowing it, however, even these “conservative” women, by living independently of a husband, presented a different role model, one that impressionable Chinese girls readily adopted as a pattern.

That brings us to a major concern: the relationship of Christianity to China’s rapidly-changing society. The new religion was correctly viewed as culturally “subversive” by 19<sup>th</sup>-century conservatives, but as a key to modernization by many 20<sup>th</sup>-century progressives. How should a Christian relate to the larger society? Can a Christian be a Communist? What are the reasons for cooperating with a government-sponsored church, and what are the risks? Several chapters explore this vital topic with balance and sophistication, at least from a secular historical viewpoint.

Sometimes the answers to this question will depend upon whether one has a “liberal” or “conservative” theological viewpoint. We see this clearly in the chapters on Gilbert Reid, the Wenshe (Protestant Publishing house) and Y.T. Wu. Like Jonathan Spence’s *To Change China: Western Advisers in China*, these studies show the potential and the perils of focusing on education and reform as “missionary” and “Christianizing” activities.

The Communist victory in 1949, like the brief Japanese occupation of parts of China during World War II, brought forced indigenization to the Chinese church. Several chapters deal with various aspects of this development, which had been long desired but insufficiently prepared for. Brief overviews of entirely indigenous ministries both before and after 1949 remind us that the history of the church in China is not limited to a record of missionary activity!

Though I skipped several chapters on my first reading, because they didn’t seem to discuss matters of interest to me, for the sake of this review I eventually read the entire collection. I’m glad I did. This is not a complete history of the last 150 years of Christianity in China (despite a rather misleading title) but it does highlight a number of key themes, movements, and people, and raises critical issues for all who seek to ponder how the Gospel has affected the world’s most populous nation.

This collection of essays from specialists in Chinese history will seem too detailed at first for many readers. I found, however, that all the articles provided quite useful information and insights, with application far wider than the narrow topics treated in each chapter.

Published by a non-religious press, this compendium seeks to maintain the highest standards of historical scholarship and seems to succeed well. Balance, objectivity, careful documentation—these qualities make for a reliable and convincing presentation of each subject addressed.

Not everyone will find the format appealing at first, but I recommend this book to all those who seriously want to understand Christianity in China.

## **Christians in China**

**A.D. 600 to 2000**

**By Jean-Pierre Charbonnier**

Charbonnier, Jean-Pierre. *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*. Translated from the French by M.N.L. Couve de Murville. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007.

This is a marvelous book and represents the learned Sinology of a long line of French Roman Catholic scholars, going back for hundreds of years. Though he devotes most of his attention to the story of Roman Catholicism, the author does give fair and generous summaries of important aspects of Protestantism in China.

Charbonnier is qualified to write such an overview, having spent decades doing firsthand research both in China and in the archives of Europe, as well as traveling to Hong Kong and Mainland China more than 40 times since 1975. He is clearly at home in the Chinese sources to which he frequently refers. I wonder how many Protestant scholars could match his erudition.

His basic conviction is that “if one wants to understand Catholics in China of today, one has to know something about their past.” That is not easy, however, for most of the books on Christianity in China have focused on the work of foreign missionaries. Charbonnier wants to correct that imbalance by telling the stories of Chinese believers, which he does with admirable success. Throughout the book, we are treated to many accounts of both clergy and lay people who sought to live out their faith within Chinese society and culture.

Indeed, that is one of the main themes of *Christians in China*: “One . . . needs to ask why so many studies start from the assumption that Christianity is a foreign religion where China is concerned.” After all, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism are considered two of the five religions of China by the government. So, he gives us the stories of Chinese Christians, “so as to emphasize the unfolding of a constant cultural interaction.”

In the process, he seeks to answer these questions: “How did the Church develop over many centuries in a civilization different from ours? How do Christians in China give witness to their faith? How do they contribute to the life of the Church Universal?” Such an approach requires not only a mastery of details, but an understanding of Chinese culture and the ways in which Christians have attempted to relate to their culture, both at the theoretical level and on a day-to-day basis.

One reason Charbonnier narrates Protestant efforts to relate the Gospel to Chinese culture is that he believes both they and Roman Catholics have encountered the same problems and can learn from each other. Likewise, he includes excellent discussions of Islam in China, because he believes that the success of Muslims to root themselves in Chinese society provides useful lessons for Christians.

Indeed, as an evangelical Protestant, I have garnered a great deal from this survey of Roman Catholicism in China. One must admire the zeal of foreign and Chinese Christians alike; the painstaking lengths to which their missionaries have gone to acquire facility in, even mastery of, Chinese language and culture; their careful instruction (catechesis) of seekers and converts; their extensive travels and arduous labors; their courage in the face of persecution; and their dedication to their faith, even to the point of martyrdom.

*Christians in China* ranges widely, with extensive coverage of the various Catholic orders in China; the role of consecrated virgins, catechists, and converted scholars; the existence of Catholic villages; and the tangled mess of missionary work supported by the military power of foreign (mostly French) governments. He deftly handles the role of Christians in the modernization of China and provides many examples of how Catholics participated in both social reform and patriotic defense of the country. At many points in his narrative, he emphasizes the fact that many Chinese accepted, or at least tolerated, foreign missionaries and their message because of its usefulness at the time.

He seems quite clear-sighted also about the twists and turns of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese politics, including the religious policies of the Nationalists and Communists. Unlike many, he does not ignore the vital role which Christians in Taiwan have played in thinking through the possible interactions of Christianity and Chinese culture.

Charbonnier frequently expresses his own faith in the work of Christ on the Cross for our redemption from sin, and he correctly isolates this as the core message of the early Protestant missionaries and of modern evangelical Chinese believers, whom he obviously admires and appreciates. He also gives sympathetic treatment to Protestants like W.A.P. Martin and Timothy Richard who sought to follow the methods of Matteo Ricci. Throughout, his descriptions are accurate and charitable.

At the same time, this excellent volume highlights some of the significant differences between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Though he has absorbed, and clearly approves of, the reforms issuing from Vatican II (such as an emphasis upon Bible reading and the use of vernacular languages), Charbonnier consistently reflects his own Roman Catholic commitments.

Writing for a mostly Roman Catholic audience, it seems, the author naturally uses a host of technical terms which most Protestants would not understand. He assumes the entire Roman Catholic system of doctrine and practice, including adoration of Mary, prayer to the saints, strict ecclesiastical hierarchy, relics, pilgrimages, the efficacy of sacraments, and especially the supreme authority of the Pope, who is considered the Head of the Church on earth.

This last doctrine has become, of course, a point of intense contention since 1949, for the Communists have insisted upon severance of all organizational ties with foreign church bodies, and total autonomy for Chinese Catholics, who are thus no longer to be considered "Roman." Consecration of bishops by prelates in the "Patriotic" Association has flown in the face of papal claims of exclusive authority to appoint the higher clergy. Likewise, recognition of bishops and naming of cardinals by Rome has angered the Chinese government, which sees such moves as unacceptable interference in the Chinese church. The "underground" Catholics in China continue

to meet separately, to train and ordain clergy without approval from the state-recognized church, and to hold on to their fidelity to the Pope—all to the consternation of both the government and the state-sponsored hierarchy.

Charbonnier shows how the tensions between Rome and Beijing, and between “patriotic” and “underground” Catholics, have eased from time to time, and how each tries to reach out to the other, but he also relates ways in which the two sides continue to irritate each other. Only the future will tell the outcome.

*Christians in China* relates the story not only of ongoing cultural encounter between Christianity and Chinese culture, but also of the continuing cost of faithfulness to one’s faith. He makes no bones of his loyalty to the Pope, nor does he spare readers details of the sufferings of loyal Roman Catholic clergy and laity since the Communists came to power.

For me, both the most helpful and the most problematic feature of this volume concerns the author’s truly superb analyses of the intersections of Chinese culture and the Christian message at various times in history. Beginning with the oldest surviving documents of the Church of the East (formerly called Nestorians), up to very recent years, Charbonnier draws upon his own extensive knowledge of Chinese culture, including Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, to assess how faithfully missionaries and Chinese believers expressed their understanding of the truth in ways that would communicate to their contemporaries.

His judgment that the Syrian Christians did, in fact, preach a biblical message, though using many Buddhist terms, can be compared with the analysis of Samuel Moffett in *A History of Christianity In Asia*. Moffett agrees with Charbonnier that the Syrian Christians were essentially orthodox but thinks also that they did engage in “compromise and accommodation beyond the usually acceptable limits of missionary adaptation” (I, 310).

The author explains the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Rites Controversy in a way that lays bare the multiple complexities of the decades-long dispute about whether Chinese Catholics could participate in ceremonies in honor of Confucius. He properly notes that the Jesuits, who worked mostly with the literati, sought to declare their version of Confucianism compatible with Christianity, whereas the Dominicans and others, who worked mostly with the lower classes, saw the rites as idolatrous. The Kangxi emperor’s judgment that the rites were civil in nature, and not religious, must be decisive for an understanding of his interpretation, but whether he voiced the beliefs of the masses who engaged in those rituals must be doubted.

In the end, the Jesuits’ accommodating approach was accepted by the Chinese ruler, but condemned by the Pope, only to be endorsed again by Pius XI in 1935. (What this does for the doctrine of Papal infallibility, the author does not say.) Throughout the process, the Jesuits displayed far more understanding of official Chinese Confucianism, and indeed of Chinese literate culture itself, even if they did not quite grasp what was going on among the people as a whole. Their opponents were shamed by the exposure of their ignorance of classical Chinese documents when examined by the emperor. His scathing rebuke of the papal legate stands as a warning to all foreigners who would seek to enter into dialog with Chinese about their own culture: “Europeans cannot understand the meaning of our books correctly but want to discuss

them. They are similar to people standing in front of a door and wanting to discuss the things inside the house.”

A few pages later, to be sure, we are reminded of “the religious aspects of Confucianism” as the Yongzheng emperor contemplating the creation of a state creed based upon a mixture of Buddhism, and Taoism, and Confucianism, all under the supremacy of the monarch. Perhaps the matter is not as simple as some have thought.

While I am not sure I would agree with Charbonnier’s approach to the contextualization (inculturation) of the Gospel in Chinese culture—he speaks approvingly, for example, of a Chinese scholar who sought a “fusion” between the Gospel and Chinese culture, the tradition of the Jesuits—I greatly admire his learning, balance, insight, and core commitment to Nicene Christianity. I most highly recommend this volume.

**Constructing China's Jerusalem**  
**Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou**  
**By Nanlai Cao**

Cao, Nanlai. *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Anthropologist Nanlai Cao has painted a detailed portrait of an enormously significant phenomenon—the rise of “boss Christianity” in the port city of Wenzhou. With their national and global reach, Wenzhou Christians may be building a type of Christianity with immense consequences for Chinese Christianity everywhere.

Noting that Wenzhou has become “the largest urban Christian center in China,” (1) the author seeks to understand “the local significance of Wenzhou’s Christian effervescence” in recent years rather than “studying it as an instance of a general religious upsurge” (2). He believes that Wenzhou is unique in China, so he doesn’t want to extrapolate from what he has seen there, but the last page states that it is in “the contexts of spectacular modernization and social polarization that the story of Wenzhou Christianity finds its wide resonance in contemporary China.” Thus, “[a]lthough Christian entrepreneurs still represent a minority within China’s Christian population, active involvement of the upwardly mobile urban class in church life constitutes not only a trend but a likely future of Chinese Christianity in the context of China’s embrace of a competitive globalizing economy”.

For a variety of reasons, the usual domination-resistance model for understanding Christianity in China today does not reflect reality. For one thing, the state is not a monolith. In the case of Wenzhou, unique local history, culture, and distance from Beijing combined with an unusually high proportion of Christians have created a complex situation that is marked more by cooperation between church and government than by confrontation. For another, whereas rural Christians tend to be older, female, illiterate, and poor, the new urban churches are filled with young, male, educated, and prosperous people who are confident of their place in society and of their power to mold a new future for themselves and other believers. Official recognition of Christmas as a popular holiday simply provides one window into this new reality.

Cao seeks to place Wenzhou Christianity “in the context of an emerging post-socialist Chinese modernity that is embedded in a state developmentalist project,” in which “Christian entrepreneurs negotiate identity while seeking to anchor their feelings and emotions in relation to both a larger meaning system [i.e., Christianity] and state ideology [communism]” (12). “Wenzhou Christianity is a historically complex regional construct framed by a moral discourse of modernity... [that] tends to justify various social hierarchies and legitimatizes a new socioeconomic order in the making” (12).

Today's Christians trace their spiritual lineage back to early missionaries like George Stott and the China Inland Mission church he founded in the 19th century. Like others in their city, they are noted for their regional dialect, which is incomprehensible to outsiders, a penchant for making money, and "migration and sojourning." Wenzhounese have taken their businesses all over China and the world; in recent years, their Christianity has gone with them, creating national and international networks that feature large churches that are "visual representations of sacred power" (17). Identifying himself as a "cultural Christian" who had come to study their religious life as a part of his scholarly pursuits, the author gained intimate access to almost all phases of Wenzhou Christianity, enabling him to fashion a report that seems to be largely accurate.

### **The Rise of "Boss Christians" and Their Engagement with State Power**

"The Christian revival has been intertwined with regional development for the past two decades in Wenzhou" (25). As Christian businessmen have become prosperous, they have brought their new-found wealth and social status into the church, where they assume positions of leadership. They are models of success, which they ascribe entirely to God's mercy and grace. Contributing lavishly, they enable fancy new buildings to be built for growing congregations, and full-time workers to be hired. Seeking to do business "by the Book," they strive both for integrity and a management style that reflects biblical values, and they encourage – or even require – their employees to do the same. Bible study attendance may not be optional for managers; it is certainly a way for workers to earn the favor of their Christian bosses. A Christian businessmen's fellowship provides them with support and instruction on the application of the Bible to management. Always, it is stressed that doing business is a way to serve God. In short, "they seek to be integrated into the current socioeconomic mainstream and play a greater role in the public arena. Rather than conform to institutionalized religious authority, they shape church culture to suit their emotional and identity needs" (41).

At the same time, they fit seamlessly into modernization both at work and in the church. Evangelistic services and church equipment reflect the latest in technology, professional production, and efficiency. Other entrepreneurs are invited to evangelistic meetings that feature pretty Christian women as hostesses, outstanding entertainment, and highly successful business leaders as speakers. In contrast to their rural background, their Christianity now reflects, and transmits, high culture.

All of this, moreover, is done without government intervention. The boss Christians see themselves as partners with the local government in promoting both material and moral development in Wenzhou, and in helping to build the "harmonious society" called for by the central government. Good relationships are the key to everything in China, and these businessmen work assiduously to cultivate close and cooperative ties with local officials. They pay their taxes, contribute to government-sponsored charities, and teach their employees to obey the law and work hard. They invite government people to attend some of their evangelistic meetings, and some even serve in the government or in the Party. In return, they are left pretty much alone to pursue their religious agenda, which is to build world-class, modern churches and to bring others to the faith.

## **Of Manners, Morals and Modernity: Cosmopolitan Desires and the Remaking of Christian Identity**

Wenzhou boss Christians are “redeeming the blessing” of having become prosperous by contributing to a new moral culture in their city and around the world. Deeply desiring to leave behind their rural background, they strive to become modern, cosmopolitan carriers of a higher culture. Their Christian identity “implies both a superior spirituality and social prestige, at least among Christians.” That is because “Christianity is a prestigious cosmopolitan faith that embraces both global capitalism and an idealized notion of Western civilization and modernity,” deriving in part from the Western missionary roots of Wenzhou Christianity. “Today Wenzhou Christianity has become a precious cultural and moral resource for the upwardly mobile bosses to reposition and distinguish themselves in the process of catching up with the capitalist West and shedding uncouthness. It is also an integral part of Wenzhou’s urbanization, industrialization, and modernization processes” (43).

The official Three- Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Christians downplay the Western origin of Protestantism in China, though they invoke the ties they have with “mainline” Protestant denominations in the West to legitimize their own status. The unregistered churches, however, hitch their wagon to the evangelicals in the West with whom they have close links, and do all they can to show that they, too, are modern and civilized just like their Western counterparts. Just as the prosperity and democracy of the United States can be, they believe, traced in part to its Christian heritage, so they aim to use Christianity to make Wenzhou modern, prosperous, and civilized. Sunday schools are copied from Western churches; most households own a piano and have their children learn to play it; English is widely used in a variety of settings, both as a sign of modernity and as a means to upgrade the educational level of Christians. Weddings follow the Western pattern. Some symbols of traditional, non-Christian culture are avoided, such as the dragon, as “Wenzhou Christians consciously avoid infusing Chinese cultural components into Christian rituals” (71).

Successful Christian businessmen are called upon as guest speakers, and their piety, sexual purity, and politeness alike referred to as exemplary for others to follow. They stress that we cannot become good people unless God works in our hearts to transform us; the mark of his work in us is a change in behavior. Wenzhou Christians seek to distinguish themselves from their pagan past and their non-Christian neighbors by their faith, their worship, and their moral probity. On the other hand, traditional Chinese values can still be seen. Weddings, for example, involve lavish expense in what may seem like a competition among successful families to display their new-found wealth and social status; the “economic condition of the young man’s family is still a paramount concern for Christian girls” (71).

### **The Business of Religion in the “Wenzhou Model” of Christian Revival**

Successful Wenzhou boss Christians “explicitly promote production and management of church development in consumeristic and entrepreneurial terms” (74). Although they tout “the Wenzhou model of church” as proof of the “uniqueness and superiority of Wenzhou Christianity,” the author sees “this concept as a metaphor through which boss Christians express their conflicting

identities as entrepreneurs, Christians, Wenzhou citizens, and new rich” (75). These businessmen supply the funds for “church building projects, evangelical (sic) organizations, and church initiatives,” (75) and “use locally developed entrepreneurial logic in investing in church infrastructure, establishing investor control over churches, managing church brands, networking, and outsourcing production of church activity” (76). Elaborate, even extravagant, church buildings are symbols of success, sources of further growth, and signs of Christianity’s presence in the city. These structures also enable the bosses to display their own wealth, success, and power. Naturally, given their investment, the bosses expect to control both the buildings and all other church activities. They have, in fact, come to replace pastors, church workers, and traditional church leadership structures.

With so much money, power, and prestige involved, we are not surprised to read that “conflicts over control of the church are commonplace in the reform era” (80). “The boundaries of the entrepreneurial and Christian worlds are quite blurred” and “personal economic relations shape the politics behind the church organization” (82). Church divisions and splits take place frequently, often amidst charges of either corruption or dictatorial control.

Both regular preaching and evangelism are “outsourced” to rotating volunteers who are funded by the bosses, who also draw heavily on their international networking to bring in outstanding speakers from overseas, especially successful businessmen and Westerners, who are seen as the acme of modernization. In all this, the boss Christians hope to turn the “Wenzhou model of church” into an internationally recognized “brand.”

### **Gendered Agency, Gender Hierarchy, and Religious Identity Making**

The different roles of men and women are clearly defined in Wenzhou Christianity. Men provide the funds; lead the enterprises; and demonstrate their rationality by seeking further education in the Bible and theology, while women support the men by running the home, providing food at church gatherings, and serve as pretty hostesses for men-only evangelistic meetings. Serving as “Marthas” (Mada), they are often busy during the sermon, which furthers their marginalized position, which is at the same time highly honored by the men. In all this, Wenzhou bosses justify their continued domination of women, whose spirituality they consider to be emotional and uninformed by sound theological knowledge. They are looking, rather, for “boundless and unconditional love from God” (111), especially in a close relationship to him as “friend, father, husband, and lover” (112).

Wenzhou Christian men eagerly enroll in theological education programs, most of which feature Calvinistic theology, with its stress upon rational knowledge. These courses are taught by experts, often foreigners with advanced degrees, and are strictly for education (teaching) not edification (preaching). Both translated and locally authored and translated books and journals are published to further the goal of education. The women, meanwhile, support each other by forming fellowships in which intense emotional experiences are sought and valued, rather than careful study of the Bible. While men prefer Bible study, the women attend prayer meetings and special devotional sessions where the preaching is highly emotional, with little reference to the Scriptures. At home, women manage the household, including finances; contribute their efforts

to the family business; and seek to bear the all-important son. Christian girls may not marry non-Christian boys, but the boys may marry unbelieving girls, since it is assumed that their brides will follow them into the church. Sexual purity is expected of them at all times.

### **Conversion to Urban Citizenship: Rural Migrant Workers' Participation in Wenzhou Christianity**

Migrant workers in Wenzhou numbered almost two million in 2003. Their life is one of hard work, long hours, cramped living conditions, isolation, and discrimination. No wonder they respond when well-to-do Christians show interest in them. Bosses invite them to evangelistic meetings which are “a constellation of self-evident truths, fanatic passion, public spectacle, and artistic performance with the aid of multimedia technology. For many migrant workers, this ‘red and fiery’ atmosphere in the church is reminiscent of temple festivals and other folk events in their rural hometown” (131-132). They love the “good atmosphere,” which includes “loud music, glamour [the performers are usually attractive girls], glitzy stage lighting, and the presence of large crowds in a theatrelike church building with festival-like interior decorations” (132). When their boss treats them with courtesy, sometimes even praying for them, and when the boss’s wife personally greets them at the door, they feel accepted and honored. The message appeals to them, too. They can find meaning in life and a means to improve their lot by moral transformation. The Christian God brings different goals and produces the power for self-discipline, while educational opportunities are offered by the urban church. Often desperately lonely, they are welcomed into a warm, family-like fellowship of people like themselves. They also find closeness to God and profound emotional healing.

On the other hand, their rural origin, inability to speak Wenzhounese, and lack of education and “culture” set them apart from the local believers. Their meetings are conducted in Mandarin and mostly led by locals, who call them “outside brothers.” No matter how long they stay in Wenzhou or how well they adapt to its church life, they cannot escape their status as “outsiders.” The men cannot hope to marry a local Christian girl or be invited into church leadership. According to Cai, the migrants are seen as objects of evangelism and of “taking culture down” to the countryside, not active agents in the process of becoming a Christian or growing in spiritual maturity and urban sophistication. In fact, Cai believes that the Wenzhou bosses use Christian language and activities to make the migrants’ position on the margins of urban society permanent.

### **Conclusion: Religious Revivalism as a Moral Discourse of Modernity**

Wenzhou Christianity defies the usual domination-resistance narrative of popular journalism. Instead, Cai has shown that “the presence of a business community organized at the grassroots level can not only negotiate changes in church-state relations but also move Christianity from the margin to the mainstream of Chinese society” (163). In this town, Christianity is a complex phenomenon, which “is inextricably intertwined with class positions and dispositions, gender differentiation, place distinction, and everyday lived experiences in the local society. The church offers a site for formation of new social experiences and cultural identities among local groups of varying backgrounds” (163). Heavily influenced by the age-old cultural patterns of rural life, this

new form of the faith in reform era Wenzhou often includes “a celebration of pragmatism and growing individualism, a supernatural justification of newfound wealth, and simultaneous commitment to religious faith and modern rationality” (164).

Christian entrepreneurs “seek to establish themselves as members of a new local elite through simultaneously embracing evangelical Christianity, rational masculinity, state connections, a freewheeling market, and Western lifestyle” (166). More than that, they are aspiring to transcend “a decadent state moral order captured by prevalent cadre corruption in both official and popular discourse” (169). In doing so, they place themselves firmly in the middle of a modern discourse in China that aims to elevate the culture and produce people of “superior” personal qualities, so that the entire society will progress into greater and greater order and prosperity.

Cai emphasizes that Wenzhou Christianity itself is “far from a coherent universe.” It is a “moral discourse of modernity” that “enables a bizarre combination of prosperity gospel, biblical fundamentalism, and moral conservatism whereby the upwardly mobile class can claim an overall economic, spiritual, and moral superiority” (171). Wenzhou Christians’ creation of hierarchies in the church “can be viewed as mainly a product of the earnest efforts of individuals to advance in the historical context of a modernizing China, concomitantly with their equally anxious search for a unifying meaning system and moral order whereby they can make sense of their experiences of growing inequality and dislocation in a rapidly changing society” (171).

This book has a number of major strengths: It is tightly organized and well written; it gives the big picture along with fascinating detail, including quotations from individuals; a strong theoretical framework ties the various components of a complex reality into a coherent whole; the author has done extensive research and presented his findings in a compelling fashion.

On the other hand, it suffers from a serious weakness: Throughout, (as shown in many of the quotes above) religious motives are either denied or discounted, and almost everything Wenzhou Christians do is interpreted cynically as an attempt to seek power and place, rather than to know God or glorify him. It seems that Marxist categories inform much of the analysis, especially the chapters on gender and on class. Consistently, Cai confuses result with motive, so that what Christians achieve as a consequence of their efforts is seen only in sociological terms as the intended product of an entirely pragmatic project to improve one’s lot in this life.

In other words, this purportedly objective picture lacks the depth necessary for real accuracy; it is a flat, two-dimensional portrait lacking the essential third dimension of spiritual reality. In logical terms, the author commits the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* error (“after this, and therefore because of this”). Scriptural justification for evangelism, missions, prudential marriage choices, focused ministry to migrants, and the role of women in the church is either ignored or downgraded to mere rationalization for self-seeking motives. In addition, although Cao did his best to understand Wenzhou Christianity, his perspective as an outsider dominates the book, and shows up even in some word choices, such as a consistent misuse of “evangelical” instead of “evangelistic.”

Nevertheless, I found *Constructing China's Jerusalem* extremely helpful and I very highly recommend the book to anyone who wants to understand Chinese Christianity today. This review has given only a taste of the richness of a work which should be read several times and carefully pondered. For a preliminary evaluation of Wenzhou Christianity as described by Cai, see "Boss" Christianity, Big Christianity, and Biblical Christianity" at China Institute's website.

## **Dead Women Walking: Entangled in Addiction, Abuse, and Idol Worship**

**By Jennifer Su**

Su, Jennifer Su. *Dead Women Walking: Entangled in Addiction, Abuse, and Idol Worship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2007.

“You are the God most worthy to be praised!” Mei prays, her voice soaring confidently above the sound of the rushing stream. “You’ve conquered my past, you’ve conquered the spirits, and you’ve conquered Satan! Lord, we ask you to let your glory fall on this place . . . for this is YOUR land!”

This hard-won cry of victory comes on the last page of what must be one of the most gripping books I have ever read. If you want to know the real impact of what is blandly termed “popular Chinese religion,” *Dead Women Walking* is for you. Though based upon true stories from Taiwan, it could just as well describe the plight of millions of Chinese on the mainland, as traditional religions experience resurgence in a post-Mao society.

Jennifer Su frankly acknowledges at the outset that many of her Western readers “may find some of the stories contained in this book difficult to believe” because of our automatic rejection—or at least neglect—of demon possession as a current reality. “But Eastern society operates very differently . . . In fact, missionaries have found that most Taiwanese people, especially those belonging to the less-educated working class, unfalteringly believe in an active spirit world.”

And they participate in that world, too, as the next 400-plus pages vividly demonstrate. By alternately narrating the dramatic histories of three Taiwanese women and one Western missionary, Su plunges us into the sordid, saddening morass of superstition, spirit-worship, and bondage to demons that lurks just beneath the surface of “modern” life in a developed Asian society.

Along the way, the stark realities of the dark side of urban existence in Taiwan—and, one should add, China—are thrust before our eyes. You want to turn away, but can’t, because you have to face the facts. Gambling, prostitution, drugs, and the gangs that often thrive upon them weave a deadly web of slavery and fear. Parental neglect and disdain kindle a desperate longing to belong and to be loved. Envy and greed breed a lust for money and all that it can buy. Sexual passions overwhelm men and women alike, with the women usually washed up on the shores of abandonment—battered, used, despising themselves, and hating the men who have abused them for their own pleasure.

Horrid voices in the night strike terror into the hearts of those who seek freedom from the “gods” they had previously trusted. Vivid visions both awe and frighten. Temporary victories turn into fresh defeat, as the old masters return to claim what was once theirs.

It’s not so easy for these women to run away and start all over again somewhere else. Boyfriends and bosses trace them down, demanding allegiance again. Brief encounters with Christians bring

rays of light but aren't enough to set them free. And always, the demons return, evoking ancient fears and playing upon persistent patterns of unwise choices and their baneful consequences.

Is there any hope for these victims of idolatry and ignorance? Yes, because Su has seen formerly "dead" women "walking." As they come into the sphere of the Gospel, the warmth and light of God's truth and love begin to enfold them. They see where they have been deceived and learn that they do not need to fear "gods" that are not gods at all.

Elisabeth Weinmann, a missionary with OMF International, faithfully visits women who work in department stores, greeting them with a friendly smile that communicates sincere concern; listening to their sorrowful tales; and leaving behind literature that points toward life and liberty. Slowly, these working-class girls begin to trust her. Some attend Bible studies she leads. Others turn away, but then welcome her later. Always she persists, praying that God Almighty will set these people free and reclaim them from Satan's domain.

By living among them, and then inviting some to live with her, Elisabeth imitates the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, the women come into contact with real love; they hear a message that rings true; they begin to feel a power greater than that of the evil spirits.

Gradually, the former lies seem less and less credible. Better habits of handling money, relating to men, and facing the stresses of life start to take hold. They find a new family in the community that has grown up around Elisabeth and those who have trusted in Christ through her ministry. Inevitably, some other professing believers prove to be inconsistent and irritating and seem to discredit the Gospel they profess to believe; some even turn out to be false followers of Jesus and fall away.

In the end, however, God wins out. The risen Christ proves his vastly superior might. The resident Holy Spirit works progressive transformation. Demon-worshippers turn into disciples of Christ. Devotees of idols become defenders of the truth. Deliverance, though incomplete, is real and lasting. Life replaces death, light expels darkness, and the triumphant cry quoted above testifies to the resurrection power of Christ in the lives of all who trust in him for salvation.

## **Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity**

**By Lamin Sanneh**

Sanneh, Lamin. *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

### **Chinese Christianity in World Perspective**

This first volume in the *Oxford Studies in World Christianity*, also edited by Professor Sanneh, has set the highest possible standard. The author's elegant writing, impressive scholarship, expansive outlook, and incisive analysis combine to make this a book to read and re-read. A full survey being impossible, my review will only highlight a few major features of Sanneh's overall thesis, with a focus on the insights they provide for students of Chinese Christianity.

As the subtitle indicates, Sanneh builds his discussion of World Christianity upon a few "pillars." Presented in roughly historical sequence, they are: the "missionary" pillar of the New Testament and the early church; the "pillar of historical intelligibility" as applied to the encounter with Classical culture; the "comparative" pillar of "the Christian movement in Islamic perspective"; the "trans-Atlantic" pillar of "Old World precedents and New World directions"; the "colonial" pillar of the modern missions movement; the pillar of charismatic renewal; the "primal" pillar of "resurgence and the new order in West Africa"; the "critical" pillar, dealing with "civilization and the limits of mission"; and finally the "bamboo" pillar manifest in "Christian awakening and the New China."

Of particular interest to Sanneh is the "vernacular" pillar, present from the beginning, which allowed for the "translation" of Christianity into the languages, thought-forms, and deep cultural structures of societies in which it became implanted.

The author, who was Professor of History and World Christianity at Yale University, makes little attempt to provide a comprehensive history of the spread of Christianity around the world over the past two millennia, though this rich volume would be a good start for such a study. Instead, he offers us critical perspective on certain key men (and women), moments and movements, particularly as they illustrate the indigenization of the gospel. Naturally, Sanneh draws upon his own background and extensive research to reflect long and deeply upon Christianity in Africa. Perhaps this should not have surprised me, but I discovered that the parallels with China are numerous and striking.

As Philip Jenkins points out, "throughout, Sanneh asks the critical question: How can we reconceive Christianity in a way that frees it from its European and imperial contexts, permitting the faith to adapt to the kaleidoscopic realities of different societies around the world?"

With that introduction—and invitation to enjoy the pleasures of this intellectual banquet for yourself—let us move to what we might learn about Chinese Christianity from this brilliant volume. We'll follow the order of the book for convenience and historical sequence.

In the first chapter, the author makes two major points: “Christianity [has] no inalienable birthplace and the church no territorial patrimony.” It brings new forms of social life “without the necessity of a promised land or the advantage of cultural privilege.” That is, Christians do not—or should not—sink their identity into any one nation, nor do they place their reliance on the favor of any government. The Roman Empire, seeing “religion as state monopoly” and intent upon controlling all public exercise of religion, “saw Christianity as a structural anomaly, and dealt with it as a political problem.” Recent analyses of China’s religious policy have come to similar conclusions.

These two competing ideas of this new and “foreign” faith brought the early church into conflict with the Roman state, with multiple persecutions trying both sides for almost three hundred years. During this period, however, Christians were growing both in numbers and in their penetration of Hellenistic culture with the new wine of the gospel. Philanthropic activities by Christians began to win public, and even official, recognition and admiration, while the superior morality and civic obedience of believers slowly allayed suspicions.

Christianity gained the allegiance of more and more different peoples within the Empire, and even burst the boundaries of Roman control to attract adherents in neighboring countries among a variety of cultures, proving itself to be a truly universal faith. It placed “God at the center of the universe of cultures, implying equality among cultures and the necessarily relative status of cultures vis-à-vis the truth of God.” There is no inherently superior culture, nor one so “backward” that it can be ignored or despised—another major theme in the book.

One major contribution was a “transformed kinship” and “a new sense of social solidarity” brought about by baptism into the church of Christ. A fragmented Roman empire needed just such a social anchor to prevent total social disintegration. One thinks of China today.

Later, monasteries “redefined mainstream culture” by “hammering out distinctive styles of religious living.” Indeed, true Christianity will have the same formative influence wherever it is truly lived. At first, it spread among Arabs partly by taking advantage of the deep commitment to hospitality, which led naturally to “culturally prescribed ways of acknowledging God’s unfathomable hospitality.” Alas, without the translation of the Bible into Arabic, Christianity was left powerless against the advance of Islam—the same fate that befell the first three attempts to root the Gospel in Chinese culture.

Such Christianity as did develop in Arab societies was so shallow that “an indigenous Arab church failed to arise.” Meanwhile, the Eastern Greek church was hopelessly split by theological controversy and almost totally embroiled in national politics to present a home to Arab believers. The connection of the faith with an alien empire made its acceptance by Arabs all the more difficult.

“Things were different in Ethiopia,” where the Bible was early translated; identification with ancient Israel helped to give a sense of distinctive worth in a world dominated by Islamic nations, and the dynamic character of Christianity “offered a convincing rationale for established societies, as well as for those undergoing rapid internal change.” “The church provided the essentials of social security” and “a new sense of social solidarity.”

As Muslim armies attacked the “Christian” West and Byzantium, they encountered a church that had not conquered the Roman Empire but had been itself conquered by the empire. “The empire . . . converted Christianity.” In the early modern period, Muslims saw European Christianity as mostly committed to the good life, which “demanded as its price the repudiation of God.” How true is that today?

Fast forward to the Age of Exploration—or the beginning of Western imperialism, as it is more properly called. On the one hand, as Sanneh shows at great length, the ties that bound the missionaries to their rapacious home countries did untold damage to the cause of the Gospel. On the other, the missionary movement itself led to a radical rethinking of the connection between Gospel and culture. In the end, acceptance of Christ by peoples of Latin America, Africa, and Asia “transformed Christianity into a world religion,” though Westerners were long in recognizing this fundamental fact.

In both Africa and China, the message of the missionaries was believed, often despite the methods and ungodly ways of some missionaries. Local believers saw that Jesus was not bound to the white man’s culture; that they were valued in God’s sight; that essential human dignity was affirmed for them by the Scriptures; and that they could overcome their anger at European imperialism by forgiving their former masters in the name of Christ. All the while, they have been struggling with what it means to be both African—or Chinese, or Indian—and Christian, both affirming some aspects of their traditional cultures and denying others.

After the calamitous disaster of World War I, non-western peoples lost much of their respect for European civilization, and the Christians had to face increased pressure just because they had embraced a Western religion; they have mostly come through that phase, however, and now the church is firmly planted as an indigenous movement. As part of that de-linking with missionaries, independent, and mostly charismatic, leaders and movements have sprung up both in Africa and in China, outside the confines of mainstream mission organizations. Mutual suspicion and even criticisms have marked this stage of “growing up,” but now these movements are being held accountable by other Christians within their own cultures, with regard to both doctrinal orthodoxy and biblical morality.

Though appreciative of the efforts of missionary education and medical work, Sanneh shows how John Nevius exposed the fallacies of relying on institutions like schools and hospitals to spread the Gospel. He applauds both Nevius and Roland Allen for going back to the Bible for effective means of communicating Christ—rather than Western culture—cross-culturally.

Sanneh’s long chapter on “Christian Awakening and the New China” shows him to be an acute student of the rise of the Chinese church. He finds the Western liberal idolization of the communist revolution, with their premature announcement of the replacement of Christianity by

Mao's brand of Marxism, to be highly ironic in the light of the subsequent imploding of communism as a viable world view and the explosion of indigenous Chinese Christianity. After a long period of "appeasement" of communism and the government by both Protestant and Roman Catholic church leaders, the surge of conversions and growth of mature leadership has ushered in new era in Chinese Christian history.

He quotes a Chinese believer who observes that "the Christian idea of love has introduced a new value system in China, including the idea of repentance 'which is lacking in Chinese culture.'" The faith has become truly indigenous, with its own leaders, Chinese Bibles, songs, and style of worship. "The church looks and feels Chinese."

On the other hand, Sanneh is aware that a huge percent of "Christians" "said they embraced Christianity for reasons that had to do with their personal physical health" and that "the values of the Gospel . . . are in sharp contrast to the new Chinese values of making money and having more and more possessions." It seems that European Christianity has no monopoly on worldliness.

He notes David Aikman's theory that Christianity might become "the dominant worldview of China's senior elites," with significant consequences for its foreign policy. For this reviewer, that prospect raises the specter of a new Chinese Constantine, who would co-opt a willingly-patriotic church and replicate the cultural captivity of Christianity that forms a major theme of this book. The fact that many Chinese believers seem to consider China as *Shenzhou*—"the land of God"—recalls too many tragic parallels which Sanneh has described in the earlier chapters of his book.

The author helpfully balances the usual focus on the Protestant church in China with a discussion of the Roman Catholic dialogue with China. He notes the gradual, and quickening, collapse of boundaries between the state-controlled Patriotic Association of Catholics and the Catholics who hold on to their allegiance to Rome.

Much of the fascination and complexity of this volume derives from the Sanneh's description of the two-way process of communication that the expansion of Christianity has spawned, with a proper shattering of Western cultural and national pride, as well as a clearer understanding of the universal nature of the Gospel, as inevitable consequences. The "Christian" Western civilization that can rightly boast of many intellectual, artistic, philosophical, governmental, and even religious achievements has, in the process of the Gospel's assimilation by people of other cultures, been also exposed as arrogant, blind to its own faults, limited in understanding of some fundamental features of biblical revelation, and woefully lacking in moral depth and integrity.

Meanwhile, the translation of the Scriptures has not only penetrated local cultures with the Gospel but has led to a renaissance of indigenous languages and traditions. Not infrequently, the very language of the Bible infused existing languages with new life, and non-Christians found themselves using new terms and metaphors. Recent studies in the birth of modern Mandarin have documented the potent influence of the Chinese Union Version upon 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature, for example.

The traffic has gone both ways. Western missionaries quite often lost much of their cultural pride as they became more familiar with the rich tapestry of local traditions. Some rejected the Gospel altogether, but more of them received new insights into God's revelation as they encountered different ways of thinking and living. One thinks especially of the rebuke to Western individualism presented by the value which traditional cultures place upon the claims of community; our monochrome worldview that is blind to anything that cannot be seen; our pathetic reliance upon money, power, and organizations rather than upon the Holy Spirit and the Word of God; and our shallow concept of friendship.

Indeed, the Western church, which is now so marginalized and empty of real spirituality, has begun to turn to the "younger" churches for examples of truth, faith, hope, and love. Stories of Chinese Christians, such as those found in *The Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity* ([www.bdcconline.net](http://www.bdcconline.net)) and the *Salt & Light: Lives of Faith that Shaped Modern China* series of books, have encouraged many non-Chinese to break out of our lukewarm lives into authentic discipleship.

Naturally, no one will fully agree with everything in a work of such scope, complexity and sophistication. I have questions, for example, about his frequent references to the "Hellenization" of New Testament Christianity, whereby "Jesus became a Greek philosopher" and "the Greek Christ ended up trumping the Jewish Jesus." Such statements need more elaboration and qualification than Sanneh could allow himself, and distracted me from his major point, which is the fundamental "translatability" of the gospel message.

Like many others, Sanneh interprets the Apostle Peter's move toward Gentiles as essentially the rejection of a cultural boundary marker. Both Peter and Paul, however, are following the example and teaching of Jesus, who from the beginning viewed the inclusion of Gentiles as the necessary corollary to what Paul would call justification by faith alone, not obedience even to the moral law of Moses. The issue is not faith versus "national custom and social affiliation," but faith for all believers "without regard to their moral record, spotty as that is," as Sanneh himself also says. The internal contradictions and over-generalizations of the Introduction and first chapter are, to me, the only real weakness of the book.

But even if some of his theological judgments may be questioned, Sanneh's sure grasp of history, and especially the history of the expansion and inculturation of Christianity around the world, makes for thrilling reading. For students of world Christianity, this volume is a must.

## **Does This Help Explain the Recent Crackdown?**

**By Tony Lambert**

Lambert, Tony. "Does This Help Explain the Recent Crackdown?" A summary of the translation by Tony Lambert of an important article published in Beijing in June 2010 by the China Social Sciences Press. The article is entitled: "An Analysis of the Reasons for the Rapid Growth of Christianity in Today's China". The translation is found at the OMF website.

The publication of this translation may help us understand at least one of the factors involved in the 2010 government crackdown on large house churches in some parts of China, including its response to the decision of Shouwang Church leaders to try to hold Sunday worship meetings outside. It also gives essential background for comprehending the recent (2018-2019) comprehensive campaign against Christian, Muslim, and even Buddhist public expressions of faith.

Lambert presents the translation of this article to "show that the experts advising the Chinese government at the highest level recognize the enormous growth of Protestant Christianity as a fact and predict that this growth will be so explosive in the coming decades that it may well change the face of China." This is Part II of his translation; Part I dealt with some reasons for the rapid growth of Christianity in China. This concluding section speaks more particularly of Christianity's ethos of constant propagation:

"For all sorts of reasons Christianity has formed a whole system of missionary expansion, especially in the modern era. Accompanying the growth of Western political, economic and military power, its propagation has seen some new characteristics causing it to spread throughout the world." Note, first, that the author traces Christianity's worldwide spread to the advance of Western power.

He continues: "Firstly, Christianity is absolutely exclusive. All religions stress they have the absolute truth, but this is particularly apparent in Christianity. It is monotheistic and rejects other faiths such as Daoism. With the growth of capitalism, Western culture enjoyed a revival with Christian culture at its heart. The combined strength of the Western powers increased Christianity's sense of superiority even more. From claiming to have the only truth it became conceited, and this fed its ambition to 'export religion'."

As the last three sentences quoted above show, the author ties Western expansion to a sense of superiority, which fueled an impulse to export the faith.

The author now gets to the heart of his argument:

"On a global scale it promotes 'universal values' and a political system with Christian culture at its heart, thus fulfilling the Western World's 'Great Commission', led by the United States.

Through all kinds of political, economic, military & cultural means, it promotes its values throughout the world and fulfills its strategic objectives.”

Later in the article, he states that “the propagation of Christianity has the political power of the great powers behind it, and there is a certain element of church and state mixed together.”

This faith is central to the entire thrust of the article: Western nations, led by the United States, seek to export their political system, with the intent of achieving absolute worldwide hegemony. In the process, they use a variety of means, including the propagation of Christianity.

The article traces what he alleges to be the changing role of Western powers in the spread of Christianity in China through history:

“In modern times there have been two ways in which Christianity has been spread in China: first, reliance on military power; secondly, using economic power. Before 1949 the propagation of Christianity in China was not unconnected to the gunboats. Since the Open Door policy [beginning in 1978] it has relied more upon economic power, charities and using money to smooth its path.”

The key point here is the assumption that Western governments, especially the American government, are actively involved in the missionary and evangelistic endeavors of foreign and Chinese Christians, as well as in charitable non-profit organizations.

The author illustrates his claim by stating that “the relatively poor Chinese believers could not have built so many hugely expensive churches without overseas help.”

In the next part of his article, he tries to show that the “explosive” growth of Christianity in China is “abnormal,” and will upset the religious balance in China, destabilizing society in the process.

### **Upsetting the Religious Balance**

The inevitable result will be that Christianity’s expansion “will seriously damage the balance of religions in China and worsen the religious environment . . . Christianity has already destroyed, or will very soon destroy, the present situation of a balance between religions. It is not that a decline in Chinese Buddhism, Daoism or, in particular, folk-religion, which has ‘created’ this rapid growth of Christianity, but rather that the ‘monopoly’ or even ‘hegemony’ of Christianity has already, or will very soon, produce a further blow to folk-religion, Buddhism and Daoism.”

The article claims that the spread of Christianity has been possible because house churches have “avoided government control.” “It is not that the government’s religious policy has led to the so-called loss of balance between religions, but rather that illegal Christian evangelism has challenged the government religious policy and finally brought about the break-up of the religious situation in China.”

According to the author’s sources, Christians could increase dramatically in numbers, so that a moderate estimate is that, in 50 years’ time, the number of Christians will be 150-200 million.

Mr. Lu Daji estimates that in just the next 20 years there will be 200 million and even 300 million Christians (in his paper presented in 2008 to the United Front Research Group).

### **Endangering National Security**

Not only will the religious balance be upset, but “this [rapid growth] will affect national security.” Why? Because “against the background of globalization, cultural and ideological security can be often ignored, so that ideological & cultural aggression easily gain the upper hand. Western powers, with America at their head, deliberately export Christianity to China and carry out all kinds of illegal evangelistic activities. Their basic aim is to use Christianity to change the character of the regime in power in China and to overturn it.”

He quotes Western analysts who observe that “this is ‘a battle to gain the very soul of China’.” It is a contest between “socialist atheism and Christian theism, . . . traditional Confucian pragmatism and the Christian spirit of seeking the heavenly kingdom, also between a renewed Buddhism and Christian opposition to idolatry. It is a confrontation between the international system of Christian values and the values of traditional nationalism and Marxism. It is a contest between American Protestantism and Chinese Communism, and a contest between American Christians and China’s traditional forces.” (Yu Ge, *America’s Essence*, 2006, Modern China Publishers.)”

Unless the Chinese government steps in, the author warns that the use of Christianity by Western governments to “westernise, split, Christianize and ‘gospel-ize’ China, . . . will create a great blow to our national security.”

He returns to the problem of the shift in the religious “balance of power”: The presence of huge numbers of Christians will “challenge the government’s control of society and its public services and create confrontation and clashes between Christian culture and traditional culture, and between Christians and believers in other religions.” After all, how can you control a religion with 200-300 million believers? Along the way, the government’s policy of limiting Protestant activity to the Three–Self Patriotic Movement will be challenged, as control of religion is wrested from China and grabbed by foreign powers and their Chinese Christian tools.

The author concludes that, “faced with this abnormal growth, we must undertake State interference, and take legal and administrative means so that religion does not have a free market and expand out of control.” First, the “racial pride and self-confidence of the Chinese people” must be strengthened, along with “core socialist values . . . and superior cultural traditions of the Chinese people” to eliminate “the present fertile bed causing the disorderly expansion of Christianity, as well as resisting infiltration from abroad which uses religion.”

Here we see clear indications of Chinese “exclusivism,” as opposed to the “international” or “universal” values which “liberals” think should drive China’s domestic and foreign policies.

He goes on: “Secondly, we must use the method of combining government policy leadership to control [Christianity] according to the law and undertake ideological education, so gradually the Christianity fever calms down and we can establish normal religious order.”

Trying to “control” religion “according to the law” means using the official religious bodies, such as the Three–Self Patriotic Movement, to keep religious practice within tight boundaries. The participation of the TSPM in the interrogation and “education” of members of Shouwang Church fits this pattern nicely.

Translator Tony Lambert ends with these words: “The reader will see the importance of this article as revealing the kind of advice currently being given by researchers to the government at the highest level. It may explain why there is no thaw in religious policy and continuing pressure on the house-churches.”

The entire translation, like every issue of *China Insight*, deserves careful reading, but for now we should just note that the Chinese author mixes some fact with a considerable amount of fantasy to concoct a scenario which must be horrifying to his readers. Clearly, he either willfully hides what he knows, or he is hindered by massive ignorance of the essence of Christianity, both in the West and in China. His own cultural and political blinders make it impossible for him to understand either the history of Christianity in China or its present condition. Readers of the entire article will sense confusion and repetition in his argument, obviously caused by fear and prejudice.

At the same time, we can see why the open challenge to the government’s religious policy recently expressed by the actions of the leaders of Shouwang Church, the petition by house church leaders to the National People’s Congress, and the strong support expressed both by the Western press and American government leaders would serve to confirm the article’s fundamental thesis in the eyes of the Chinese government. Let us hope that they are receiving better, more informed advice from other researchers.

In fact, there is some evidence that they are. Although, as a recent article in *The Economist* stated, the hardliners have a far stronger hand than the liberals in the Chinese government today, the relatively mild treatment shown towards the Shouwang Church and the unregistered church leaders who have supported Shouwang’s case seems to be an indication that some high-level officials in China do not view the growth of “house church” Christianity in the same way as the author of this article.

They may have seen evidence showing the independence of “house” churches from foreign control, the participation of urban professionals that enables them to buy property, and the lack of purely political ambition of its leaders.

Still, this article seems to fit the general “Red” revival taking place in China; as such, it represents a definite backward trend that has affected the information and security sectors of the government and accords with the strong insistence upon China nationalism that has fueled important foreign policy moves in the past year.

As indicated above, the article is even more relevant to conditions in 2019.

## **Faith of Our Fathers**

### **God in Ancient China**

**By Thong Chan Kei and Charlene Fu**

Thong, Chan Kei, with Charlene Fu. *Faith of Our Fathers: God in Ancient China*. Shanghai: China Publishing Group Orient Publishing Center, 2006.

This well-written, beautifully-produced volume represents many years of painstaking study, a firm conviction that the Bible is God's special revelation, and a profound love for the best in Chinese civilization. As a result, it possesses many strengths and will be convincing to many readers, especially Chinese.

On the other hand, it suffers from a number of nearly-fatal weaknesses which will greatly reduce its value for more critical students of Chinese culture, church history, and the Bible.

Thong states his purpose early: That others may "understand, through the perspective of Chinese culture, the truth of the Bible and the faithfulness of God." The author, a Singaporean Chinese now living in China, wrote this book as a result of his own search for his spiritual roots. He wants "to bring others along on . . . the journey" that led him from renunciation of his Chinese past to a belief that to worship the God of the Bible is to "return to the foundations of our ancient cultural heritage."

He achieves at least the major part of his purpose: the book ably presents the main tenets of the Christian faith, with ample Biblical citations. Any person seeking the truth about the Gospel will find it clearly stated in *Faith of Our Fathers*.

He acknowledges that others have plowed this same field but offers in this book "a systematic examination of works by other scholars on this topic, along with new revelations and [his] own insights." He thinks that God has left "signposts" that point to the conclusion that "the early Chinese forefathers worshipped God in a manner similar to that set forth in the Bible."

There are seven signposts contained therein:

1. "The composition of ancient Chinese characters suggests knowledge of the earliest events of human history as described in the Bible."

Thong exercises care in explaining this point. He does not claim that Chinese characters "were originally designed to convey a Christian message," but only that "what is now known as the biblical story of Creation was at one point in ancient history also the Creation story known in Chinese culture. It was so commonly accepted as truth that elements of that story are reflected in the symbols chosen to represent key ideas in the formation of the written Chinese language" (53).

He also refers to the original form of the characters which he adduces as evidence that the early Chinese know a great deal about God and his plan of salvation; this protects him from the criticism that an analysis of modern forms only carries little weight.

2. “The Supreme Being venerated by the ancient Chinese . . . corresponds to the God revealed in the Bible.”

The name for this being among the early Shang Dynasty was *Shang Di*. He was believed to be unique; was never represented by an idol or image; an “all-powerful and supreme Deity” (79); “sovereign of surrounding nations as well as the Chinese themselves” (80); governed the forces of nature; “governed the construction of cities, the outcome of wars, and the well-being and misfortune of human beings” (81). Amazingly, he “received no cultic or manipulative worship” (81).

When the Zhou dynasty replaced the Shang, they believed that their supreme deity, called *Tian* (Heaven), was the same as *Shang Di*, and used the two names interchangeably for a while. Later, *Tian* (Heaven) became the standard term. There is no evidence that either of these names referred to a being who had a beginning; Thong opines that he may have been considered eternal (82).

Another morpheme, *Di*, has also been used interchangeably with *Shang Di* and *Tian* for the supreme being. Thong notes that “di” or “ti” appears in many languages—perhaps most of them—as a referent for deity, a most interesting point, in my opinion.

*Shang Di* has become “a personal name for God, while *Tian* seems to be more of an abstraction” for the Deity (84).

The attributes of *Shang Di* as reflected in ancient Chinese classics show him to be “the same Father God of my Christian faith” (106).

“*Shang Di* and the God of the Bible are one and the same” (174).

3. The Border Sacrifice ceremony performed by the emperor at the Temple of Heaven . . . shows startling and meaningful parallels with the sacrificial system prescribed in the Bible.”

In this imposing ceremony, the emperor prostrated himself before *Di* in acts of homage that expressed a belief in a supreme deity upon whose favor and forgiveness depended the welfare of the empire.

Thong also finds remarkable similarities between the covenants ratified with blood in the Bible and those in Chinese history (as well as other civilizations). “From the very beginning of China’s long history, *Shang Di* has been revealing the truth of blood

covenants to the Chinese people in order to prepare them to receive life's greatest blessing: salvation through the eternal *Tian Zi* (Son of Heaven), Son of god, who is Jesus Christ. Rather than being the founder of a Western religion, Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the longing expressed annually through the shedding of blood at the Border Sacrifice for an unbroken, unblemished relationship with *Shang Di*. The same Creator God that China knew dimly through many millennia can now be known intimately and clearly through His special revelation in Jesus Christ" (180).

4. Eminent sinologists from the 16th to 19th centuries believed that "the ancient Chinese venerated a Deity who bears remarkable resemblance to the God of the Bible."

In this chapter, Thong relates the careers and missionary strategies of Roman Catholic Jesuits Ricci, Schall, and Verbiest and the Protestant James Legge, whom he describes as "known for their scholarship, exactitude, and integrity" (217). Out of their love for China and respect for Chinese culture, they had mastered the Chinese classics and believed—as Legge wrote—that the "Chinese do know the true God and have a word in their language answering to our word God, to the Hebrew *Elohim*, and to the Greek *Theos*" (217).

Their Christian opponents, however—both Roman Catholic and Protestant—are portrayed as unattractive, petty characters with "little or no scholarship" to support their point of view (216).

Thong uses this supposed contrast to confirm his own conclusion that "*Shang Di* . . . was clearly recognizable as the Christian God" (215).

5. "Striking similarities exist between the Hebrew and the Chinese approach to moral truth."

Thong finds in ancient Chinese documents a high regard for public and private morality that resembles some of the commandments given by God in the Old Testament.

6. "The ancient rulers of China understood and set forth a godly way of ruling the people."

Drawing upon early documents, Thong describes the first rulers of China as humble worshipers of *Shang Di* who saw themselves merely as stewards of the authority bestowed on them by God, and who sought the welfare of their people.

By contrast, later rulers, beginning with the First Emperor (died 221 B.C.), forsook the worship of *Shang Di* and committed themselves to following the dragon as a symbol of self-seeking lust for raw power—a tradition that Thong implies has persisted to modern times.

The chapter "Enter the Dragon" explains how the dragon became a prominent symbol in Chinese culture, and how it has been a part of the long decline from the proper worship of

*Shang Di*. His analysis of “dragon power” and of why Chinese tend to submit to authoritarian rule is quite compelling.

7. “Chinese historical records appear to confirm some key astral events spoken of in the Bible.”

In a chapter entitled, “All Truth Is God’s Truth,” Thong discusses what he considers to be major and fundamental correspondences between the Biblical and ancient Chinese views of truth, particularly similarities between the *Dao* of Laozi’s *Dao De Jing* and the Logos of the Bible.

The “key astral events” to which Thong refers are two comets around the time of Jesus’ birth and a solar/lunar eclipse around the time of his crucifixion, which were noted by Chinese astronomers and interpreted by the reigning emperor as having cosmic significance.

The conclusion: The early Chinese had “an amazingly accurate knowledge of that one true God, whom the Chinese reverentially referred to as *Shang Di*.”

I have quoted the author, because he is quite careful to state his thesis in terms that seek to avoid the misunderstanding and excessive claims of some other writers with this point of view. For example, he is careful to state that “the Chinese were not a [c]hosen nation” in the same sense as Israel.” In his attempt to show the historical reliability of the Chinese classics, he says that “we do not intend to give more weight to the Chinese Classic than to Scripture. In fact, we firmly believe that the Bible is God’s special revelation to the world and that it is completely true” (20). He only wishes to use the Chinese writings as complementary sources on ancient history.

Thong begins by showing that the Hebrew Bible and Chinese historical writings can be considered accurate. He adduces much evidence especially for the reliability of the Chinese documents. He argues for an original monotheism held by all mankind before the Flood, which was then carried to the four corners of the globe by peoples dispersed after the Tower of Babel.

This knowledge was augmented by General Revelation—through nature, history, and conscience. General revelation “is meant to let us know that a sovereign, creator God truly does exist. Its purpose is to lead us to seek God and to discover His special revelation,” (37) which “takes precedence over general revelation” (39).

Although the earliest Chinese practiced a “pure” worship of *Shang Di*, over time elements of this were changed (such as not having the emperor himself slay the sacrificial animal) and later even the border sacrifice was debased with the worship of other spirits.

This all-important ritual was restored to its pristine purity by the first Ming emperor in the early 14th century.

Thong states his purpose early: That others may “understand, through the perspective of Chinese culture, the truth of the Bible and the faithfulness of God. In particular . . . that my fellow

Chinese will see that the God spoken of in the Bible and now worshipped throughout the world is the same God that our ancient forefathers revered” (Introduction).

Specifically, he wishes to dispel for Chinese the notion that to become a Christian is to submit to a Western religion; rather, it is to return to the true religion of one’s ancestors. Indeed, “there is no conflict between their [i.e., the Chinese] cultural heritage and the Bible” (327).

How convincing will be his assertion of the identity of ancient Chinese views of God and the God of the Bible will depend upon the degree to which one accepts his interpretation of various aspects of ancient Chinese language and culture, and his correspondence of these with Christian beliefs. In my opinion, he has avoided some of the extreme claims of earlier attempts to “reconcile” Chinese culture with the Bible.

On the other hand, he has fallen victim to his own assumptions at numerous points, leading him to find things that may not be in the original text; to make sweeping claims about the identity of the *Shang Di* of the Chinese classics and the God of the Bible; to call Christian faith the “faith of [his] fathers;” to give us an idealized version of Chinese history since the Shang era; to present a disputed interpretation of the *Dao De Jing*—one that has been questioned by a large number of Chinese scholars, both Christian and non-Christian—and to engage in really unnecessary and almost slanderous criticism of those who disagree with his missionary heroes and, by implication, with him.

Chapter 6, on the Magi from the West, is the low point of the book, and reveals a theological and historical naiveté—not to mention either ignorance of, or an unwillingness to pay attention to, the considered opinions of those who held—or hold—a different opinion. Did (do) they not also “love China” and respect Chinese culture? Is his interpretation the only one to which honorable Christians who care for the progress of the Gospel in China can assent?

Thong shows the relevance of the controversy today by noting that some Chinese Bibles use *Shang Di* to translate *Elohim* and *Theos* and others use *Shen*. He has already tried to demonstrate that only *Shang Di* will do, of course, but some Protestant scholars have taken another view, and they are not all as ignorant, as disrespectful of Chinese culture, and as lacking in integrity as Thong very strongly asserts. In fact, there are very valid theological and linguistic reasons for preferring *Shen* to *Shang Di*, but Thong does not seem to be aware of these. (See below.)

As one who highly appreciates both the Four Books of the Confucian canon and Laozi’s *Dao De Jing*, and who also thinks that *Shen* is a more apt translation of *Elohim* and *Theos*, I find Thong’s attitude difficult to take.<sup>5</sup>

*Faith of Our Fathers* will appeal to Chinese who are seeking the truth and who will be glad to know that their ancestors believed in a supreme being who had many of the characteristics of the God described in the Old Testament.

---

<sup>5</sup> The author supervised the translation of the Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament into Chinese, and has published a book comparing Confucius and Christ, which is available in Chinese.

It may receive a less enthusiastic welcome from those who value a critical handling of historical sources and a balanced view of Chinese history since the Zhou era; expect fair treatment of differing opinions and those who hold them; or have training in theology, church history, or the Biblical languages.

### **Some Questions and Critical Observations**

Did Confucius write the commentary on the Classic of Changes (20)?

Did Confucius believe that God was Creator (21)?

He repeatedly appears to equate the reliability of the Bible and ancient Chinese documents (e.g., 23).

Thong intersperses biblical and Chinese classical texts to illustrate what he sees as correspondences; some of these fit, and some seem a bit far-fetched and strained. It appears that Thong will sometimes be willing make the evidence fit his thesis even when it does not manifestly match.

Was Sima Qian “[i]nterested in presenting history because it gives insights into man’s relationship with the Creator God” (29)? The letter quoted does not say so.

Can we credit a story that the written language of China was created in 2700 B.C.?

Was “God’s good intention [for Adam and Eve] to become more like Him, through a practical knowledge of good and evil . . .?” Is it true that “God wanted them to gain experiential knowledge of good or happiness and evil or misery” (60)?

Did the early Chinese really understand “that righteousness comes with a price, and that price is the life of the sacrificial lamb because a person on his own cannot attain or achieve righteousness” (68)?

Does the flower radical in the word “di” really point to the meaning Creator God?

Does the argument from silence prove that Shang Di was considered eternal? The texts cited do not (89-90). The same is true for immutability (90), all-knowing (92), infinite (93-94), and loving (95).

There is no notion of plurality in the concept of *Shang Di* or *Di* or Heaven, as there is in the Hebrew concept of God, even in the opening verses of Genesis, where the word for God is plural *Elohim*; the Spirit of God is referred to as distinct from God—and God says, “Let us make man in our own image.” This is not to mention other hints at some sort of plurality God in other places of the Old Testament, not to speak of the New Testament.

Is it true that “the good news of God’s provision to reconcile mankind to Himself is not solely a Christian concept” (104)?

Is God “the Father of all” (104)?

Does the word (*li*) translated as “made” in “made the heavens” actually mean that (130)?

Were the “instructions God gave to the Hebrew people about their sacrifices to Him . . . the same” as those given for the great border sacrifices (135)?

Thong repeatedly emphasizes that *Shang Di* or *Di* is qualitatively superior to other spirits (*shen*), which are lower. But the word *shen* is used in the compound translated as “Sovereign Spirit” (*Huang Shen*) in the “Song of Comforting Peace” and elsewhere in texts in this book (136, 144). Similarly, in the imprecation against potential covenant breakers, “the intelligent spirits” (*ming shen*) were invoked as punishing agents.

Then, in the chapter called “God’s Country”—*Shen Zhou*—he clearly identifies “God” with *Shen*. This is a glaring and stunning contradiction to his earlier insistence that *Shang Di* and *Shen* (usually considered plural) are not in the same category of being. It greatly weakens his harsh criticism of those who think that *Shen* is a more appropriate translation of the Greek *Theos*.

After sacrificing to *Di*, the emperor also offered sacrifices of wine to “the secondary tablets to the east and west” of that tablet to *Di* (140). How does this compare with the commandment in Exodus to worship only God and not to anyone else?

And how do we handle the fact—not mentioned by the author—that the Shang emperors practiced human sacrifice along with their supposedly “pure” worship of *Shang Di*?

Does the word translated “everlasting” (*jiu chang*) in the “Song of Pure Peace” really mean eternal, or merely “very long” (144)?

Change of names often went with covenants. The Chinese examples given have nothing to do with covenants. Another strained parallel (165)?

Does the song that Thong quotes on 273-274 say that God “brought light to the world”? That word “light” does not appear, nor does the idea of light.

Is it true, as Legge believed, that “the Chinese had worshipped a monotheistic Deity called *Shang Di*, who was clearly recognizable as the Christian God” (215)? Should we make a distinction between the notion of a single supreme being which both the Old Testament and the Chinese classics contain and the Triune God revealed in the distinctively Christian Scriptures—that is, the New Testament, and the Old Testament interpreted in the light of the apostolic revelation?

What does it mean to say—as Thong approvingly quotes Legge—that the Chinese “do know God”? Or as he himself states, “Like the nation of Israel, the ancient Chinese knew this One True God” (273).

The Apostle Paul says that the Gentiles “knew God” from observing “the things that are made,” but “did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Romans 1:21). Indeed, they “suppressed the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18).

In 1 Corinthians, he wrote, “in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God” (1:21)—and this was in reference to Hellenistic Greeks, who had by then developed a sort

of monotheism similar to that Thong ascribes to the ancient Chinese. In Ephesians, he exhorted the believers not to walk “as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (4:17-18).

Jesus himself, in his prayer to the Father, declared, “O Righteous Father, the world has not known You” (John 17:25).

Throughout the book, Thong seems to confuse several possible meanings of “know” and “worship.” In what sense did the ancient Chinese “know” and “worship” the one true and living God? Yes, they did “know about” a being with some attributes similar to those of the God revealed in the Bible. But did they “know” him? The Scriptures say No. Yes, they did “worship” *Shang Di*, but was this true worship of God that the Bible enjoins?

If they did truly “know and worship” God, then they were saved. But how do we square this conclusion with their practice of human sacrifice and their worship of other, lesser, “gods”?

Is Thong aware of the fundamental Roman Catholic (and thus Jesuit) approach to other religions, based on the theology of Thomas Aquinas—an approach that differs considerably from that of the Protestant Reformers?

When the author criticizes anti-Jesuit popes and emissaries who “condemned all the Chinese emperors to burning in hell” (205), does he do so on the grounds of their ineffective evangelism, or from a belief that the emperors, with their supposed knowledge of the true God, were not in danger of God’s eternal judgment? It makes a difference.

Does he realize that the Dominicans and Franciscans were opposing rituals in honor of ancestors from the standpoint of those who worked almost exclusively among the masses, whose view of these rites differed drastically from those of the emperor and the educated elite among whom the Jesuits worked?

Indeed, despite the higher rating for accuracy accorded ancient Chinese documents now, can we consider them as reliable as Thong does throughout *Faith of Our Fathers*? A great part of his historical reconstruction depends upon the assumption that accounts of the earliest rulers, and even of later history, are untainted by error or bias.

Thong seems to think that a strong centralized power, in which the leader is able to mobilize the entire nation at will, is a good form of government. Though the Bible does not criticize monarchy outright, it does contain both examples and principles that would make one doubt the wisdom of the sort of total power that Thong seems to approve of—at least when wielded by the “good” emperors of China’s golden age. Can we believe that these kings were really as good as they are made out to be?

Thong follows Yuan Zhiming’s reading of later Chinese history, which has been widely criticized as naïve, simplistic, and inaccurate.

In “All Truth Is God’s Truth,” Thong invokes the authority of renowned scientist, philosopher, and essayist, Francis Bacon, and quotes his memorable statement that “there are two books before us to study . . .; first, the volume of Scriptures . . .; then the volume of the Creatures.”

This “two books” theory has exercised great influence, but lacks biblical warrant, and must be used with care. Thong largely shows discernment in his treatment of “all truth is God’s truth,” but—at least in my opinion—goes too far at a number of points to try to show exact correspondence between traditional Chinese and Christians concepts of truth.

Some of the quotations from the Bible and from the *Dao De Jing* do not seem to me to match as closely as Thong seems to think. For example: His equation of “antiquity” (*gu*) with “eternity” (305); the translation of *sheng ren* (holy man) as “the Holy One” (306); finding “grace and gentleness” in *Dao De Jing* 55:1-2 (306); putting *Dao De Jing* 35:3 under the category of “Truth is Revealed” (309).

Here he also accepts Yuan’s interpretation of the *Dao De Jing*, which has been rejected by almost all Chinese scholars, both Christian and non-Christian. I have made a preliminary study of the Laozi’s concept of the *Dao* as it relates to the Logos of the Bible. Though there are many similarities, there are even more differences. I am not qualified to pronounce on this matter, but the opinions of all the Chinese experts in this field whom I consulted would seem to make Yuan’s interpretation doubtful, at least.

While I found his explanation of the astral phenomena around the time of the birth of Christ really fascinating, I wonder how he knows that when the Magi reached Jerusalem “the star was no longer visible” to them. It is an inference with some possibility, but this assumption is at the heart of his understanding of two different appearances in the heavens.

### ***Shen and Shang Di***

Thong presents the case for *Shang Di* as the proper translation of *Elohim* and *Theos*, but there are weaknesses in this position, and reasons why *Shen* might be more appropriate. This is a complex matter, but here is a brief summary:

As noted above, *Shang Di* contains no hint of plurality in the Godhead. Thus, in passages of the Bible where *Theos* must refer to the entire Godhead and thus allow for plurality, *Shang Di* simply will not do. Furthermore, in places like John 1:1-3, to name only one of many, the use of *Shang Di* hopelessly muddles the concept of the Trinity and causes confusion as to the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Since the Trinity is a fundamental concept (though the word is not used) in the Scriptures, this is no small matter.

*Shang Di* is a personal name; it designates one particular being; it is not a generic term for deity. But at least Greek *theos*, and perhaps also Hebrew *Elohim* (which is the plural of *el*) are generic terms, which can refer to any and all sorts of “gods.” Greek philosophy, the Greek translation of the old Testament, and the Greek New Testament, use *Theos* almost exclusively to refer to the one true and living God, the Creator, Sustainer, and Savior of the world. That is, the Bible takes a word that—like *shen*—has a number of possible meanings and pours new significance into that word.

The fact that *Shang Di* is a particular name for a particular deity—albeit the supreme one—among the Chinese is a fatal objection to its being superior as a translation of *theos* (and probably also *Elohim*), despite its strong attraction for Chinese who want to link the Christian faith with their cultural heritage.

### **Conclusion**

In short, though I really enjoyed reading *Faith of Our Fathers*, though I believe that it will lead many Chinese to faith in Christ, and I learned a great deal from it, I cannot recommend it wholeheartedly, because of the number and nature of its weaknesses.

That is not to say that many will not benefit from Thong's years of hard work, clear presentation of the Christian message, and evident love for his people and his culture.

**Getting Saved in America:  
Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience  
By Carolyn Chen**

Chen, Carolyn. *Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience*.  
Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Though this book deals only with immigrants from Taiwan to the United States, it has a much wider application, since many of the issues raised affect immigrants from Mainland China also.

*Getting Saved in America* “tells a story of how people become religious by becoming American.” The author focuses almost entirely upon immigrants from Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s, which is when many of the Chinese churches in the United States began as Bible study groups initiated by these highly-educated newcomers. Anyone working with, or wanting to understand, Chinese churches in America today should read her carefully-wrought study, for it explains much.

When the first large batch of students left Taiwan to study in the U.S., they had definite notions of both “Buddhism” and Christianity. The former was associated with popular religion, with its multiple gods, ghosts, and ancestors, to whom worship must be given; to these young moderns, it all seemed superstitious. Christianity, though espoused by many educated middle-class folk in Taiwan, also appeared behind the times; besides, it was a Western religion.

“Buddhism” was wrapped up in society so much that it was an “embedded” religion, inextricably entwined with family, custom and tradition. It was something you did at the temple or before the household shrine, not a life to be lived. Christianity, likewise, did not impose demands, mostly because the Christians were not aggressive in evangelism or personal witness. They left you alone.

All that changed, along with pretty much everything else, when they landed at the airport. Cut off from family ties, the newcomers struggled to find a new identity in a strange and daunting environment. There was no one to help you find a job, or navigate the new legal, medical, and educational systems. Language remained a barrier for most, including professional men who had known success at home but felt like ignorant children in the new country.

Then you discover that some of your professors are Christians. That challenges your belief that Christianity belongs to an outmoded, pre-modern superstitious worldview. Furthermore, American Christians showed kindness and offered to help. More importantly, Christians from

Taiwan, who were also highly educated, reached out with practical assistance, friendship, and a new perspective on life.

At first with curiosity, then with growing comfort, you found a new community to replace that large family network that had given support when you needed it back in Taiwan. Everyone was a “brother” or “sister,” “uncle” or “auntie.” They all believed in a heavenly Father who would take care of them, and worshiped Jesus as not only Lord and Savior, but also Elder Brother, always there to help and to guide.

The worship was a bit strange, of course, but lunch afterwards was free, and you could meet people who would introduce you to others who could help you find housing, a doctor or dentist, customers, or a job. The more you understood the Bible, the more it seemed to make sense. Perhaps it was, as they all claimed, the true revelation of the only God. At least the moral standard sounded a lot like the old Confucian values—hard work, thrift, and, above all, respect for parents and elders.

For, as tough as it was to succeed in this country, it was even harder to bring up your children here. Pretty soon, they were beginning to learn American ways. When you understood what they were saying, you didn’t like what you heard. They want to play; they don’t want to work hard; they demand freedom; they don’t show respect. Worst of all, their friends are into dating (in high school and college already!), alcohol, and even drugs. Why can’t they do what I tell them? Don’t they realize that it’s all about studying hard, getting good grades, gaining admission to the best universities, going to graduate school, finding a high-paying job, and then marrying someone who could help advance your career?

At least in the church you met like-minded folks with traditional morals. If your kids would hang out with the youth there, they would learn that God wants them to conform to traditional Taiwanese expectations. The new “family” of Christians supported you in your efforts to protect your offspring from an evil society that threatened to ruin them and dash your hopes for them.

As time went on, you began to see that if there is a God, and if he is holy, then you have a problem: you are not good enough to stand before his judgment. It’s not just about going through rituals; it’s about knowing, loving, and serving an almighty, transcendent Being. Maybe you’re not as good as you previously thought. Maybe Jesus is God’s Son, who died for our sins. What began as a very pragmatic program of gaining community and practical help began to transform your life.

Women found added incentives: If God is our Father and Christians our family, then they don’t have to derive their identity from being a member of a demanding earthly family. If everybody is equal in Christ, then you don’t have to obey your mother-in-law, bear a son, spend all your time in the kitchen, or orient your life around husband and kids. You can be free to become your own,

independent person, with your own new and autonomous identity. Service in the church takes the place of family obligations.

For men, it is different. Mostly because of their lack of proficiency in the English language, they discover that they can't advance in their profession as well as at home in Taiwan. There's no network of older relatives and their connections to help you get a job. You sense that white Americans look down on you and don't accept you as an equal. Once dependent upon success at work for your identity, you begin to question that standard of evaluation.

Christianity offers a new identity: child of God, member of the family of God, person of worth, regardless of success or failure in your career. Positions of leadership in the church are open to men, giving them status in a Taiwanese community which they lack in the larger Caucasian society.

Both men and women experience a radical change in world view. A transcendent God who promises eternal bliss to his followers and threatens everlasting misery to those who reject him requires the highest standards of moral probity, not just in outward behavior, but in the heart. Reading the Bible (though not as often as the pastor says you should), listening to sermons, attending Bible studies, praying—all these help form new habits of internal discipline that bridle the selfish passions we all struggle to control.

Though it's hard to break into "American" (i.e., white) society, you realize that your church belongs to the larger evangelical Christian presence in America. As your English improves, you listen to sermons, watch TV programs, attend conferences, and enjoy Christian music, all the while forging a sense of belonging to a very significant segment of "American" culture, with which you increasingly identify yourself. In short, you become "religious" by moving to America, and "American" by becoming Christian. Or Buddhist.

A small minority of Taiwanese immigrants turn to Buddhism to construct a new "American" identity. Cut off from the popular religion which permeates Taiwanese society, they stop going to the temple to worship gods; most don't even erect the sort of household shrine that is ubiquitous in Taiwan. After all, you are an educated, modern person now, living in the most "modern" nation on earth.

But then you encounter Taiwanese Christians. They are not at all like the few relatively tame churchgoers you may have known back home. Here, inspired with evangelistic zeal, they invite you over and over to come to church to find the only true God. Worse, they accuse you of being superstitious because you claim to be "Buddhist." Though your "Buddhism" didn't mean much to you before, out of irritation at these pesky Christians you begin to re-examine the traditional faith of most Chinese. (At least white American Christians don't pressure you to believe. If you

can get over the language barrier, it's much easier to relate to them than to Chinese-speaking Christians.)

Here in America, however, you find something different—a modern, scientific, and increasingly “American” religion. The temple offers classes on “pure” Buddhism, which is not like what you knew before. The focus is not on rituals to appease gods but learning how to transform your inner self. Since Buddhism teaches that our problems come from desires that flow from the illusion that both we and this world are permanent, we need to retrain our minds to see the evanescence of it all, and to calm our emotions by constant “practice” of meditation, chanting, and quiet that re-orient the self away from the passions of this life towards an inner space where tranquility reigns.

American Buddhists try hard to reach out to whites and others with this same message and engage in acts of social welfare; in this way, they forge an “American” identity. True, the temples don't offer the close community one finds in the Christian church, and the degree of assimilation with the dominant culture is relatively low, but at least it's less demanding than being a Christian.

This careful study of an evangelical Chinese church and a prominent Buddhist temple in Southern California builds upon, and refers often to, the work of other sociologists of immigrant religion in China, including Yang Fenggang (whose Chinese Christians in America is reviewed in these pages). As both popular religion, “pure” Buddhism, and Confucianism continue to experience resurgence in China, and as PRCs settle down in the U.S., the book's relevance for understanding immigrants from China will become even more evident than it is already. For example, I know several families from China whose “Americanized” kids are driving them crazy.

(For some possible implications of this book for Christian ministry, go to [www.chinainstitute.org](http://www.chinainstitute.org))

## **Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity**

**Edited by Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan H. Anderson**

Yang, Fenggang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan H. Anderson, eds. *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*. Boston, MA: Brill, 2017. Global and Pentecostal Studies, Volume 22.

This fine collection of essays grew out of a symposium organized by the editors titled “Global ReOrient: Chinese Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements in the Global East,” held November 1-3, 2013, at Purdue University. Most of the chapters were presented at papers though some have been added.

At the outset, I should say that *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* breaks new ground in our understanding of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity among Chinese around the world. It also provides valuable information and insight about large elements of Chinese Christianity that are not, strictly speaking, “Pentecostal” or even “charismatic.” On the whole, these chapters give a pretty good overview of much of Chinese Protestantism, though its focus on P/CC means that one must turn to other books, such as *Surviving the State, Remaking the Church*, by Li Ma and Jin Li, and *China’s Urban Christians*, by Brent Fulton, for fuller treatments of the new urban churches.<sup>6</sup>

For an evaluation of Chinese Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, see <http://www.reachingchineseworldwide.org/blog/2018/3/27/global-chinese-pentecostal-and-charismatic-christianity-a-response>.

Note: At times, I shall use P/CC as an abbreviation for Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity.

### **Overview**

#### ***Pentecostals and Charismatics among Chinese Christians: An Introduction***

Noting the dramatic rise in conversions to Christianity in China since 1950, as well as the huge growth in Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity around the world, the editors say that they intend to study “Pentecostals and charismatics in global China, which includes not only China proper but also Chinese societies and diasporas around the globe that are closely connected in interwoven networks. We examine various cases in diverse localities in historical, contemporary, social, political, cultural, and religious contests” (1).

---

<sup>6</sup> Both of these are in the series, *Studies in Chinese Christianity*, co-edited by Carol Lee Hamrin and G. Wright Doyle, published by Wipf & Stock under their Pickwick Publications imprint. For a complete list of the works in the series, go to <https://wipfandstock.com/catalog/series/view/id/49/>.

Difficulties hinder accurate research. One of them is just how to define the terms “Pentecostal” and “charismatic,” since both English and Chinese terms are imprecise and fluid. “As a working definition, ‘Pentecostalism’ may be considered to include churches and movements which, despite significant differences, share a family resemblance in that they emphasize the miraculous working of the Spirit through the practice of spiritual gifts, especially healing and speaking in tongues” (4).

I disagree with that definition, since Pentecostal theology believes that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is a distinct work of grace, different from and subsequent to, regeneration (conversion, being born again, etc.), with speaking in tongues as its sign. The other characteristics they name are common to both Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity.

The book tries to describe the varieties and complexities of Chinese P/CC and trace its distinctiveness within Global P/CC. Chinese P/CC has “a distinctly Chinese form that confronts sickness, misfortune, and evil spirits, and lives constantly in expectation of the miraculous. In doing so, Chinese Christianity has largely rejected the modernizing Social Gospel . . . that was the legacy of many Western missionaries . . .” On the other hand, in Wenzhou, “the so-called ‘boss Christians’ with their emphasis on God’s blessing resulting in economic success are reminiscent of the prosperity gospel present in Pentecostalism in other parts of the world” (5).

Only some Chinese Christians would identify themselves as Pentecostals. They prefer the term *ling’en pai*, of the spiritual gifts movement. Even here, however, some could be called “heavy” *ling-en*, “which means placing some of the Spirit-gifts at the center of their belief and practice”; these can be called charismatics. Others are “light” *ling-en*, which means “occasionally having some of the Spirit-gifts” (6).

“The light *ling’en* is very common among Chinese Christians, in such forms as occasional miraculous healing, occasional glossolalia, or occasional Spirit-moved crying in thanksgiving or repentance, or occasional revelation in dreams or through some other signs” (6). There are some Pentecostals, like the congregations associated with the Assemblies of God denomination founded in the United States and the True Jesus Church.

Importantly, however, if we use Chinese terminology, many contemporary congregations are “charismatic” (i.e., associated with heavy *ling’en*), not “Pentecostal,” and these charismatics do not appear to be the majority of Chinese Christians (7).

Some of the influential leaders who did not join the official church after the Communist revolution were opposed to the charismatic movement, and their position still carries weight. “In addition, many Chinese Christian intellectuals, especially those in seminaries and divinity schools, have some inclination toward Confucian sentiments that favor order, rules, rationality, and sobriety. For them, Pentecostal or charismatic practices appear to be chaotic and hard to control” (8).

“Outside of China proper, some revivalists like Yuan Zhiming and Zhang Boli are open to charismatic practices, while the magazine *Life Quarterly*, edited near Chicago but distributed widely in China, maintains a fundamentalist, anti-Pentecostal and anti-charismatic sentiment.” (10 Here the authors rightly say that the late Jonathan Chao tried to attract Chinese Christians to the Reformed tradition, but wrongly state that he was anti-charismatic.

Their conclusion: “Overall, . . . we may say, tentatively, there are a few Pentecostals, a few more charismatics (but not necessarily the majority of Chinese Christians) and a growing number of Christians who do not reject certain charismatic practices” (10).

## **Part 1**

### **Historical, Global, and Local Contexts**

#### **Chapter One: “Contextualizing the Contemporary Pentecostal Movement in China” by Donald E. Miller**

“Pentecostalism is not growing in China in the same exponential way that it is exploding in many parts of the global south, and especially Africa. There are house-church movements that are Pentecostal, and, more recently, individual house churches have been influenced by Pentecostals from Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, and elsewhere . . . [T]here are house churches that affirm some elements of the Pentecostal tradition, such as healing and, on occasions, speaking in tongues and deliverance from demons, but they are not overtly Pentecostal in other ways” (18).

There follows an excellent section of “Observations Regarding the House-Church Movement.” All are growing except the rural congregations, which have lost members who migrated to the cities. On his visits to China, Miller was surprised by “the negative attitude toward Pentecostals . . . among many urban house church-leaders” (20). He estimates that the number of Pentecostal house-church members may be “no more than 10 percent in Shanghai and Beijing. Especially among educated professionals, Pentecostals are viewed as emotional and too noisy in their worship, and therefore give a bad name to Christianity” (20). They also believe that much of P/CC has the flavor of shamanistic folk religion.

In the cities, people are looking for personal peace amidst massive social change and psychological pressure. Belonging to a close-knit Christian community helps to meet this need. Conversions and new ideas also come from students who professed faith while in the West, “but 90 percent fall away from this commitment when they return home” (21). One reason may be that they encounter more traditional worship in Chinese churches than in the West. Church splits seem to involve generational differences, with younger people preferring a livelier form of worship sometimes characterized by charismatic congregations.

His conclusion is that “what is happening in house churches in the major cities of China is new, but it does not seem to be particularly Pentecostal, nor is it being stimulated by outside

missionaries to any great degree” (31). Western labels do not necessarily apply to China, where the situation is fluid and complex, and many congregations feature some things associated with PC/C but without the same emphases.

### **Chapter Two: “Chinese Ecstatic Millenarian Folk Religion with Pentecostal Christian Characteristics?” by Daniel H. Bays**

Bays surveys the history of P/CC in China since its first introduction by Western missionaries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He finds that these movements have always been a mixture of Western P/CC and local traditions, including millenarianism. This mix often results in splits, the formation of new groups, and the disruption of existing church and even social structures, as some groups combine religious fervor with an intense expectation of the coming of the end. Naturally, governments fear such ideas, since they have in the past led to rebellions like the Taiping rebellion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The combination of Western Christian ideas and practices with local Chinese religious traditions and habits has resulted in a new form of P/CC, one that is hard to define with Western labels.

### **Chapter Three: “Pentecostalism Comes to China: Laying the Foundations for a Chinese Version of Christianity” by J. Gordon Melton**

The first Pentecostal missionaries to China were Thomas J. McIntosh and the Rev. Alfred G. Garr with his wife, Lillian. Like other Pentecostal missionaries, they taught a three-stage view of Christian life: “salvation,” that is, believing in Christ; sanctification; and the baptism with the Spirit, an empowering for service. Several of them believed that when they received that “baptism with the Holy Spirit,” God had given them supernatural ability to speak in foreign tongues, including Chinese. They went to China on their own initiative, not being sent by an organized denomination.

When they arrived in China, they discovered that, in fact, they could not understand or speak the language, and came to believe that speaking in an unknown tongue was primarily for their own spiritual edification. They also discovered that most—though not all—Western missionaries were not receptive to their new teaching.

Very importantly, however, they did find a warm reception among Chinese Christians, whom they then empowered to lead local churches. Thus, Pentecostal Christianity in China became an indigenous, Chinese-led movement.

Pentecostal missionaries began arriving in force, so that by “1912, Pentecostalism was represented in all parts of China,” despite opposition from traditional missionaries and their societies, “partly because the “Pentecostal message split the missionary team” (52). By 1914, all the Pentecostals were totally cut off and isolated from the mainstream of Chinese Protestantism” (53).

Within the movement splits soon occurred. Perhaps most significant for China was the Oneness Movement, which focused on Jesus alone as God.<sup>7</sup> Through the influence of Norwegian Bernt Berntsen, this became the guiding theology of the True Jesus Church, founded by Wei Enbo and Zhang Lingsheng. The TJC “would become the cutting edge of the Pentecostal movement over the next generation and go on to become the largest Chinese Pentecostal church, indeed one of the three largest Christian bodies, in the whole of China, and take the lead in spreading through the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia and beyond. In the process, it would establish both a singularly unique version of Pentecostalism and a textbook example of what would come to be identified in China as a ‘Three-Self Church,’ a Chinese-led ecclesiastical body that was truly self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating” (60).

#### **Chapter Four: Elitism and Poverty: Early Pentecostalism in Hong Kong (1907-1945), BY Connie Au**

Typically, in the early years of its development in the West, professional elites did not respond as warmly to Pentecostalism as those in the lower socio-economic strata. As a result, a gap typically existed between the majority of Pentecostals and the elites in their society.

In Hong Kong, however, “a group of elites who were members of a Congregational church founded by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (BABC FM). They left their wealthy church, where their fervent faith in revivalism was unacceptable, and started the Pentecostal Mission . . . among the downtrodden in the city, provided education for women, fought for tenants oppressed by high rents, and launched missions in remote villages. They also published a Chinese Pentecostal newspaper, Pentecostal Truth . . . Although the church was founded by the elites, it was for the poor and of the poor” (63).

This chapter tells the exciting story of that unique expression of Chinese Pentecostalism.

#### **Part 2**

#### **A Chinese Pentecostal Denomination: The True Jesus Church**

#### **Chapter Five: “Charismatic Crossings: The Transnational, Transdenominational Friendship of Bernt Berntsen and Wei Enbo” by Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye**

“The closeness between Berntsen and Wei in their personal relationship and in their churches is telling because it reveals the transnational exchange that played a key role in the development of Christianity in China in the early twentieth century. . . Wei’s True Jesus Church was both authentically Chinese and authentically Pentecostal, a direct descendant of Berntsen’s congregation and of the Los Angeles revival” that helped to birth the worldwide Pentecostal movement (92).

---

<sup>7</sup> In the early church, this was called the heresy of monarchical modalism.

At their first encounter, Berntsen washed Wei's feet in a gesture of humble Christian solidarity. Their families became good friends, the two men engaged in a business partnership, and their two churches in Beijing engaged in healing and other ministries together. Their intimate friendship surpassed most of the relationships between Western missionaries and Chinese in depth and reciprocity.

They had major theological and policy disagreements: Wei refused to repay a loan Berntsen had given him, and they split over the issue of baptism, but they remained friends. Equally important was their agreement on important points of theology and practice, including baptism by immersion, foot-washing, and rites in the name of Jesus only.

The TJC developed some distinctive beliefs, however, including the conviction that the Western churches were in error and, in fact, not "true" churches at all.

What held Berntsen and Wei together was their zeal for the gospel and their hunger for direct experiences with God through visions, signs, and wonders.

### **Chapter Six: "Taming the Spirit by Appropriating Indigenous Culture: An Ethnographic Study of the True Jesus Christ as Confucian-Style Pentecostalism" by Ke-hsien Huang**

Pentecostalism emphasizes "the free agency of individual believers." This creates a problem in Chinese society: "How can the maintenance of religious order be tackled in a religion like Pentecostalism?" (119).

The author's answer is that "local culture . . . can be utilized to tame the otherwise freewheeling Spirit among the laity and consolidate leadership." Specifically, typical Pentecostal "performances" have been toned-down and "downplayed in three ways: (1) worship services have been shaped as a Confucian-style educational venue with an emphasis on silence and order; (2) the base of religious legitimacy has shifted from God-given spiritual capability to the literati-style ability to memorize canons; and (3) spiritual practices are deliberately assigned to female partners along with moral teachings" (119).

"Pentecostalism is characterized by its ability to adapt to local cultures. The appropriation of spiritual cosmologies and ritual practices from indigenous culture can be seen in many Pentecostal faiths" around the world (119). The True Jesus Church (TJC) offers a prime example of this feature of Pentecostalism in China.

Since Confucianism, with its emphasis upon ethics and civility, is still central to Chinese culture, "every religious group that hopes to be accepted by Chinese society accommodates itself to Confucianism in one way or another. Christianity is no exception" (121). This stunning statement should give everyone pause: How much of Chinese Christianity is "Christian?"

In the TJC, worship services are adapted to Confucianism by (1) "the segregation of different social groups, including men and women; (2) "the presentation and interpretation of classic text," with sermons being filled with quotations from the Bible; "(3) pedagogy"; and (4) "an emphasis

on self-control.” Even speaking in tongues “is repetitive and not high-pitched and has a more or less uniform style” (127).

Leadership legitimacy rests upon both spiritual gifts and the mastery of classic texts, especially the Bible but also standard TJC documents by the founder, Isaac Wei. Women play a prominent role, both in teaching and ministering to other women and in prayer for healing.

In sum, Confucianism has reshaped traditional Pentecostal practices to make this faith acceptable to Chinese.

### **Chapter Seven: “Glossalia and Church Identity: The Role of Sound in the Making of a Chinese Pentecostal-Charismatic Church,” by Yen-zen Tsai**

Despite all the variations among Pentecostal and charismatic Christians, “glossolalia or speaking in tongues [is] the trait most widely shared by these groups. It is a powerful experience that almost all charismatic Christians have recognized, and the defining feature that has congregated them into a group called Pentecostals”—or, one might add, charismatics (139).

This practice is not just an individual matter, but “a public discourse that concerns a church community” (140). “On the communal level, this ‘expected and normative’ ritual ‘helps to unite [worshippers] emotionally and spiritually.’” Through this practice, “the members of the . . . church obtain a ‘sense of unity with God, which in turn contributes to action that sustains and nurtures community life” (141).

In the TJC, speaking in tongues is an indispensable sign that one has received the baptism with the Holy Spirit and is, therefore “saved.” “When—and when only—one speaks in tongues, one becomes a true member in and of the True Church” (145). For many, receiving this gift marked the beginning of a new life with God and the start of the transformation of character.

This one phenomenon stands at the center of TJC teaching and practice.

## **Part 3**

### **Pentecostal or Non-Pentecostal: Self-Identity and Scholarly Observation**

#### **Chapter Eight: “Spirituality and Spiritual Practice: Is the Local Church Pentecostal?” by Jiayin Hu**

Originally founded by Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng), the “Little Flock” and its successor movement under Witness Lee, the Local Church (LC), is “perhaps the most influential independent Chinese Christian group to originate during” the same period that saw the rise of indigenous movements like the Jesus Family and the True Jesus Church. It has “transcended racial, national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries.” The movement has some features, such as “calling on the name of the Lord” and “pray-reading,” that have led people to identify it as Pentecostal, but this is not correct.

Nee “did not oppose divine healing or speaking in tongues, nor did he promote or exalt such miraculous gifts. Rather, he reminded believers to be cautious of miraculous phenomena because they could have come from the divine Spirit as well as from the human soul.” The movement’s influence in mainland China has grown immensely since the 1980s, partly because of the smuggling of Bibles and religious literature into the hinterland.

The “Shouters” are an offshoot of the movement, consisting of people who “claim to be faithful to Witness Lee’s ministry but who distort Lee’s teachings and have no true relationship with the LC” (167).

The LC stands within the broader evangelical movement with its “emphasis on biblical authority, of the great mystics’ and pietists’ concern for the inner life, of the millennia-old expectation of a New Age, and of born-again, experimental religion.” They do not emphasize “signs and wonders, speaking in tongues, Spirit baptism, and miraculous healing” (168).

This excellent article includes a fine discussion of the LC teachings on baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, being filled with the Holy Spirit, as well as its distinctive practices of “calling on the name of the Lord,” pray-reading-, and prophesying.

### **Chapter Nine: “Are Chinese Christians Pentecostal? A Catholic Reading of Pentecostal Influence on Chinese Christians” by Michel Chambon**

In a wide-ranging article, the author looks at both Protestant and Roman Catholic experiences of P/CC. He shows how both local and global contexts impact the reception and growth of P/CC in each case, how overseas missionaries and other exposure to P/CC have influenced Chinese believers and even bestowed greater prestige upon their “novel” beliefs and practices, and how the ecclesiastical differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics have fostered very different forms of P/CC within each group.

P/CC experienced rapid growth after its first introduction into China in recent decades; since then, there has been a noticeable decline, though very strong elements remain. These have become an apparently permanent feature in both Protestant and Roman Catholic (RC) circles, though taking different forms. The stronger organization of the RCs restricts P/CC to be recognized, and highly supervised, smaller groups. These, however, possess great vitality.

P/CC taps into not only the great interest in all things Western after about 1980 (until recently) and the existing beliefs and practices of popular pagan religion. Indeed, the author repeatedly points out the close connection between popular religion and the emotional and very pragmatic aspects of P/CC. As a result, there is a real fear of heterodoxy.

In almost every case examined by the author, the introduction of P/CC has created disputes, discord, and division.

At the same time, the warmer, more emotional style of worship; real faith in God's willingness to hear prayer and provide healing; and, among RCs, the emphasis upon small group Bible study, have all brought renewal and fresh vitality.

### **Chapter Ten: "The 'Galilee of China': Pentecostals without Pentecostalism" by Yi Liu**

This chapter begins with an introductory study of Christianity in Henan Province; after that "the author argues that Pentecostalism is more like a model for understanding the Christian revival in contemporary China, rather than a defining feature of the churches" (201). "China is too large and diverse to be treated as a single unit, so research should adopt a more local perspective" (201). This chapter focuses on Nanyang Prefecture, known widely as "the next of house churches" (201).

The work of the China Inland Mission and Norwegian missionaries laid the foundation. In the early twentieth century, Jonathan Goforth and Marie Monsen "led great revivals . . . with a strong emphasis on born-again experiences, which became the seeds for revivals in the 1980s and 1990s" (202). China also has the fastest-growing Christian population. Three large networks took root here and then spread across the nation: the Word of Life Church (Shengming Zhidao Jiaohui, aka the Born-Again Movement, Chongsheng Pai), the Tanghe Church (Tanghe Tuanqi, aka China Gospel Fellowship, Zhonghua Fuyin Tuanqi) and the Fangcheng Church (Fangcheng Tuanqi, aka China for Christ, Huaren Guizhu Jiaohui).

These groups briefly formed the "Sinim Fellowship" in 1994. In 1998, they issued "A United Appeal by the Various Branches of the Chinese House Church" for better relations with the government. Perhaps more importantly, they "make a sevenfold confession of their faith in the Bible, the Trinity, Christ, salvation, the Holy Spirit, the church, and the last things" (205).

All these fellowships feature some Pentecostal or charismatic characteristics, though only the Fangcheng Church (China for Christ), influenced by American Pentecostal Dennis Balcombe, can be categorized as a Pentecostal or charismatic church (205). They all pray for healing, expect to have supernatural experiences of fellowship with God through the Spirit, and show a passion for evangelism. Their worship services are filled with joyful song and ardent prayer.

"A Pentecostal [Note: the author seems to use this term to include also "charismatic" Christianity] revival is always centered on charismatic leaders. To a great extent, the leader's presence or absence determines its ebb and flow" (205).

Due to the lasting influence of Goforth and Monsen, these churches "have a strong tradition of public confession and the born-again experience," though with variations of expression and expectations among them (207).

The author makes a useful distinction between the Chinese terms *shuling* (spiritual) and *ling'en* (Pentecostal). Millions of Christians in Henan would identify themselves with the former term, though not the latter.

Personally, I thought that this chapter was one of several that in themselves were “worth the price of the book,” as the saying goes.

#### **Part 4**

#### **New-Wave Charismatics in Chinese Societies**

#### **Chapter Eleven: “Christianity Fever” and Unregistered Churches in China” by Selena Y.Z. Su and Allan H. Anderson**

The authors have given us another survey chapter that sums up much of what we know about the rapid growth of unregistered Protestant churches in China over the past thirty years. They trace the background of these revivalistic groups to the early twentieth century Pentecostal missionaries and also to the independent movements associated with John Song (John Sung).

Several observers, including Xi Lian, note that the Chinese churches that emerged after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) share some similarities with the earlier revivalist movements: evangelistic zeal, biblical literalism, “charismatic ecstasies, and a fiery eschatology not occasionally tinged with nationalistic exuberance” (220). They are “revivalist (marked by ‘Pentecostal’ features like emotional prayer meetings, healing, and evangelism) and fundamentalist (marked by a conservative approach to morality, withdrawal from ‘worldly’ affairs like politics, and biblical literalism” (220).

The body of the chapter follows the history of these churches from the 1950s and the founding of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement through the “first generation” of leaders who suffered for their faith and still exercise great influence. The “second generation” “emerged in secret during the cultural revolution,” and transformed “Chinese house churches into a Chinese faith that was beyond the control of the state” (225). Some of these have accepted classic Pentecostal teaching, while all have been open to the supernatural workings of the Holy Spirit.

The “third generation,” or “third church” refers to the new urban congregations. They are better educated and less inclined to feature “Pentecostal” teaching or practices, except for singing modern songs. Some are openly anti-Pentecostal or anti-charismatic.

Very helpful discussions of the issue of registration with the government and the missionary movement among house churches conclude the chapter.

The only problem I have with this chapter is the facile way in which the term “Pentecostal” is employed to cover much of what we should term “charismatic.” It would almost appear as if the authors want to give the impression that most Chinese house churches are “Pentecostal,” though they try to provide some qualifiers that reflect the more careful statements by other authors in the volume.

## **Chapter Twelve: “China’s Patriotic Pentecostals” by Karrie J. Koesel**

Patriotic statements have long characterized the state-sponsored Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). This chapter, however, explores the patriotism of Pentecostal and charismatic churches, which are unregistered and “operate on the margins of the religious marketplace and outside the five official faiths; they are independent from the patriotic associations; . . . and their clergy do not attend compulsory patriotic education course, nor are they trained in government-approved seminaries. . . . Nevertheless, patriotism is present in many Chinese Pentecostal and charismatic churches. The purpose of this chapter is to explain why” (242).

At the outset, the author says that “unregistered Pentecostal and charismatic churches strategically construct patriotic identities that emphasize devotion to their country to help navigate the risky and repressive political climate in which they operate” (243). They do this for purely pragmatic reasons.

In addition to the usual reasons for coming under government scrutiny, Pentecostal and charismatic churches attract unusual attention because they “make up a sizable portion of unregistered house churches.” They “represent some of the largest and most robust forms of associational life operating outside of the state and its institutions. They are unofficial and voluntary organizations, often with dense horizontal networks that cut across salient cleavages; they have transnational linkages, are endowed with resources and dedicated supporters and are often led by charismatic leaders.” All this makes “them particularly good at mobilization,” which the government considers “extremely threatening” (246).

In particular, their strong ties to the global Pentecostal and charismatic movement arouse the government’s “fear that Western hostile forces may attempt to use Christianity to incite domestic instability in China” (246).

Finally, these churches also face “[i]ndirect pressure from Protestant churches affiliated with the TSPM as well as other (non-Pentecostal) house church leaders, all of whom tend to be critical of charismatic religious practices and organizations.” They are accused of being “poorly run organizations where a pastor’s behavior borders on rent-seeking and cult-like,” “being over-emotional and blindly pursuing gifts of the Holy Spirit at the expense of biblical teachings,” and of engaging in “expressive practices” that “are condemned as either reducing these churches to ‘low-level commercial entertainment,’ or are considered no better than folk superstitions, witchcraft, and heresy” (247).

No wonder their churches do all they can to legitimize themselves “as supportive citizens instead of subversive foreign agents”! (247).

These churches demonstrate their patriotism in various ways: Prayer for the nation during services, singing patriotic hymns, expressing patriotic sentiments on social media and websites, and engaging in social outreach programs to benefit the community.

In all this, we should note several things:

Some churches led by elite businessmen promote a “prosperity gospel” message that sees China’s rise and prosperity as good for individual Christians.

Many elites see China’s rise as good for the spread of the gospel worldwide.

Nationalistic sentiments have been successfully spread by the government, so that the general populace, including Christians, believe them.

Even if Christian churches do all they can to appear patriotic, it may not be enough to prevent government restrictions and even persecution.

This last fact has become apparent in recent months.

### **Chapter Thirteen: “The Catholic Charismatic Renewal in China,” by Rachel Xiaohong Zhu**

Compared with similar movements in Protestant churches, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) in mainland China has a shorter history, beginning only in 1994. The author traces the story and describes the major features of Chinese CCR.

Usually, a charismatic group forms after an outside speaker has been invited to address the group. After several have received some experience, often including speaking in tongues, they form a cell group for Bible study and prayer. The laying on of hands often leads to healing. Congregants find new life in the Spirit, far more vital than the ritualistic religious routine they had previously known.

If the diocesan bishop and local priest approve, follow-up teaching seminars will address “such topics as the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ the sole savior, charismatic gifts from God, and holistic life in the Holy Spirit. The culminating point of the program is baptism in the Spirit, or ‘receiving the Holy Spirit’” (271). Many have a new sense of peace and joy; some receive physical healing. Speaking in tongues is “a symbolic sign that a person has become a member of a Charismatic Prayer group. Sometimes people called it ‘receiving the Holy Spirit,’ which is quite a confusing expression. In the Catholic tradition, after receiving the Sacraments of Initiation, namely baptism and confirmation, one has already received the Holy Spirit” (272).

We see here how Roman Catholic theology fits with a “Pentecostal” understanding of the baptism with the Spirit as an experience distinct from conversion (or regeneration, or receiving the Holy Spirit”). For a theological critique of this terminology go to <http://www.reachingchineseworldwide.org/blog/2018/3/27/global-chinese-pentecostal-and-charismatic-christianity-a-response>.

CCR groups have brought new vitality to congregations in China. Not only have individuals received spiritual renewal (or, perhaps, regeneration), but they have formed small communities that have, in turn, served both the larger congregation and society at large.

The chapter includes sections on challenges for the future of CCR and for researchers.

**Chapter Fourteen: “City Harvest Church of Singapore; An Ecclesial Paradigm for Pentecostalism in the Postmodern World” by Kim-kwong Chan**

“This chapter examines a church that fits the following criteria: it embraces Pentecostalism, it is situated in a Chinese cultural milieu, it enjoys healthy growth, it is developing a new ecclesial paradigm, it influences local and regional ecclesial communities, it has demonstrated the ability to transplant itself cross-culturally, and it contributes to the diverse expression of Christianity” (286).

After a brief outline of the history of Pentecostalism in China, the author lists some of the challenges it faces today: it has to show that it is theologically orthodox, does not necessarily promote schism as it has in the past, it must justify the supernatural in a rationalistic Confucian and atheistic environment, and it should “harness its sensationalist or dramatic manifestations – which attract many followers – so that it will not be perceived as a threat to both the civil authorities and the existing Christian communities” (289).

CHC presents us with stark contrasts: on the one hand, it has dozens of affiliate churches in many countries, a theological school, a college, a community service center, and an international humanitarian aid agency. The main worship room seats 8,000 people. A research report in 2007 said that “[t]he church has 15,000 youths and young adults – where the average age was 26 – has an extensive arts program, a world-class tutoring program, and a full-blown program of social ministries.” “In 2013 it ranked as the seventh largest church in Asia, with forty-seven affiliate churches in nine countries” (291).

“CHC can be categorized theologically as a progressive Pentecostalism; ecclesiastically as a proto-Episcopal structure, with the founder making the ultimate decision regarding faith matters; pastorally as a cell group ministry; and missiologically as a Lausanne Covenant-based holistic formulation” (295).

The church caters to young people, mostly through its music. The worship services resemble a pop concert, except that the leaders give an exhortation or teaching, after which people have time for group prayer and personal reflection.

More importantly, perhaps, CHC appeals to the postmodern generation with a strong emphasis upon feelings, providing a safe place to express religious emotions. Individuals are encouraged to relate to God personally but given a surrogate family in the form of the church. Cell groups provide a secure “home” for people otherwise lost in the city. Its lack of history gives it the flexibility to explore new ways of doing “church,” including engaging in commercial enterprises to raise funds and to spread the gospel. “Its reliance on strong personal leadership . . . determines many of its ecclesial characteristics, and its emphasis on vision rather than tradition . . . enables it to experiment with nontraditional ministries and ecclesial practices” (306).

The author believes that this model holds great promise for the millions of young people in China's cities who are looking for meaning in life.

On the other hand, the founder, Kong Hee, and five of his top staff members were convicted of criminal fraud and misuse of church funds to benefit the "music evangelism ministry" of Sun Ho in 2013; they were sentenced to prison. Hee's wife, singer-pastor Sun Ho, took over as interim leader. Her lifestyle, racy music and sexy dancing raised eyebrows among outsiders as well as among the faithful, who were told that she was preaching the gospel through her "entertainment ministry."

### **Chapter Fifteen: "The Localization of Charismatic Christianity among the Chinese in Malaysia: A Study of Full Gospel Tabernacle" by Weng Kit Cheong and Joy K.C. Tong**

Though Protestant Christianity is still regarded as a Western transplant in Malaysia, Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity "has been reckoned among the most successful varieties of Christianity in terms of its ability to enculturate itself in many countries in the global south," including Malaysia (309).

The authors cite surveys stating that ten percent of the Chinese in Malaysia are Pentecostal-charismatic; this chapter seeks to explain why this is so.

"We argue that this localization occurred in a milieu of rising Islamic nationalism that accelerated postcolonial identity pressures on the Malaysian church. This adverse context reinforced a local Christianity that retained strong phenomenological and sociological ties to Western charismatic practices. In addition, the rapid urbanization of Malaysian society in the 1960s and 1970s decoupled many young Chinese Malaysians from religious identities that were tied to territorially-grounded, traditionalist practices and freed them to embrace a charismatic faith that addressed their spiritual sensibilities in a modernist (sic) garb" (310).

At first based on the urbanized Chinese who wished to retain and even strengthen a Western identity through the use of English, P/CC in Malaysia later moved into a Sinophone phase beginning around 2000. The history of Full Gospel Tabernacle (FGT) reflects these phases.

In an otherwise helpful survey of the history of P/CC in Malaysia, the authors incorrectly, I believe, ascribe to John Sung's revival ministry in the 1930s the conversion of Chinese Christians to a "charismatic-type Christianity" (313). John was a fiery revivalist who saw many healings in answer to prayer, but he did not identify himself as a charismatic. He sought the fruit and fullness of the Spirit more than ecstatic experiences.

Founded in 1981, FGT reached out to youth with its charismatic worship style and popular music. It became a "spiritual family" for people feeling displaced in a big city. Young couples and professionals soon began to attend. "At its core, the spirit of FGT has always been marked by tongues-speaking, fervent prayer, prophesying, and boisterous worship. . . . As a manifestation of the baptism of the Spirit, . . . tongues-speaking has a special priority in

Malaysian charismatic churches, particularly FGT” (316). Pastors urge people who don’t speak in tongues to go up for prayer to receive the gift.

The authors see this as a response to “the disempowerment of English and Chinese when Bahasa Malaysia was authorized as Malaysia’s national language in the 1970s” (316). After more non-Malaysians began to speak this language, tongues-speaking declined in importance in FGT, even becoming rather “ho-hum” for some.

Both the use of English and a new understanding of alternate spiritual realms helped to distance young Malaysians from traditional Chinese religions. In contrast, however, members of the Mandarin section of FGT “embraced many Chinese cultural symbols (such as the dragon)” (320). Indeed, “their new faith resonated with elements of their traditional background.” As in Daoism, they were taught that “God is here to bless you” (320). The authors perceptively note other significant similarities between FGT and Daoism.

New technologies, such as song lyrics up on a screen, freed worshipers to be more expressive. “In the last decade, videos of lyrics and worshippers beamed onto large screens subtly induced a mass audience to sway and clap in worship.” This all seems very modern and appeals to youth (324).

As noted before, P/CC has taken root among Chinese-speaking Malaysians in recent years, as “Mandarin education became increasingly popular as the new front of urban Chinese identity,” and as P/CC Christians from China and Taiwan exercised more and more influence.

FGT provides an example of how P/CC is forming beachheads among young urbanized Chinese all over the world, including mainland China.

### **Chapter Sixteen: “The Femininity of Chinese Christianity: a Study of a Chinese Charismatic Church and Its Female Leadership” by Joy K.C. Tong and Fenggang Yang**

This chapter describes and reflects upon the Forerunner Christian Church (FRCC) and its senior pastor, the Rev. Grace Chiang. The authors attended a conference at which Chiang was the only speaker to more than 2,500 people from almost every state in the United States and from all over the world. More than half were “male clergy with theological degrees while the main speaker, Chiang, was a female pastor with no theological training” (330).

They first survey the relatively small number of Chinese P/CC congregations in the United States. They find four types, one type of which includes those that “were or are still affiliated to indigenous Chinese denominations such as Lingliang Church, Xi’antang, and the Truth Jesus Church. FRCC grew out of Xi’antang in Taiwan and “its theology and ministries are still strongly influenced by Xiantang’s tradition” (332).

Many observers note the prominent role of women in P/CC from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Among Chinese, men have exercised more leadership, however. Yang Fenggang has ascribed this to “Confucian patriarchy plus American fundamentalism” (333). (Though one

would have to add that many Chinese Christians believe that the Bible calls for male leadership in the church.)

Chiang was brought up in a traditional folk-religious environment in Taiwan. She was converted and disciplined through the ministry of Pearl G. Young, pastor of Xi'antang in Taiwan. Her later worldwide influence stems from her personal charisma, the example of her lifelong choice to remain single and her example of Christian dedication.

She has imparted a “feminine” flavor to her ministry and the church through an emphasis upon having an intimate spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ as the soul’s true “lover,” and the encouragement of emotional expression in religion.

Furthermore, Chiang “is popularly called by her members ‘elder sister Chiang,’ and acts “as a ‘little mother’ by taking care of her younger siblings” in the faith (337). “Such an image and lifestyle,” including not taking a salary, “resonates with the typical picture of a filial-spirited eldest daughter in a big family or a chaste single mother in Chinese minds and creates empathy and a respectful emotion in them.” Not only so, but “to her male followers, Chiang is a mother figure who provides unselfish support and comforts that are much wanted in their stressful life in Silicon Valley” (337).

She uses gentle gestures, has a smiling face, and speaks “slowly and tenderly” (337). She does not shout or make a big show. She allows her own emotions to be known and comes across as a vulnerable woman who trusts in God to care for her.

At the same time, she “vehemently criticizes the Chinese preoccupation with hierarchy, including the order of seniority,” intentionally reaching out to youth and encouraging them to lead (339). By stating that the church’s purpose is to help people develop an intimate relationship with Christ, she avoids a “goal-oriented tone and redirects people’s attention inward” (339).

Paradoxically, it would seem, she holds to a traditionalist understanding of the role of women in the home and the church and seeks to build male leaders, though she opposes traditional Confucian ideas of the “strong” man who rules in a self-righteous way.

The authors note, however, that there is a very strong “unintended resonance with Taoist tradition,” which has ideals of “maintaining ‘oneness’ with the Dao, i.e., the spirit”; “childlikeness;” “fluidity, mystery, and union with nature,” and especially its “positive attitude toward women or feminine qualities.” The Dao is “the mother of all things” at the opening of the *Dao De Jing* (342).

The entire last paragraph of the chapter is almost “worth the price of the book,” since it shows how Chinese P/CC “is strikingly similar to Daoist tradition. . . . As Daoism is deeply embedded in Chinese tradition and minds, and as it still plays an important role in contemporary popular folk religion,” this may help explain “why charismatic faith resonates with Chinese Christians and appeals to them” (343).

**Conclusion: “Challenges, Theories, and Methods in Studying Chinese ‘Pentecostalism’” by Allan H. Anderson**

The editor briefly reviews the historical origins and development of P/CC in China and calls for an interdisciplinary approach to researching this highly complex movement.

## **God and Caesar in China**

### **Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions**

**Edited by Jason Kindopp and Carol Lee Hamrin**

Kindopp, Jason and Carol Lee Hamrin, eds. *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004.

GCC Senior Associate Dr. Carol Lee Hamrin co-edited this collection of excellent essays, delivering more than it promises, which is not surprising, given the credentials of the nine contributors from both sides of the Pacific. All are leading specialists on church-state relations.

Though its title, and especially the subtitle, would lead you to think that *God and Caesar in China* deals mostly with church-state tensions, this tightly-edited book really represents one of the best overviews of Christianity in modern China.

An unusually fine Introduction by Kindopp describes the basic contours of church-state tensions in China and their bearing on U.S.–China relations, explains the organization of the book, and summarizes the contents of each chapter.

Daniel Bays then shows that the Chinese state has always tried to control religion and has always distrusted the potentially explosive energy of unregulated popular movements. The Taiping Rebellion, as well as the church-inspired “revolutions” in Eastern Europe, serve as reminders to the current regime of the subversive possibilities presented by Christians if they become sufficiently aroused and organized to take political action.

Mickey Spiegel explains how “Control and Containment in the Reform Era” differs from previous efforts to eradicate religion in Communist China. Detailed examination of the methods used by the government paints a picture of wide-ranging, though greatly-varied, attempts to keep Christians on a very short leash. The question is, however, whether the government realizes how counter-productive such repression may turn out to be.

Kim-kwong Chan explores the implications of entry into the WTO for Chinese society, including the religious sector. There will be great social upheaval as China adjusts to globalization. Specifically, “transnational interaction, resurgent regionalism, and internal mobility” will probably lead to continued growth in the number of adherents to all religions, including Christianity. The government has responded with “recognition [of religious groups], containment, guidance, nationalism, and suppression.” The problem is that “the more the government tries to control and suppress religion, the more religion can turn into a destabilizing force by going underground and using discontented social elements to turn against the regime.”

Jean-Paul Wiest gives us a very helpful survey of the successive efforts by Roman Catholics at “setting down roots” up to 1949. Of note: Roman Catholics have almost always had to struggle against the perception (and, often, the reality) that they were working under the authority of

foreign powers; this gave their opponents ammunition for criticism and frequent persecution. In “Catholic Conflict and Cooperation in the People’s Republic of China,” Richard Madsen carries the story up to 2003.

Two chapters trace the history of Protestantism since 1949. Yihua Xu demonstrates that the “Official” Church grew out of the “liberal” wing in early–20th century Protestantism, especially the YMCA–Episcopal Church–St. John’s College nexus. In “Fragmented yet Defiant: Protestant Resilience under Chinese Communist Party Rule,” Jason Kindopp traces the sometimes fierce, yet ultimately futile, attempts of the government to suppress or contain rapid growth. At the grass-roots level, even the TSPM eludes the total control that it seeks. At the same time, unregistered “house” churches continue to increase in numbers, organizational strength, political sophistication, and integration into world-wide Christianity. The government can be thankful that they are so far largely apolitical, but who can tell when sustained pressure will create an explosion?

The final two chapters present policy implications for the governments of the United States and China as they face their own internal political dynamics, the “staying power of religion” in both societies, and the fundamental clash of cultural assumptions that has caused so much misunderstanding and friction.

Peng Liu explains why the U.S. and China approach religious freedom entirely differently and recommends that “The Chinese government must accept . . . the fact that there is no way to change the faith of Americans or lesson their concern about religious freedom in other countries. There is also no realistic hope that the U.S. government will support or praise China’s traditional approach to religion.”

On the other hand, “The U.S. government . . . should not package religion as an item on the political agenda and should especially avoid using it for political leverage.” This only increases the perception that Christianity in China is a tool of American foreign policy.

Carol Lee Hamrin outlines the history and causes of the current Sino-American impasse over religious freedom. At the same time, there are a number of forces that could, and may, lead to greater religious freedom in China, including the growing awareness that the non-profit “third sector” of society is essential for healthy growth.

She concludes that the U.S. must not rely on public pressure at the top to change China’s religious policy. “Critical publicity and advocacy must continue to address immediate egregious abuses; at the same time, there should be long-term engagement to promote cultural tolerance and institutional change. This . . . must come from networking with groups that have a stake in human rights protection, both inside and outside of China and at all levels and in all sectors of society.”

Hamrin lays out a very creative approach, which would focus on the provincial and local level in China and involve a wide array of incentives for Chinese officials to treat believers in accord with international (not just American) norms.

One reviewer put it well: “To my knowledge, there is no other publication that gives such an excellent overview of the Christian experience in China and presents such original discussion of the policy implications of U.S. and Chinese religious policies.”

## **Handbook of Christianity in China**

### **Volume Two: 1800–Present**

**Edited by R.G. Tiedemann**

#### **Part I**

Tiedemann, R. G., ed. *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume Two: 1800–Present*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

This superb volume, edited and written by some of the world’s leading scholars, should be read carefully by every serious student of Christianity in China. Foreign Christians who wish to have a positive impact on the growth of the faith in China should reflect soberly on a few of its major themes.

We also invite our readers to see the companion article at China Institute for some possible implications of the history of 19th century Roman Catholic and Protestant missions for today.<sup>1</sup>

The book is divided into three parts, dealing respectively with late Qing China, Republican China, and the People’s Republic, Hongkong, Macao, Taiwan. This review will deal with Part One only.

Each Part is divided into four sections, Introducing the Sources, Actors, “Scene” (historical period), and Themes. The Sources section could not have been more inclusive, containing 114 pages of detailed bibliographic information about Chinese Primary Sources (annals, official histories, archival sources, published collections of edicts and memorials, local histories, published primary sources in modern collections, libraries with important collections). Western Primary Sources include a “typological survey,” bibliographies of primary sources, topographical surveys, published collections of primary sources, and manuscript sources in archives. Secondary Sources and Reference Works are divided into bibliographies and biographies. This is a researcher’s gold mine, though it can be skimmed before one dives into the substantial articles themselves.

#### **The Actors**

Most of us will be more interested in the next three Parts, beginning with the Actors. In order of appearance, they are Roman Catholic missionaries, Protestant missionaries, the Russian Orthodox Church, Chinese Roman Catholics, Chinese Protestants. What a star-studded cast of characters it is!

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.globalchinacenter.org/analysis/christianity-in-china/an-essential-resource-on-christianity-in-china-part-one.php>

We learn that persecution of Roman Catholics in the 18th and early 19th century had driven their church underground and, with few foreign missionaries unable to operate openly, had impelled Chinese priests, catechists, and “virgins” to take the lead, thus laying the foundation for a truly indigenous church. The process was interrupted by the arrival of many new missionaries from Europe after the Opium War treaties in the 1840s, so that local initiatives and innovations were stifled by the imposition of foreign rules and regulations, a process which only intensified as the French exercised a “protectorate” over Roman Catholics in China.

The result was “the imposition of a borrowed church” (119) that was understood by many Chinese as “an integral part of a deliberate planned policy of the West. The gospel was perceived as a gospel of power, a foreign religion imposed by barbarians” (120). Understandably, since “[i]t was especially French power that enabled the missionaries to reassert the Western political and religious form of the Catholic church” (120). More attention should be paid to the heroic and effective labors of the Chinese, even though one must also admire the “apostolic” labors and sufferings of the missionaries, many of whom paid the ultimate price for their dedication.

“The Protestant Missionary Enterprise” began in 1807, with the arrival of Robert Morrison, and can be divided into two phases. The first one, 1807-1841, is further divided into the first period, 1807-1830, and the second, 1830-41, beginning with the arrival of the American Elijah Bridgman and ending in 1841 with the temporary departure of most missionaries at the start of the First Opium War (1839-42). “Morrison in China: the Many Lives of a Missionary Exemplar,” gives due credit to this hard-working and long-suffering pioneer, who had the foresight to see himself as a foundation-layer preparing the way for others.

Elijah Bridgman paved the way for what became a steady stream of American missionaries, but neither he, nor Morrison, nor any other foreigner could have accomplished much without the assistance of such Chinese co-workers as the indefatigable and courageous Liang Fa, who is also given proper recognition as the first in a long and growing line of Chinese who formed an “embryonic network of Christian workers” (141) who would build a fully indigenous church. Murray Rubenstein pens a crisp, concise, yet lively introduction to these early missionary giants, many of whom, alas, were, directly or indirectly, fairly or unfairly, associated with, and sometimes implicated in, the odious opium trade and the “unequal” treaties that followed the First Opium War.

“Mission Strategies and Tactics in the First Treaty Port Era” began with preparing new missionaries for their work, starting with learning the language, the teaching and acquisition of which were still illegal when Morrison arrived in Canton. Sometimes they began their work in Southeast Asia, where the Qing government could not impede their progress. Some especially gifted missionaries, such as Morrison, Charles Gutzlaff, James Legge, and others, became outstanding linguists and Sinologists; most acquired by sheer hard work enough Chinese to communicate at least the basics of the gospel.

Before describing the wide variety of discrete activities in which missionaries engaged, the important point is made that “the missionaries employed a larger and more cohesive strategy that served to integrate such activities as part of a larger whole. To put it another way, each and every

type of missionary activity was ultimately directed toward one ultimate goal: to win the individual Chinese to Christ” (167). In other words, central to their thinking was “bearing witness and converting people” (168). One might add that they intended to bring these converts into congregations of believers.

Especially before the interior of China was opened to evangelistic itineration, missionaries devoted much of their energy to preparation of Christian literature in Chinese and relied on Chinese converts to carry these silent sermons into the hinterland, where they performed essential preparatory work. The Bible came first, of course, and then a whole series of “tracts,” some of which could be very substantial.

“Protestant Missionaries in late Nineteenth-Century China,” by Jost Oliver Zetzsche, covers the period of rapid missionary expansion, both in the number of individual workers and in the number of mission societies, during the period 1860-1890. In addition to the established missions, dozens of newer societies entered the scene, “the most remarkable” of which was the China Inland Mission (CIM), founded by J. Hudson Taylor in 1865.

The CIM differed from other organizations in several key respects: “(a) its headquarters was in China, (b) the necessary funds were not solicited (the ‘faith-mission principle’), (c) the educational or denominational background of the applicants was essentially irrelevant,” though “they did have to agree with the evangelical view of the Bible and Christian life and work,” (d) cooperation rather than competition with the denominational societies was sought, (e) the missionaries were to conform as much as possible to the living conditions of the Chinese, and (f) “the main goal of the mission was the diffusion of Christianity and the entering of new areas.” Here, sadly, the author relies on Alvyn Austin’s highly inaccurate treatment of the CIM and repeats the common misconception that the CIM did not seek to build local churches.<sup>2</sup> The truth is that the CIM used itinerate evangelism very strategically, with the aim of establishing Chinese-led churches in cities, from which further evangelism in the surrounding countryside would then lead to the founding of more congregations.<sup>3</sup>

Though various Protestant societies did sometimes compete within the same region, as time went on they worked hard to establish “comity” agreements, which called for one society to focus on an agreed-upon area and to respect the “turf” of other missions. By and large, a spirit of harmony and cooperation existed among the many mission societies.

They came together to form special interest groups addressing particular needs in Chinese society, such as famine relief, textbooks for schools, Bible translation, printing and distribution, the campaigns against opium and foot-binding, and ministries to “the blind deaf, opium addicts, and orphans” (181).

---

<sup>2</sup> For a review of Austin’s *China’s Millions*, go to <http://www.globalchinacenter.org/analysis/christianity-in-china/chinas-millions.php>.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.bdcconline.net/en/stories/t/taylor-james-hudson.php> for more on Taylor’s strategy.

After this general introduction, we are given lively cameo portraits of some of the more famous missionaries of this period, including Griffith John, Hudson Taylor, Timothy Richard, and Lottie Moon.<sup>4</sup>

Russian Orthodox missionaries and their work receive a brief description, followed by a longer overview of Roman Catholic missionaries and societies by Jean Charbonnier, author of the magisterial *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2,000*.<sup>5</sup> He partly retraces ground traversed earlier in the volume with a quick survey of the situation in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, but then offers significant additions, such as a detailed catalogue of the directives given to Chinese catechists, short biographies of major Chinese priests, more on the “institute of virgins,” and refugee communities for Roman Catholics harassed by the authorities. Distinguished historian of modern Roman Catholicism in China Jean-Paul Wiest follows with a concise description of the context of Roman Catholic work in the middle of the century, Chinese “Lay Apostles,” and Chinese Priests, Sisters, and Brothers.

Jessie G. Lutz, author of several authoritative studies on early Protestant Chinese Christianity, begins by noting the difficulty of reconstructing the biographies of the first generation of Chinese converts, who were few, while “apostasy was all too common” (247). Nevertheless, she gives thumbnail sketches of Liang Fa, helper to Robert Morrison and William Milne, and his son Liang Jinde, who worked for Commissioner Lin during the first Opium War, later returning to help Elijah Bridgman with the Delegates Bible. Two men with a strong commitment to Confucianism, Dai Wenguang and Wang Tao, illustrate just how tenacious loyalty to traditional Chinese culture could be; Dai even left the Christian faith. Their stories “help us to understand the obstacles to conversion and the social costs of church membership,” (250) factors still operative today, though perhaps less so in some ways also.

Religious tracts and the Bible brought some to faith, among whom was Che Jinguang. Alas, when James Legge called in military force to gain possession of property for a church and then left Che in charge, the local gentry vented their wrath upon the convert, who was tortured and killed—an example of the frequently toxic effects of close association with foreigners, another constant in Chinese Christian history. Missionaries lamented the rarity with which Chinese converts expressed sorrow for sin, but some did, like He Jinshan. Another recurring theme is the penchant, even obsession, missionaries had for establishing schools, hoping thereby to gain converts to the faith who would also become preachers. “Relatively few graduates entered the ministry and many ceased active church membership,” however; a trend that continued up to 1950 (253).

“Once a small cluster of Chinese had converted, these Chinese recruited a high proportion of the ‘second generation’ of Christians. Chinese assistants ordinarily made the initial converts, while missionaries and the few ordained Chinese provided further instruction and baptism” (254).

---

<sup>4</sup> For short biographies of these and other missionaries mentioned in the Handbook, see the online *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity* ([www.bdcconline.net](http://www.bdcconline.net)); for longer studies, see *Builders of the Chinese Church*, edited by G. Wright Doyle, a volume in the *Studies in Chinese Christianity* series published by Wipf & Stock.

<sup>5</sup> A review can be found at <http://www.globalchinacenter.org/analysis/christianity-in-china/christians-in-china-ad-600-to-2000.php>.

Again, this pattern persisted into the middle of the twentieth century. Lutz notes the growing involvement of Chinese Christians in education, the important role played by women, and the ways in which Christian communities were formed along kinship and other relationship lines.

These new communities became mini-societies, replacing former networks in providing a variety of services, but also tending to alienate Christians from their neighbors and often provoking charges that they had ceased to be “Chinese” and had come under the sway of foreigners – yet another persistent phenomenon. In one good development, Christian families “were often the major source of Chinese ministers, Bible women, and teachers while family stability and parochial schools promoted social mobility” (256).

I have quoted this chapter so extensively because it seems to show how much the early decades laid the foundation for the church that would grow in the coming century, with both beneficial and baneful features still visible today.

David Cheung follows with an introduction to specific groups of Chinese Protestants in the last four decades of the nineteenth century. These included pastors; preachers—evangelists—catechists, Bible women, educational and medical workers, writers, colporteurs, and general assistants or helpers. Perhaps the dominant impression given is the speed with which missionaries recognized the greatly superior effectiveness of Chinese workers, compared with foreigners. Increasingly, Chinese were entrusted with leadership of local congregations as well as evangelism; in time, they took over more and more responsibility for teaching, medical work and writing. Alas, then as now, the chief impediment to the production of quality literature in Chinese lay in the busyness of qualified Christians, who were overworked and laden with the burden of multiple responsibilities.

Cheung then provides vignettes of some well-known Chinese Protestants, including He Futang, “Pastor Xi,” Ren Chengyuan, Li Zhenggao, and others. Towards the end of this period and until the early 1900s, “the revolutionary movement was mainly spearheaded by Chinese Christians,” a fact that will strike different readers in different ways (274). The main point of this section, however, seems to be that Chinese Protestantism was coming of age, and a generation of highly capable leaders was rising, building up the “spiritual capital” for the full indigenization of the church that would eventually have to come.

## **Handbook of Christianity in China**

### **Volume Two: 1800–Present**

**Edited by R.G. Tiedemann**

#### **Part II**

Tiedemann, R. G., ed. *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume Two: 1800–Present*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

The contents of this magisterial volume deserve careful reading by everyone interested in Chinese Christianity, but the length and cost of it will probably be deterrents, so I offer this series of rather thick reviews in order to give a taste of its riches, and perhaps entice a few more to buy and feast upon it.

We cannot understand the residual resistance to Christianity among educated Chinese without a knowledge of the material covered in this section on the late Qing scene.

#### **Late Qing Scene**

Having been introduced to the main “actors” of 19th-century Chinese Christianity, we turn now to the “stage” on which they played their many roles.

There was a “Roman Catholic Revival” beginning in the 1830s, especially in France, whose missionaries promoted “the modern ‘mission civilisatrice’” of France, under the powerful protection of the government (281). Popes decreed that they should make the training and empowerment of Chinese clergy their highest priority, but this was resisted by the missionaries for almost a hundred years. “Depending for their work on French military protection, the[y] often saw their mission as an intimate extension of French economic and political interests” (282).

Meanwhile, the Protestant world experienced widespread religious revival, one of the fruits of which was the modern Protestant missionary movement, in which there was “a remarkable degree of unity of purpose and international co-operation” (283). Missionaries differed among themselves, of course with some looking for speedy, and perhaps superficial, conversion, while others, notably Calvinists and members of denominational societies, preferred a slow and steady approach that would yield solid growth. Over time, another debate arose, concerning whether missionaries should limit themselves to evangelism and church planting, or whether they should also engage in “good works” such as medicine and education. What would become a wide theological fissure was already starting to open.

Once again, the remarkable growth of the China Inland Mission receives notice, and once again the claim is made that the CIM engaged in only “extensive” itineration and evangelism, “promoting relatively superficial proclamation of the gospel,” rather than “intensive” and “in-depth building of churches” (287). One has to wonder where this misconception comes from, for

it could not be the result of a careful reading of the sources. The concluding paragraph of this chapter also records, without qualification, charges made against “faith” missions by spokesmen for “classical” societies that they worked without close coordination with a sending board at home which could properly select missionaries, and somehow failed to see to “appropriate distribution of . . . contributions” and to provide “an adequate supply of information from the mission field” (289). At least for the CIM these statements are utterly inaccurate and could easily have been known to be so at the time.<sup>1</sup>

Otherwise, this chapter, like all the others, is a model of concise and comprehensive clarity.

### **Chinese Historical Context**

From the beginning the Qing dynasty government relied upon a small group of elite officials supplemented by a much larger, though still relatively small, class of educated mandarins and their employees. By the end of the 18th century, “administrative decay had set in,” aggravated by immense growth of the population “and the consequent overall scarcity of opportunities” (292). To make matters worse, “the quality of most local office holders seems to have deteriorated as ineptitude, mismanagement and malfeasance spread,” widely. Worst of all, “corrupt practices were particularly prevalent amongst the sub-bureaucratic yamen clerks and runners” (292). The whole system relied on a very delicate balance between local and central power, and between official administrators and members of the local elite.

When disaster struck, the entire structure could collapse. Floods, famine-causing droughts, and uprisings, which were all too common and quite devastating, could eviscerate the core of social and governmental control and lead to social breakdown. At all times, growing scarcity of resources exacerbated existing tensions between clans, villages, and factions, leading to collective violence, rural unrest, rebellions, and accelerating dynastic decline.

When foreign powers began to intrude, the situation became both more complex and more volatile. If, as often happened, local Christians could leverage connection with a foreign power—usually France—to protect or even advance their interests in competition with others, their success further fed anti-foreign anger. A worldwide silver shortage led to economic decline and prompted foreigners to import even more opium to make up for the shortage, further enraging Chinese officials, who linked opium to missionaries. The “scramble for concessions” begun by the so-called “Unequal Treaties” only intensified after the devastating defeat of China by Japan in 1895. As imperialist governments expanded their presence in China and ate away at the sovereignty of the nation, patriots fumed at the aggressors and the missionaries who depended upon the treaties for their multiplying stations in the interior. The further into the country they penetrated, the more Chinese connected them with the horrible disasters which were killing millions and impoverishing many more.

---

<sup>1</sup> The last five volumes of A.J. Broomhall’s *Hudson Taylor & China’s Open Century* (now published as *The Shaping of Modern China*) provide ample evidence of the tight but flexible organization, strong home council involvement, financial frugality and accountability, and almost unparalleled dissemination of information from the field from the inception of the CIM, in strong contrast to the Chinese Evangelisation Society with which J. Hudson Taylor was first connected.

## The Treaty System

The treaties which were extracted from a defeated Qing government both inserted new foreign rights into Chinese official and public life and forever implicated the missionaries who either assisted in the negotiations or benefited from the provisions, as each nation insisted on “most favored nation” treatment. In particular, when missionaries insisted on implementation of treaty “rights” for themselves and Chinese Christians, both local officials and non-Christian citizens resented the intrusion of foreign power.

The Sino-French negotiations in the 1840s not only led to removal of the ban on Christianity but also the return of properties that had been confiscated in the previous century or more, leading to bitter disputes over land as the Roman Catholic missionaries sought to obtain better property. The French led the way again in 1860 with concessions that allowed missionaries to travel freely, demand punishment for those who injured missionaries or Chinese Christians and build on property which they purchased. This final provision was surreptitiously inserted into the French version of the treaty and only discovered later. When it was, however, missionaries from other nations demanded that they, too be allowed to acquire land and build structures of all sorts. Naturally, “it incurred the indignation and a general distrust of the messengers of Christianity and French diplomats in China,” an attitude that was soon transferred to all foreign powers and Christian missionaries who reaped the results (300).

French missionaries were in time granted assistance by consular officials in their frequent conflicts with Chinese authorities over land and taxes, and then ordained clergy received the right to dress like government officials and be treated as equals, further challenging the social order and antagonizing Chinese elites. Protestant missionaries “insisted, however, that they were entitled to the same privileges as Catholic priests and continually urged” their consular authorities “to secure equal rights for them” (302). The major exception, again, was the China Inland Mission.

This led to hundreds of so-called *jiao'an*—religious legal cases—in which missionaries and their Chinese converts were involved, as they asserted rights to property and protection in the courts. As a result, though “anti-missionary conflict was to some extent part of the growing resistance by the Chinese people to the increasing pressures exerted by the foreign powers, it should also be recognized that anti-Christian violence tended to be intimately linked to existing tensions within and among local systems” (303).

Another cause of anti-Christian conduct was the growing perception that Christian missions presented a fundamental challenge to the Confucian social order, as missionaries in general “launched an uncompromising attack on the Confucian value system.” Furthermore, missionaries “affiliated with the ‘classical’ missions . . . advocated their version of ‘modernisation’ (for example, Western learning; the provision of medical services; promotion of individualism) as China’s way forward to ‘salvation’—if need be at the point of a gun” (305). The CIM, once again, is the major exception, though there were others.

Sectarian movements which could merge with Christianity were yet another source of official opposition. Often rebellious, these also tended to destabilize social order. When sectarians joined

the Christian movement, and then aligned themselves with foreign powers, they were properly seen as subversive and evoked strong persecution at the local level. Of course, many former members of sects became Christians because they found the answer to their spiritual quest. But when they refused to join in temple sacrifices or even pay taxes to support temple activities, they aroused the ire of their neighbors for withdrawing from the social fabric.

Religious cases also stemmed from attempts by Protestant missionaries to acquire property in the interior like their French counterparts, and then called in consular authorities to back up their claims. Some missionaries were not reticent about their opinion that change would come to China only if it were imposed by force from the outside. After the outrage at Yangzhou in 1868, the CIM resolutely refused to seek help from either local or foreign authorities, preferring instead to trust in God's protection.<sup>2</sup>

Provoked to the point of exasperation by these repeated insults to their national integrity, the Chinese government's Zongli Yamen circulated a Memorandum in 1871, asserting that the missionaries' right of exemption from local laws (extraterritoriality) was the core problem, aggravated by criticisms of Confucianism and interference in legal cases. The foreign powers rejected this overture, laying the ground for the furious response of the Boxer Rebellion at the end of the century, which was supported by the Qing government.

The CIM is singled out for its missionaries' adoption of Chinese dress, living among the people, and distance from foreign government help. Even when, as with the CIM, missionaries did not interfere with the local administration, their very presence irritated officials who resented what they represented. Contrary to the impression given in this chapter, however, popular response was usually quite warm and favorable, even if converts were relatively few. Except in a few places, such as Hunan and Shandong, missionaries found many who welcomed their message and their acts of charity and love, and a solid foundation was being laid for the growth of today's Chinese church.

Missionaries of other societies, alas, were not always known for their appreciation of local customs. "Among the Americans, for example, there seems to have been an explicit sense of cultural superiority in their refusal to blend into their Chinese surroundings" (318). Living in a foreign compound in foreign-style buildings, separated from their Chinese neighbors except for those whom they employed, they stood out as foreigners in every way. And yet, despite the impression given in this chapter, most Protestant missionaries seem to have been generally appreciated by those whom they came to serve.

### **Female Missionaries**

Especially with the CIM, but also among Roman Catholics and, later, denominational Protestant missions, female missionaries assumed a growing role, until they comprised two-thirds of the total foreign missionary presence. On the one hand, they were able to reach women and children as men could not, and were greatly loved; on the other hand, their counter-cultural lifestyle,

---

<sup>2</sup> Alwyn Austin once again gives a false impression by claiming J. Hudson Taylor changed his story after the event.

particularly when they were unmarried, shook the roots of Confucian society, and even more when single Protestant women taught Chinese girls in missionary schools.

### **Protestant Advance into the Interior**

Charitable work, particularly famine relief, brought a sharp reduction in anti-missionary and anti-Christian feeling in the latter part of the 19th century. Both the CIM and other societies worked together with the government to alleviate the horrible suffering of those whose lives were devastated by floods, drought, disease, and famine. These “good works” earned a great deal of good will, though anti-foreign feeling could resurface quickly.

That brings us to motives for conversion to Christianity. These included material incentives, not just during famines but also when Roman Catholics could get privileged access to land; other Christians were given legal protection; many were employed by missionaries; and there was prestige and power attending association with foreigners. Spiritual incentives included a sense of having found the truth and life-changing power that they had been seeking in other religions.

On the other hand, those who resisted the missionaries and their Chinese converts usually did so because they saw the missionaries as “formidable political actors” and their followers as agents of the foreign interloper (325). When religious cases were settled in favor of the Christians, large indemnities might be imposed. In some instances, Chinese officials who had failed to prevent violence were removed or even punished. When a large number of American missionaries later became involved in diplomatic and consular work for their government, they naturally wanted to see their former colleagues protected, further convincing the Chinese elite that missionary and military officer were co-conspirators in a plot to destroy China as a sovereign nation.

### **The Boxer Uprising**

No one should have been surprised, therefore, when all these irritants finally converged to produce the Boxer Uprising, which is well described in this section. Though an awful drought precipitated widespread social violence, the slaughter of thousands of Chinese Christians and a few hundred missionaries must be attributed to decades of rising resentment and fear.

**Inside China's House Church Network**  
**The Word of Life Movement and Its Renewing Dynamic**  
**By Yalin Xin**

Xin, Yalin. *Inside China's House Church Network: The Word of Life Movement and Its Renewing Dynamic*. Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2009.

Let me say from the outset that this book possesses unusual worth for all students of Chinese Christianity. Not only does it analyze a very important sector of the Chinese church, but also presents a model which, with some variations, is both inspiring and challenging.

The author declares his purposes: to describe the origins, growth, and inner dynamic of the World of Life movement; to interpret the movement in light of research on renewal movements, especially Howard Snyder's so-called "mediating model" of such movements; and to suggest ways in which the Word of Life movement might have lessons for the worldwide church.

As Snyder, who wrote a foreword, says, "The author's perspective is unique . . . [because he is] a participant-observer and researcher conversant with both Chinese and English sources." Yalin Xin, who grew up in the Word of Life Movement, is now a Research Fellow for the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements at Asbury Seminary.

**The Rise of the House Church Movement**

Dr. Xin opens with a brief, concise, and very helpful Protestant history of Christianity in China, especially in the 20th century, when the indigenization movements led by men like Wang Mingdao, John Sung, Watchman Nee, and the theologian Jia Yuming laid a foundation for today's house churches, and then collided with the state-sponsored Three-Self Patriotic Movement after 1950. He traces the rise of the house church movement, focusing especially on the Word of Life movement, which is sometimes also called the Born Again Movement, since it was one of the earliest and became the largest. Other names for it are "New Birth" and "All Range" movement.

The author attributes the rapid growth of house church Christianity to a variety of causes: the Holy Spirit, the strenuous and intelligent efforts of the leaders, and three historical and social causes. First, after the Cultural Revolution, people faced an "ideological vacuum," a "vacuum of belief," that prepared them for the Gospel. Second, the Cultural Revolution also "pushed the Chinese folk religions off the ground, particularly in rural China." Finally, following Daniel Bays, he agrees that the "folk religiosity of Christianity" played a major role, as the faith showed "signs of syncretism with non-Chinese ideas and behaviors."

In a later chapter, he adds other considerations, including the rapid social change, rise in disposable income and time, and relaxations of Chinese government religious policies in the 1980s.

### **WOL as a Renewal Movement: Origin and History**

For reasons which he explains at length, the WOL Movement can be classified as a “renewal” or “revitalization” movement, since it arose in conscious contrast to an existing Christianity, though it was not ever part of a larger organized denomination. Peter Xu (Xu Yongze 1940- ) started the movement as a recovery of the “pure” gospel rather than submit to the “faith plus politics” stance of the TSPM. He deeply appreciated the work of evangelical Western missionaries like Hudson Taylor, as well as the indigenous Chinese leaders mentioned above. A fourth-generation Christian, Xu found himself “on the run” from government authorities early in life; wherever he went, he shared the gospel, and thus became an itinerant evangelist and the prototype for thousands more to follow in his steps.

In Chapter 2, Xin offers a comprehensive and enlightening review of the literature on renewal movements, Chinese Christianity in general, and the Word of Life Movement. The third chapter traces the history of WOL movement, starting with Xu’s own story, then moving through the “revival stage,” the “organizational stage,” the “mission-oriented stage,” and finally the “unity stage.” He points out the crucial role of Xu as leader and pioneer, as well as the critical part that training and theological education have played in the ongoing vitality of the movement. He notes the prominent role given to women, the tight multi-layered organization, and the indispensable activity of gospel bands.

Moving to the near present, he describes some of the divisions and re-combinations of the large house church movements; the loss of members to urban migration; the growing shortage of workers; and the divisive impact of foreign actors, especially Pentecostals and adherents of Witness Lee (the so-called “Shouters sect”).

### **Inner Dynamics of the WOL Movement**

The most helpful section of the book describes the core values of the WOL movement, its organization, its nature as a renewal movement, and the possible implications of its huge success for other churches today. Chapter 4 presents in detail the “inner dynamics of” WOL and finds that they correspond roughly to Howard Snyder’s “mediating model” for renewal movements, with ten basic characteristics. Let us focus on these:

First and foremost, the WOL “rediscovered” the “nature of the Gospel,” which is the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the Cross for our salvation from sin, Satan, and death. When churches were either closed or co-opted by the government, some Chinese Christians returned to the essence of the faith and began preaching the necessity of repentance, faith in Christ, and regeneration by the Spirit. They also spoke of the “way of the Cross,” which included both denying sin and being willing to suffer for Christ. Persecution was met with faith and fortitude, as a mark of the normal Christian life. These two elements form the vital core of the WOL.

Next came the recognition that New Testament Christians gathered weekly in homes, in numbers small enough for “more believers to participate in the life and ministry of the Body of Christ.” These little house churches multiplied by the thousands across central China, and today still form the basic unit of WOL, even though they are not necessarily required in areas where government restrictions are looser. Small groups meet weekly; they take time for fellowship; and include teaching, worship, singing songs with Chinese tunes, and prayer.

Training takes place both through the traditional master-apprentice discipleship method familiar to Chinese, as well as in carefully-designed classes that rise from elementary Christian doctrine to advanced theology for leaders at higher levels.

The whole movement is united around “The Seven Principles,” a statement of the main beliefs which have guided them from the beginning. These are worth citing:

1. Salvation through the Cross
2. The way of the Cross
3. Discerning the “adulteress”—namely, the state-controlled TSPM
4. Building the church as a body of born-again believers
5. Providing for life by teaching the Scriptures as the Word of God and essential spiritual nourishment
6. Interlinking with other house churches in the movement and fellowship with churches in other localities, as well as with leaders of other movements
7. Frontier evangelism, the sending out of evangelistic teams throughout China and now, Back to Jerusalem

Though not part of the TSPM, WOL seeks to maintain unity with the worldwide church by adherence to orthodox Christian doctrine and, when possible, fellowship with Christians in other countries. In 1998, leaders of WOL and three other large house church movements “came together and drafted an official Statement of Faith of Chinese House Churches,” with the expert help of the late Jonathan Chao. This statement identifies these house churches as fully orthodox, despite some TSPM and government suspicions to the contrary.

Largely because of its rural background, WOL members remain close to the poor—a hallmark of renewal movements—and demonstrate compassion by seeking to meet practical needs of their neighbors.

Several features of WOL receive repeated emphasis: the absolute authority of the Bible in the role of both individuals and corporate life; constant reliance on prayer, especially corporate prayer, along with a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit to transform lives, empower witness, and work miracles; and the centrifugal force of a missionary passion that has now spawned the Back to Jerusalem Movement (BTJ).

The BTJ vision originated among Chinese Christians in the 1940s and was renewed in the 1990s, with Peter Xu sensing God’s leading to make this a high priority. After being arrested and released several times, in 2002 Xu left China for the U.S., where he now lives and serves as leader of the BTJ Movement, headquartered in Southern California.

## **Evaluation of WOL**

Xin himself comments on several weaknesses of WOL. Especially in the past, too much emphasis was placed upon profuse weeping as a necessary sign of true repentance and a heartfelt sense of God's forgiveness. The training of evangelists has been criticized for being "too narrow" and "not encouraging self-reflection"; the "discipline involving the training . . . is also strict, to the extent that the freedom of marriage is strictly restrained." Some evangelists "did not have any chance to support or even visit their parents for years."

The pietistic tradition of the leaders has meant a lack of fully-orbed teaching on the sanctity of work and the duty of believers to serve as salt and light in the general society; organized ministries of compassion have been slow to develop. And there has been difficulty with divisions inside the movement since the 1990s, with different theological emphases producing separate networks.

Despite my own very high admiration for WOL as described in this book, may I venture to add three other comments, in a spirit of deep respect? First, WOL sent out pairs of young women as evangelists. The result was often highly emotional and subjective preaching, the conversion of multitudes of women, a yawning disproportion between women and men in the house churches and thus the availability of Christian men for them to marry. Had Jesus' method of sending men been followed, this problem might not exist today.

Second, while the highly-structured organization has produced lasting stability and constant growth, the expansion of groups of house churches into a multi-province network has produced a vast pyramid structure with a few people at the top, formerly led by Peter Xu. Not only does this worry the Chinese government, which is always paranoid about potentially competing national organizations, but it places a huge amount of authority in the hands of a small group and makes temptations to power and prestige almost unavoidable. Autonomous county-wide networks in communication with each other would have been sufficient, if the New Testament is any guide.

***Note: In 2019, more than one hundred leaders were arrested in Henan when they gathered for a leadership conference. Their cell phones were confiscated before they were released. This sudden capture of key leaders could have been prevented by a less centralized structure.***

Finally, though the silence about Xu's divorce and remarriage is not surprising, the book makes little mention of other criticisms which have been directed at him by some house church leaders, perhaps because he has corrected some earlier mistakes. While he is obviously a great Christian leader, with profound personal and worldwide influence—one of his disciples is Brother Yun of "Heavenly Man" fame—some of the statements in the biographical sketch of Xu on the BTJ website appear a bit problematic. Has he really trained 100,000 evangelists? Is he truly still the "leader" of WOL, and is WOL still—intact—the largest house church network in China? Xin's book itself seems to indicate otherwise.

Overall, however, despite a large number of spelling and grammatical mistakes, this is a stirring book about a remarkable man and an amazing movement. It challenges the lukewarm character of the Western church and the growing shift from home meetings to large gatherings in big buildings in the urban house churches, as well as the political emphases of some prominent urban house church leaders. I highly recommend it.

# Introducing Chinese Religions

By Mario Poceski

## Part I

Poceski, Mario. *Introducing Chinese Religions*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Anyone who wants to understand Chinese Christianity today must have some knowledge of its religious milieu. In other words, to see the tree clearly, we must study the forest; to appreciate the flower, we must survey the entire garden.

Why? Many reasons exist, including these:

1. The Chinese Bible employs vocabulary that existed in Chinese before the Christians arrived. Key words (such as *dao*, rebirth, love) carry denotations and connotations from other faiths that must be distinguished from their biblical uses.
2. Chinese who investigate the Christian faith bring a mixed repertory of religious ideas and images that inevitably color their understanding of the gospel.
3. Even after conversion to Christ, Chinese will be heavily influenced by notions that seem natural and right to them simply because they are so familiar and taken for granted, even if these ideas conflict with biblical teaching.
4. For Christianity to penetrate and redemptively transform Chinese culture, it must engage in meaningful dialogue with the best representatives of other faiths.
5. Love of neighbor must include respectful listening, with the goal of understanding, before any attempt at persuasion.
6. To make sense of the relationship between Christianity and the government, one must go back several millennia for patterns and paradigms that prevail even now.

For that purpose, Poceski's textbook will serve admirably and should be required reading for all students of Christianity in China.

The following review will include extensive quotations from the book, mostly because the author writes with such concise comprehensiveness.

### **Earliest religious traditions**

Poceski begins with the earliest Chinese religious traditions, which consist of myths, perhaps ancient, but preserved only in later texts, especially starting from the Zhou dynasty. Some talk about great men who might once have been worshiped as gods but were demythologized after Confucianism began to exert influence. “Chinese myths feature numerous gods, divine heroes, and other mythical figures including strange birds and animals. Prominent examples of mythical themes include the creation of the world and the origins of humanity, the births and acts of the gods, the achievements and tribulations of the semi-divine heroes of antiquity.” The Flood myth goes back to the 8th century BC.

### **The Mandate of Heaven**

Under the Shang, politics and religion were inseparable. The king was head of the shamanistic cult. There was a sense of “connectedness and continuity between the divine and human worlds,” in which the king was intermediary. He prayed for the people, asking for divine help, and employed divination, sacrifices, and other rituals. This role later developed into the idea of the Emperor as Son of Heaven.

The establishment of the Zhou dynasty was one of the seminal events in Chinese history. The new Zhou kings said they had received moral authority to rule directly from Heaven. Their conquest was “the realization of a divine plan,” which decreed that corrupt Shang rulers had to be replaced by virtuous Zhous.

### **Confucianism**

The classical Confucian tradition was based on the Five Classics, focusing on the *Analects* of Confucius but expanding considerably with the addition of other key texts, such as the writings of Mencius. The main goal was to reestablish “the ancient Way (Dao) that was revealed and followed by the ancient sages, which echoed the norms and designs of heaven and brought perfect harmony between Heaven and humanity.” This Way “provided a blueprint for just governance and proper ethical conduct” – the two principal emphases of both Confucianism and Chinese ethics generally even today. One thinks of the quest for a “harmonious society.”

Harmonious social interaction requires the fulfillment of one’s duties in the “five relationships” (father/son; ruler/subject; husband/wife; elder/younger brother; friend/friend), four of which involve clear hierarchy. Is anyone reminded of the importance of relationships and the pervasive of hierarchy in contemporary society?

The key was to cultivate oneself through strenuous moral effort based on knowledge of ethical principles, so as to earn the right to serve as a leader in society. Essentially, it came down to the right kind of education, based upon memorization of authoritative texts in a community that prized cooperation and conformity.

Ideally, the state would be governed by a ruler of such moral excellence that others would follow his example, but reality clashed with the ideal, leading to the formation of other schools of thought, such as the Legalists, who believed that people must be ruled by strict laws with clear rewards and intimidating penalties. Mao Zedong considered himself a Legalist.

Is human nature basically good, or bad? Confucius, Mencius and their followers posited a fundamental goodness to our being, while the Legalists saw people as essentially inclined towards evil and in need of both education and government control. Everyone agreed on the importance of education, however, either to evoke what was good or to tame what was bad.

Eventually, Confucianism gained preeminence as state orthodoxy, and—in a “long-lasting marriage of convenience”—was used by emperors and officials to buttress their rule, with some exceptions, until the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. There are calls for its reinstatement as the official creed of China today.

## **Religious Daoism**

The *Dao* has many meanings, such as “the impersonal creative force of the universe that is perpetual and engenders yin and yang, from which emerge the myriad things. Within a Confucian context, the main thrust of Dao’s meaning revolves around the proper patterns of human behavior—encompassing formal rituals and everyday activities—that accord with the principles of Heaven.”

Within Daoism, “the fundamental realm of Daoism is the world of nature—which encompasses additional supernatural or transcendental dimensions—in contrast to Confucianism’s preoccupation with the social realm.”

Daoism can’t be neatly defined, but there are continuities among its stages and schools, including “a pervasive belief in the lack of permanence and solidity.” The *Dao De Jing* has been treated as a “philosophical and religious classic, with prominent mystical dimensions.” But it “has also been approached as a political work, a treatise on military strategy, or a manual of longevity practices.” In this short treatise, the *Dao* “is an impersonal natural principle, operating constantly and spontaneously, irrespective of purposeful human action and impervious to pious supplication.”

Like Confucianism, Daoism envisions “an idealized vision of a perfect world, albeit of a different kind. . . . This vision is part of a non-theistic understanding of the universe which is conceived as constantly changing and evolving, naturally going through stages of growth and decay, without the presence or intervention of an anthropomorphic creator or controlling deity. The sage who has realized harmony with the Dao is situated in a serene realm, which possesses an unstructured quality and is in tune with the spontaneous flow of nature.”

“The best approach to realizing such a harmonious state, according to Laozi, is the cultivation of *wuwei* (lit., “non-action”), a key term that implies uncontrived or effortless behavior that is free from grasping and fixation.” This is also “a potentially effective method of sagacious governance that adopts a *laissez-faire* approach.”

In the writings of the immensely-influential Zhuangzi, “The main focus of attention . . . shifts to the inner world and the various states of consciousness, especially those engendered via mystical experiences. That is accompanied with an unconcealed aversion to involvement in the sociopolitical arena.”

“The wise person avoids intellectual and moral rigidity, adopting a relativist standpoint that allows for viewing the world from a potentially limitless variety of angles and perspectives.”

Later, Daoism developed not only as a philosophical school, but a complex religious community with distinctive traditions and practices, including elaborate rituals and various means for attaining eternal life.

## **Buddhism**

“Within the broad sweep of Chinese history, Buddhism was undoubtedly the most significant and influential among the religious traditions that originated outside of China.”

Spreading from India to the rest of Asia, “Buddhism underwent profound changes as it adapted to local cultural norms and responded to changing sociopolitical predicaments, developing an astounding variety of teachings and traditions.”

“Buddhism came to encompass diverse and at times seemingly conflicting theoretical templates, rich arrays of ritual expressions, comprehensive ethical systems and monastic institutions, innumerable texts written in a variety of languages and genres, and a lush tapestry of popular beliefs and practices.”

“Buddhism developed interlinked assemblages of doctrines, practices, traditions, and artistic expressions, and exerted far-reaching influence on various aspects of Chinese society and culture. . . . The Chinese adoption of Buddhism opened up new intellectual horizons, distinct avenues of spiritual engagement, and novel esthetic sensibilities that enriched Chinese civilization and substantially expanded its contours.”

At the beginning, this alien religion was criticized for “being primarily concerned with individual salvation and transcendence of the world of everyday affairs, at the expense of an ingrained Confucian emphasis on human interactions and the fulfillment of social obligations.” It was also too “foreign.” With its own ancient sages, why did China need a new religion or god?

There were also formidable “linguistic and cultural barriers,” including the language gap, especially between Chinese and Sanskrit (an Indo-European language). This “necessitated experimentation with ingenious translation strategies and . . . the gradual formation of highly technical Chinese Buddhist vocabulary.”

These languages represented different cultures, too; Chinese was “humanistic, this-worldly, and family focused.” Indian culture had “exuberant flights of religious imagination.” It “set transcendence of the everyday world as the final goal of spiritual life.” Real integration into Chinese idiom and culture required “an extensive intercultural translation and negotiation,” which took many centuries.

As Buddhist monasteries grew in number, size, and influence, they became an important part of the economy. The state extended limited patronage and support, and “the clergy compensated by bolstering the reigning regime and offering a veneer of religious legitimacy to imperial rule and ideology.” Not surprisingly, “the support extended to Buddhists by the imperial state was accompanied by efforts to control the religion. Various emperors and government officials were eager to harness the power and prestige of Buddhism to bolster their authority and achieve specific political ends.” We are introduced to the different “schools” of Buddhism, including the immensely popular Pure Land school, with its promise of a Western paradise, to be gained by simple faith in the name of Amitabha. The Chan (Zen) tradition prized meditation leading to immediate illumination, but all Buddhists stressed the primary obligation of universal compassion.

“Buddhism was integrated in some way into the lives of most people, even if many of them did not claim exclusive allegiance to it in the manner we encounter in the contexts of other faiths.” Mostly, however, “the main expressions of Buddhist faith took the form of public and private rituals that were infused with heartfelt devotional sentiments.” These were “primarily geared towards the fulfillment of utilitarian objects such as the securing of good health or long life.”

Various gods inhabit the Chinese Buddhist pantheon: Buddha (Shijia mouni); Amitabha (Emituo); Medicine Master (Yaoshi); the Buddha of healing; and Maitreya (Mile). Even more popular, however, because they were considered more approachable and responsive, were the bodhisattvas, the most important of whom was Guanyin, the goddess of mercy.

### **So what?**

Three decades ago, we might have relegated all this to history, since Mao and the communists had seemed to eradicate all traditional religious beliefs and practices. No more. The government itself acknowledges a phenomenal rise in the number of “believers,” especially “Buddhists.” Temples have proliferated, initially fueled by money from overseas Chinese tourists, but now supported by local believers.

For all the reasons noted above, plus others, we need to familiarize ourselves with this religious landscape, lest we seriously misconstrue the recent rise, nature, and problems of Chinese Christians today. The alert reader will have noticed, also, a variety of potential points of contact between these religions and the Christian faith, which represent both opportunities for creative evangelism and openings for syncretism. Effective Christian communication will require a great deal of hard work.

## **Introducing Chinese Religions**

**By Mario Poceski**

### **Part II**

Poceski, Mario. *Introducing Chinese Religions*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

We continue our review of Mario Poceski's excellent *Introducing Chinese Religions*, picking up the story at his chapter on popular religion. With the publication of *Redeemed by Fire*, by Li Xian, with its demonstration that much of house church Christianity in China draws upon, and reinforces, powerful themes and trends in Chinese popular religion, understanding this growing phenomenon is all the more imperative.

At the outset, we need to realize that Chinese popular religion is hard to define precisely, since it is without fixed beliefs, recognized clergy, a set canon of scriptures, or clear organizational structures. Widely diffused throughout Chinese society and marked by immense local variation, popular religion is "highly adaptable and responsive to local conditions . . . Accordingly, popular religion is characterized by abundant variety."

Nevertheless, it "encompasses key values and outlooks that are characteristic of Chinese civilization in general." Furthermore, it is not only practiced by uneducated common folk, but there has always been participation by elites in rituals and other practices. "Therefore, popular religion constitutes a rich substratum of religiosity that is shared by most Chinese people and reflects prevalent norms, values, and worldviews."

Historically, it has been beneficial to preserve normative values and validate "hegemonic sociopolitical order." At other times, however, it has been destabilizing, and has been used "to challenge the status quo." Bookmark that last statement, for we shall return to this as a factor in the legal place of unregistered churches today.

### **Syncretism**

Popular religion is syncretistic, borrowing from a variety of traditions, none of which is seen to exclude the others. It incorporates Confucian moral norms; Buddhist notions of hell and the afterlife, "as well as . . . prevalent ideas about merit and karmic recompense," and "the inclusion of Buddhist deities as objects of worship."

The connection with religious Daoism is even closer and includes "the arrangement of the pantheon" and "the structure of key rites and other prevalent modes of worship." Daoist priests

are often called on to officiate at rites held in temples, especially in Taiwan and other parts of South China. As a result, official statistics often class practitioners of popular religion in the category of Daoists in Taiwan. You can see this sort of syncretism in temples, where images of Buddhist deities like Guanyin can be found next to statues of Mazu or even Confucius.

Another manifestation of syncretism shows up in the idea that the three teachings (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) are considered to be essential, with each highlighting important truths and with none in direct competition with the others. It is formally embodied in the so-called Three-in-One Teaching (Sanyi jiao), especially in Southeast Asia and the Chinese diaspora. It can be seen also in the Falun Gong and Yiguan Dao, the latter being especially popular in Taiwan.

### **Gods, ancestors, and ghosts**

“Much of popular religious practice in China revolves around the supplication and worship of various divine or supernatural beings,” usually divided into the categories of gods, ancestors, and ghosts. For believers, “the supernatural and the mundane worlds, as well as the realms of the dead and the living, are not radically disjoined.” The living and the dead can affect each other’s well-being: the living feed and honor the dead, who are expected to extend protection and blessing in return. Here we find the core beliefs underlying ancestor worship.

When they are not properly attended to, ancestors can become hungry—and angry—ghosts, who return to the earth to inflict all sorts of harm, even calamity, until they are appeased. To avoid this, one offers food and incense on regular occasions. Of course, some spirits are intrinsically malevolent, and must be honored in order to prevent trouble.

Gods are ranked according to their distance from ordinary people. The higher ones are more aloof, and can effect relatively little good or harm; the closest ones receive more attention, for their connection with their worshipers is more intimate. There are the kitchen god, the local earth god, city gods, and regional patron deities, like Mazu in southern China and Taiwan. City gods serve as spiritual magistrates and go on regular inspection tours of their locale in parades featuring firecrackers, incense, offerings of food, dancing, and general joy.

Higher deities include the Jade Emperor (Yuhuang or Yudi), who presides over a sprawling heavenly bureaucracy resembling the imperial government. His counterpart in the underworld is Yanluo (or Yanwang). Other popular deities are Guandi, the god of war, and Mazu, a goddess who grants protection to those in danger. As with other deities, these two were originally human beings who became deified after death.

## **Utilitarian practices**

“The main objectives of the vast majority of worshipers are unabashedly pragmatic and geared towards the procurement of this-worldly benefits.” Sacrifices and rituals are offered in order to gain “wealth, good health, long life, happiness, and worldly success.” There is a definite *quid pro quo* to this relationship. If a god does not deliver the goods, he can be replaced.

“The same pragmatic orientation also carries over into other practices . . . , such as divination, mediumship, exorcism, and geomancy” [feng shui], all of which are well described in the book. Mediums convey messages from the dead and, along with Daoist priests, cast out evil spirits. Specialists in feng shui enable one to place buildings and tombs in propitious locations.

## **Millennarian movements, heterodox sects, and secret societies**

As we noted at the beginning, popular religion has not infrequently spawned revolutionary activity, as adherents respond to adverse economic or social conditions by organizing armed revolts, like the Daoist Yellow Turbans movement, various Buddhist millennarian sects such as the White Lotus Teaching, and the semi-Christian Taiping movement—all of which caused immense turmoil and suffering. Secret societies, especially the Triads, have sometimes also been involved.

Thus, we can understand why “successive Chinese governments, all the way to the present, have been highly wary and suspicious of religious groups or teachings that espouse millenarian [sic] or messianic ideas. Often such worries have led to the active pursuit of public policies aimed at control or repression of millenarian [sic] groups and heterodox sects, a recent example of which is the suppression of Falun Gong.” And, we might add, the government’s continuing restrictions upon unregistered churches.

Alert readers will have noticed just how much popular religion influences Chinese Christianity, especially in its pragmatic focus. We often hear that someone has “believed in” Christ in response to receiving, or in order to gain, some earthly benefit. Evangelistic preaching, more often than not, holds out the promise that things will go well with you if you just follow Jesus.

Likewise, the fantastically high attrition rate found in Chinese churches can be traced at least partly to the same cause: the benefit having been obtained, one no longer has to attend worship or submit to the disciplines of the Christian life. Or, if one’s prayers for some material blessing have not been answered, the Christian God is abandoned in disappointment and perhaps disgust.

There is much food for thought here.

## Introducing Chinese Religions

By Mario Poceski

### Part III

Poceski, Mario. *Introducing Chinese Religions*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

We continue our review of Mario Poceski's *Introducing Chinese Religions* with his discussion of "Later transformations of Confucianism."

Lest that sound too abstruse, we should note that these developments in Confucianism created "the official orthodoxy in late imperial China, a position it occupied until the early twentieth century." This "Neo-Confucianism," in turn, forms the background and basis of the "New Confucianism" of our own time, which is a powerful movement among some key intellectuals.

#### Confucianism

During the medieval period of Chinese history, Buddhism and Daoism mounted a powerful challenge to the former hegemony of Confucianism, though "Confucian learning continued to flourish within a cosmopolitan culture that fostered religious pluralism." Specifically, Confucianism developed theories and rites that lent powerful legitimization to the government. Beginning in the Sung era, a major reformation in Confucianism took place, and eventually it became the officially sanctioned state orthodoxy.

Drawing upon non-Confucian traditions, Zhu Xi's grand synthesis strengthened Confucianism's position against Daoist and Buddhist philosophy by adding a metaphysical component, along with trenchant criticisms of Buddhism as a "foreign" faith. The concept of principle (*li*) stood at the center of Zhu Xi's system, along with the ancient idea of "vital force" (*qi*); these two combined to explain the nature of all reality, including the relationship between universals and particulars (the problem that engaged Plato and Aristotle so much). Zhu's stunning achievement rivals that of the similar effort by Aquinas in the West.

Especially significant was Zhu's shift in emphasis from preparation for public service to self-cultivation with the goal of attaining sagehood. Self-mastery would be pursued by a vigorous "investigation of things and the extension of knowledge," a "process of extensive learning and reflection," concentrating particularly upon the realm of human affairs, to comprehend the basic principle (*li*) that underlies all of reality, both human and cosmic.

Zhu Xi's transformation of Confucianism included a recasting of the canon to concentrate on the "Four Books" (*Analects of Confucius*, *Mencius*, *The Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean*), which became the focus of both scholarly research and personal reflection and meditation. (As late as 1979, these "Four Books" were listed in a newspaper poll as the most-read and admired works in Taiwan.) Over time, these classics, and Zhu Xi's commentaries on them, formed the essential ingredients of the official examination system, success in which was

virtually the only path to prestige, power, and wealth for aspiring men. Sadly, these examinations became, in time, an arena of “cut-throat competition” with a narrow emphasis upon rote learning and formulaic essays. They also cemented a symbiotic relationship between the government, the educated elite, and Neo-Confucianism.

This official Confucianism did not go unchallenged, however. Wang Yangming’s “School of Mind” (Xin Xue), propounded “reflection and illumination of the mind within,” which was thought to lead to the purification of the mind and “the elimination of selfish desires.” By contrast, the School of Han Learning (Han Xue) “was firmly anchored in scholarly study and canonical exegesis.” Its proponents engaged in careful philological research in order to recover the real teachings of the ancient sages.

Regardless of which system of Confucianism we consider, each held a traditional view of the role of women in the family and in society, which included the conviction that widows should not remarry. Still, there is evidence that Confucianism sometimes softened the treatment of women, and that “in some instances they treated women well.”

### **Christianity, Islam, and Other “Western” Religions**

Though his treatment is brief, Poceski at least escapes the usual restricted paradigm of “Chinese” religions by including Christianity and Islam in his study, acknowledging—correctly—that both are “integral parts of the Chinese religious landscape.”

He begins by reminding us that “foreign” religions were welcomed during the cosmopolitan Tang era. “Western” religions which gained entry to China included Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

“Nestorian” missionaries arrived at the Tang court in 635 and were accorded the same warm reception as did emissaries of other faiths. (Actually, this branch of Christianity is now more correctly called by scholars the Syrian Church of the East (*Jing Jiao*), since the reputation of their founder, Nestorius, has been rehabilitated.) The church spread for a while, mostly among non-Chinese, but was “decimated in 845 during the persecutions instigated by emperor Wuzong and disappeared from China by the tenth century, although it revived during the Mongol period,” only to cease to exist altogether when the Ming overthrew the Yuan rulers. Scholars have suggested that one reason for its demise was that “its teaching and practices adopted syncretic tendencies,” but Poceski insists that “they retained their distinctive Christian character.”

The Mongol rulers adopted “an amicable policy of religious tolerance” that allowed foreign Christians once again to spread their faith in China. Missionaries from both the Church of the East and the Roman Catholics entered China at this time, and gained some success, again mostly among non-Han people. By the end of the Yuan dynasty, however, all forms of Christianity had once again disappeared.

The third wave of foreign missionaries came with Western colonial expansion by sea in the 16th century. The Jesuits managed to gain admission even to the court in Beijing by their impressive mastery of Confucian classics and possession of modern technology. Franciscans and Dominicans worked among the masses. The so-called “Rites Controversy” led to the proscription

of all Roman Catholic activity when the Qing emperor, responding angrily to the Pope's "interference" in internal matters, issued a decree in 1724. Like most other modern scholars, Poceski admires Jesuits' "willingness to acculturate and adapt Catholic teachings in light of prevalent Chinese norms and conditions" in order to counter the charges of the literati that this new religion was not only foreign, but fundamentally destabilizing to society. (While applauding the superb linguistic and cultural attainments of the Jesuits, this reviewer agrees with those who believe they veered dangerously towards unnecessary compromise and even syncretism.)

When Protestant missionaries arrived in China in 1807, they had to live under the same harsh restrictions that had been imposed on Roman Catholics since the 1740s. After the Opium Wars, the first of which took place in 1842, however, they gained the legal right to propagate the gospel in a few cities and then the entire empire. For most of the 19th century, they focused their efforts upon evangelism, coupled with medical work and education. Later, they sought both to benefit China and to win favor by introducing "modern" Western thought and technology, founding colleges and printing presses as part of their strategy. Usually, however, they were regarded with contempt and fear by the mandarins whose social position depended upon the retention of Confucian orthodoxy, and the Christians could not escape the taint of gunboats and the opium trade which Western powers forced upon a crumbling Qing dynasty.

Interestingly—and quite pertinent to today's situation—the author spends considerable time describing the Taiping Rebellion, led by Hong Xiuquan, who considered himself to be a Son of God, Jesus' younger brother, and God's anointed agent to deliver China from paganism and idolatry. This semi-Christian sect wrought horrible havoc for ten years, laying waste vast tracts of land and resulting in the death of millions, before the uprising was finally quelled. No wonder modern Chinese rulers, whose memories are keen, view Protestant Christianity with some suspicion!

Islam also entered China during the Tang dynasty, brought by Persian and Arabic merchants in the seventh century. A few of them settled and established communities in the South and West of China. Another wave of Islamic growth in China took place in the Mongol period, when Mongol rulers employed Muslims in their administration. Over time, Muslims gained both acceptance and some limited prominence, as the career of Admiral Zheng He illustrates. Islamic educational institutions were established, and Islamic teachings were expressed in Chinese.

Over time, Islam in China took on a varied character, with different sects, ethnicities, and emphases, some of which were "militant, separatist, or revivalist tendencies"—a development relevant to today's tense situation. Though Muslims accommodated their faith at some points, they were unwilling to compromise in areas like ancestor worship and filial piety, and thus "a lingering sense of dissonance and disconnect from mainstream Chinese culture and institutions, felt by many Muslims," persists to the present.

In the 19th century, bloody uprisings, and even attempts to establish of an independent Islamic state, resulted in harsh crackdowns by the Qing government and mutual ill-will that has not gone away.

## Religion in Modern China

The last chapter of the book surveys the twentieth century, and especially the period since the establishment of communist rule. Without going into detail, we need merely note several major developments.

Religion in general, including Confucianism, was criticized as “feudal,” superstitious, and anti-modern by Chinese intellectuals who longed for a strong nation. They directed special anger towards Christianity, which was seen as a willing tool of foreign imperialists. In defense, both Confucianists and Buddhists tried to “modernize” their faith and practice. “New” Confucianists, with support from the nationalist regime, presented their movement as a humanistic world view thoroughly capable of helping China adapt to modern times. Buddhists tried to reform their religion by philosophical reflection, renewed educational efforts, and even political involvement.

All religion came under criticism, then attack, during the Mao period. Religious venues were closed, and a cult of Mao developed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). China’s new ruler even assumed the status of a deity, honored by many even today, in the tradition of leaders of utopian and millenarian movements “promoted by different religious groups throughout Chinese history.”

Since the Opening and Reforms begun by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, a general revival of religion has taken place in China. Buddhists, Daoists, practitioners of popular religion—all have seen their numbers grow, their temples rebuilt and refurbished, and their acceptance in society renewed. Confucianism, too, has returned as a major force, advocated especially by academics looking for an alternative to any “religion” as the national orthodoxy. The rapid growth of Christianity must be seen as part of this overall trend.

Likewise, the government has reverted to its traditional policy of official toleration of world religions, of which five are recognized: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Protestant Christianity. “Patriotic” associates operate under government control to regulate the activities of these communities, while unregistered groups—including Roman Catholics who remain loyal to the Pope and Protestant “house” churches—evoke the same sort of suspicion and restrictions that have historically been directed towards groups not authorized by the state. As always, the chief concern is for social stability.

The author pays special attention to “Christianity and Buddhism, two traditions that are perhaps best positioned to shape the religious future of China.” He accepts an estimate of about fifty million Roman Catholics and Protestants, with the latter outnumbering the former “by a ratio that is close to three to one.” “The position and fortunes of Catholicism . . . are to a large degree shaped by a longstanding conflict between the Roman Curia in the Vatican and the Chinese government,” while the situation with the Protestants is very similar.

Quite correctly, he points out similarities between popular Protestant Christianity and popular Chinese religion, both of which feature “the prevalence of healing practices, utilitarian concern with the procurement of this-worldly benefits, pervasive sense of anti-intellectualism, and focus on dramatic conversion experience.”

The book closes with a description of Buddhism, especially Tibetan Buddhism, which is rapidly growing, both on the mainland and in Taiwan, as well as among overseas Chinese around the world.

### **Conclusion and Some Implications**

In Buddhism and Confucianism (both “Neo-” and “New”), Christians face philosophical and religious systems of surpassing sophistication and subtlety, brilliance and beauty, containing not only metaphysical constructs of a very high order but also intricate and almost comprehensive ethical teachings worthy of the utmost respect and consideration. Well-schooled adherents of these complex faiths will not be impressed with simplistic appeals to “believe in Jesus.” Only a comprehensive worldview based on the Bible, speaking not only to the concerns and concepts of these great rivals, but also supplying the divine revelation and transforming power which they lack, will earn the respect of thoughtful Chinese.

Similarities between popular Chinese religion and popular Christianity should lead us to be a bit skeptical about the depth of much of “house church” Protestantism and even some Roman Catholicism. Large numbers of “converts” do not necessarily represent true faith, consistent “Christian” conduct, or thoughtful application of biblical principles to all domains of life.

Christians who do not join the “patriotic” associations, and especially if they offer even hints of opposition to the regime, will be distrusted and perhaps even feared by the government, which remains aware of the revolutionary potential of popular religious movements.

While judicious and comprehensive interaction between Christianity and Chinese culture is imperative, history shows that this process is also fraught with the danger of fatal compromise.

The growth of religious faith and practice in China has often occurred during periods of change and instability, while restoration of nationalistic rule has often been followed by fierce persecution. Note: Such persecution was launched in 2019.

While marked similarities—“points of contact,” if you will—exist between Christianity and other religions in China, there are also major differences, which will provide opportunities for what Christians (in my view, rightly) consider to be the superior elements of their faith, which comes as “good news” to those who have “tried everything.” On the other hand, these same points of conflict will inevitably spark resistance, resentment, and perhaps even renewed persecution.

At any rate, Christians must face the facts of both history and a current situation which is very complex—rather like China itself!

Let me repeat my belief that Poceski’s balanced text should be required reading for all who want to understand religion in China.

## **I Stand With Christ: The Courageous Life of a Chinese Christian**

**By Rongliang Zhang with Eugene Bach**

Zhang, Rongliang with Eugene Bach. *I Stand With Christ: The Courageous Life of a Chinese Christian*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2015.

The former leader of one of the five largest house church networks in China has penned a story that gripped and moved me greatly. Endorsed by prominent Chinese Christians who know the author, this fast-paced narrative covers the decades from the dark days of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), rapid church growth and persistent persecution in the 1980s and 1990s, consolidation and further expansion in the slightly more relaxed conditions of the late 1990s and early 2000s, to the continued outreach, even to foreign countries, along with government pressure, of recent years.

Zhang does not just give us his personal testimony. As he says, he represents thousands of Chinese Christians who risked everything, and suffered terribly, for the sake of the spread of the gospel. That is why one endorser said that reading this book will give you “details from the last forty years of history in China’s church.”

Born into a poor farmer’s family, Zhang “ate bitterness” from his earliest days— if, that is, there was anything at all to eat during the great famine caused by the ill-conceived “Great Leap Forward” (1958-1961). Hard work on an empty stomach inured him to hardship and forged a steely character that strengthened him for incessant labors as an evangelist and pastor, as well as almost unimaginable suffering.

In 1961, when the boy was about twelve, “Grandfather Sun,” who was his grandfather’s brother, explained the gospel of salvation from sin through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, as foretold in Isaiah 53. Then he gave Zhang a Bible and urged him to guard it with his life, for, indeed, “this book is a heavenly book. It is your treasure in this life . . . Consider it more precious than your own life.” Touched deeply by the old man’s earnest words, Zhang gave his life to Christ.

Zhang witnessed Grandfather Sun suffer and die for his faith not long afterwards, so he knew the risks of following Christ and preaching the gospel, but he had committed himself. Despite the threat of public disgrace, beatings, imprisonment, and even death, he began to communicate the Christian message in his own village and then in nearby villages. Through a bizarre misunderstanding, he was asked to join a Communist gang, and then the Communist Party. In his youthful ignorance and zeal, he saw no conflict between Christianity and the revolution led by Mao Zedong but soon faced a choice between the Party and Christ.

“I stand with Christ,” he responded, thus plunging himself into a ceaseless round of jail terms, torture, continued preaching when he had the slightest opportunity, followed by even worse suffering. Zhang was only a man, and he came close to giving up several times. The reader

appreciates his candor and marvels that the barbaric treatment he received didn't kill him. Each time, however, God "showed up" in a way that reminded Zhang that Jesus would never fail him nor forsake him. When his strength returned, he would be at it again, knowing that horrible, excruciating pain would soon test his faith to the uttermost.

Meanwhile, the gospel was spreading like wildfire, not only in Fangcheng County, where he presided over an ever-widening network of house churches, but in nearby counties and throughout the province of Henan. From there, evangelists fanned out to other parts of China, where God was preparing millions of people to receive the gospel and identify themselves as Christians. Braving brutal persecution, young evangelists conveyed the core gospel of reconciliation with God through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, the now-risen Savior of all who trust in him. They prayed for and saw miracles of all sorts, especially healing, but also amazing incidents of provision for their needs and protection in times of danger. Transformed lives attracted family and others to the faith.

Bibles were scarce and highly prized. Zhang followed the exhortation of Grandfather Sun to treasure the Word of God as his very life, poring over its pages day and night and instructing others to do the same. Lacking other Christian books, he became a man of one Book, the words of which instructed, guided, comforted, and motivated him to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, regardless of the cost.

In time, Zhang met the leaders of the other networks and began to admire them. He learned, too, from older preachers whom he met in prison or in brief encounters outside. In 1996, Zhang and leaders of the four other largest networks formed the short-lived Sinim Fellowship. Their shared experiences of conversion, preaching the gospel, and suffering for Christ overcame substantial differences in practice and even beliefs among them. Later, several leaders issued a Confession of Faith that set the boundaries of orthodox Christian doctrine, united disparate groups under one common set of beliefs, and testified to the government that they were not a heretical "evil cult."

A loosely connected movement rekindled the earlier "Back to Jerusalem" vision that had sent a few Chinese Christians to the western regions of China as a staging-point for taking the Christian gospel through Central and South Asia and all the way back to its place of origin. In recent years, a formal Back to Jerusalem organization, based in the United States and the United Kingdom, has emerged. Both Zhang and Brother Yun, the "Heavenly Man," now have ties to this organization, which published Zhang's book.

They have not neglected the vast unevangelized areas of China, however. As the largest human migration in history has taken hundreds of millions of rural Chinese into cities, the house church networks have intentionally planted churches among urban migrants.

Conditions in China relaxed under the "Opening and Reform" programs of Deng Xiaoping (after 1978) and his successors, creating openings to receive foreign visitors like Dennis Balcombe, a missionary based in Hong Kong. Under an alias, Zhang was able to procure a passport that allowed him to make eleven trips to other countries, including the United States and England, where he was able to express his gratitude for the sacrifices made by the early missionaries to

China. He thrilled audiences with stories of the rapid increase of the number of Christians in China and the miracles they had witnessed.

Not everything went well, however. Zhang's "imperial" style of leadership provoked resentment and finally rebellion, leading to a split in his church. Deeply hurt, he acknowledged his faults, and came to see this split as God's way of multiplying the number of new churches.

The law finally caught up with him, and he spent another seven years in prison. This time, however, there was plenty of food, the guards refrained from torture, and the sick received medical treatment. As before, the prison became a hothouse for the conversion and spiritual growth of even more people. When he regained his freedom, Zhang found that his church had flourished in his absence. Though he enjoys friendly relations with the local police, he remains under surveillance, and wonders what will happen to him if they ever obtain a Chinese copy of his story.

## **Evaluation**

### ***The "Simple Gospel" Applies to Chinese***

The first thing that strikes me is how Zhang's story completely refutes the increasingly popular theory that, since the Chinese "have no concept of sin," we must alter our message to them. (For reviews of two books advocating different versions of this approach, see

<http://www.globalchinacenter.org/analysis/reviews/weaknesses-in-general-wu-makes.php> and <http://www.globalchinacenter.org/analysis/christianity-in-china/theosis-sinochristian-theology-and-the-second-chinese-enlightenment-part-ii.php>).

In stark contrast, Zhang's conversion, the message that he and others like him have preached, and the response of millions of Chinese, demonstrate that the "old, old story" of salvation from sin through faith in the atoning death of Jesus continues to draw Chinese to Christ. The same is true, by the way, of China's urban Christians.

### ***Power Corrupts***

As his influence grew and more and more people responded to his preaching, Zhang, like most Chinese church leaders, followed the only model of leadership he knew—the "imperial style" that Chinese had seen in their homes and in society for millennia. Predictably, this concentration of power in one man leads to resentment, rivalry, and even rebellion, as happened with Zhang.

### ***Money Corrupts, Too***

Reliable Chinese Christians have accused Zhang of telling one story to audiences overseas and another story to people in China. They attribute this to the influence of his foreign "handlers" in the Back to Jerusalem organization, and to Zhang's ignorance of the ways of Western "Christian marketing." Brother Yun, the "heavenly man," has come under criticism as well.

Only God knows the truth of the matter, and no one is saying that either Zhang or Yun has personally profited from their public speaking or the publication of their books by the Back to Jerusalem organization, despite allegations of lack of transparency and accountability in the use

of funds by their Western sponsors. Perhaps all that has changed in response to such criticisms. One hopes so.

### ***Greatness Through Suffering***

Zhang frankly admits that he has made mistakes. Who has not? From his narrative, however, several things emerge with compelling force:

- Persecution and suffering refine, strengthen, and enable Christians to bear witness to Jesus Christ and to draw others to believe the gospel.
- The Christian church can grow despite massive opposition from the government. As China begins to impose another round of restrictions on religious expression by Christians outside the “official” church, we do not have to worry that the Word of God will cease to spread.
- Zhang and his fellow believers have experienced God’s presence, power, provision, and protection in ways that most Western Christians have not. Despite our greater access to resources in theology, biblical studies, and church history, our multi-million-dollar buildings, and our slick promotional programs, Western Christian leaders would do well to sit at the feet of people like Zhang as humble pupils in the school of Christ.

This book has “the ring of truth.” When I finished my second reading of it, I burst into tears. I recommend it as a valuable resource for understanding the recent history of Protestant Christianity in China.

For a brief biography of Zhang Rongliang based on this book, go to <http://www.reachingchineseworldwide.org/blog/2017/12/28/zhang-rongliangs-stand-with-christ>.

## **Jesus in Beijing**

### **How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power**

**By David Aikman**

Aikman, David. *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003.

David Aikman has given us perhaps the most controversial introduction to the explosive increase and growing influence of Christianity in China.

With a Ph.D. in history, the former *Time* Magazine Bureau Chief in Beijing and Moscow possesses the necessary background for a big-picture assessment of the expanding role of Christians within Chinese society. Add to that an eye for personal detail, aggressive investigative reporting, courage, wit, and a great deal of hard work, and you have the ingredients of a stirring account of one of the most momentous developments in modern times.

According to Aikman, we are talking not just about an incredible increase in the number of Chinese Christians in the past fifty years (from one or two million to more than 70 million), but what might become a fundamental shift in world power alignments.

In other words, the spread of a vibrant Christian faith throughout all echelons of society could produce a “critical mass” of believers that would impact both domestic and foreign policy. Specifically, Evangelical Christians could tilt their nation towards America in the global conflict between Islam and the West.

Despite such claims on the dust jacket and in the first and final chapters, the heart of the book lies in vivid portraits Aikman paints of intrepid missionaries and fearless Chinese believers over a span of more than a thousand years.

Aikman begins with the story of early missionary efforts in China, from the Nestorians in the 7th century, followed by Franciscans in the 13th century, to the Jesuits in the 16th century. Each time, foreigners fell victim to Chinese politics and were driven out or suppressed.

The history of the Protestant church in China starts with the heroic efforts of Robert Morrison, who arrived in Canton (now called Guangzhou) in 1807. His translation of the Bible laid the foundation for the substantial success of thousands of Protestant missionaries from the West in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

When Mao took control of China however, all foreigners once again had to leave. Many wondered whether the Chinese church would survive. *Jesus in Beijing* offers vivid proof, not only of survival, but of unprecedented growth.

Following a roughly chronological order, the author introduces us first to the “Patriarchs”—a handful of stalwart pastors who endured decades of harsh treatment in prison because they would

not join the State-controlled Protestant Three–Self Patriotic Movement “church.” Interviews with these resolute men provide the basis for brief sketches of their sufferings and their profound impact upon the current generation of believers, who have been inspired by the courage of their elders. (*Note: This review was written in the early 2000s; things have changed since then.*)

Next come the “Uncles”—leaders in their forties and fifties who now guide tens of millions of believers in “house church” networks. They, too, have undergone brutal persecution for refusing to register with the government or join the TSPM. Imprisonment, beatings, and the agony inflicted by the electric stun-gun have failed to dampen their zeal or commitment to evangelism.

Aikman introduces us also to “Aunts, Nephews, and Nieces,” who follow in the footsteps of the Patriarchs and Uncles to take the message of Christ to China’s millions. He traces the growth of house churches, describes miracles, and quotes joyful believers from all walks of life.

In a chapter on “Artists, Writers, and Academics,” he offers solid evidence for his optimism about the coming cultural impact of Christianity upon even the upper levels of Chinese society.

Theologians will notice his bias towards “Charismatic” forms of Christianity and his less–than–limpid analysis of their apparent misunderstanding of Reformed doctrine. Nor does he dispute the belief among Chinese believers that 20–30% of their countrymen will be Christian within a few decades or try to analyze what “Christian” might mean under those circumstances.

But Aikman is a reporter, not a theorist, and he keeps his focus clear: to relate to those on the outside the activities and attitudes of a truly remarkable array of ardent followers of Jesus.

Several well-researched chapters take us into the complex world of both the Three–Self Patriotic Movement and of the two Roman Catholic organizations (one loyal to Rome, the other at least nominally subservient to the Government). He includes a very balanced survey of the role of foreign Christians in China over the past couple of decades.

He has received some criticism for revealing more information about some Christian ministries operating in China than seems necessary. He responds by observing that the Chinese already know what Christians are doing and don’t really have time to listen in on every conversation. But his detractors, though admitting that the police know more than we would like, reply that it’s better not to make the Christian work of foreigners so prominent that the government is compelled to crack down.

Indeed, that seems to have been the case, for since the publication of *Jesus in Beijing* and the almost concurrent appearance of Yuan Zhimin’s CD, “The Cross in China,” the authorities seem to have been forced to do something about the rapid spread of a movement they cannot control, for hundreds of house church leaders have been apprehended. Most have been held for only a few days, but some have suffered harsh treatment, and a few have been given very long sentences.

I would add these further comments:

- David Aikman's view that China will be "Christian" in a few decades or less depends on a view of "Christian" which he received from his Chinese Christian friends. They do

evangelism in such a way that millions of professions of faith result, but the reality or depth of those conversions is often questionable.

- The worldview of such "Christians" usually lacks depth and breadth. Only a handful of them have the means or opportunity to apply anything like a Biblical standard to the questions of their society. That means that their political influence could be uneven, at best.
- Aikman himself holds out the possibility that China will lurch towards aggressive nationalism in the near future. Some experts note that a strong anti-Christian reaction, and thus ruthless and thoroughgoing persecution (as distinct from moderate and spotty, as now), could push the church to the margins of society, as has happened several times in the past several hundred years. (*Note: Precisely this change has taken place since Xi Jinping came to power.*)
- Aikman points out the danger of splits, cults, and heresies. These cannot but diminish the overall political impact. The horrendous turmoil resulting from the Taiping Rebellion in the mid-19th century shows what such a cult could do. China's leaders are aware of that history and are zealous to quash any such movement. They do not know how to distinguish true from false religion, however, so their blows could (and often do) fall on orthodox groups.
- Still, Aikman does try to qualify what he means by "Christian" influence and makes a good case for such a powerful growth of the faith among all sectors of society that the entire nation will be affected.
- There is even a danger that some future Chinese Constantine will latch on to Christianity as the only "glue" to hold together an otherwise unraveling country and make it the "official" religion. Since China has always had an official orthodoxy controlled by, and supporting, the government, you can imagine the disastrous consequences this could entail.

In the end, however, *Jesus in Beijing* is mostly about the indomitable house church movement which, starting as a tiny seed in the dark soil of remote villages during the days of the Cultural Revolution, has blossomed into a garden of immense variety and beauty.

## **Jesus Never Left China**

### **The Rest of the Story**

**By Werner Burklin**

Burklin, Werner. *Jesus Never Left China: The Rest of the Story – The Untold Story of the Church in China Now Exposed*. Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word (a division of WinePress Publishing), 2005.

This volume possesses a number of strengths and one nearly-fatal weakness.

First, the strengths: Burklin was born in China as the son of missionaries; in China he experienced both conversion to Christ and a commitment to ministry among Chinese. He has traveled widely in China, enjoys good relationships with many leaders of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), and heads a movement with wide involvement in the land of his birth.

He writes with verve and passion, mixing personal observations, interviews, and the results of his own reading. You never doubt where he stands, for he states his views clearly and forcefully. Evangelicals will rejoice at his firm belief in the Bible as the Word of God and only touchstone of true theology and applaud his great concern lest liberal theology wreak in China the havoc it did in his native Germany.

All readers will also delight in the good news that God continues to work in China, with thousands of churches being built and opened in recent years, millions coming to faith in Christ, and eager new students seeking to learn more of the Scriptures in order to serve the growing church.

Those who think that all TSPM pastors are lackeys of the state, or all members of TSPM churches are nominal Christians, will be glad to hear of Burklin's free access to TSPM evangelical seminaries and Bible schools in China and his first-hand observation of church buildings jam-packed with dedicated believers and earnest seekers.

### **Balance!**

Burning with zeal to tell "the rest of the story," Burklin seeks to restore balance to our perception of the Christian movement in China. Thus, he dwells at length on the open doors within the TSPM, and he bends over backwards to explain the views of Bishop T.K. Ting (Ding). Wishing to present an accurate picture, he challenges, even mocks, the inflated claims of some Evangelicals who assert that tens of thousands are turning to Christ in China each day. He rightly excoriates those who misrepresent the facts in order to raise money for their own ministries.

While admiring the zeal of Chinese believers, he wonders whether the much-touted "Back to Jerusalem Movement" will really field the 100,000 cross-cultural missionaries that many Westerners, picking up on a statement by a few Chinese leaders, naively believe will soon flow

west from China. He is wary of the idealistic, even romantic, picture of the house churches painted by Evangelicals in the West and tries to fill out the portrait with the darker hues of the heresies and divisions which plague those congregations.

Most of all, he worries about the lack of proper theological education among Christians in China. Aware of the dangers of shallow teaching and the general failure of Chinese Christians (and the missionaries who taught them) to relate the gospel to Chinese culture, he pleads for more solid theological instruction for Chinese church leaders. He believes that the greatest threat to the church comes not from government persecution, but from liberal theology, as he states repeatedly.

The book contains several Chinese communist government documents as appendices, including the Constitution. They are helpful, stating the laws which govern religious activity in China today, and they explain why Burklin can blandly state that “it is not persecution but prosecution that Christians may experience.” Thus, “As long as the rules, regulations, and laws of the land are respected, no one needs to fear death because of his or her faith.”

The author wants to contrast the horrific persecution of Christians during the Cultural Revolution with the relative freedom enjoyed today by the state-sponsored TSPM. He deeply resents the common portrayal of universal oppression and suffering of believers merely on account of their faith and insists that true freedom of religion exists in China, supporting that assertion with manifold stories from his own experience with the TSPM.

### **Balance?**

On the other hand, despite his best efforts, the author fails in his intention to give us “the Rest of the Story: The Untold story of the Church in China Now Exposed,” as the cover loudly claims.

True, he provides us with some good historical background, both of China and of the spread of Christianity among the Chinese. He quickly relates the story of Christian witness in China, and graphically details the sufferings of Christians during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). In all this, he is fair and straightforward.

Even his treatment of the controversies surrounding Bishop Ting avoids a totally one-sided approach. He quotes, at length, both those who support, and those who oppose, Ting’s program of “theological reconstruction.” In a moving passage, he tells how the venerable Wang Mingdao expressed his sorrow over Billy Graham’s cooperation with the TSPM.

Nevertheless, the balance to which Burklin aspires fails to appear.

To begin with, the inflated claims of the title are punctured by the one-sided case made for religious freedom. Burklin almost totally ignores the constant, and often costly, efforts of members of unregistered churches to maintain and spread the faith. He tells a small part of the story, perhaps, technically, the “rest” of it, but by no means does he “expose” the “untold story of the church in China.” House church believers constitute the vast majority of Christians in China, and they receive little mention in this supposedly “balanced” book, and what Burklin does say is usually critical.

For example, he rightly emphasizes the need for theological education, but merely notes, with an admission of ignorance, the attempts of house church leaders to train their people. Clearly, he has not taken the time or trouble to find out what is going on.

His treatment would have carried more credibility if he had engaged in dialogue with David Aikman's widely-read *Jesus In Beijing*. Indeed, Burklin says he deliberately refused to read Aikman's book, "so as not to be influenced by his opinions."

Equally baffling, his bibliography omits reference to Tony Lambert's authoritative works of meticulous research on China's Christians, or *God and Caesar in China*, edited by Hamrin and Kindopp.

Although he does quote critics of the TSPM, Burklin also seems to take at face value the rejoinders of Bishop Ting and his supporters. Alert China researchers know which "camp" such spokesmen represent and evaluate their comments accordingly. The same goes for the many endorsements for the book, which come mostly from those who have a stake in their relationship with the TSPM and have studiously avoided much association with the house churches.

His account of the "theological reconstruction" campaign which Ting has been waging against Evangelicals in the TSPM moves mostly in the refined air of theoretical arm-chair theologians.

As for the lack of "persecution" in China, it will not do merely to say that if you keep the laws you will not suffer for your faith. In the first place, these laws force believers to choose whether to follow Caesar or Christ in the limited arena of faith. China's regulations criminalize religious activities which are considered legitimate by international standards.

Again: Burklin does seem to ignore reports of the hundreds of church leaders who have been rounded up in the past eighteen months as part of a crackdown upon house church Christians.

To conclude: this book is hard to evaluate. It possesses much value as a description of legal Christian activity in China and as a general overview of some aspects of Chinese Christian history. Burklin's critiques of evangelical hype and of the vulnerability of house churches to false teaching are well taken.

On the other hand, it lacks objectivity, omits much that should have been included, and ends up leaving an impression that is not fully true.

Like the biblical Barnabas, Werner Burklin is widely regarded as a good man who has done much good work. If only he had written a better book!

# **Mobilized Merchants-Patriotic Martyrs: China's House-Church Protestants and the Politics of Cooperative Resistance**

**By Timothy Garner Conkling**

Conkling, Timothy Garner. *Mobilized Merchants-Patriotic Martyrs: China's House-Church Protestants and the Politics of Cooperative Resistance*. Self-Published, 2013.

## **Introduction**

Timothy Conkling wants to shed light on “the crucial questions of whether the PRC Protestant house-church movement is motivated or capable of bringing about political change or inciting revolt on the one hand, or significantly contributing to the development of civil society, democratic rule or political pluralism on the other” (1).

“House-church” (HC) “refers to private, or sometimes public, gatherings of (Protestant) Christians who choose to meet in non-registered venues for Bible study, prayer, and/or corporate Protestant worship” (8). They do not register for reasons which “range from theological to practical.” Some believe that since Christ is Lord of the church, it should not put itself under the full authority of any political organization. Others do not want to submit to the regulations which prohibit meetings outside of designated places, at designated times, and under designated personnel and the religious instruction of children and youth. Many don't like the traditional worship services of official churches; others believe that meetings should take place in homes, not church buildings. Some worship in house churches for “reasons of practicality and expediency.” They want the flexibility, freedom from police monitoring, and more intimate atmosphere of home gatherings (9-10).

Conkling notes that “developments over the past decade [before 2012] have either lessened the animosity between house-church believers and TPSM [Three-Self Patriotic Movement] members or opened up more doors of association between the two movements,” especially among younger leaders and believers (10).

In any case, because unregistered gatherings are prohibited by government policy, “individual house-churches are a form of resistance, and when organized into house-church networks that function as de-facto denominations . . . their organizational structure functions as an organized, multi-faceted form of resistance” (12). He emphasizes that these HCs and their people do not see their activities as a form of resistance, but as “simply trying to do what Christians should do without state interference” (13).

Careful definition of terms is essential in a study like this, and Conkling provides them. “Persecution . . . takes many forms. Religious believers are labeled as ‘evil-cultists,’ forbidden to worship or evangelize, arrested, sent for re-education, fined placed under house-arrest, threatened, beaten, tortured, and in some cases even killed” (4). Defined in this way, declaring all unregistered meetings as illegal, and subjecting Christians of all sorts to restrictions does not count as “persecution,” though Conkling sometimes seems to blur these boundaries.

“Cooperative resistance,” another key term, has three distinguishing characteristics: (1) It “actively asserts submission to and recognition of the government and its rightful authority while imploring a reversal of the presenting grievance, policy, or persecution” (2) It “threatens the mobilization of non-violent means of incapacitating the (local) government responsible for specific prohibitions of religious activity or persecution of house-church Protestants, through the mobilization and cooperation of international activists” (3) It “brings together international activists, human-rights organizations (specifically ChinaAid Association of Midland, Texas), political leaders, and governments to pressure the PRC Central government to stop the policies and practices which lead to the persecution of religious believers” (27).

China’s HC Christians do not oppose the CCP or the government. On the contrary, they assume that the government will respond to appeals to honor its constitution and the international agreements on religious freedom that it has signed.

Conkling began his research with the assumption that, at some point, when pressed too far and oppressed too brutally by the government, HC believers would eventually “mobilize within their networks for some form of direct resistance or revolutionary activity against the PRC government” (37). However, despite increased persecution of Christians since he began his research, he discovered that his original assumption was incorrect: “The ability to mobilize and the prevalence of persecution did not and does not inevitably lead house-church Protestants in the PRC to pursue a strategy of public demonstration of opposition to the government or the CCP, but rather leads to a theologically nuanced, yet politically influential strategy of cooperative resistance” (38).

## **Chapter 1: Patriotic Martyrs and the Politics of Christian Commitment**

“The emergence of the Protestant house-church movement in the PRC occurred in the historical context of state control over religion, characteristic of China since the Tang Dynasty” (1). For more than a thousand years, the Chinese government has seen itself as the final arbiter of truth and the only proper object of total allegiance. Religion is supposed to serve the interests of the state, and when it doesn’t, it becomes an enemy of the state. The government establishes religious organizations in order to control religious activity and conform it to the purposes of the state. Any religious believers who do not join the state-approved organization, in the eyes of the government, *ipso facto* declare themselves to be opposed to the state, no matter what they say to the contrary.

The state guarantees freedom of religious belief but allows only “normal” religious activity. Anything else is branded illegal. Conkling quotes and analyzes various documents that have outlined religious policy in China, noting that these have the force of law.

Further, those who belong to non-registered religious groups are labeled “evil cultists,” agents of de-stabilization, enemies of social order, and therefore criminals. Accordingly, they must be punished, not for being religious, but for being unpatriotic and even dangerous. Cruel measures then become warranted. Since Christianity in particular has been associated with foreign imperialism since the nineteenth century, and foreign Christians are seen as “hostile” agents who are “attempting to use every opportunity to infiltrate in order to ‘return to the China mainland,’” any unauthorized contact with foreign Christians is strictly forbidden (55).

HC believers in China have hitherto been willing to suffer any persecution for the sake of Christ, without resentment or rancor, and with a sincere belief that they are patriotic citizens. They only disobey when they think that the state is ordering them to violate God’s clearly revealed command, such as to meet in homes or otherwise, evangelize, teach their children, and pray for healing and deliverance from demons. Otherwise, they seek to be good citizens who fully submit to government authority.

In response to harsh government crackdowns in the past, a “martyrdom mentality” based on a theology of martyrdom has taken firm root among HC believers. Conkling considers their willingness to suffer as one of the main reasons for the rapid growth of HC Protestantism in China.

## **Chapter 2: White Magic and Ghost Busting: Charismatic Protestants and the Politics of Healing and Exorcism**

This chapter demonstrates in detail the “affinity between traditional Chinese popular religion and rural house-church Protestant charismatic theology,” and identifies this as “one of the primary factors explaining rapid Protestant house-church growth in the PRC.” Indeed, about ninety percent of all Christians attribute their conversion to an experience of healing through the prayers of believers (22). Since most HC Christians incline towards a charismatic theology, and almost all believe in prayer for healing and in exorcism, they are automatically considered “evil-cultists” by the government, which prohibits these activities as a form of socially-destabilizing superstition. Since the state sees itself as the source of all social benefits, the rise of popular religion in general and of HC Protestantism in particular “cuts right to the heart of the Chinese state’s own logic of legitimization” (120) and has thus prompted fierce persecution at times.

### **Chapter 3: Silencing the Lambs: The South China Church and the Politics of Heretical Cults**

This chapter tells the story of the South China Church (SCC) and shows how, in fact, its leaders did embody the definition of a cult, including “setting up illegal organizations in the name of religion; deifying core leaders; initiating and spreading superstitions and evil teachings; confusing and deceiving people; engaging in disturbing the social order in an organized manner, and harming people’s lives and properties” (136). More specifically, the top leader of the SCC engaged in repeated rape, and other leaders and teachers used violence to coerce their students into total allegiance to the “Teacher,” Gong Shengliang.

When Gong and several others were sentenced to death by a Chinese court, international support for them was mobilized, with the result that President George W. Bush appealed personally to Chinese President Jiang Zemin for their release. This pressure resulted in commutation of the death penalty and reduced prison sentences.

Alas, Conkling describes in detail how later investigation of the actions of Gong and his cohorts by qualified representatives of China Ministries International found that they were indeed guilty as charged. Thus, what at first seemed like a justified and successful intervention by American Christians, including the president, turned out to have been based on false information, to the great embarrassment of advocates of the SCC. In fact, Conkling concludes, “the South China Church members worshipped their exalted teacher . . . tolerated his sexual abuse, lied on his behalf, and committed acts of violence to protect his person. . . . The homage rendered to Gong by his devoted followers, combined with their millenarian convictions and violent propensities rendered members of the SCC culpable as cultists according to the PRC’s definition” (169).

The SCC illustrated a much larger problem, which is that “house-church networks usually have a leadership structure which mirrors a Chinese imperial dynasty,” so that even when members are aware of their leader’s wrongdoing, “disclosure of a leader’s misdeeds does not lead directly to discipline” (190).

Given the history of violent revolts in China by millenarian religious sects led by egotistical men, the government’s suspicion of such movements is justified. The violent Eastern Lightning Cult also fits this pattern. That is why HC Protestants have done their best to explain to the government their own orthodox beliefs and firm commitment to civil obedience.

### **Chapter 4: Mobilized Merchants: Wenzhou Christians and the Politics of Cooperative Resistance**

This chapter vividly describes the rise of so-called “boss Christians” in Wenzhou, their establishment of rich congregations meeting in large and expensive buildings, and their cozy

relationship with the local government. When the city sought to enforce the policy against religious education of children, these bosses mobilized resistance, including appeals from overseas, and finally the threat of virtually shutting down the governing apparatus by a blitz of faxes, telephone calls, and emails. The city backed down and the cozy relationship between “boss Christians” and local officials returned.

The “boss Christians” based their resistance upon the constitution of the PRC and also upon the international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights signed by the PRC in 1988. They also assumed that the central government would abide by the treaty it had signed and support their appeal.

Conkling cites this as a prime example of “cooperative resistance,” in which Christians affirm their desire to cooperate with the government, but refuse to desist from practices which, though strictly illegal, they consider to be essential to their identity as Christians and necessary to their obedience to Christ.

## **Chapter 5: Dissident Voices: Bob Fu, ChinaAid, and the Politics of International Appeal**

Since Bob Fu and ChinaAid played a prominent role in generating international support for the SCC, this chapter traces “the development of ChinaAid through the biography of its founder, Bob (Xiqiu) Fu”; outlines “the extent of persecutions against house-church believers from 2005–2012 as detailed in ChinaAid’s annual Persecution Reports”; examines “the effectiveness of ChinaAid to create transnational alliances between persecuted” HC Christians and “human rights agencies, media sources, governmental organizations in the US, United Nations, and European Union to . . . bring relief to victims of persecution”; and assesses “the tactics and effectiveness of ChinaAid to mobilize international appeal” in several high-profile cases.

Two things stand out. First, in violation of international treaties which the PRC has signed, and with the knowledge of high officials, Chinese police often use unspeakably cruel torture to force people to confess their “crimes” or to change their ways. One wonders how the leaders of the PRC can tolerate this sort of barbaric behavior.

Second, though international appeals and pressure from foreign governments has lessened the severity of punishment for people detained by the authorities, it has not stopped either the persecution or the state-sponsored torture. On the contrary, such international intervention has convinced China’s rulers that Chinese Christians are, at the very least, in close cooperation with hostile foreign powers, if not actually agents of those powers.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion: House Church Protestants and the Futures of Cooperative Resistance**

Conkling sees several possible futures for the house-churches' relationship with the government in China:

1. "If the PRC government continues to attempt to control and suppress the house-church movement, particularly in rural areas, along the same lines as it has in the prior decade, then due to the theology of patriotic martyrdom and submission to government . . . the house-churches will continue to grow under persecution, but not as a movement intent on destabilizing society or overthrowing the present government."
2. "If the cooperative element of cooperative resistance becomes a two-sided overture of cooperation, one where the government initiates a deeper and more respectful cooperation with the house-churches, then the house-churches are positioned to grow while experiencing less persecution."
3. "However, if the resistance element of cooperative resistance becomes, for the house-church members, a self-consciously adopted strategy of intent against the government . . . then the future outcome is more uncertain. A greater resistance on the part of house-church Protestants could lead the government to a greater repression."

In any case, "the missiological strategy of the house-church movement . . . will attempt to continue to grow the church of Jesus Christ peacefully in the world's most populated nation" (255-256).

In short, the house church movement in China will continue to grow, no matter what the government does. The questions are:

Will the government acknowledge the sincerity of the HC Christian's protestations of patriotism, their total lack of any desire to oppose, much less overthrow, the government, and their desire for a truly cooperative relationship with the government?

Or will China's rulers continue to regard any and all disagreement on any policy as global, total opposition to the government, fueled by an intent to destabilize the regime, and thus continue to pursue a path of suppression or even persecution?

If so, will HC Protestants forsake their commitment to theological orthodoxy, their willingness to suffer martyrdom for the sake of Christ, and their resolute refusal to disobey the government except when they think they must do so in order to be faithful to Christ? If that happens, will

they resort to force in order to protect themselves, their church buildings, and their religious rights?

Sadly, and rather pathetically, the communist leaders of China cannot seem to discern the distinction between disagreement and rebellion, for they regard all disagreement as treason. The policy of cooperative resistance described in this book “is misinterpreted by the PRC government to be a counter-revolutionary, volatile force which could potentially destabilize Chinese society.” They are in bondage to “psychological paranoia” that assumes that “limited resistance must be evil in motivation, revolutionary in intent, and destabilizing in its result” (254).

“The research which led to this dissertation does not justify that political paranoia. Protestant house-church Christians are non-violent” (254). Ironically, the very misguided attempt to eliminate all supposed (and non-existent) rebels could possibly turn pacifists into protesters, and then into political activists.

Recent events in Wenzhou, which occurred after this dissertation was written, illustrate the determination of the government to limit public expressions of Christianity, control the church in a variety of ways, and crush all opposition. Christians in Wenzhou have not all sat passively watching the removal of crosses and demolition of church buildings. They have interposed their bodies and even resisted wreckers physically. There have been a few incidents of violence. A situation that was described in this chapter as a cooperative relationship between HC Christians and the local government has been replaced by confrontation, contention, and complete control.

The government will win in the short term, of course. Whether it will succeed in the long run remains to be seen. Unnecessary use of force may eventually provoke unnecessary violence, unless Christians can retain their current fundamentally submissive and cooperative attitude towards the state.

Conkling believes that the HC Christians are in no position to rise up against the state. They just don't want to, they don't think it's right to disobey civil powers, they would rather suffer martyrdom, and they believe they can best glorify God through evangelism, prayer, and a pacific response to unwarranted persecution. Let us hope they continue in those convictions.

## **Evaluation**

Timothy Conkling has written an extremely important book. Based on exhaustive research over many years and drawing upon a wide variety of unimpeachable sources, he has given us a definitive analysis of both HC Protestants and government religious policy and practice as they were at the time of writing.

The comprehensive and severe crackdown on all dissent in China since 2013 highlights the inability of the nation's leaders to tolerate any alternate voices and heightens the immediacy of the questions Conkling poses.

One major caveat: we should not conclude that HC Protestants in China are being persecuted on a wide scale—yet. Yes, large church buildings have been demolished and crosses removed, pastors who have objected to these actions have been removed from their pulpits and some have been arrested, Christian leaders across the nation say that conditions are far tighter and tougher than they were not long ago, and the new law on NGOs will drastically affect how both Chinese and foreign Christians operate in coming years.

Still, the vast majority of Christians in China meet for worship without hindrance; the Christian message continues to go out to millions through a multitude of media; and persecution is rare and localized, and restricted to situations where Christian activity is large-scale and blatant.

Despite those encouraging facts, however, Timothy Conkling's book is essential reading for all who want to understand the situation of HC believers in China, and especially those who want to be of use to Christians in China. Though not agreeing completely with everything in this dissertation, I highly recommend it.

For some thoughts on implications of this book for Christian ministry among Chinese, go to <http://www.reachingchinese worldwide.org>.

## **My Dreams and Visions: An Autobiography**

**By Ted Choy with Leona Choy**

Choy, Ted with Leona Choy. *My Dreams and Visions: An Autobiography*. Co-published: Winchester, VA: Golden Morning Publishing, and Paradise, PA: Ambassadors For Christ, Inc., 1997.

### **The Strategic Role of Overseas Chinese in the Growth of the Chinese Church**

When the story of the stupendous growth of the Protestant church in China is fully told, the part played by overseas Chinese believers will surely be a prominent theme. This autobiography of Theodore (“Ted”) Choy (Tsai), written by his wife Leona, contains in the life of one intrepid man (and his equally intrepid wife of 45 years) the various ways in which Chinese living outside of Mainland China have contributed to the spread of the Gospel there.

Ted Choy was born in Shantou (then called Swatow), Guangdong, in 1916, one of ten children. His father (Chua Hang-nguan) had become a believer in Christ through the witness and effective treatment of a Christian missionary doctor. His grandmother (Yang Hiang-sui) first opposed her son’s new faith, but eventually turned away from her idols to follow Christ as well, as did Ted’s mother. The whole family attended Bethel Church in Shantou.

Ted Choy started his education at the Bethel church grade school, then went to Hong Kong with his brother to attend St. Joseph’s College (a junior high school) and then LaSalle College (a senior high school), both run by Roman Catholic priests. An indifferent student, he later regretted his lack of ability in Chinese and in English.

After going through a dark period, he committed himself to Christ towards the end of high school. During a revival meeting held in Hong Kong in the 1930s by the evangelist Dr. John Song, Choy dedicated himself to full-time Christian service. He first enrolled in Jia (Chia) Yu-ming’s seminary in Nanjing, but war conditions forced the school to close, so he transferred to the Canton Bible Institute (C.B.I.), which had moved from Guangzhou to Hong Kong. He graduated in 1939. Then he traveled to the U.S. with some of his teachers, who were returning on furlough, and entered the Evangelical Free Church Seminary in Chicago, Illinois (now called Trinity Evangelical Divinity School). After graduation from Trinity, he entered Wheaton College for further biblical and theological studies, supporting himself by working at odd jobs.

His career at Wheaton was interrupted when he volunteered to join the U.S. Marine Corps as a specialist interpreter. The Marines sent him to North China, where he also helped with Youth for Christ meetings for Chinese young people. After World War II ended, he returned to Wheaton to complete his college degree. There he met Leona Spryncl, a second-generation Czech immigrant. They were married in 1947, right after Choy received his B.A.

Returning to Hong Kong in 1948, Choy took a position as pastor of the Swatow Christian Church in Kowloon. Three sons—Richard, Clifford, and Gary—were born during that period. Choy accepted a position to teach in a seminary in Singapore for one year, then sailed back to the U.S., where he began studies in the School of Religion of the University of Iowa, receiving an M.A. in 1955.

As an international student, Ted Choy could sympathize with others who had come from foreign countries to study in the United States. He and his wife joined International Students, Inc. (ISI), concentrating upon Chinese students for six years from their base in Washington, D.C. This work involved extensive travels to colleges throughout the country. Starting from a home Bible study, the Chinese Christian Church of Greater Washington, D.C. was formed, with the Rev. Moses Chow as the first pastor.

In 1962, the Choys left ISI and co-founded a new ministry for Chinese students, Ambassadors for Christ, Inc. (AFC). Besides traveling to visit students, they opened their home to Chinese, using warm hospitality to demonstrate the love of God. The ministry soon outgrew their home, however, and a generous gift from two Christian ladies (Christiana Tsai and Mary A. Leaman) enabled them to purchase property in Paradise, Pennsylvania, for the permanent headquarters for AFC, which was dedicated in 1971. Ted Choy served with AFC until his retirement in 1981, during which time he saw the rapid growth of both the ministry and the number of students coming from China.

The next phase of the Choys' ministry began even while Ted was still serving with AFC. Soon after China began opening its doors to Western tourists, Leona joined one of the first tours. She took along some English-Chinese scriptures, as well as some Chinese Bibles, just in case she would have an opportunity to share them. People eager to read anything in English quickly exhausted her supplies of the bilingual books, but she wondered how she would find anyone who could use the Chinese Bibles.

A fellow Westerner on the tour, who had been a missionary in China, had arranged to meet with an old pastor whom she had known years ago. Leona packed all her Bibles into a shopping bag and went along. The reception they received by Christians desperate for the Word of God overwhelmed her and left an indelible impression. Much of the rest of the book describes subsequent visits by both Ted and Leona, mostly to house church Christians, who joyfully accepted Christian literature, especially Bibles, and asked for Ted to share his knowledge of God with them. I was struck by their willingness to endure hardship, including illness, to serve this expanding church.

These were the heady days of rapid church growth, when Christians were still widely persecuted but refused to slacken in their devotion. Moving tales of courageous persistence in faithful witness to Christ make this biography also a narrative of Chinese church growth in the 1980s and 1990s, when the Choys made a dozen trips, often to isolated and hard-to-reach places, to minister to hungry souls. They even went to Hainan Island, at that time still a remote destination, to share the Gospel. Ted's experience, and his extensive biblical knowledge, made him a valuable

resource to churches bereft of pastoral care and teaching, while his fluency in the Shantou dialect gave him access in regions where he had spent his youth.

When the Choys showed them pictures of Chinese students who had become Christians in the US, their hosts were amazed, for they had been told that no educated person believe in Christ, and that Christianity had died out in the West.

In the 1980s, Leona organized tours to China, some of them for Christians, on which Ted accompanied her. They also used the postal service to send cassette tapes and Christian literature to Christians in China, until that became risky. Ted set up an “English Teaching Center,” which established links with people in China wanting to study English, using specially-published books, cassettes, and a magazine. Relationships with a university in Shanghai led to exchange programs for American Christian students, who were able to befriend and share their faith with their Chinese classmates. On rare occasions, they gave money to help pastors and their families in need.

As time progressed, so did the church in China, which Ted Choy’s biography describes in vivid detail. Now the greatest threat comes from the prosperity which has overtaken millions of Chinese after decades of deprivation. While depicting the courage and zeal of Chinese believers, the book does not gloss over the weaknesses of this burgeoning church. Indeed, it provides a rather accurate portrayal up to the early 1990s.

Ted Choy died in 1992 at the age of 76, after a life replete with varied, but always faithful, service to Chinese in the U.S. and in his home country. His career illustrates the crucial function that overseas Chinese Christians have served in the growth and maturation of what may now be the largest group of Protestant Christians in the world.

**No Limitations:**  
**Brother Shen Xiao Feng – His story and writings with Dr. David Hunt**  
**By Xiao Feng Shen**

Shen, Xiao Feng. *No Limitations: Brother Shen Xiao Feng – His story and writings with Dr. David Hunt*. WorldServe Publishing, 2006.

Of all the books on the house churches in China, this is surely one of the best.

The author, a leader in one of the large house church networks, displays remarkable balance, insight, depth, knowledge, humility, and charity—not to mention the courage and zeal we have grown to expect from house church Christians in China. This is an eminently *sane* book, with a mixture of the spiritual and the practical that is sometimes lacking in such accounts.

David Hunt, President of WorldServe, pens a Foreword that draws attention to a major lesson to be gleaned from *No Limitations*: “The Lord doesn’t need your strength. He needs your weakness, your dependence upon Him. He needs a vessel through which He can work with relentless power and ‘show that this all-surpassing power is from God.’”

“Part One – Revisiting the Past” takes us from Shen’s childhood through his release from captivity by the Eastern Lightning cult. Most of us would have been broken by the sufferings that he has endured and sidelined by the rheumatoid arthritis that requires him to use crutches to get around, but he believes that God has used these to temper his soul, toughen his body, and tie him to God in humble reliance upon divine strength.

He writes of persecution by the government for not registering with the Three–Self Patriotic Movement; constant itineration to evangelize unreached villages; and miracles of healing, guidance, and protection. How different from ours were his “most common sermon topics”: “Self-denial, Suffering, Carrying Your Cross, and Evangelizing”! No wonder the Chinese church has grown exponentially, while those in the West languish amidst the cares of this world.

In “No House, No Money, Sick and Persecuted—‘Will You Marry Me?’” he tells the story of his “courtship” and marriage. The hardships and trials endured by his wife are enough to make one weep, and yet she was willing to accept these as part of her vocation as his companion and helper.

Other chapter and section headings give the flavor of the book: “Torture and Forced Labor—A Normal Life,” “Emissaries Sent Throughout China,” “The Spirit’s Fire Ignites the Church,” and “Jesus—Our Help and strength.”

A central section of color photographs depicting the life of house church Christians is followed by Part Two: “Envisioning the Future.” Here Brother Shen presents his reflections on church life in the era of reforms, “the Battle for Unity,” “Migratory Missions,” “Great Poverty Provides

Great Opportunity to Share,” and “Parasitic Dependence Versus Self-Sustenance of Church Workers.”

Shen introduces to us a house church leadership marked by organizational ability, utter insistence upon fidelity to the Bible, a hunger for unity, an awareness of the challenges resulting from urbanization and globalization, an eagerness to upgrade theological training for leaders, and bold plans for missions.

These people will not surrender what they consider to be the truth in order to affiliate with the Three–Self Patriotic Movement. Though Shen admits that there are believers within the TSPM, he states that its continued persecution of house churches, subservience to the government, and promotion of non-biblical theology (at the top; most at the local level are orthodox) make widespread close cooperation with house churches impossible.

Indeed, one of Shen’s purposes in writing *No Limitations* is to inform Christians outside of China of the true conditions facing believers in house churches. They are “deeply hurt” by reports of full religious freedom in China and the donations of millions of dollars to an organization they consider to be compromised and corrupt.

Not that house churches have no serious flaws. Far from it. Shen faces these candidly and frankly discusses ways in which they need to improve. Still, the growing unity, cooperation, toleration, and mutual trust among leaders of large networks—and especially the adoption of a common statement of faith in 1998—attest to a “coming of age” that evidences real humility, maturity and sagacity.

Shen packs a great deal of material into a brief compass, often using lists to outline major categories. One gets the impression that he could write long chapters on each of the topics listed, such as (in a list of reasons why foreign giving has dropped off recently) “5. God wishes for the churches in China to mature amidst these trials.”

This consideration brings me to a theme which becomes more prominent towards the close of the book: the financial needs of the house church and the merits and demerits of foreign aid. Shen voices ambivalence about receiving funds from abroad, but still utters a request for help, at least for a while.

Frankly, this part—and the strong plea for funds in the Conclusion by WorldServe President Hunt—bothered me a bit. When I considered Paul’s passion for helping the Christians in Jerusalem, however, I thought that perhaps Western believers should do something to help Chinese Christians who have lost all their possessions through persecution or who want to send teams of missionaries to people of other cultures (read: Muslims) in China but lack the means.

Another question raised by the book for me was: how effective is the leadership training it describes in the photo section, featuring non-stop, intensive lecturing for weeks on end? But I have heard that house churches are re-evaluating their training methods recently.

It's hard to say what struck me most in this remarkable work by a man of obvious spiritual stature, but I must not omit the bold, and very practical, plans he and his colleagues have for sending experienced married couples on "migratory missions"—that is, long-term missions with the goal of settling among a people whose language and culture one must learn. Inspired by Western missionaries of an earlier time, Chinese house church Christians are overcoming their natural ethno-centrism to carry the Gospel to unreached peoples.

Though he describes the Back to Jerusalem Movement as "more a slogan than a movement," Shen implies that he, too, shares the goal of "completing the circle" of evangelism (as Chinese believers see missions history).

When I first saw this slim volume, I wondered why the publishers had spent so much money on its hard cover and glossy paper. Now I think I know: It is worth repeated, prayerful readings as a small gem that will be treasured for years to come. I recommend that it be a required text for all those in the Western church who are, or aspire to be, leaders.

## **“Patriots” or “Traitors”?: A History of American-Educated Chinese Students**

**By Stacey Bieler**

Bieler, Stacey. *“Patriots” or “Traitors”?: A History of American-Educated Chinese Students*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004.

Readers of Stacey Bieler’s earlier work (including *China at Your Doorstep*, with Dick Andrews, and *Chinese Intellectuals and the Gospel*, with Samuel Ling) will not be surprised by the quality of this book, but its depth and scope will delight them.

This superb piece of historical writing traces the careers of seventeen Chinese who studied in America and then returned to serve their country. More than that, however, the book ranges widely over the course of China’s history from the late nineteenth century up to the present. Thus, each individual story fits into a coherent narrative, illustrating general trends and finding significance from the overall picture.

We read of scientists, diplomats, doctors, and engineers, professors, and deans. Though fewer in number, women play a vital role in this engaging, even engrossing, account of courage, commitment, and competence. Bieler introduces us to the Americans (often Christians) who befriended them, as well as to those who mistreated them, and to their Chinese compatriots, who alternately praised and reviled these promising scholars.

The title reflects the ambivalent reception afforded those who returned to China. While they were valued for their new skills, questions about them quickly arose. Had they forgotten their homeland? In their effort to adapt to American culture, had they abandoned their own? What were these dangerous ideas which they so glibly bandied about—democracy, Marxism, freedom, individualism, even marriage for love?

Like Bieler herself, we cannot withhold our admiration, even affection, from those who endured much opposition to their well-intended efforts to modernize and humanize their nation, often with a new-found Christian faith. Again, like the author, those who are privileged to get to know today’s generation of Chinese students tremble with awe and apprehension at the weighty burden they carry. Nor can we ignore our own responsibility as their hosts. So much hangs upon how they are treated while in America!

Plentiful quotations from the students’ writings and dozens of photographs add even greater vividness to this already sparkling study. Since all the chapters but the Epilogue deal with students who came before World War II, this reader eagerly awaits a sequel.

Meanwhile, anyone who picks up this marvelous book will find it hard to put down.

## **Reading Christian Scriptures in China**

**Edited by Chloe Starr**

Starr, Chloe, ed. *Reading Christian Scriptures in China*. London & New York: T & T Clark, 2008.

We are all aware that Christianity, especially Protestantism, has grown at an astonishing rate in China over the past few decades, and that believers can be found among all strata of society, from the rural peasant to the university professor. What we may not know so well is how the Bible has been read and understood by Chinese.

Since the Bible serves as the main source of Christian doctrine, the nature of its reception, interpretation and influence must be understood in order for us to comprehend the varying streams of Chinese Christian faith and practice and the different responses to Christianity among non-Christians.

Despite the very modest aims and claims of the editor, this volume provides a great deal of information and insight in a dozen well-written essays preceded by a splendid introduction.

As Dr. Starr writes, because of China's millennia-long history of interpreting sacred texts, "we cannot read pre-twentieth century Chinese responses to Scripture without some understanding of the framework of imperial scholarship." The interplay of classical and biblical texts forms a prominent—and fascinating—theme in this book. Other factors influenced the way Chinese read the Bible also, notably the history of Western biblical interpretation and application that came with the translations of the Bible.

These essays also explore the tensions between "traditional Chinese heritage and scriptural mores [ethical norms]," and those "between personal and individual readings and institutional or academic ones." Readers before 1949 concentrated on the former of these, while the latter have been more pronounced under the communist regime.

A further distinction must be made within contemporary readings of the Bible in China: That between the more "literal" and the more "liberal"—the first representing the unregistered churches and the second the official state-sanctioned bodies, especially the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement, or at least its leaders.

Attention to such complexities makes this book especially valuable. Indeed, as Dr. Starr states, we do learn a bit about both Christian and secular history as we watch how Chinese have responded to the Christian Scriptures over the past two hundred years.

Part 1, “The Bible in China,” “looks at the history of readings through to the present and of contextual settings of the Bible in China, while Part 2 focuses on hermeneutics, presenting case-studies of individual Chinese biblical exegetes and their approaches to reading.”

The only major deficiency in this otherwise excellent volume is hinted at in the editor’s introduction: There are only a few references (including the influence of Jonathan Chao’s manual for Christian workers and the role of Archie Lee of Hong Kong) to the very extensive corpus of high-level biblical studies among Chinese Christians in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and North America. Several dozen of these scholars have engaged in robust studies; a number of them—and more of their publications—have exercised influence in China proper and should therefore be considered a part of the “Reading of Christian Scriptures in China.” As Dr. Starr admits, their “reading practices . . . offer a counterbalance to mainland trajectories and open up avenues for comparative research.”

That being said, the contents of this collection are already sufficiently rich, with each chapter contributing substantially to our understanding of the reception of the Bible in China. As the back cover says, it is “wonderfully informative.”

Perhaps the most striking contribution of *Reading Christian Scriptures in China* is the variety of perspectives it gives us to shed light upon the powerful—one might even say determinative—role which their cultural and social context has played in the understanding of the Bible by Chinese.

These studies are so valuable, in fact, that the book may be considered required reading for anyone wanting to understand Christianity in China, both past and present. The following summary can provide only a glimpse:

In “Modern Chinese Attitudes Towards the Bible,” Chen Jianming surveys different ways in which Chinese viewed the Bible in the late-Qing and Republican periods. Some read the Scriptures (or portions of the Bible) as “heterodox text” and responded with criticisms.

Others received the Bible as “a norm for faith” and the source of superior ethical instruction. A third group used the Bible “as a guide to revolution.” Finally—and most surprising to me—were those Chinese writers who saw in the Bible “a model for enriching Chinese literature.”

Chloe Starr’s “Reading Christian Scriptures: The Nineteenth-Century Context” opens our eyes to the vast wealth of other Christian texts which informed the reading of the Bible itself. Many, if not most, of these were heavily influenced by Chinese literary texts, and represented an attempt to make the Christian message seem less “foreign.”

Aside from “50 or so different editions and single books of scripture,” there was a huge literary production of supplementary works in different styles, of different lengths, and aimed at different reading audiences. These included annotated Bibles; children’s primers; Bible story books and narratives; Bible dictionaries; “overviews and reading guides”; selections of Scripture sentences; and liturgical texts, including catechisms and an elegant translation of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*.

Fredrik Fallman brings us into the current situation with his chapter, “Hermeneutical Conflict? Reading the Bible in Contemporary China.” With due regard to the complexity of Bible access and reception in China, he makes a confused picture less so. He points to increased, though still limited, access to the Bible; the greater number of people from various classes reading the Scriptures; and the zeal with which the Bible is received.

Other sections of his chapter concisely summarize complicated subjects, such as the various ways and contexts in which the Bible is studied and interpreted, including the “liberal” view of Ding Guangxun and many of Three–Self Patriotic Movement’s publications to the more “conservative” stance of other materials, especially those coming from unregistered churches.

Intellectuals in China approach the text from a variety of perspectives, some seeking to “contextualize” it; others to retain its distinctive nature; still others have sought independence from missionary influence, to construct a “Sino-theology,” while “a new generation” holds to the authority of the Bible along with “analytical capability as well as linguistic and literary knowledge—and a living faith sustained by frequent Bible reading in daily life.”

In “The Bible in the Twentieth–Century Chinese Christian Church,” Thor Strandenaes limits his focus to the ecclesial status of the Scriptures. By 2006, fifty million bibles had been printed by Amity Press, and the Bible was “unofficially the best-selling book in China.” He gives several reasons why the Chinese Union Version gained such overwhelming popularity; a major factor was the “heavy involvement of Chinese co-translators.” Another was the use of something approaching the spoken vernacular in this translation.

Strandenaes also surveys the development and use of the Chinese Catholic Bible and the pervasive presence of biblical themes and quotations in Chinese Christian hymnody.

Zha Changping provides a very useful survey of New Testament studies in the Chinese academic world from 1976 to 2006, which he admits are in their infancy. He writes that those in China are characterized by “studies of constituent parts than of the whole; and there is more research in religious studies than theology.” Historical studies predominate, perhaps because that approach is safer, but actual attention to biblical texts suffers as a result.

Zha helpfully divides current biblical research in China into: Christology perspectives; the perspective of philosophical theology; comparisons between the Bible and traditional Chinese texts; “the perspective of the conception of language,” by which he means rhetorical and narrative criticism of the Bible; one example of the perspective of traditional Christian theology; and various other approaches.

He concludes that “Christian studies in the Chinese academic world today need a more balanced perspective: one which includes traditional theology, and which does not slavishly follow social science perspectives.” He attributes the relatively immature state of New Testament research partly to the lack of training in theology and in the biblical languages.

Despite promising to include research done outside of Mainland China, Zha hardly mentions the substantial contributions by highly-trained Chinese in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and North America.

Part 2, “Chinese Biblical Hermeneutics,” looks at 20<sup>th</sup>-century hermeneutics in China from first Protestant, then Roman Catholic, points of view.

Sze-kar Wan begins with “Competing Tensions: A Search for May Fourth Biblical Hermeneutics.” He challenges at the outset whether Western hermeneutics, which seeks understanding of the text before engaging in interpretation, can account for the way in which Chinese Christians approached the Bible in the first half of the 20th century. Instead, “they read the Bible as they would a Chinese classic, namely, for the sake of self-transformation, moral cultivation, discovering ethical injunctions.” In other words, they tended to “read the Bible in a particular cultural milieu that more often than not was an amalgam of Western culture and their own traditional Chinese upbringing.”

His survey of five Protestant authors includes “conservative” figures Ni Tuosheng, Chen Chonggui, and commentary writer Jia Yuming; and “liberal” interpreters Zhao Zhichen (T.C. Chao) and Wu Leichuan. All these men are portrayed as essentially Confucian interpreters of the Bible responding in different ways to the national crisis. Several of them, indeed, shared the “underlying concern to move from the spiritual to the moral and ultimately to national salvation” in a fully Confucian fashion, with a focus on “moral perfection through self-effort,” leading to “national salvation by character.”

Thus, despite their deep theological and hermeneutical differences, all five interpreters shared a Confucian approach to any classic: “Their root motivation was moral.” They engaged in a “moral interpretation of the text that aimed at transforming the character of the reader” and eventually of society as a whole.

I am not sure whether Zha’s application of Confucian categories adequately explains the confidence in the Bible as God’s Word held by the conservative interpreters he discusses.

Grace Liang examines Wu Leichuan’s interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer as an example of 20th-century “Confucian-Christian” exegesis. She notes that Wu’s perspective included elements of Christianity, Confucianism socialism, Darwinism, communism, and “various other revolutionary theories.” Like many other Chinese, he sought for “effective and immediate solutions to the serious sociopolitical issues of his time,” and found Christianity to be the most “workable” of all the options.

From this perspective, he abandoned the sort of exegetical principles brought by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century missionaries and reinterpreted biblical texts, including the Lord’s Prayer, from a this-worldly point of view. In his hands, this passage calls for the establishment of the perfect society through human effort. His hermeneutical strategy is “ideological,” and centers on how to reconstruct society through individual transformation as a result of self-cultivation.

Influenced, like Zhao Zichen and others, by the skepticism which characterizes both Confucian humanism and modern rationalism, he rejected the core elements of Christian faith, such as the resurrection and deity of Christ. He made Jesus into a Confucian sage, a moral exemplar. Though Liang concedes that “the Confucian heritage will still play the leading role in Chinese cross-cultural reading, and Confucian philosophy and ethics strongly influence a Chinese orientation in biblical study,” she believes that Chinese biblical scholars should still try to be faithful to the text, as well as to their own context.

Richard S.Y. Zhang’s short but enthusiastic chapter tries to explain the immense popularity and influence of *The Life of Jesus* by T.C. Chao (Zhao Zichen). He attributes its abiding appeal of this book among Chinese intellectuals to several things: Its “graceful writing style,” liberal theology and demythologized portrait of Jesus, poetic treatment of Gospel history, and humanist framework.

Chao wrote from within the Confucian tradition and produced a “life” of Jesus that highlights Jesus’ human nature and the similarity of his ethics to those of the Chinese classics. Though familiar with some Western works on Jesus (almost all of them “liberal”), he chose to reconstruct his own imaginative portrayal as a fully Chinese adaptation of biblical material.

John Y.H. Yieh continues the series of chapters on Protestant interpreters of the Bible with his substantial essay on “Reading the Sermon on the Mount in China: A Hermeneutical Enquiry into its History of Reception.”

He notes first the significant differences among the three men he selects: Wu Leichuan, Wang Mingdao, and Ding Guangxun (T.H. Ting). Wu approached the Sermon on the Mount with his Confucian conviction that “the purpose of religion was not simply to offer personal salvation but to reform society,” which must begin with “character formation.” As we have seen, Wu held to a “low” Christology, in which Jesus is the ideal citizen and social reformer, and a “liberal” view of the Bible.

Wang, on the other hand, believed the Scriptures to be the inspired, inerrant Word of God and Jesus the divine-human Savior of mankind. Holding to the biblical view of human nature as enslaved to sin, he called for personal regeneration before character formation could be attempted. Even then, the presence of sin in individuals means that no perfect society will be built on earth.

Sharing the “liberal” understanding of the Bible and of human nature of Wu, Ding also called for Christians to engage in social reform and urged more study of the Sermon on the Mount but did not speak or write on it himself. Yieh offers the conjecture that Ding’s concern to emphasize the universal love of God and his experience of human frailty during the Cultural Revolution turned his attention away from personal moral reform.

On the other hand, these three interpreters of the Christian message shared some assumptions in common, the most important of these being an emphasis upon ethical instruction; the belief that Christians must seek to influence society through good behavior; and a thoroughly Confucian concentration on character–formation.

In the last three chapters, attention shifts to Roman Catholic readings of the Bible. Tian Haihua first explores “Confucian Catholics’ Appropriation of the Decalogue,” using Archie Lee’s model of cross-textual reading to show how both Confucian and Christian texts shaped biblical interpretation by both converts and missionaries in the late Ming and early Qing. The process was mutual, since each side learned from the other.

“Inculturation” took place when Confucian terminology and concepts molded the ways in which the Decalogue and introductions to it were rendered in Chinese. “Acculturation” happened as the biblical texts began to exert influence on traditional Chinese culture. In the first case, for example, words for “God” and “honor your parents” come from Confucian texts and ideology, whereas in the second, the commonly-accepted practice of concubinage was gradually recognized as a form of adultery, and thus prohibited for Christians.

“The interaction between the Decalogue and traditional Chinese culture presents a complex and interwoven picture,” only a portion of which is touched upon in this short summary of his rich study.

The last two chapters introduce us to the remarkable translation work of Wu Jingxiong (C.H. Wu), who rendered the Psalms and then the entire New Testament into elegant Chinese.

Mark Fang briefly surveys “Translating and Chanting the Psalms” by Roman Catholic Chinese in the latter part of the 20th century, beginning with the translation of the entire Bible into Chinese by Lei Yongming and of the Psalms by Wu Jingxiong. He shows how quickly the Psalms, and books of hymns in Chinese based upon them, became a mainstay of Roman Catholic worship in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

As both Mark Fang and Lloyd Haft emphasize, Wu’s rendering of the Psalms and the New Testament into Chinese is considered “one of the most elegant, most ‘Chinese-sounding’ Bible translations ever made.” The almost total neglect of his work in recent years may be due not only to their relatively archaic style, but also to the very considerable involvement of Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) in the process of producing the final version. Chiang not only provided financial support for Wu’s literary work, but offered extensive comments and suggestions on each passage, many of these being accepted by the translator.

Haft notes, first, that the classical style employed by Wu, with its preponderance of single-character words, allows for the sort of ambivalence that some passages require.

He then explains Wu’s departure from Roman Catholic practice by translating *Logos* as *Dao* in John 1:1, as Protestant Bibles had rendered it from Medhurst and Gutzlaff on.

Previously, Roman Catholic translations, here as elsewhere, had tried to avoid syncretistic or misleading usage of existing terms with Buddhist or Daoist connotations by inventing rough “transliterations.” So, *Logos* was rendered, Wu-er-peng,” a three-syllable transmogrification of v-er-bum,” the Latin for “Word,” to avoid the difficulties of the alternatives - *yan*, spoken word, and *dao*, a term laden with religious and philosophical baggage.

As a noted translator also of the *Dao De Jing*, Wu was thoroughly familiar with its terminology; allusions to which in his version of the New Testament reflect, nevertheless, a non-Daoist use of the classic's words. Whether the same is true of the evident Neo-Confucian influence upon Wu Haft does not make clear. In addition to Chinese philosophical traditions, Wu's biblical works reflect his intimate familiarity of previous translations, as Haft illustrates by comparing Wu's rendition of the Johannine Prologue with other versions.

The richness of the final chapter of *Reading Christian Scriptures in China* defies adequate summary—a reflection, in fact, of this entire volume, which superbly communicates the best scholarship in a lucid and lively style.

**Redeemed by Fire**  
**The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China**  
**By Lian Xi**

Xi, Lian. *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

*Redeemed by Fire* is a major contribution to our understanding of popular Chinese Christianity and deserves an extended review. Perhaps a brief summary will show why:

Lian believes that most of today's Chinese Protestant house church Christians—what he calls “popular Christianity”—bear the marks of various men (and women) and movements whose history he relates in the first few chapters. These early indigenous leaders emphasized independence from Western control; Pentecostal, or at least charismatic, ecstasies and miracles; and millennial, apocalyptic beliefs that predicted the imminent end of the world. In many ways, they resembled popular Chinese religious movements, some of which have ignited rebellions that sought to usher in the new world order by violence. Although most house church Christians today are a-political, there are plenty of sects and cults, most of which grew out of the popular Christianity whose story Lian tells, and which, if government repression continues, have the potential to spark a widespread revolt.

Beginning with the Acknowledgments, Lian Xi demonstrates both his access to primary sources and his reliance upon scholars with expertise in Chinese Christian history, such as Tao Feiya of Shanghai University. He admits that considerable “sadness” remains in his narrative, but he still marvels “at the human spirit that lifted millions of nameless people (among whom was his late father)—whose collective story I have tried to tell in this book—above the voiceless suffering and despair toward exultant hopes and radiant visions.”

The dust jacket contains a bold claim that tells us why the current regime in China remains so suspicious of the Christians: “Lian shows that, with a current membership that rivals that of the Chinese Communist Party and the ability to galvanize China’s millions into apocalyptic convulsion and messianic exuberance, the popular Christian movement channels the aspirations and the discontent of the masses and will play an important role in shaping the country’s future.”

Lian aims to narrate the ways in which a small Christian population bound to foreign mission control was transformed into “a spirited, popular religion” by the indigenous groups on whom he concentrates his study.

He acknowledges that the Taiping rebellion was “disavowed by most mainline Christians,” but believes that “with its proclamation of raw supernatural power and its messianic visions,” the movement “foreshadowed the development of a viable Chinese species of Protestantism during

the twentieth century.” Perhaps its greatest significance lies “in its articulation of a utopian vision that was Chinese in its nature but Christian in its vocabulary.”

Lian spares no sacred cows in his sober assessment of popular Chinese Christianity. Xi Shengmo (“Overcomer of Demons”) comes across as a mystic with messianic pretensions, kept in check by the China Inland Mission missionaries who “advised” (quotations in the original) him and restrained him from going off into doctrinal excesses.

According to Lian, the mainline Protestant denominations in the early twentieth century “embarked on progressive efforts to make Christianity relevant to the struggles of modern China.” Their limited support of nationalism and advocacy of “a social Christianity to infuse Protestant spirit and values into Chinese attempts at nation-building” yielded only “dubious” results, in contrast to the indigenous groups, whose leaders were “gripped by an indefatigable, premillennial vision” that energized their growing numbers of followers.

Beginning in chapter 2, Lian introduces us to these groups. The earliest was the True Jesus Church (TJC; also called “The Lightning from the East”), with its “exuberant Pentecostalism, apocalyptic convictions, and opportune denunciations of missionary Christianity amidst mounting anti-imperialist sentiments.” We are treated to a lively narrative of the pivotal experiences of the founder, Wei Enbo, who forged a new sect that sharply distinguished itself from all other existing groups. Aggressively seeking fresh adherents from missionary churches, especially Seventh Day Adventists, the group rapidly grew in numbers and influence.

The TJC practiced the usual Pentecostal distinctives such as tongues, healing, prophecy, trances, visions, spiritual singing and dancing; they also provided mutual support by sharing goods in common amidst the deteriorating conditions of early twentieth-century China. Contrasting their simple life with the extravagant comforts of Western missionaries, they set themselves apart from the newly-formed National Christian Council.

Early in his career, Wei had predicted the imminent return of Christ and the end of the world, which Lian shows fit nicely with previous apocalyptic popular religious movements; we shall see this feature in other groups in the study. As might be expected in a movement encouraging direct revelation by the Spirit, the TJC spawned many splinter groups before (and after) tightening its organizational structure and clarifying its doctrinal position. Equally unsurprising is their belief that the last of four ages in world history began when Wei received his first vision.

The third chapter describes the Jesus Family, which was also “energized by end-time expectations,” but marked especially by “a utopian pursuit of Christian communalism” that helped its adherents overcome wartime sufferings by “shared Pentecostal ecstasies.” The lasting significance of this group may be found in “its rapturous worship and quest for a tight-knit community that shunned the world” and “revealed a general bent of mass Christianity in Chinese” that has persisted to this day.

In chapter 4, we read about the Shandong Revival, with its “trances, visions, ‘tongues,’ and prophecies . . . which bore an uncanny resemblance to spirit possession in popular religion.” The movement also “circumvented the authority and teachings of Western missionaries, catapulted

lay Chinese into positions of spiritual leadership, and became a major catalyst in the emergence of indigenous Christianity.”

Lian does a great job describing the various forms of Pentecostalism that swept through, and then from, Shandong, drawing thousands of new converts into their lively fellowships. He traces the rise and permutations of the Spiritual Gifts Society and Spiritual Gifts Movement. Like the TJC and the Jesus Family, these groups made huge inroads into missionary churches, drawing much criticism as well as praise. They also fed on anti-Western nationalism, as well as tapping into a desire for something more than the dull, even dry, worship experiences of much Chinese Protestantism at that time. Believers thrilled to the many varieties of Pentecostal ecstasies—some of which Lian says resemble Chinese popular religion—and found comfort in the prophecies of the coming of a heavenly paradise in the midst of the horrors of natural disasters and the ravages of warfare.

There were criticisms, of course. Wild emotionalism, unbridled psychological extremes, blatant nationalism, aberrant end-times teaching, “sheep stealing”; all evoked cautionary and even highly negative responses. Still, no one could deny that the movement(s) offered more than the empty formalism, liberal theology, and close attachment to Western denominations found all too often in churches connected with the National Christian Council.

Chapter 5 portrays the famous pastor and itinerant preacher, Wang Mingdao, who promoted an “individual Christianity of repentance of eschatological salvation” that possesses great influence even today. Wang had a brief encounter with Pentecostalism in his youth, but never identified with the movement; instead, he preached a message of repentance from sin, faith in Christ, strict morality, and hope in the eschatological kingdom that Christ would bring upon his return. Services in his church in Beijing were always conducted “decently and in order.”

Like the other independent leaders already studied, Wang Mingdao severely criticized Western missionaries, especially those who espoused liberalism and the so-called Social Gospel. He did not think much of their attempts to sinicize Christianity by such means as art, architecture, music, and elegant literary productions. Instead, he believed that the gospel would become truly Chinese only if it adhered closely to the fundamentals of biblical and historic Christian teaching. Though only moderately educated, he published a magazine, the *Spiritual Life Quarterly*, that exercised influence far beyond the city limits of Beijing and the low numbers of subscribers.

In this chapter, Lian also describes the denominational Christianity that was becoming increasingly independent of missionary control, even as it relied on funds from overseas and absorbed the modernist theology and Social Gospel that had gained such prominence in Europe and America. The National Christian Council, *Wenshe Monthly* and YMCA, were all part of a movement to reform China through education, eradication of such practices as opium use and foot-binding, and advocacy of democracy and science as means to national salvation. These were partly successful in deflecting the raging anti-foreign sentiments of the 1920s and 1930s, but offered little solace to the masses, who were suffering from the chaos of war and the collapse of

government, and who found much more hope in the “otherworldly salvation” promised by Wang.

Among those he mentions are several figures from the *Salt & Light* series (edited by GCC Associates Carol Lee Hamrin and Stacey Bieler, published by Wipf & Stock), some of whom may not have been as “liberal” in their theology as Lian states, though the movement of which they were a part certainly embraced modernist beliefs. Still, the Christian worldview that they accepted shaped their sense of duty towards society and directed their efforts to make life better for China’s masses.

John Sung (Lian uses the older spelling for his name, as shall this review; the more common form now is “Song”), the powerful itinerant evangelist and revival preacher, receives careful study next. Though Lian generally writes in a lively style, this chapter’s gripping intensity seems to pulsate with the energy of its subject, surely one of the most dynamic, dramatic and controversial preachers of all time. His brief but passionate career—marked by extensive, almost heroic, journeys; countless conversions; miraculous healings; white-hot emotion; and excruciating pain—captured the attention of the masses and the media alike.

Lian highlights those features of Sung’s ministry that reflect the themes of the book: Anti-Western, anti-missionary rhetoric; independence from denominational authority (though Sung remained a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and preached in denominational churches); apocalyptic warnings; healings, exorcisms, and exuberant expression of religious emotions. Sung did not move within Pentecostal circles, for he believed that speaking in tongues and other spiritual gifts were not as important as repentance, faith, and holy living. In other respects, however, he closely resembled other charismatic preachers, and had no use for the formalism, organizational rigidity, and hypocrisy (as he saw it) of denominational churches.

In this period of warfare, famine, floods, drought, and political turmoil, his message offered a kind of solace that lukewarm liberalism could not. He proclaimed both forgiveness of sins and radical discipleship, which resulted in changed lives. For the suffering masses, his assurance of a blessed life in the hereafter, rather than the dubious prospect of political, economic, and social reform trumpeted by politicians and “establishment” preachers alike, brought ultimate hope and inner peace.

Lian is especially good when he traces the spiritual, ecclesiastical, and theological background of his subjects, and particularly in the chapter on Watchman Nee. Even as he castigated missionary Christianity as lifeless and subject to Western domination, Nee drank deeply from the wells of Western “deeper life” teaching. Lian shows how Nee transmitted the doctrines he imbibed from J. N. Darby, C.I. Scofield, Jesse Penn-Lewis and T. Austin Sparks, without always giving attribution. His early dependence upon female Western missionaries is highlighted.

Nee belongs securely in the camp of the independent preachers introduced so far, though he treated his peers with disdain, considering Wang too shallow and Sung too wild. Turning from what he considered to be the ephemeral effects of itinerant evangelism, Nee built a network of fellowships to extend his influence. Lian describes Nee’s own increasingly autocratic style of leadership, shrewdly covered at first by language that implied local autonomy, but eventually

assuming virtual correspondence to the Roman Papacy. He also exposes Nee's occasional (at least) hypocrisy. It seems that he indulged in sexual license with multiple female co-workers more than once, and sometimes drove a donated Fiat car to scenic Hangzhou after urging all believers to give their possessions to the Little Flock. After the Communist victory, he "publicly 'repented' of the 'sin' of the ineffective Three-Selfs . . .—a mere 'theological' but not 'political' independence—that the Little Flock had practiced . . . and had come to realize that 'foreigners that are not imperialists are hard to find.'"

After the war ended, popular Christianity experienced strong growth, as various groups renewed activities across the nation. Under the communists, independent Protestants were increasingly restricted, until everyone was forced to join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) which, even today, remains the only legal Protestant organization. Despite what became fierce persecution, however, popular Christianity continued to grow, albeit underground. When the reform and opening-up movement began in 1979, church buildings were returned and Christian activity again became legal, at least in the TSPM.

Meanwhile, however, the former independent groups had continued to flourish, spawning a plethora of sects and cults, some of them quite outside the boundaries of orthodox, traditional Christianity. Lian's description of these forms one of the most valuable features of the book. The "Eastern Lightning" cult is perhaps the best known, but others are almost equally scary. Of particular interest is the connection he draws between Watchman Nee's Little Flock and the Shouters, who are associated with the Local Church of Li Changshou, Nee's lieutenant in his later years. According to Lian, some of Nee's more questionable ideas and actions took place after Li entered the picture.

The situation today is quite complex, since both the True Jesus Church and the Little Flock are often allowed to meet under the auspices of the TSPM, while other groups, such as the Shouters, are vigorously opposed by the government, which considers them *xie jiao*, evil cults.

While I generally agree with Lian's thesis, I have three problems with this book. First, it occasionally seems that his attempts to connect these independent movements with popular Chinese religion, though basically on the right track, are a bit far-fetched. It might have been better to go a bit deeper, and show how the fundamentally materialistic, this-worldly, and pragmatic nature of all Chinese religion predisposes even Christian teachers to focus on tangible benefits of believing in Christ (such as healing, exorcism, and a changed society). This, in the opinion of many, constitutes the deepest link between much Chinese Christianity—both in its popular and in the more "Social Gospel" forms—and the general religious environment.

Second, it does seem to me that he is sometimes a bit unbalanced in his treatment. Lian seems to follow Alwyn Austin's acerbic take on Xi Shengmo's opium-curing efforts, his own experiences, and the effectiveness of his evangelistic ministry. I wonder how, if Lian and Austin are right, D.E. Hoste and other CIM leaders, who were no fools, could have been so thoroughly deceived.

There are other questionable statements as well. For example, he correctly notes that the “most favored nation” provision of the treaty that gave Roman Catholic priests and bishops status equal to that of their Chinese government counterparts also bestowed this privilege upon Protestants. But he does not say that the Protestants both protested this provision and mostly refused to take advantage of it themselves.

Throughout, Lian displays an ambivalent attitude towards the indigenous Christian leaders whose story he relates. On the one hand, he clearly admires their courage in charting a new path, free of missionary control, and he repeats their criticisms of the missionaries with no qualification. On the other, he writes in a rather caustic style, apparently not agreeing with the fundamentalist views of the people he describes, and frequently inserting comments that evince either suspicion of their motives or outright disdain for their theology and some of their actions. He repeats charges leveled against them by critics, often without refutation, so that you are left in doubt about their accuracy.

The large gifts collected at Sung’s meetings are an example: Did he actually benefit from them personally? The evidence indicates otherwise, but Lian lets the implication hang as a shadow. Again: Was Sung a highly-emotional, sometimes overwrought “genius,” or a deranged “madman”? Lian takes no sides on this, when we have reason to believe the former, not the latter.

It is not clear to me why he repeatedly describes Wang Mingdao as “obsessed” with strict morality (he rightly observes that both liberals and fundamentalists were moralistic), or how he can speculate with such confidence on Wang’s motives for distancing himself from Western-dominated churches. Much more difficult to accept is his statement that Wang Mingdao survived the Japanese occupation of Beijing with “fortitude and a stroke of good luck.” He correctly relates how Wang refused to submit to the Japanese order to join the puppet church organization but doesn’t show how this can be called “luck,” rather than courage and adherence to principle.

The statement that “independent evangelists like John Sung and Wang Mingdao, on the other hand, withdrew deeper into their search for other worldly salvation,” (155) raises questions. Does he mean that they didn’t talk about the effects of spiritual salvation upon life in this world? If so, that contradicts his own account. More likely, he merely wants to focus on their eschatology, which is legitimate, but why use the loaded word, “withdrew”?

The war-time independent preachers “furthered the trend in Chinese Protestant Christianity—arising out of avowed biblical literalism—toward apocalyptic gloom and messianic fervor.” This is a strong sentence, but what does it mean? For these believers, the revelation (“unveiling”; the meaning of “apocalypse”) of Christ at the end of time brought strong comfort and joy, not gloom. And what is “messianic fervor”? A zeal to preach Christ as Messiah, that is, Savior? Or a messiah complex? Lian is unclear but leaves an impression that cannot be favorable.

The author says repeatedly, furthermore, that they “proselytized”—a negative term—rather than “evangelized.”

Finally, and most importantly, it seems that needed complexity has been sacrificed for the sake of clarity. For Lian, it all boils down to the preaching of “apocalyptic gloom” and “other-worldly salvation,” as the key distinctive message of popular Protestantism. Really? Both Wang Mingdao and John Sung emphasized the necessity of moral reformation, and the centrality of the Cross of Christ far outshone eschatological preaching in Sung’s sermons.

As a result, I have an ambivalent reaction to this work. On the one hand, I greatly appreciate the depth and breadth of his research and his willingness to take on “sacred cows” and tell the truth, “warts and all.” In every chapter, including those on people about whom I have done some reading, I learned much that was new.

On the other hand, at least in the case of Wang Mingdao and John Sung, his more-than-mildly disdainful approach does not seem sufficiently objective or even, sometimes, fair and accurate. While not obviously sympathetic to the liberal Christianity prevalent among denominational churches in China, Lian appears to share some of the contempt of their current heirs in the academy towards evangelical Christianity. Though filled with facts and persuasive analysis, this account reminds one of Alwyn Austin’s jaundiced treatment of Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission: It describes much of what happened but does not quite get to the heart of either the leading characters or the real reasons why they exerted such influence.

For example, his accurate portrayal of John Sung’s bad temper is not balanced by any mention of Sung’s private agony over this sin, or his public apology on more than one occasion. Nee may have been a hypocrite, but he would not be the first Christian leader to be guilty of that sin. Nor would he be the only autocratic Chinese Christian leader. And there was obviously something about his speaking and writing that left a deep impression upon millions, as it still does today. Perhaps one has to have a certain sympathy in order to understand.

Still, this is a very important book, for the overall thesis—that popular Christianity, with its focus on spiritual ecstasies, healing, and preaching about the end times, bears some disturbing likenesses to popular Chinese religion—seems sound. Considering the real aberrations of theology and practice that Lian has recorded, and the possible threat to social order posed by some of these groups, perhaps his overall negative tone is understandable. One wonders, also, whether he might have seen and experienced some things first hand that left a bad taste in his mouth.

My guess is that *Redeemed by Fire* will provoke not a little consternation among local church leaders in the U.S., who have succeeded in having the label of “cult” withdrawn by leading evangelical spokesmen. If Lian is accurate, however, the Shouters’ designation as a cult by the Chinese government might have some merit—a possibility that will be angrily denied by Li Changshou’s disciples, who have not been shy about taking critics to court, claiming that this label will cause needless suffering to their brothers and sisters in China.

*Redeemed by Fire* may also probably prompt Chinese government officials to think carefully about their religious policies. On the one hand, there are some pretty wild and potentially dangerous cults out there; on the other, the author rightly observes that if the government treats a group as subversive, it might eventually become so. Furthermore, major house church

“networks” vary in their conformity to traditional orthodox Christian faith and practice, and it’s not always easy for the government to distinguish a harmless religion from a potential rival for power.

One major distinction that must be made is between preaching about the imminent return of Christ, which is an orthodox Christian belief, and deciding to hasten the process by armed revolt. Merely having sincere convictions about eschatology does not indicate that a group sees itself in “messianic” terms. Faith in a coming Messiah is very different from pretending to be the coming savior and taking up the sword to prove it. I am afraid that Lian frequently fails to make this crucial point.

This volume should cause Christians outside of China to tone down their rosy rhetoric about Chinese house churches. This is a very large array of diverse movements, with a great deal of variety, some of it not worthy of the name “Christian.” Discretion is in order as we try to understand what has been happening in China over the past few decades.

Everyone familiar with the Chinese house churches knows just how a-political they have been—so far. It would be a great shame if, because of history, government fears that they will coalesce into a popular rebellion with aspirations to political power leads to greater repression. It would be a horrible tragedy if those fears became a reality.

One can only fervently pray that church leaders will channel aspirations for earthly redemption into a longing for liberation from sin and death, and for the speedy return of Christ, and would focus on being “salt and light” in society now.

To answer the question posed in the title above, it would seem that a great many house churches are both doctrinally sound and politically harmless. Many others, to be sure, are definitely theologically unorthodox and, perhaps, potentially politically dangerous, especially if the government fails to open up greater space for civil society generally, and independent Protestants specifically.

Despite the flaws I have mentioned, both specialists and beginners will find this volume a rich resource and compelling account. Lian’s mastery of the sources, clear and convincing argument, and energetic style combine to create a book well worth careful reading.

## **Revival Preaching and the Indigenization of Christianity in Republican China**

**By Gloria S. Tseng**

Tseng, Gloria S., "Revival Preaching and the Indigenization of Christianity in Republican China." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 38, No. 4, October 2014, 177-182.

This important article highlights significant issues in the study of the indigenization of Christianity in China. Gloria Tseng, who is Associate Professor of History at Hope College, Holland, Michigan, is currently working on a history of twentieth-century Chinese Christianity.

Born in Taiwan, Tseng is able to draw upon Chinese-language sources in a way that few Western scholars can match, and yet she enjoys the benefits of a strong Western-style education in historical research.

Hardly anyone could have foreseen the rise of powerful and popular revival preachers in the hostile atmosphere of the 1920s and 1930s. Widespread anger at the West had spawned a corresponding anti-Christian attitude, especially among Chinese intellectuals, leading to the withdrawal of many Western missionaries. At the same time, growing theological liberalism among those missionaries had reduced the numbers of those who preached the traditional evangelical message of Jesus Christ crucified, risen, ascended, and coming back to save those who repent of their sins and believe in him.

Though both Wang Mingdao and John Sung (Song Shangjie) came from Christian homes, they otherwise differed in many respects. They shared a fundamental similarity, however: a conviction that the Bible is true and that the historic Christian gospel must be preached widely so that their fellow Chinese could be delivered from their sins and come to know God through faith in Christ. Each one traveled throughout China, preached countless sermons, focused on expounding the Scriptures, exposed sin and called for radical commitment to Christ, and opposed modernist theology.

Both Wang and Sung criticized the liberalism that had affected many western missionaries and some Chinese leaders in the "mainline" denominations. Though Sung began his preaching career working under a Westerner, he later embarked on a completely independent preaching ministry, though remaining a licensed preacher of the Methodist church. Wang was free from foreign attachment from the beginning. Both men, nevertheless, accepted invitations from Western missionaries and Chinese denominational ministers to speak in their churches, although both were also fearless in their indictment of hypocrisy and corruption among Chinese clergy and missionaries.

Neither Wang nor Sung valued academic theological training. Wang never went to a seminary or Bible school, and Sung totally rejected the liberal theology to which he had been exposed during his brief time at Union Seminary in New York. Each one relied mostly on his own exegesis of

the Scriptures. Of the two, Wang seems to have stuck more closely to the text. Sung's interpretive methods have been criticized as "fanciful," though he did preach from the Bible and hone in on the central tenets of the gospel message. Selected sermons and articles of both men are available and very popular among Chinese believers. Tseng holds that Wang's printed sermons and articles are more helpful than Sung's for believers today. Still, their utter rejection of theological education of any sort is seen as unfortunate for the Chinese church. Happily, this attitude has changed among younger Christian leaders.

Assessment: The author concludes that "the ministries of Wang and Sung illustrate ways the timeless and universal Christian message of salvation took root in historically and culturally specific circumstances." She goes on: "In both cases, one sees that the indigenization of Christianity in early twentieth-century China defies reductionist sociological or political explanations." In sum, they demonstrate that the old biblical message can take root in China when Chinese Christians proclaim it clearly and boldly, and with lives of zeal, courage, and faith.

Tseng's brief study is a helpful balance to the claims of those who say that Chinese people have no concept of sin and cannot be reached effectively by a message centering on the cross of Christ, as well as to historical works that focus on the Chinese and foreign Protestant "Establishment" in the first half of the twentieth century. The great success of Wang and Sung in their own day, and the continuing popularity of their printed sermons and articles, remind us to be careful to avoid generalizations about what Chinese people will be able to hear and an undue emphasis upon the "mainline" denominations of Republican China. Their success also rebuts the claim that the gospel must be "contextualized" by melding it with Confucianism or Daoism.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This article, and all the contents of the IBMR, may be freely accessed online at [www.internationalbulletin.org](http://www.internationalbulletin.org). For more on John Sung and Wang Mingdao, see the articles on them in the *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity* ([www.bdcconline.net](http://www.bdcconline.net)). For some lessons from the careers of John Sung and Wang Mingdao, see: <http://www.reachingchineseworldwide.org/blog/back-to-the-basics>.

## **Salt and Light**

### **Volume III: More Lives that Shaped Modern China**

**Edited by Carol Lee Hamrin with Stacey Bieler**

Hamrin, Carol Lee, with Stacey Bieler, eds. *Salt and Light, Volume Three: More Lives that Shaped Modern China*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011.

With the publication of this final volume in the highly-acclaimed *Salt and Light* series, stories of nine outstanding Chinese provide yet more evidence that Christian ideas and ideals played a vital role in the formation of modern China.

In the introduction, Carol Hamrin states that “China’s faith community . . . served as a moral preservative in a nation under stress from severe socio-economic dislocation and corrupt power politics. And like light, it gave others hope during difficult times” (2). Chinese churches provided a “set of ethics and leadership service experience that brought benefit to the larger society,” while denominations, church-related associations, and independent Christian civic institutions modeled private social services, philanthropy and volunteering.

This series highlights the immense contribution that people influenced by Christian values and culture made to a nation in turmoil. They include women whose roles in the home and in society at large were undergoing rapid transformation, sometimes in response to Christian impulses. Almost all had Christian affiliations, though some were more explicit about their faith commitment than others, but all reflect the widespread impact of (mostly Protestant) Christian education and concepts.

Many had studied in the United States, and thus were able to serve as bridges between East and West, bringing new resources for China’s development and sometimes serving as a buffer between two civilizations. They had imbibed beliefs in the power of Christian principles to create a modern, prosperous nation “through renewal of the Chinese people through education, citizenship training, and social reform” (5). Even before the end of the Manchu dynasty in 1911, Christian Chinese were laying the groundwork for systemic reforms in society and were positioned to take prominent places in the new Republic.

For a variety of reasons, “there is a ‘deep’ or ‘thick’ linkage between Christianity and modernity as played out in China and elsewhere” (6). Protestant Christianity’s view of the responsibility of the individual believer to live out God’s will in public and private; the respect for reason over tradition, promotion of literacy as a part of the dissemination of the Bible; decentralized congregational management of church affairs, preparing for democracy; ethical principles such as thrift and the affirmation of secular vocations: these and other concepts work to create modern society. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants also believe in the intrinsic worth and dignity of every man and woman as created in the image of God, the basis for the elevation of women and concern for the poor and powerless.

Protestants were at the center of the 1911 revolution, though later they advocated gradual reform rather than the violent revolution pursued by the communists. Rather than being tools of the Western missionaries and their governments, Chinese Christians did all they could to make their nation strong and independent. Some even turned nationalism into an idol, as they asked, “How can Christ help China?” rather than “How can China serve Christ and His Kingdom?” Most, however, maintained a balance between their commitment to the church and to the welfare of society and sought to imitate Jesus in his life of sacrifice for others.

The lasting influence of Christianity on modern Chinese society includes a variety of facets. Christians introduced new moral, scientific, and physical education in primary, secondary, and especially higher education institutions; many of today’s premier universities were founded by them.

Modern professions were created as students returned from the West to fill posts in government, the military, finance, trade, and diplomacy, but others played a key role in establishing new professions such as engineering, medicine, journalism and the arts. Spurred on and inspired by their participation in the YMCA and the YWCA, social reformers launched a variety of other organizations that began work in literacy training, public health, rural development, and community self-government (13).

The women described in *Salt and Light* “were among the first to benefit from higher education abroad or from girls’ schools in China pioneered by Christians,” and went on to serve in society and in the home in ways unprecedented for Chinese women (14).

Chinese Christians not only learned from missionaries, but also branched out both to start independent local congregations and take leadership positions in the China Christian Church and the National Christian Council, often representing China at international conferences that became part of an extensive interfacing of China and the rest of the world. “This process forged transnational identities both for missionaries and for their local converts,” and spawned many “track two” or “people to people” diplomatic initiatives (15).

Finally, and most importantly, the subjects of these chapters “helped to plant seeds of personal character and public responsibility in all sectors of society.” After the traumas of war and occupation, their values and institutions were available to rebuild the Chinese society that reemerged in a new post-war world community” (16).

In Volume 3 of *Salt and Light*, we meet the following outstanding leaders who made significant contributions to various “modern” fields.

### **Politics and the Military**

Huang Naishang was an early and ardent supporter of Sun Yat-sen’s revolution. Fearful for the situation of villagers in his home province of Fujian, he led a migration of some of them to Sibiu, Sarawak; after the 1911 revolution, he returned to take part in the political leadership of Fujian.

Zhang Zhijiang was one of several famous “Christian generals,” though less well-known than Feng Yuxiang. Throughout his military career, he did his best to fight for justice and to spread the Christian faith among his troops and in his sphere of influence.

Judge Wu Jingxiong became famous as a legal scholar early in life, playing a major role in the constitution of the Republic that was drafted in 1933. An initial and apparently superficial commitment to a form of Methodist Protestantism was followed by years of profligacy, which were brought to an end when his life was changed by faith in Christ. He was baptized as a Roman Catholic, produced an elegant and highly-acclaimed translation of the Psalms and of the New Testament, and served as China’s representative to the Vatican.

### **Literature**

World-famous author Lin Yutang was brought up in a Christian home, but rejected the faith as a young man, partly because he thought that Western missionaries were denying Chinese the heritage of their culture. After an illustrious career, he wrote *From Pagan to Christian*, in which he claimed to have returned to his Christian roots.

### **Education**

Liu Tingfang was not only an ordained Christian minister but also a professor at Yanjing University and the founder of the influential journal *Truth and Life*, which sought to speak into the tempestuous intellectual and cultural debates of the 1920s from a Christian perspective.

Zeng Baosun and her cousin founded a school for girls in Changsha, Hunan. Her writings, lectures, and participation in delegations representing China at international meetings carried a message of the application of the example of Christ to all aspects of modern life. Above all, her indomitable spirit inspired others to carry on despite tremendous obstacles.

Zhang Fuliang taught forestry at Yale-in-China in Changsha, Hunan, and mobilized churches to engage in rural development. During the war against Japan, he offered shelter and necessities to thousands of refugees. Later, he taught at Berea College in Kentucky and hosted hundreds of foreign visitors who came to learn about how rural education and reduction of poverty was being done there.

### **Civil Society**

As a leader in the Chinese YMCA, Yu Rizhang combined character building, mass education, citizen training, and patriotism to mobilize his fellow citizens to build a stronger China and resist Japanese aggression. As chairman of the National Christian Council of China, he involved the institutional church in the affairs of politics. Later in life, he also engaged in citizen diplomacy.

After returning from study in the United States, Wang Liming became involved in the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement (WCT), of which she later became the national leader. She broadened the focus of the WCT from opposition to opium, tobacco, and alcohol addiction to a wider emphasis upon the family, including women’s rights, care for the poor and needy in Shanghai, and resistance to the Japanese invasion. She served both in the Nationalist and later the Communist governments. All the while, she devoted herself to her husband and her children.

## A Few Comments

In this volume we read, once again, accounts of brave, capable, and dedicated Chinese who sacrificed a great deal, working under immense pressure and sometimes mortal danger, to benefit their countrymen.

All the people featured in the *Salt and Light* series were public figures with strong ties to institutions, both Christian and secular. Furthermore, most of them belonged to what Dr. Daniel Bays has helpfully called the Sino-Foreign Protestant Establishment, rather than to the independent evangelical Chinese churches. And, as the title of the series states, they were active agents of modernity. Generally, they reflected the “Social Gospel” side of Protestantism in China, though several of them were also zealous in personal piety and evangelism.

We know that thousands of educated Chinese were impacted by the evangelical wing of Protestantism during this period. Watchman Nee’s movement attracted students and professionals, as did Wang Mingdao. John Sung (Song Shangjie) records in his diaries how businessmen, housewives, educators, government officials, and even military officers were converted and radically transformed through his preaching.

It would be interesting to know the stories of those who lived out their faith not in public ways like the figures in *Salt and Light*, but in private—in the home and at work. One can assume that their contributions to Chinese society, though less prominent, were just as significant and lasting as those connected with public institutions. In other words, “salt and light” Christians can permeate and bless society behind the scenes and without public recognition, embedded within ordinary life and quietly seeking to “glorify [their] Father in heaven.”

Sadly, we know little about them, for the very reason that they were relatively hidden. But if you have materials for a story about such an unsung hero(ine), please send it to me for possible inclusion in the *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity* ([www.bdcconline.net](http://www.bdcconline.net)).

The short biographies in this series raise the question of the meaning of “Christian.” As editor Carol Lee Hamrin points out, the degree of personal commitment to Christ and his church varied greatly among the people included in these volumes, though all were decisively molded by Christian ideas and ideals. One example is the problematic conversion of Lin Yutang, the orthodoxy of whose Christian faith has been questioned recently, as it was at the time.<sup>1</sup>

On another note: Modernity promised personal and national prosperity and happiness to the Chinese who embraced it, but it proved to be a double-edged sword that also inflicted incalculable damage and suffering. Perhaps that should give us pause and prompt us to ponder afresh the relationships between Protestant Christianity and the modern project.

---

<sup>1</sup> See “Dialogue between Christianity and Taoism: The Case of Lin Yutang,” in *Christianity and Chinese Culture*, edited by Miikka Roukanen and Paulos Huang (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 124- 144; and Critique of Humanism, in *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng)*, published in the Studies in Chinese Christianity by Pickwick.

With the publication of this final volume in the highly-acclaimed *Salt & Light* series, historians of modern China have no more excuse to ignore the role of Christians in twentieth century China, much less to accept the canard that they impeded progress and were simply lackeys of imperial powers. John Barwick's unpublished dissertation, "The Protestant Quest for Modernity in Republican China" sheds a great deal of light on this entire subject, and together with the *Salt and Light* series proves that Christians of all sorts were indispensable in the creation of modern China.

**Saving God's Face:**  
**A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame**  
**By Jackson Wu**

Wu, Jackson. *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2012.

Jackson Wu, who teaches theology to Chinese pastors, has written an important book that deserves careful consideration by missiologists, those engaged in ministry among Chinese, interpreters of the New Testament, and systematic theologians. He also maintains a lively blog, in which he expands on and clarifies many points in this book ([www.Jacksonwu.org](http://www.Jacksonwu.org)).

The initial reviews were mostly laudatory, and with good reason, for Wu makes important observations that challenge several traditional approaches to theology, biblical interpretation, and evangelism of Chinese people. For excellent surveys of his book and its many strong points, see:

[https://www.academia.edu/6932048/Review\\_of\\_Saving\\_Gods\\_Face\\_Mission\\_Frontiers](https://www.academia.edu/6932048/Review_of_Saving_Gods_Face_Mission_Frontiers)  
<http://aace.link/review-of-jackson-wus-saving-gods-face-by-daniel-eng/>  
[https://www.academia.edu/6675908/Review\\_of\\_Saving\\_Gods\\_Face\\_by\\_EMQ](https://www.academia.edu/6675908/Review_of_Saving_Gods_Face_by_EMQ)  
[https://www.academia.edu/6675880/Review\\_of\\_Saving\\_Gods\\_Face\\_JETS\\_56\\_no\\_4](https://www.academia.edu/6675880/Review_of_Saving_Gods_Face_JETS_56_no_4)

Rather than repeating these competent summaries of his argument, in this review I shall only comment upon what I consider to be some of its significant strengths, and then mention what seem to me to be major weaknesses.

## **Strengths**

### ***Interdisciplinary Approach***

In order to bridge the gap between theology and practice, and biblical studies and missiology, Wu undertakes an ambitious interdisciplinary study. He deserves commendation for his courage in seeking to present material from various fields, including missiology, current strategies of contextualization among Chinese, Chinese culture, and biblical theology in an attempt to build a comprehensive, cumulative case for his thesis. His writing reflects a great deal of reading in different areas.

## *Contextualized Theology*

Wu rightly challenges common fallacies in current attempts to construct a truly contextualized theology among people of a different culture. He shows that we must not first assume that we know what the gospel is, and then try to apply it to a particular situation. Our understanding of the gospel is influenced (he would say determined) by our cultural background, so we must humbly try to recognize our cultural lenses and try to see things from another perspective.

Specifically, his survey of prominent “Western” formulations of the gospel highlights what he calls a tendency to overlook some images of salvation (the main focus of his book) and to focus only on the “forensic” nature of justification. In addition, he makes the common observation that some popular “Western” presentations of the gospel highlight only the individual believer, neglecting corporate implications of salvation. He singles out the “Four Spiritual Laws” booklet as an egregious example of a truncated message.

He calls upon missionaries to become competent theologians and generalists, and to listen humbly to the other culture, so that they may rightly interpret and apply Scripture to different contexts. Resisting limited descriptions of salvation, he insists that we use a variety of analogies from the Bible to move towards what he calls a “worldview conversion,” not just a superficial acceptance of a “canned” formula. To accomplish, this, “[a] missionary must so identify with local people, personally and academically, that he or she genuinely begins to think their thoughts and feel their desires after them” (57). Amen!

In this chapter, he also presents a complex, nuanced process of contextualization that seeks to take seriously both culture and truly biblical theology. A major aspect of his thesis is that people of different cultures can see things in Scripture that those from another culture cannot. Like Andrew Walls, Wu believes that insights from different cultures can enable the church around the world to understand the full scope of God’s revelation in Scripture better.

As an evangelical, both here and throughout the book, Wu asserts firmly that the Bible must always be the authoritative norm and voice in the contextualization process.

## *Description of the Chinese Cultural Context*

The second chapter describes some distinctive features of Chinese culture: He repeats the well-known facts that Chinese tend to be more relational, concerned with face, and aware of group identity, especially membership in the family, than are Westerners. They value harmony and avoid confrontation. Group identity is expressed also in a strong nationalism and ethnocentrism, posing a challenge for Christianity, which they often perceive as a Western imposition.

He offers an interesting contrast of Western and Chinese legal traditions, showing that Chinese laws are meant to be flexibly applied, emphasize duties more than rights, and see righteousness as appropriate behavior in various contexts. A sense of shame is essential to being righteous. Chinese avoid lawsuits and much prefer to seek reconciliation outside the formal legal process.

Next comes a most helpful survey of six different approaches to contextualizing the gospel among Chinese. This section is, as they say, “worth the price of the whole book,” and is the best such analysis that I personally have seen. From his conviction that the Bible must be the controlling norm for all theology, he sensitively critiques models that put Confucianism, the Dao of Laozi, Chinese identity, the Chinese language, Western theological traditions, Chinese philosophy, the “salvation” of the Chinese nation, Marx, or anything else before the Scriptures. His balanced analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of the positions of people like Ding Guangxun, K.K. Yeo, proponents of Sino-theology, Lai Pan-chiu, C.K. Thong, Yuan Zhiming, and Enoch Wan display careful reading and discrimination. He also evaluates such popular methods as “T2T,” the “Four Spiritual Laws,” and others, which he generally faults for being individualistic and focused too much on law.

Very importantly, he agrees with Enoch Wan’s warning that “a high emphasis on individual decisions and immediate response may convey pressure that is simply counterproductive” (135). By the way, this applies to much of current Chinese Christian evangelistic methods as well.

Chapter Four explores the meaning of honor/shame (HS) in Chinese society, comparing and contrasting it to the concept of guilt. He states that the group orientation of Chinese society means that “the concept of shame permeates every aspect of Chinese life” (153). “For the average Chinese person, one’s honor or reputation is ‘more important than life itself’” (154). Especially for Westerners, this extensive analysis of the role of shame and face/honor among Chinese is “worth the price of the whole book,” for it will illumine much that is otherwise mysterious to us.

Likewise, Wu’s treatment of honor and shame in Scripture alerts us to the prominence of this way of looking at God and our relationship to him, as well as the similarities between Chinese and biblical cultures. One conclusion is that “[s]in is not merely the breaking of law. At its heart, sin is publicly shaming God” (182). To regain his own honor, God saves his people through the work of Christ. Wu then surveys various attempts, mostly by Westerners, to construct a message that recognizes both the biblical stress on honor and shame and its relevance for HS cultures, including Islamic and African societies.

Chapter Five seeks to build a “soteriology of honor and shame.”

Wu stresses that the Bible contains many metaphors and argues that we must not begin our interpretation of Scripture by choosing one metaphor—such as law-guilt—over another, such as

HS. He explains in greater detail why he thinks that the atonement “saves God’s face” by freeing him from the charge that he was unfaithful to his promises to Abraham and indeed to his purpose for creating human beings. Through his work, Christ defeated God’s enemies and began to establish his kingdom on earth. This highlights the royal nature of God and of the gospel.

The atonement also brings believers into union with Christ and thus into union with God’s people, who are the family of God. They gain a new group identity in Christ, through faith, and this is a matter of great honor for them, reversing their shameful status as enemies of God. Our expression of faith in God is a public act that also implies our pledge to be loyal to our heavenly King and to live for his honor and glory. We are thus freed from the fear of losing “face” before men. Righteousness is, therefore, primarily relational, as we act out our fealty to our savior. Since sin is basically a violation of God’s honor, righteousness becomes bringing honor (glory) to him through trust and obedience. A changed life is possible, by God’s power, which satisfies the stress Chinese put upon the practical effects of religion.

There follows a helpful discussion of the biblical meaning of righteousness, with particular focus on its relationship to HS.

The heart of Wu’s biblical argument is contained in this chapter, which features a very sophisticated analysis of Pauline texts, especially Romans and (to some degree) Galatians. Wu shows himself to be adept at handling the biblical languages, aware of a wide range of scholarly material from different perspectives, and proficient in applying the rules of logical inference to buttress his case or expose the weaknesses of others’ opinions. It is by far the strongest part of the book. He tries to steer a middle course between both the traditional view of St. Paul and some aspects of the New Perspective on Paul, especially N.T. Wright’s emphasis upon the “royal” nature of the gospel.

Wu’s lengthy exposition contains many helpful insights.

Throughout the book, he tries to qualify his approach by affirming the value of traditional theology; he does not want to throw what he persistently labels as “Western” theology out completely. He agrees that guilt as violation of God’s law is an important category in the Scriptures and should not be omitted from a balanced treatment of the gospel.

Despite all these strengths, and many more which space does not allow me to mention, I believe that Wu’s book possesses significant weaknesses.

### **Weaknesses**

Despite all these strengths, and many more which space does not allow me to mention, I believe that Wu’s book possesses significant weaknesses.

In general, Wu makes too many overstatements; he indulges in too many sharp dichotomies, despite his aversion to either-or thinking. (For a rather nuanced review that anticipated some of my concerns, see <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/review/saving-gods-face-a-chinese-contextualization-of-salvation-through-honor-and/>.) He sometimes even sets up “straw man” arguments.

As he said in one of his blogs, “When someone is seeking to correct certain views, they will not be as balanced as one would like. This is only natural.” (<http://jacksonwu.org/category/saving-gods-face/page/2/>)

### ***Methodology (epistemology)***

To begin with Wu’s overall methodology: As an evangelical, he stands within the larger Protestant tradition, which historically insisted upon the principle of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone). As opposed to Roman Catholics, the Reformers rejected the use of any extra-biblical category or frameworks as a lens or paradigm for interpreting the Bible. They were thinking particularly of Thomas Aquinas’ use of Aristotelian philosophical categories and the church’s high reliance on tradition, but church history as a whole has confirmed the danger of beginning one’s interpretation of Scripture with a previous personal, cultural, philosophical, or religious set of assumptions.

Some examples of the resulting distortions in church history include: beginning with Plato (Clement, Arius, asceticism); Stoicism (ethics, “four cardinal virtues,”); Aristotle (Aquinas, later Protestant Scholastics); Existentialism (Kierkegaard, Barth, Tillich, many evangelicals today); process philosophy (Process theology, Openness Theology); 18<sup>th</sup>-century rationalism + Aristotle (“proofs” for the existence of God, purely rational apologetics); Hegelianism (Dialectical theology); rationalism, naturalism, Darwinism (classic Liberal theology); Romanticism (Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Coleridge, Charles Williams); Marxism (Liberation theology); Marxism + feminism (feminist theology); Marxism + racism (Black theology); etc., etc., etc.

(For a Chinese critique of twentieth-century liberal attempts to integrate theology with various forms of Chinese thought in China, see Lit-sen Chang, *Critique of Indigenous Theology*, in G. Wright Doyle, editor and translator, *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng)*.)

Common experience also reveals the same trend and danger: men read the Bible like men, and women like women; the oppressed identify with Israel in Egypt, while the rich think about Abraham. Leaders look for leadership principles, moralists for ethical norms, philosophers find profound assumptions and careful logic, etc.

In other words, Wu turns an insight—we are influenced by our background—into a doctrine: we can't read the Bible outside our cultural lenses.

Though he elsewhere says that anyone can discern the correct meaning of a biblical passage by careful reading (what the Reformers called the “perspicuity of Scripture”), the way he states his methodology assumes what Carl Henry called “hermeneutical nihilism” (*God, Revelation, and Authority*, Volume IV, chapter 14). In Chapter Five, however, he practices exegesis based on a close reading of the text according to accepted rules of interpretation. In other words, he speaks as if we were determined, rather than influenced, by our perspective, but he actually engages in close biblical interpretation as if one could determine the meaning of the Bible through disciplined study.

In a way, his thesis is self-refuting, for his biblical and theological argument employs *Western* scholarship almost exclusively to establish his point!

## ***History***

### *Western culture and law*

Wu constantly characterizes a focus upon law in the Bible as a “Western” over-emphasis. Here his argument loses some credibility, for two reasons.

First, he does not explain how “law” came to be so important in Western civilization. It is true that Europeans have been greatly influenced by Roman law, especially after the Enlightenment. On the other hand, Western law shows almost everywhere the imprint of biblical law. Canon law formed an essential element of the great code of Justinian. The Ten Commandments were repeated and expounded in the code promulgated by Alfred the Great.

We must also distinguish between Continental law, based on the code of Napoleon, and British/American law, which has a much stronger foundation in the Bible. Blackstone's *Commentaries* on British common law exercised pervasive influence on American law for a number of years. (For more, see the discussion on American law and the Constitution in G. Wright Doyle, *Christianity in America: Triumph and Tragedy*). In the Bible, divine origin of the law is stressed.

Second, and more importantly, Wu does not, in my opinion, give adequate attention to the notion of law in the Bible. Contrary to his assertion that “law” is impersonal, the Scriptures see it as a revelation of God's will (Wu acknowledges this later, when he speaks of God as King.)

There are over 700 appearances of the word “law” in the English Bible. *Nomos* and related words are used two hundred times in the New Testament. He admits in a footnote that 1 John 4:3 says that “sin is lawlessness,” but insists that this is only one perspective (which is of course true, but perhaps not in the way that he asserts). Without going into detail, I will just register my opinion that Wu’s treatment of sin as relational, which is basically correct, does not do sufficient justice to the entire legal matrix of guilt-punishment, obedience-righteousness in Scripture, including Paul’s letters.

He seems also to ignore “traditional” Western theological works that awareness of God as king and lawgiver. (E.g., Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 1981; Thomas Shreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 2013.)

### *Chinese history*

Wu’s thesis depends upon the assumption that Chinese people simply cannot “hear” or receive a gospel presentation that focuses on sin as violation of law resulting in guilt and needing God’s forgiveness.

Here he seems not to show awareness of some aspects of the history of Christianity in China. The nineteenth-century missionaries almost all preached such a message, and they gained converts almost everywhere. True, they met with opposition, and they had to explain the meaning of “sin” (*zui*) with reference to a holy and righteous God, who was universal Lord and King. Their letters and records are filled with instances of Chinese people of all classes who accepted this message as “good news” of forgiveness. In the twentieth century, foreigners like Jonathan Goforth, and Chinese like Wang Mingdao, Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng), and especially John Sung (Song Shangjie) saw hundreds of thousands of people express repentance for sin and faith in a Christ who suffered on their behalf.

(For more on these men and other similar figures, see the online *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity* [[www.bdcconline.net](http://www.bdcconline.net)] and G. Wright Doyle, editor, *Builders of the Chinese Church* – forthcoming.)

My own experience over the past twenty-five years of working with Chinese intellectuals in America confirms the undeniable fact that many Chinese can be shown their guilt before a righteous God, their need for pardon, and the necessity of trusting in Christ as a substitutionary atoning sacrifice.

Though Wu mentions the Legalist tradition in China, he does not seem to give it adequate emphasis. Chinese law has a long, rich history, as the Tang code and the Great Qing Code testify. Furthermore, in a forthcoming paper, Danny Hsu shows that Chinese, even “Confucian”

elites, have always evinced an awareness of sin as moral transgression and guilt as violation of legal and moral standards.

The *Wikipedia* article on Chinese law says, “One element of the traditional Chinese criminal justice system is the notion that criminal law has a moral purpose, one of which is to get the convicted to repent and see the error of his ways. In the traditional Chinese legal system, a person could not be convicted of a crime unless he has confessed. More recent studies have demonstrated that most of the magistrates' legal work was in civil disputes, and that there was an elaborate system of civil law which used the criminal code to establish torts.”

The Buddhist teaching on heaven and hell, with punishment and rewards for ethical disobedience or obedience, is another indication of the power of this “legal” framework within Chinese society.

### *“Straw man” arguments*

His “straw man” arguments include characterizing traditional Western theology as having an “obsession” with forgiveness, as if forgiveness of sins were not a matter of major concern in the entire Scripture, and as if Western theologies did not treat other aspects of salvation as well (e.g., adoption, regeneration, reconciliation, purification, union with Christ, new life, etc.).

Another example would be his assertion that for Chinese, salvation must have practical effects, and that we must always include inward transformation as part of the subjective component of salvation. The necessity of personal transformation has been consistently stressed in Protestant theology. One thinks of the Reformers’ insistence of works as attesting true faith, the Pietists, the Puritans, Jonathan Edwards, and most modern discussions of salvation.

### *Individual vs. group identity*

Though Wu does acknowledge that we do not have to choose between either group or individual identity, in the course of making the very important point that salvation has corporate aspects (believers are members of the Body of Christ, children in God’s family, citizens of the New Israel, etc.), he often sounds as if he thinks that group identity is *ontologically* prior to individual identity. His apparent proposal in some places of the group as the primary aspect of individual identity does not appear to me to be biblical. The Scriptures often speak of individuals as responsible moral agents before God. (e.g., Ezekiel 18:4, “The soul that sins shall die”; Ezekiel 33:1-19; Psalm 62:12; Romans 2:16; 3:10, 22; 4:4, 8; 2 Corinthians 5:10.)

He claims that “[e]ven repentance is inherently social, for it entails a changing of value standards and thus group (249) identity.” That is true, but the Paul speaks of “repentance towards God” (Acts 20:21).

### *Caricatures of “Western” theology*

At more than one point, Wu’s description of “Western” theology borders on caricature. For example, I think he overrates the tendency of Western theologians to overlook corporate dimensions of salvation: (e.g., Ray Stedman’s *Body Life*; John Stott’s *God’s New Society* title for his commentary on Ephesians in *The New Testament Series*.)

Likewise, even as he quotes John Piper and others like Jonathan Edwards on the glory of God as an over-arching theological category, he seems to underplay traditional Western theology’s awareness of this central theme.

A famous quote from St. Augustine is *apropos* here:

Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, ‘Thou art my glory, and the lifter up of mine head’ (*City of God*, Book XIV, Chapter 28).

John Calvin is well known for his stress upon God’s glory in all aspects of his theology, so much so that two recent books on him bear these titles: *Living for God’s Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism*, by Joel R. Beeke and *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever*, by Michael Horton.

And, of course, we must not forget the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*’s first statement: “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.”

Clearly, the West has not been unaware of the centrality of God’s glory in the entire history of salvation.

### *Ethnicity and law-keeping*

In his interpretation of Romans, Wu emphasizes the social and group aspects of keeping the “law,” placing ethnicity before obedience. Once again, it sometimes appears to me that he overstates this, and does not give sufficient place to the role of obedience to the law as a fundamental criterion. It is true that reconciliation of Jew and Gentile is key in Romans, but it seems to me that he does not sufficiently clarify the role of law-keeping in the definition of Jewish ethnicity. I realize that he has dealt with this issue in detail and hesitate to criticize his

exegesis. I must leave to others more expert than I to evaluate his argument; I am merely stating my opinion.

He says, for example, that “[j]ustification is by faith because God’s promise is for all nations” (272). Would it not be more accurate to say that justification is by faith because all have sinned and cannot be justified by performance of works of the law—any law, including the Mosaic Law? This puts Jews and Gentiles into the same category of sinners who cannot save themselves by their own efforts.

I can anticipate ways in which Jackson Wu would respond to all these criticisms, but I present them as, at the very least, ways in which his complicated book could be misunderstood by a sympathetic reader from a similar theological background and with some familiarity with Chinese culture and ministry among Chinese.

Despite these apparent weaknesses (and my assessment could be incorrect), *Saving God’s Face* deserves careful attention by anyone wanting to think more clearly about how to express the biblical gospel effectively among Chinese.

For another very brief view on how shame and face could be addressed by the gospel, see Chapter Seven, “Points of Contact,” in G. Wright Doyle, *Reaching Chinese Worldwide*.

For a response to Jackson Wu, see: <http://www.reachingchineseworldwide.org/blog/2015/1/8/responding-to-jackson-wu-saving-gods-face-a-chinese-contextualization-of-salvation-through-honor-and-shame>

**Shanghai Faithful:**  
**Betrayal and Forgiveness in a Chinese Christian Family**  
**By Jennifer Lin**

Lin, Jennifer. *Shanghai Faithful: Betrayal and Forgiveness in a Chinese Christian Family*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.

“This masterful biography is a loving and skillfully written portrait of the Lin family, spanning five generations. The author also provides an authentic survey of the historical events that overtook the family members during these decades. I recommend this book highly for both the novice and the ‘old China hand.’” Daniel Bays

“Jennifer Lin has written a dramatic, wide-ranging history of modern China, focusing on the lives of her grandfather and his brother-in-law, Watchman Nee, to explain how Western Christianity became a Chinese religion.” Terry Lutz

“*Shanghai Faithful* is an extraordinary book based on thorough research and an intensely personal question for understanding. . . . It provides a unique window into the complicated and often painful history of Protestant Christianity in modern China.” Ryan Dunch

These comments from the back cover could be amplified by quotations from other China experts on the inside front page, who use words like, “a captivating, poignant story,” “an extraordinary story. . . . Lin’s research is meticulous.” “This engrossing book . . .” “A riveting tale.”

Rarely do I begin a review with others’ commendatory remarks, but this time I thought I could do no better than they in expressing the beauty and power of this book. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

***The Author***

Jennifer Lin is an award-winning journalist and former reporter for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Among other assignments, she served as the paper’s Asia bureau chief, based in China. Her father is Chinese, and her mother is Italian. After hearing about her relatives in China from her father, she and two sisters travelled with him to Shanghai in 1979 to meet the China branch of her family. What she discovered there set in motion a decades-long search for the truth of what happened during the “silent years,” when all the news from them was, “We are well as usual. Do not worry about us.”

The reality was far different, of course. These (mostly) faithful Christians had suffered more than she—or we—could imagine and had (mostly) survived. Lin wanted to know the facts and their meaning. She dug into archives, read old letters, immersed herself in the history, travelled back to China to visit the scenes about which she would write, and then applied her journalist’s skills,

which are first-rate, to give us a chronicle of tragedy and triumph that will, I expect and hope, be read for generations to come.

### ***The Story***

*Shanghai Faithful* traces the lives of five generations of Christians in the Lin family. At the same time, the author sets their story within the context of the growth of Christianity in China, which cannot be understood apart from the larger framework of the political, social, and religious events of the past two hundred years. Jennifer Lin has woven a tapestry that artfully combines all these threads, resulting in a book, as reviewers have said, that tells the story both of Protestant Chinese Christianity and of modern Chinese history.

### **Old Lin**

The story starts with a poor fisherman, Lin Yongbiao. While his neighbors scoffed at the strange message of the even stranger missionaries who occasionally visited his rural village in Fujian Province, Lin “came back again and again whenever a Christian preacher came to town” (17). In 1871, when murderous hostility broke out against the “foreign devils” who brought “foreign poison,” Lin, who had by now identified himself as a Christian, took his wife and his young son to the provincial capital, Fuzhou. He had heard that the missionaries there need helpers. Maybe they could help him, too.

He soon found a job as a cook with the Anglican missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). They lived in foreign-style buildings built on Black Stone Hill, overlooking the city, where many temples had attracted worshipers for centuries. As elsewhere in China, the local priests and literati resented the presence and teaching of these foreigners, whose doctrine challenged the established order. In a foretaste of much of the rest of the book, anti-foreign feeling led to a riot, destruction of the mission premises by fire, a trial in which the LMS missionary insisted on his treaty rights, loss of the property, and relocation to another place.

### **Doctor Lin**

Hoping for a better future for his son—another theme we shall see again—Old Lin enrolled Lin Dao’an in the missionary school. The lad’s intelligence and diligence caught the attention of the Reverend Birdwood van Someren Taylor, who ran the CMS hospital in the walled city of Funing. The author describes the energy and tact of Taylor, who gained respect and a hearing for his gospel through medicine, while his wife exemplified kindness and love as she moved among the people. All around the hospital, “the tenets of Christian faith were on display” (35). Rich and poor received the same treatment. Chinese catechists taught basic truths of the Bible while patients waited for treatment or recovered.

Taylor trained his students with as much rigor as his teachers had shown in far-off Edinburgh. Along with English, science, and medicine, the young men also learned to play tennis!

In 1893, Lin Dao’an married Zhan Aimei, the daughter of poor parents who had enrolled her in a mission school as a means of survival during a terrible famine. Education for girls introduced them to a wider world, the Christian faith, and skills that would enable them to be good wives for

Christian catechists and church members. Aimei proved to be a good student, receiving further training in Fuzhou and then returning to Funing to teach in her former school. She gave birth to their first son, Lin Pu-chi, on Christmas Day, 1894.

Lin Dao'an had worked with Taylor for five years, helping him open and run a new hospital in the southern city of Xinghua, but he later returned to Fuzhou as the head Chinese assistant of another missionary physician, Dr. Thomas Rennie. When he heard that an Irish member of the CMS was opening a new school, St. Mark's Anglo-Chinese school, to train Chinese boys in English, he promptly took Lin Pu-chi to be one of the first class. The CMS had resisted using English as a medium of instruction, but relented in 1907 when they began losing students to the Americans, who taught their classes in English rather than Chinese.

The Empress Dowager had abolished the centuries-old classical education system in 1905, unleashing a rush to found new schools that taught Western subjects. The greatest opportunities opened to those who mastered science and other elements of a modern curriculum, but especially to the ones who could acquire fluency in English.

### **The Rising Churchman**

The next chapters trace Lin's academic career, from Trinity College in Fuzhou, to St. John's University in Shanghai, one of China's premier colleges and the crown of the Anglican educational mission in China. He excelled at his studies, especially English, but he also applied himself to master the Chinese classics. From St. John's he sailed to America to study theology at the Divinity School of the Protestant Episcopal Church. He also took classes in philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania.

The Social Gospel movement was in full stride at the time, so Lin would have been taught theology from a "modernist," or liberal point of view, with an emphasis upon the human side of Christ and the duty of Christians to participate in society. With a strong confidence in the natural powers of humans, modernists played down the necessity of personal conversion to Christ and a life of holiness, and trumpeted the reforming potential of governments, leaning towards socialist politics.

After returning to China, he married Ni Guizhen, the sister of Watchman Nee, who had founded an independent movement called by outsiders the Little Flock. The narrative now becomes a study in contrasts between the formal Anglicanism of Lin and the informal, but deeply pious, worship of Nee and his followers.

Through careful sleuthing, Jennifer Lin discovered something that Lin had not told any of his family. In 1927, at the height of the Anti-Christian movement, a mob of protesters grabbed Lin, tied him up, dragged him through the city, and demanded that he renounce his Christian faith. "Never," he replied. "You can kill me if you want."

After a year as dean of the Anglican cathedral in Fuzhou, Lin worked as headmaster of Trinity College, but he resigned when he realized that he was not effective in that post. The author attributes this not only to his rather inflexible and distant personality, but also to the rising tide of virulent anti-foreign and anti-Christian agitation among students all across China, which she

graphically depicts. Also, Christian colleges, in general, were not meeting their twin purposes of converting students to Christ and training clergy for the church.

He moved to Shanghai to work in St. Peter's Cathedral, where he also helped to start a branch congregation on the other side of town. After a while, Ni Guizhen stopped playing the piano for her husband's worship services, and eventually ceased attending altogether, switching to Watchman Nee's congregation instead. This move would entail great suffering for her.

The Japanese attack on China, including Shanghai, in 1937, changed almost everything for a while. Life under the Japanese was hard, but at least church services could continue. Lin had preached a nationalistic sermon against the Japanese before the war but did not suffer any consequences as a result. After the Japanese interned all foreigners, Lin and other Chinese stepped in to lead the churches. When the war ended, the churches continued to help people who had been displaced, but soon the Communist insurgency engulfed the entire nation.

### **Sustained Suffering**

The author vividly describes the chaotic post-war conditions; the conquest of Shanghai by the Communists; the gradual imposition of strict controls on the churches; the formation of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement; enlistment of all churches in support of the war effort in Korea; the expulsion of all foreign missionaries; the arrest, trial, and imprisonment of Watchman Nee; the agony this caused his sister as their home was searched and Ni Guizhen accused of complicity in Watchman Nee's alleged anti-government activities; and the terrible pressure that led Lin Pu-chi to denounce his bishop and former mentor and friend.

The disastrous "Great Leap Forward" inflicted hardship on everyone, including the Lins, but it was mild compared to what was to come.

Lin's daughter Martha had married John Sun, the son of a businessman who was also close to Nee. Martha and her husband attended Nee's church with Lin's wife. All suffered terribly as a result, as did Martha's children.

We read how, during the murderous madness of the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards ransacked their home many times; son Tim endured beatings and confinement; their granddaughter Julia, the musician, had her fingers smashed with a ping-pong paddle by a classmate who had joined Red Guards; her sister Terri, the rebel, denounced Ni Guizhen for all the troubles her association with Nee he had caused the family. They tortured Matha's husband John by hanging him by his thumbs.

When Mao ordered the youth to be "sent down to the countryside to be educated by the peasants," the family were all scattered. Jennifer Lin's gripping narrative follows them all through very dark decades of isolation, loneliness, vilification, deprivation, illness and death amidst chaos, betrayal, hatred, and despair.

Watchman Nee's wife Charity was forced to work as a street sweeper and cruelly tortured by Red Guards, but she never denied her faith. Nee also refused to recant even when they offered him the chance to go home and join his ailing wife. He died in May, 1972, of illness. Under his

pillows, the guards found a little piece of paper on which he had written, “I shall die for believing in Christ.”

In 1949, Lin had been able to get two of his sons, Paul and Jim, out of China and on a plane to America. Letters from home to Lin, written mostly by his daughter-in-law, told of their success, comfort, and happiness during the desperate days of their relatives in China. His responses omitted any mention of their trials and troubles, except for occasional references to Ni’s failing health. Otherwise, it was, “We are all fine here.”

Because he belonged to the Anglican church, had supported the Three–Self Patriotic Movement, and had denounced his bishop, Lin Pu-chi escaped the vilification and torture inflicted upon his wife. Yet, he had not expressed enthusiastic support for the new government and the Communist Party, so he had no official position in church and lived on the margins of society. That gave him more time to care for his granddaughters and his wife as her health failed her.

### **Revival**

The author returned to China in 2015 with her daughter, Cory. To her surprise, she found that religion had revived and that Christianity was flourishing. Yes, crosses had been removed from thousands of churches in Wenzhou, and the government was imposing new restrictions on the public expression of faith by Christians, but that did not seem to stem the rising tide of Christianity.

They went to Christ Church Cathedral, where her grandfather had served in Fuzhou. They also visited Brother Lin, of the Little Flock. He had suffered in prison, but remained steadfast, and now had a growing congregation that looked to him for spiritual guidance. She found that Watchman Nee’s books were still popular, though not read in seminaries. Even Three–Self theologians admitted, however, that Nee was now considered a treasure for the Chinese church. Indeed, his influence is growing, with perhaps as many as fifteen million people identified with the Little Flock.

After attending a Little Flock house church meeting, she understood why Ni Guizhen had left her husband’s church: “It was the intimacy of shared fellowship, the yearning for connection in a turbulent world.”

All the members of the Lin family had left China. “They were pushed by harsh treatment as much as pulled by new opportunities.” Martha, now in her 90s, remains active in a Little Flock congregation in Australia. Terri went to Australia with her mother and then back to China in business. Julia tutors music and leads worship for a church in Chicago.

Along with millions of others, Lin Pu-chi and his wife were “rehabilitated”—that is, they were declared innocent—in the 1980s. Their son Tim had them cremated and then interred in Glendale, California.

### **Epilogue**

Lin Pu-chi had written in 1932 that the “study of China’s church history was ‘indispensable’ because ‘every society and every nation must use the past as a mirror.’” But he lamented the

paucity of books on the Chinese church, adding that “materials that could be used to compile a history were scattered and incomplete.” (277).

A photo taken in 1956 shows Lin in his Anglican priest’s garb, Bible held high, “uncowed.”

The author concludes: “In very different ways, Lin Pu-chi and Watchman Nee built a religious foundation that would prove to be sturdy enough to support the religious revival in China today. But equally as important was the conviction of believers like my grandparents. It cannot be measured by surveys. It cannot be calculated. It must be witnessed. After all that they had been through, after the physical abuse and mental torment, after the accusations, humiliation, and betrayal, Lin Pu-chi and Ni Guizhen never let go of their beliefs. To the end, the family in Shanghai remained faithful.”

### **Evaluation**

Jennifer Lin has written a superb book, one that could well serve as an introduction to modern Chinese history and to the history of Protestantism in China. She tracks the contrasting paths of independent Christians like Watchman Nee and other evangelicals, and of those who worked for “mainline” churches. Many of the latter, like Lin Pu-chi, held to a more liberal theology that stressed the social implications of Christianity as expounded by the Social Gospel. Though not Communists, they favored socialism and did not emphasize the kind of personal piety so valued by evangelicals. Indeed, the author thinks that, had it not been for the atrocities committed against members of his own family, Lin might have been intellectually and theologically comfortable with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

This story helps to understand the lingering mistrust and divisions between the unregistered churches and the TSPM even today. It also partly explains why the evangelical congregations, both within the TSPM and the far more numerous groups outside the system, have grown so dramatically in the past few decades. From the beginning of the story to the present, the connection of Christianity with Western missionaries has brought both bane and blessing. Missionaries received blame for the hated opium trade, which they also loathed, and for repeated acts of aggression by Western powers against China. This association provides fuel for government restrictions on Christian activity even now.

On the other hand, the missionaries also contributed modern medicine, scientific education, education for and liberation of women (from footbinding, concubinage, and, to some degree at least, the idea that women are inferior to men). They introduced concepts of government and business that, where applied, have vastly improved the lot of millions. Most of all, they conveyed a message of forgiveness, new life, the love of God as heavenly Father, a new and loving community, and hope of eternal life. Millions are responding to that good news even now.

Jennifer Lin says of herself, “I’m not a scholar, I’m not a theologian. I’m a storyteller.” To which I reply: No, she *is* a scholar, having done extremely careful and painstaking research in archives, general reading, and oral interviews over several decades. Yes, the theology is a bit thin, especially when she describes the message of the early missionaries and even, to some degree, the preaching of Watchman Nee. She does not clearly communicate the core beliefs of

evangelical Christians—the death of Jesus on the Cross for our redemption from sin and God’s wrath, his resurrection, the moral transformation by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit for those who truly repent and trust in Christ.

But she is a marvelous storyteller! Without making anything up—all the conversations and even the inner thoughts of the characters come from written records and eyewitness accounts—she has given us an account that is rich, nuanced, complex, realistic, compelling, and very inspiring.

*Shanghai Faithful* bears repeated and careful reading.

For some reflections on what we can learn from this book and from the life of Ni Guizhen, go to [www.reachingchineseworldwide.org](http://www.reachingchineseworldwide.org).

## **Sino-Christian Theology as a Comprehensive Way of Christian Studies**

**By Pan Chiu Lai**

Lai, Pan Chiu. "Sino-Christian Theology as a Comprehensive Way of Christian Studies."  
*Institute of Sino-Christian Studies News*, Spring 2011.

In this helpful article, Professor Lai very concisely brings us up to date on the rapidly-changing status of Sino-Christian theology.

He begins by noting the variety of cultural, intellectual and religious backgrounds among its proponents. In contrast to the previous generation, today's practitioners of Sino-Christian theology include a higher percentage who are "taking Christianity as their own religion" and becoming involved in church activities. That has led to "more healthy interactions or even cooperation" between the academy and Chinese churches than was the case ten or twenty years ago.

Secondly, some Mainland Chinese scholars of Christian studies now refer to themselves as "Christian scholars" rather than the "cultural Christians" of a previous generation. They have begun to question whether the methodologies of the human sciences are adequate to build a serious Sino-Christian theology, or whether the Christ event must take precedence.

Third, the field has moved from translating classics of Western (mostly liberal) theology to "the creative reinterpretation of Western theologies and the articulation of innovative theological discourse with Chinese characteristics," as several recent works on Karl Barth indicate.

Fourth, the scope of Sino-Christian theology has broadened, and now includes some very impressive Chinese biblical scholarship. (I would add that this process has been going on for a long time in Taiwan and Hong Kong.)

Fifth, mainland Chinese scholars have begun to shift from using the methods of human sciences to those of the social sciences, including sociology and anthropology, a turn that recognizes that "Christianity is no longer something belonging exclusively to western civilization [but] has become a cultural as well as social phenomenon . . . in contemporary China."

Sixth, "Sino-Christian theology is moving towards a full-fledged study (or studies) of Christianity, rather than focusing on the theological aspect alone," illustrated by the publication of a new bilingual journal in Taiwan, *Sino-Christian Studies: An International Journal of Bible, Theology, and Philosophy*.

The movement has thus become not only broader as to its subject matter, but the scope of participants in the discussion has expanded to include the entire globe. The prospects for Sino-Christian theology in China and in the world are bright, indeed.

Lai Pan-chiu is Professor, Department of Cultural and Religious Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong and a member of the ESCS Academic Community. He is the author of *Transmission and Transformation: Christian Theology and Cultural Traditions* (HK: Chinese Christian Literature Council, 2006).

If any doubt remains about the accuracy of Dr. Lai's thesis, one need only glance at the rest of this, or any other issue, of the fine journal in which his article appears. From its pages, we see that the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, located on Tao Feng Shan in Hong Kong, sponsors a wide array of conferences, lectures, reports, and visiting scholars. It publishes both the journal and substantial scholarly tomes, sends its own scholars to universities in mainland China to engage in dialogue on Christianity and Chinese culture, and includes in every issue a representative list of "teaching and research activities of Christian studies in the university of Mainland China." The Director, Dr. Daniel H. N. Yeung, contributes a stimulating article at the end of each number of the journal, which appears several times a year.

I highly recommend this publication, which may be ordered by writing to [info@iscs.org.hk](mailto:info@iscs.org.hk). The ISCS web site address is [www.iscs.org.hk](http://www.iscs.org.hk).

Other evidence for the breadth and depth of Sino-Christianity can be found in several major books published in recent years, including *Christianity and Chinese Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), edited by Miikka Roukanen and Paulos Huang; *Sino-Christian Theology: A Theological qua Cultural Movement in Contemporary China* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010), edited by Pan-chiu Lai & Jason Lam; *Reading Christian Scriptures in China* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), edited by Chloe Starr; and *Sino-Christian Studies in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), edited by Yang Huilin and Daniel H. N. Yeung.

Dr. Starr's book was reviewed earlier in these pages; look for reviews of some of the other volumes listed above in coming weeks and months.

**The Chinese Church**  
**The Next Superpower in World Mission**  
**By Kevin Xiyi Yao**

Yao, Kevin Xiyi. "The Chinese Church: The Next Superpower in World Mission?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3, July 2014, 296-302.

We have all heard of the Back to Jerusalem Movement, and some may remember the optimistic projection that before too long, 100,000 Chinese missionaries will have been deployed around the world. Surely, with its large and growing number of Christians, the Chinese church seems poised to make a major contribution to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

In this important article, Kevin Xiyi Yao, Associate Professor of Global Christianity and Asian Study at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, addresses both the prospects for Chinese cross-cultural missions and the challenges facing this nascent movement. Yao is well equipped to do so: He taught at China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong from 2003–2011 and maintains close contact with Christians in Greater China. He also makes use of Chinese-language sources, which few foreign writers can do.

Yao first traces the historical background to today's emphasis upon cross-cultural missions among the house churches. As early as 1918, efforts were made to reach minority groups in border areas; evangelists were sent to Southeast Asia in the 1920s and 1930s; and after World War II, several groups had a vision of taking the gospel to Muslims in northwestern China and Central Asia. The establishment of a communist government in 1949 halted these moves, however. After the tremendous growth of unregistered churches in the 1980s and 1990s, these earlier dreams were revived and a renewed commitment to cross-cultural witness arose.

### **Current Situation**

Yao cites evidence for this new commitment to cross-cultural evangelism within the unregistered churches:

1. "The Great commission has once again become one of the most talked about themes."
2. "Missionary training is on the rise within the Chinese Church."
3. "Some overseas mission agencies have begun to recruit and support . . . Chinese missionaries from mainland China."
4. "The recent rush to do business and work abroad has also brought an influx of Chinese Christians to other countries," many of them eager to share their faith with local people.

Some have tried to speculate about how many cross-cultural Chinese missionaries there are, with estimates ranging from 5,000 to 20,000, but no one can be sure. The most well-known effort is, of course, the Back to Jerusalem Movement (BJM). Though it has been slowed by questions

about its leadership, finances, and theology, it is “still the most visible and symbolic mission effort initiated by the house church movement in mainland China.”

### **Prospects**

In sum, “though major Chinese contributions to international missionary movement are still a far cry from reality, . . . the churches from mainland China have demonstrated great vision and energy for cross-cultural evangelization and seem on the threshold of much more significant engagements in world mission.” The rise of China as an economic and political power has created many new openings, “waves of Chinese emigration have led to a Chinese diaspora of eighty million people and nine thousand churches around the world,” worldwide interest in learning Mandarin has grown, Chinese missionaries do not carry the heavy baggage of Western colonialism and perceived American imperialism, and Chinese Christians have experience in suffering and persecution that Westerners do not.

Furthermore, the “unique church growth model in China,” including the prominent role of the laity in forming house churches and on-the-job training of church leaders, offers promise of a mission movement with Chinese characteristics.

### **Challenges**

On the other hand, Yao sees potential problems, some of them stemming from unbounded optimism, “even an overtone of national pride,” and an unhealthy ethnocentrism that creates doubts about the readiness of Chinese Christians for effective overseas evangelism.

He cites four major challenges which must be overcome:

1. The churches must provide better training for potential missionaries.
2. They must also develop structures for all phases and facets of sending and supporting missionaries.
3. They need better theology to work well in today’s complex cross-cultural environment. To gain this, they will have to overcome the present anti-intellectual orientation and a climate which stresses “doing instead of thinking, action instead of contemplation.” Otherwise, their mission work will be shallow and even “counterproductive.”
4. Finally, Yao notices “signs of theological disorientation and consequent questionable mission approaches and rhetoric.”

Heavily influenced by North American evangelicals, some urban house church leaders have embraced a triumphalist attitude that speaks of “Conquering or Christianizing” rather than witnessing. “Transforming the nations into the so-called ‘Christian ones’ becomes the ultimate goal.” They seem to believe that effective mission will flow from a position of China’s new national power rather than the weakness of suffering and persecution which actually led to today’s church in China.

(Yao had sounded a similar warning about the ‘political’ orientation of some urban church leaders in his chapter “Chinese Evangelicals and Social Concern,” in *After Imperialism*, a volume in the Wipf and Stock Studies in Chinese Christianity series.)<sup>1</sup>

Among other questions, he asks, “May being a ‘faithful minority with a loving witness and prophetic voice in a pluralistic world’ be a better vision for the mission-minded Christian communities in China?”

He concludes on a positive note and calls the world church to “pray for [the Chinese Christians], engage them, and assist them.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Kevin Xiyi Yao, “Chinese Evangelicals and Social Concerns: A Historical and Comparative Review,” in *After Imperialism: Christian Identity in China and the Global Evangelical Movement*, edited by Richard R. Cook, David W. Pao. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011.

## **The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ**

**Edited by Roman Malek**

Malek, Roman, S.V.C., ed. *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ*. Sant Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica & China – Zentrum, 2007. Volumes 3a and 3b. Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, L/3a and L/3b.

Review by Joseph Tse-hei Lee, Pace University, in *Journal of Chinese Religions*, No. 36, 2008, 169-174.

Because of the length and cost of these two scholarly volumes, making them inaccessible to all but a few, we are greatly indebted to this fine review by Joseph Lee.

The first volume studies the perception of the Jesus by Chinese before 1949, and the second covers the period from 1949 to the present. In each volume, as in the whole of the series, the editors examine “the transmission, reception, and appropriation of Jesus Christ in Chinese arts, literature, philosophy, popular religions, and society.” Together, they serve to “illustrate how Chinese from different intellectual religious, cultural, and political backgrounds came to grips with Jesus Christ as a historical and mystical figure, how they accommodated Jesus’ teachings with their pre-existing cultural mindsets and ethical values, and how they interpreted the story and legacy of Jesus Christ to specific Chinese audiences.”

We catch glimpses of how Muslims and Christians interacted, the distortion of Christianity by some intellectuals, the contrasting favorable impression of Christianity held by many novelists, and the cross-cultural dialogues between Confucianism and Christianity and between Buddhism and Christianity. Different essays examine how Marxists represented Jesus, the appropriation of Jesus in a number of “Christian-inspired sectarian movements in contemporary China,” several poets’ identification with Jesus’ lonely stand for the truth, and various strains of both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology.

Lee offers several insightful comments about important recurring themes from these volumes:

- “The different Chinese representations of Jesus Christ present a critique of the Western notion of morality shaped by the core values of the Enlightenment such as individuality, freedom and rationality,” in contrast to existing Chinese values which resonate with such Christian ones as righteousness, virtue, the pursuit of salvation, and the maintenance of trust and harmony.
- All Chinese theologians indigenized Christianity to make it speak to 20th century Chinese concerns and connect with Chinese concepts and terms. They earned for themselves the reputation of being “cultural mediators between East and West.”
- Chinese Christian literature reveals a sense of its own unique context and represents a genuinely Chinese response to the intellectual and moral questions of the 20th century, questions for which existing Chinese religions and philosophies, including Marxism, had

no adequate answers. These writers helped enable “more common people to use Christianity to cope with political, social, and cultural crises facing the society at large.”

Dr. Lee concludes that “there is no other publication that presents such an insightful study of the transmission, indigenization, and appropriation of Christianity in modern China.” Perhaps those of us who want to understand our fellow believers in China should spend the money and the time to obtain and study these two volumes!

## **The Chinese Puzzle**

### **Putting the Pieces Together for a Deeper Understanding of China and Her Church**

**By Mike Falkenstine**

Falkenstine, Mike. *The Chinese Puzzle: Putting the pieces together for a deeper understanding of China and her Church*. Xulon Press ([www.xulonpress.com](http://www.xulonpress.com)), 2008.

Though certain to stir up controversy, this book contains a message which should be pondered by Western, especially American, Christians with a burden for China.

Falkenstine seeks to “clarify perceptions of China and her church,” so that Western Christians may understand the current situation and serve more effectively. He believes that much misinformation, based upon an outdated paradigm perpetuated by people who profit from what he labels the “Persecution Myth,” hampers contemporary efforts to serve our brothers and sisters in China.

Chapter One “presents a history of Christianity in China and the missionary past,” in which we are reminded of the support some missionaries expressed, or even lent, in the imperialist aggression against China—a sad legacy that haunts Christians in China even today. Though perhaps a bit exaggerated, and based on limited sources, the presentation does reflect the view of many Chinese, especially those fed on communist propaganda, and is essential knowledge for outsiders, who are largely ignorant of this ugly side of the missionary enterprise.

Chapter Two canvasses “the current trends that are changing China, from the inside out.” Here we are told, by Chinese house church leaders themselves, that “China is not a strict place . . . If your relations with the Government Officials are good, you can do whatever you like, as long as there’s no trouble.” Falkenstine cites evidence for his claims that the government is looking ever more favorably upon religion in China, is building a society of laws, allows multiple open religious activities, and cannot control the flow of information.

The church, too, defies established stereotypes. Falkenstine describes the complex mosaic that includes registered and unregistered churches, the state-sponsored China Christian Council, rural Christian groups, and “Cultural” Christians.

Chapter Three pleads for Westerners to take time to learn the Chinese language and culture, some of the salient features of which he briefly highlights. We are reminded of differences in relationship building, communication, leadership styles, and interpretations to the “law.” He urges Christians from the outside to obey the laws of the land and to cherish an “immigrant,” rather than “imperialist” mentality.

Chapter Four tries heroically to explode the “persecution myth” that persists among American Christians today. Falkenstine believes that “persecution plays a small part of the overall role in

Christianity in China,” and tries to support that contention with statistics from no less a source than ChinaAid, which specializes in “reporting Chinese persecution stories.”

He advocates careful and precise reporting and concludes with a brief “theology of persecution,” in which he calls into question whether combating what little persecution does take place in China today should be a major goal for Western believers. Perhaps they ought rather to allow God to work out his purposes through suffering, which has often proved beneficial to church growth.

Like a good rhetorician, he has placed his most controversial material in the middle of the book. In the light of the recent crackdown on Christian activity, both Chinese and foreign, one wonders how this section of the book will stand the test of time.

Some readers will object to the restriction the definition of “persecution” to outright arrest and detention. What about the constant surveillance, time-consuming visits by PSB to house-church leaders, closing down of meetings, and general discrimination against Christians? Others might question how Chinese Christians will react to a “theology of persecution” coming from a Westerner (though it is certainly a timely reminder for us!).

Chapter Five constitutes a summons for “Constructive Engagement in China,” offering his own involvement as Exhibit A. His experience has convinced him that working openly with Chinese government officials, with no attempt to hide his Christian affiliation, produces long-lasting results. Guiding us through the Ethical Foundations for China Service, promulgated by his organization and others in 2006, he offers the counterpart of “best practices” guidelines for foreign Christians working in China.

This section shows how we can work with the existing structures and laws to benefit the growth of the church in China. Falkenstine proves this by the opportunities that his China Resource Center has been given, along with that of Evergreen China Service, which he highly admires.

Qualifications might be in order here: Many evangelical organizations from the West do collaborate openly with Chinese counterparts, but not necessarily with the TSPM or government officials with whom Falkenstine enjoys such cordial relations. Other groups have found the government less cooperative than he has.

This reviewer especially appreciated the stress upon long-term commitment and a learner’s attitude for Westerners in China. His warning “not to put your own agenda before that of the local Chinese agencies,” remembering that “the Chinese are always the experts in their local areas,” should be carefully pondered by enthusiastic “helpers.”

In Chapter Six, the author cites surveys concluding that “the general population is not clamoring for democracy, and they are generally happy with their quality of life.” In other words, they are not as obsessed with the lack of “human rights” as are outsiders. On the other hand, he is aware of the “endemic” corruption of the party-state and the destabilizing nature of the growing income disparity that worries the government so much.

There seems to be a bit of tension here, which the author obviously recognizes but does not want to highlight. There is no strong movement towards democracy in China at the moment, but the current regime is encountering rising resentment, which frequently explodes into violent protests, as happened recently in Guizhou. Other observers paint the scene with darker hues than he does.

Falkenstine takes hope in the zeal and joy of rural Chinese Christians, with whom he spends much of his time when in China.

The final chapter introduces the work of China Resource Center, which grew out of his own experiences ministering to Chinese in Alabama, studying Mandarin in China, and then seeking to meet needs in cooperation with local church and government leaders.

His discovery that much ministry to Chinese through the English language is greatly hampered by lack of comprehension merits careful consideration, especially by some very large organizations that base their entire strategy upon this method. Exceptions abound, of course, and should probably be attributed by the faith and humble love of the Westerners involved, as well as to the power of God's Spirit, working through his Word. Perhaps the author does not give adequate credit to the undeniable effectiveness of the life and witness of English teachers, for example.

Falkenstine writes clearly and concisely, often summarizing a great deal of information in a brief and readable compass.

Readers from the United Kingdom, or those with rather more experience in China, may find his breezy self-confidence off-putting. In my view, he exemplifies the quintessential American attitude of can-do optimism coupled with certitude that one knows the problem and the solution and possesses the resources and ability to accomplish the project with a minimum of difficulty. The pronoun "I" occurs frequently, which might create the impression of pride unless you have met Mike personally.

Other examples of his sunny approach would be the conviction that there are enough Bibles already available in China and his minimizing of the very real gaps separating unregistered and official church groups. Though registered and unregistered groups do work together in many places, the legacy of TSPM-sponsored persecution dies hard in others. Intractable theological differences will impede full cooperation until the TSPM abandons Bishop Ding's "Theological Reconstruction" campaign.

Certain portions of the book appear to reflect inadequate editing; these will presumably be corrected in future editions.

*Note: A second edition was published in 2012.*

**The Coming Chinese Church:  
How Rising Faith in China is Spilling Over Its Boundaries  
By Paul Golf, with Pastor Lee**

Golf, Paul, with Pastor Lee. *The Coming Chinese Church: How Rising Faith in China is Spilling Over Its Boundaries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2013.

Author Paul Golf admits candidly that it is “almost impossible to present a generalized picture of what God is doing among 1.4 billion people, and many differing opinions abound both within China itself and among the International Church community . . . So, while the scope of this book may seem grand, it only seeks to be one piece of the puzzle” (9).

The book itself is “an eclectic mix distilled from countless interviews, ministry trips, and late night conversations with a wide spectrum of individuals, some of which have involved me, but all of which have involved Pastor Lee,” who is head of Love China International. The author met Pastor Lee soon after studying Chinese at Oxford University (8).

Based in the United Kingdom, Love China International began as the BTJ (Back to Jerusalem) Foundation in 2003, which in 2009 merged with Life Impact Ministries in a mission to “support the Chinese House Church in their Back to Jerusalem vision” (189).

Pastor Lee often travels to China in support of Chinese Christians there, the last few visits (at the time of publication) being in preparation for the writing of this book. He believes that the Chinese house churches have been given two main weapons: praise and worship, and prayer. Grateful for the contribution made by Western missionaries in the past, he believes that their sacrifices have left a model for Chinese believers to aspire to and hopes that this book will “link the Chinese and Western churches in the pursuit of the ‘Back to Jerusalem’ vision” (12).

In the Foreword, Brother Yun, “the Heavenly Man,” likewise seeks to “thank and honour the Western missionaries who went out into China sowing in tears, paying the price for the gospel of Jesus Christ with their own blood, but also to give glory to God for the missionary vision handed down to us from Him through those Western missionaries many years ago—Go West with the gospel . . . This is the heart of the Back to Jerusalem vision!” (13).

He believes that the Western Christians are the “spiritual Abraham” of Chinese believers today, but also that “Western nations have misused religion, politics, and the power of man so that those ancient living wells of faith have seemingly been blocked up by dirt and stones. Because of their faith in Jesus Christ, the Coming Chinese Church is like your spiritual Isaac, come to help re-dig those ancient wells so that the living stream of life would once again flow freely!”

So much space has been given to these prefatory remarks because (1) they show the nature and purpose of this book, and (2) they contain classic statements of the convictions of many Chinese

Christians today, convictions which are driving and shaping their self-understanding and their missionary movement beyond China.

## **Chapter 1: China's Kairos Moment**

The book opens dramatically with a story of how a Chinese house church leader, "Pastor Gao," went to Europe to preach the gospel, so that the church could be revived. He believes that "the thing that the Chinese Church most needs right now is spiritual fathers, and we are looking to the Western churches with many generations of history to come alongside us" (21). Later, the author tells of how another house church pastor said to him that China needs Elijahs, that is, Western Christians seeking to witness to God in a secular society, to come alongside them, providing spiritual nourishment as well as receiving spiritual refreshment from the Chinese.

The author believes that an estimate of 80 million Christians in China is "ridiculously low." Such tremendous growth in the number of believers comes from three things: "They know how to believe, they know how to pray, and they know where they came from" (29).

The rest of the book follows a careful structure "based on Israel's rebuilding of the desolate towns in 2 Chronicles 14:7. These are the building of walls, towers, gates, bars for the gates, and finally the taking of the land" (29).

## **Chapter 2: The Hundred Million Revival**

"While there is a great deal more freedom and openness in Chinese society now than almost ever before, the past has all too often been filled with hardship and persecution . . . , and many Chinese church leaders believe that a fresh wave of persecution is again on the horizon" (33). Written before the recent tightening of control over public expression of opinion and of NGOs, the first part of this statement is still true.

He quotes a Chinese pastor who divides the history of the modern Chinese church into three seasons: "a period of intense suffering and persecution, from 1949 to 1979;" 1979 to 2000, "when China was opening up and undergoing reform;" and the period since then, "the era of world mission for the Chinese Church" (31).

During the second period, building on the legacy left by missionaries and preserved by faithful believers, a new generation began to spread the faith, often instructed by radio broadcasts from outside China, sometimes in the face of fierce persecution, but almost always by the power of the Holy Spirit. They saw many miracles as they fearlessly traveled around rural China and ignited the fires of revival through home meetings and public evangelism.

Golf says, "The wall of persecution may have been an obstacle in some ways, but in other ways it was a form of protection, allowing the Church to grow indigenously without outside influence, maintaining a purity of faith and conviction that is so easily lost in the modern world" (45). Sadly, the lack of sound biblical teaching also fostered the growth of heresies and cults. Chinese church leaders acknowledge their need for biblical and theological guidance from the West, but

the author wonders whether Western Christians have “become so preoccupied with being wise and persuasive that we have missed the power of the Spirit” (48).

### **Chapter 3: The Foundations for Mission**

Briefly and succinctly, we are introduced to the foundations laid by the “Nestorian” Christians, Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit and Roman Catholic missionaries after him, Hudson Taylor, James O. Fraser, and others like them. The words of Pastor Ezra Jin are quoted, as representative of the beliefs of many Chinese believers: “We need to give recognition to the Western missionaries who came to China and acknowledge that the reason they came was because of the gospel, not out of an agenda to spread imperialism. They are our spiritual fathers” (53-54). Today’s Chinese sense a heavy responsibility to receive and pass on what has been given to them at such great cost.

Golf says that there are basically three types of Chinese “house” churches today. The first group are traditional house churches whose leaders had had direct contact with missionaries, and who steadfastly endured suffering in order to preserve that heritage. “Their teaching particularly emphasizes suffering for the sake of the gospel and the cultivation of one’s inner spiritual life” (57).

The second group are the newer rural house churches that grew out of the great revival that began about 1979. This very decentralized movement was “almost exclusively centred around the uneducated peasant class” (57). It was fed by profound disaffection with Communism. Necessarily isolated from each other, many groups developed heretical, even bizarre doctrines and practices. As a result, any churches that emphasized vigorous evangelistic work were severely opposed by the government.

After the Opening and Reform initiated by Deng Xiaoping, however, a huge migration to the cities forever changed the Chinese demographic landscape, including the rural churches. Their people flocked to urban centers, laying the groundwork for the third type of “house” churches, the urban churches, which are the focus of the rest of the book.

First, however, we must understand the crucial role that outstanding 20-century preachers like Wang Mingdao, John Sung, and especially—in the eyes of the author—Watchman Nee have played in the formation of churches in the cities. He believes that Nee’s emphasis upon inner spiritual intimacy with Christ, coupled with real spiritual intimacy among believers, is the model the West needs to emulate.

### **Chapter 4: The Urban House Church**

The next phase in modern Chinese church history is the building of “towers,” that is, churches with a high profile that make no attempt to remain hidden behind “walls.” These congregations are led by an entirely new corps of pastors, mostly educated, who believe that Christians should boldly gather and worship in “public” spaces like office buildings, hotels, factories, restaurants, and the like. When police come, they receive them cordially, and cooperate as much as possible, though gently standing up for what they consider their constitutional right to freedom of belief

and public expression of their faith.

The new leaders believe that the Christian faith has applications to, and implications for, all domains of social existence. They speak often of “kingdom,” and think that the witness of believers will be used to transform Chinese society. Though they remain outside the official Three–Self Movement, that is not because they are unwilling in principle to cooperate with the state, but because they do not think that the church should be subordinate to a secular state. In other words, unlike the persecuted rural churches and traditional urban churches, they see themselves as potential partners with the state in building a better China.

Most of the chapter is taken up with the story of Ezra Jin, pastor of Zion Church in Beijing. Typical of many educated urban church leaders, he thinks that Christian churches should be like “a city on a hill,” prominently bearing witness to Christ in a highly visible fashion. Though he does not neglect spiritual concerns, Jin’s church also includes a team of lawyers to press for greater legal freedom of religious expression.

### **Chapter 5: God’s Lighthouses**

Now the author turns to the construction of “gates” for the “city” of the church. He sees these as the means by which God’s grace is “to be released into China at large” (90).

The disastrous Wenchuan Earthquake of 2008 provided a dramatic opportunity for Chinese Christians to demonstrate their love for all their countrymen by mobilizing thousands of believers to go to the devastated area and provide essential relief for them. Since then, many Christians have remained, while others who brought temporary help have gone home.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of churches have followed this path by engaging in social service projects of all sorts, convinced that they should “reveal God’s glory through demonstrating His love to society in the midst of crisis, and to show the government that the Christian Church is a blessing and not a threat” (91-92).

Of course, most of them still place evangelism at the top of their list of priorities; what is different now is that they are engaging in open, and often open-air, evangelism. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Chinese find Christ when they go overseas to the West for advanced study.

In a further step, Chinese Christian ministries, like Love China International, are sending teams to Europe, not only to spread the gospel and strengthen the churches there, but to mobilize teams of Chinese Christians to take the Christian faith around the world.

### **Chapter 6: Power in the City**

As part of their vision for “kingdom,” some urban house church leaders engage in prayer for the sick and see miraculous cures. Many more, however, initiate works that seek to meet urgent needs in society more naturally, such as “healing, counseling, discipleship, and equipping them to witness to their friends, family, and colleagues.” They expect that the “gospel will both multiply and adapt to the different cultural, social, and work environments in which citizens of

the twenty-first century find themselves. In order to transform a nation, Christian testimony has to be found in every sphere of influence and on every level of society” (108).

Most tellingly, however, Golf emphasizes that (1) healings and other demonstrations of God’s love are of not much lasting worth unless they draw people’s attention to “a miracle-working God”; (2) discipleship can only take place when those encounters with God’s power are allowed to translate into a lifestyle that shapes the direction of the Christian community "that includes personal evangelism"; and (3) such evangelism must be accompanied by “authentic, real-life testimony of . . . Christians who have laid down everything to follow Jesus” (110-111).

Chinese believers are confronting a revival of belief in the old “gods” and demons of traditional religion. They respond by confronting Satan’s power with faith in the greater power of the Risen Lord Jesus, and often see dramatic deliverance from demonic possession in answer to prayer, frequently followed by the conversion of the formerly afflicted and their family members.

### **Chapter 7: The Western Pilgrimage**

This chapter tells the familiar story of the origin of the Back to Jerusalem vision, a vision which Golf says has now become universal among Chinese Christians. It differs from earlier accounts, however, in showing how much more difficult it will be for Chinese to take the gospel through Muslim lands than they had originally thought. Now, they realize that they are in a preparation stage, in which the government’s encouragement of Chinese businesses to move to Xinjiang, and the construction of the “New Silk Road” are seen as God’s providential support for what will eventually become a major missions outreach.

### **Chapter 8: From Xi’an to Zion**

Beginning in 2006, pastors from all sorts and sizes of “house church” fellowships began to meet together to bridge the gaps among them. They recognized that persecution and pride had led to the formation of hierarchical networks with a strong and sometimes domineering leader at the top. The result was a group of “silos” with little inter-communication.

What Golf calls a spirit of being “orphans” has caused many Chinese Christian leaders to fight for success, convinced that they must make it on their own. They need, he says, spiritual “fathers” to show them the unconditional love of God for them in Christ. The “Homecoming Conference,” which has grown to include thousands, has helped to bring them together as one family.

Fifteen of these leaders formed a team to drive from western China to Israel in 2008. This remarkable journey, which has been documented in a film series, expressed the “Back to Jerusalem” vision. Golf admits, however, that the vision needs maturing. For one thing, Chinese need to see that the Great Commission includes the whole world, and that Chinese need to open their eyes to their obligation not just to go “West” to Israel, but “South” to Africa, and to all nations.

Still, we can see that the “gates” of the church have been opened, and blessing is beginning to flow through them to the world.

## **Chapter 9: Securing the Gates**

The chapter begins with a quotation of Pastor Jin asserting that government policy needs to change. “We need the space to be able to grow, just as in other countries” (155). The implication is that the “gates” of the church are now being guarded—and often barred—by the Chinese government.

Reflecting the view of many urban house church leaders, Golf asserts, “Perhaps the most crucial stage we are currently witnessing unfold in this grand process is the Church contending for a legal identity within the nation” (157).

The urban house churches are “now becoming positioned more than ever to exert influence in the nation,” because (1) their members and leaders are educated; (2) they have an “active and engaging stance towards social reformation rather than a passive one and are placing as much emphasis on pastoral care as on evangelism, and (3) they are not afraid to present a united front in actively campaigning for a change in the law and continuing to keep the discussion of religious freedoms in the open” (158-159).

Not surprisingly, this has made the government a bit nervous, as seen in its restrictions upon the Shouwang Church in Beijing and the crackdown in Zhejiang and other places since then.

Still, evidence of a growing presence in society includes positive presentations of Christianity in the state-controlled media, permission for online Christian publications to spread news and the gospel, the rapid increase of Christian business fellowships, and reports of high-ranking officials who have become Christians.

As a consequence, many Chinese Christians “are genuinely expecting the gospel to overtake the entire nation of China,” though there is still a long way to go (170-171).

## **Chapter 10: Looking to the Future**

Nevertheless, as stated before, not a few leaders believe that a new wave of persecution may be coming—a sense that has proven to be prophetic since the writing of the book.

Partly for that reason, more and more of them are becoming convinced that they should not emulate “a Western/Korean megachurch model,” but should meet together “in small groups in each other’s homes,” in an organic growth that would both be true to their roots and also harder to exterminate (175).

Meanwhile, the Chinese church presents the church in the West with an example of how to grow in a hostile environment, while it still needs the wisdom, prayers, and support of mature Western Christians. A moving section on the daunting challenges faced by Chinese pastors reminds us just how much we must pray for them.

Golf ends with a vision of a Chinese church that is united, energized, revived, persecuted in the near future, purified further to evangelize the nation and then the world, and joining with a revived Western church to glorify God among the nations. *China's Coming Church's* powerful conclusion should be read in full, as indeed, should the whole book.

## **Evaluation**

Though the book is only 190 pages long, this review, which only touches upon highlights, gives a taste of the wealth of its contents. Along with Brent Fulton's *China's Urban Christians*, and *Surviving the State, Remaking the Church*, by Li Ma and Jin Li, it should be required reading for all who want to understand, pray for, and partner with Christians in China.

Of course, no book will receive complete agreement from all readers.

Coming from the charismatic wing of the church, Golf uses terms like "revelation" to refer to impressions of God's will that come to "apostolic and prophetic leaders" among the house church Christians, vocabulary which may raise some theological eyebrows. Likewise, the term "Christian nation" will cause some with a knowledge of how this phrase has been used in the West to pause, as will the strong "political" flavor of some passages.

Many will wonder if Golf's fulsome praise of not only Watchman Nee but also Witness Lee and his Local Church should have been tempered with frank admissions of the faults of both of those leaders and their movements.

Others may find the idea that Chinese Christians must engage in high-profile, visible social work, legal action, and public worship in order to reach its full potential unbiblical. Even more problematic for some might be making the goal of influencing, even transforming, society as a priority for the church. They would prefer to say that the church's goal should be to glorify God, with social impact coming as a consequence.

Despite these and other weaknesses, the book is thoroughly researched, well-written, well-organized, and marked with energy, passion, and remarkable balance. It is extremely valuable as an expression of what many Chinese Christians believe about themselves, their history, their present condition, and the mandate God has passed on to them.

For some thoughts on what Western Christians can learn from this book, go to <http://www.reachingchineseworldwide.org/blog/2016/4/7/what-christians-in-the-west-can-learn-from-chinas-coming-church>.

## **The Life and Ministry of John Sung**

**By Lim Ka-Tong**

Lim, Ka-Tong. *The Life and Ministry of John Sung*. Singapore: Genesis Books, an imprint of Armour Publishing, 2010.

“Here is the story of one of the most remarkable Christians in Asia, yet largely unknown.”

“The value of this book is Lim Ka-Tong’s research and engaging writing, which paints a detailed picture of John Sung in his theological, cultural, and political contexts.”

This book “paints a striking portrait of Sung, adding interesting and important historical, social and theological details in its description of the man’s many successes and struggles. The author shows how Sung was a man for and of his time, and how God works in souls and societies. *The Life and Ministry of John Sung* is an inspiring and insightful book.”

“Dr. John Sung was a servant greatly used by God in the twentieth century. We can learn many precious lessons from his life and ministry.”

These comments from Christian leaders and scholars accurately convey the nature and importance of this superb biography. It is the most detailed I have read on John Sung, and it provides essential background for the interpretation of his published diaries.

The author has impressive academic credentials as well as extensive teaching and pastoral experience. A model of historical research, Lim’s book draws upon archives, letters, Sung’s sermons, eyewitness accounts, and a wide variety of published materials to produce an accurate, objective, and fulsome narrative of John Sung’s life and ministry in the context of his time. This is no armchair scholar’s dissertation, however, but a vivid story written from both the mind and the heart, and one that can both educate and inspire readers of all sorts.

Though John Sung was famous in his own time, church historians have tended to neglect him and the remarkable ministry that not only profoundly affected his own time but continues to shape the resurgence of Christianity in China since the 1980s.

In the Introduction, Dr. Lim poses the stimulating thought that good Christian biography can be a type of “storied” theology, one that is less abstract and more concrete. “In a quest for an authentic Asian Christian theology . . . biographies of great Asian saints could become a fruitful venue for theologizing at the grass-roots level. John Sung was one person whose life could be studied to help Asian Christians find their own Christian identity.”

Furthermore, he agrees with Ruth Tucker that biography can be a form of missiology that “focuses on ‘how one does mission’” (xviii). Indeed, it is much more practical than “biography as theology,” for “a good biography connects the reader’s life story to the powerful work of the

Holy Spirit in another's life" (xviii). Having been profoundly impacted by missionary biographies, I can attest to the truth of this claim.

## **Part I**

The first four chapters set the stage for John Sung's remarkable career by describing the context into which he was born and in which he ministered. Chapter 1 describes the momentous socio-political changes in early twentieth-century China; chapter 2 deals with the Chinese church in the early years of the Chinese Republic (which was founded in 1911), when a strong anti-Christian movement appeared. Chapters 3 and 4 narrate the intense Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy that split the Protestant churches in the West and in China. They enable us to understand how Sung played his part in the revival movement and why his strong stand for the authority of the Bible and traditional Christian doctrines struck such a chord in his hearers and aroused such opposition from theological liberals.

A detailed summary of the contents of Parts 2–7 will be found at the end of the review. For a short biography of John Sung, go to [www.bdcconline.net](http://www.bdcconline.net).

### **Evaluating the impact of the ministry of John Sung**

The author shows how many factors contributed to the powerful and lasting effects of John Sung's ministry. His academic credentials attracted both the uneducated and the highly educated. He was a master storyteller. He stressed both the truth of the Bible and the power of the Holy Spirit, calling for repentance, faith, and a life transformed by the Spirit.

He defended orthodox Christian beliefs against Christian intellectuals who had been seduced by "modern" and "scientific" Western thinking. At the same time, he addressed traditional Chinese religions, denouncing idolatry and delivering people from the fear of evil spirits. Though he prayed for people to be healed, he also stressed the importance of the Bible and prayer. Spiritual experiences must be judged by the clear revelation of God in the Bible, he insisted.

His own life exemplified the Confucian ideal by his strict self-discipline and self-denial. By giving up his rights as a Ph.D. and by donning a simple Chinese gown, he set an example of self-sacrifice that motivated others to imitate the example of Christ.

### **Sung's influence on the recent resurgence of Christianity**

Dr. Lim demonstrates that the ministry of John Sung and other "independent" preachers in the first half of the twentieth century "were the main contributing factors" to the resurgence of the Christian faith in the last three decades of the century.

First, thousands of people converted under his preaching held fast during the fierce persecutions that began in the 1950s. Second, many features of the "house" churches reflect the example and teaching of John Sung, including a zeal for evangelism, a love of the Scriptures and full faith in their divine inspiration, an emphasis on home meetings and family worship, the training of lay people for ministry rather than relying on the clergy, reliance on the Holy Spirit, belief in the efficacy of prayer, the insistence that every believer must live a sanctified life, rejection of liberal theology, and a firm adherence to orthodox Christian beliefs.

## **Lessons from the life of John Sung**

### *Contextualization of the gospel in China*

Dr. Lim forcefully refutes the currently popular notion that we must “contextualize” the gospel for elite Chinese intellectuals by integrating it with Chinese religion and philosophy. He shows that the career of John Sung proves that the “simple gospel” of repentance, faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit can speak to both highly educated people and to illiterate believers in traditional Chinese religions.

Indeed, “a study of John Sung’s life and ministry will provide hints on how Christianity can become an indigenous faith . . . in the Chinese context. It might shed light on why conscious efforts [at] indigenizing the gospel at a culturally elite level in China have borne little success. . . Contextualization happens when vibrant faith that requires nothing less than radical discipleship touches the mind as well as the heart” (279).

### *“Encountering the Power” vs. Power Encounter*

John Sung’s ministry demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit to bring physical healing and deliverance from evil spirits. In that sense, Sung was a “charismatic,” though he did not accept Pentecostal theology or an emphasis on spiritual gifts and supernatural events. On the contrary, Sung taught that true conversion will lead to a life filled by the Holy Spirit, who will gradually conform Christians into the moral likeness of Christ. Though God worked countless miracles through John Sung, he always emphasized love more than power, holiness more than miracles.

To overcome the power of Satan, Sung showed that we must immerse ourselves in the Word of God and in prayer. Though we can expect some spectacular manifestations of the Spirit, “every Christian must come under the convicting work of the Holy Spirit all the time. As John Sung commented, it might be easier to cast out the real demons than having to deal with evils within us” (280).

To be effective, “Christian workers should humbly encounter the Truth revealed in the Scripture. Then, relying on the Holy Spirit, we must strive to live a victorious life in Christ, not the life of a victor. God will work powerfully through our witness when we allow his power to work in our lives, and in and through the church” (280).

John sung “practiced what he preached.” He routinely read eleven chapters of the Bible a day, taking copious notes and praying over what God was saying through his written Word. As a result, he possessed a command of the Scriptures rarely seen in Christian history (F.F. Bruce, Jonathan Edwards, and Augustine of Hippo come to mind).

He also prayed more, and more earnestly, than most preachers. Aside from hours of solitary intercession, his impassioned calling upon God in public moved countless hearers to return to God. (J. Hudson Taylor’s prayers had a similar effect, though he spoke quietly and simply.)

His simple gown and self-denying lifestyle were merely the outward signs of an inward renunciation of the world and of himself. He feared God alone and was thus able to rebuke sin boldly and call for Christians to consecrate themselves fully to the Lord.

Sung's passion for souls drove him night and day and took him all over China and throughout much of Southeast Asia. He not only urged believers to evangelize others but organized countless small preaching bands in every city he visited.

Dr. Lim notes that Sung benefited much from a lifelong interest in Christian biographies. It was partly through studying exemplary Christian lives that Sung found his way back to a faith which he had lost, affirmed his call to be a preacher, and to a certain degree, developed his ministry philosophy and methodology." Lim gives examples of people who have been deeply impacted by reading other biographies of Sung. He strongly urges us to "incorporate biographies in the process of discipleship."

The online *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity* ([www.bdcconline.net](http://www.bdcconline.net)) features stories of hundreds of Chinese Christians and Western missionaries that can serve as examples for us today.

### **A great man with great sins**

John Sung was the first to admit that he was guilty of serious offenses against God. He lamented his short and fiery temper, which burst out in harsh denunciation of missionaries and Christian leaders and resulted in summarily removing interpreters who couldn't keep up with his rapid-fire delivery. He admitted that he sometimes exaggerated the numbers of those who had been converted or healed through his ministry.

Perhaps worst of all, at the end of his life he expressed remorse that he had woefully neglected his family for the sake of ministry. He was absent for the births of all five of his children and failed to spend even a minimal amount of time with his wife and family for many years.

Thankfully, he tried to make up for this failure during the last years, when they came to Beijing to be with him while his illness gradually and painfully killed him.

All in all, however, the reader of *The Life and Ministry of John Sung* cannot help but thank God for raising up such a wonderful prophet and evangelist for momentous times. Gifted with a superb intellect and rare rhetorical power, and incredibly industrious as a student of the Bible, preacher of the gospel and intercessor, Sung surely ranks among the greatest preachers in the history of the church. Only a very cold heart could come away from this book without having been challenged by Sung's utter devotion to Christ and his church and sacrificial love for lost and wandering sheep.

We cannot be as brilliant or gifted as he was, but we can ask God to give us hearts that burn with Sung's faith, hope and love.

### **Summary of Parts 2–7**

#### **Part 2**

*Sung's Childhood and Youth (1901-1920)*

Chs. 5–8: Sung's undergraduate and graduate studies in Ohio. (1920-1926) He left the faith of his father to embrace liberal theology and the Social Gospel. Intense internal struggle during his

first semester at Union Seminary. His physical and emotional crisis, leading to a dramatic conversion experienced but also to some sort of breakdown, in early 1927, that prompted Union officials to commit him to a mental hospital.

The author examines the evidence and concludes that Sung was probably sane, but also clearly exhausted, prone to extremes of emotion, and overly zealous and extremely naive as a new convert. Since this book was published, new evidence has come to light that would support the diagnosis of some kind of mental breakdown, at least for a brief period of time. He left the mental hospital fully recovered and convinced that God wanted him to become an evangelist to his people.

### **Part 3**

#### *The Water Period: Re-Immersion (1927-1930)*

This is the first of five sections named after what Sung called the five three-year periods of his active ministry: water, door, dove, blood, and tomb.

Ch. 12: Sung's dramatic renunciation of his success and position as a scholar, expressed by throwing away his golden doctoral keys and most of his diplomas and donning a simple peasant gown.

Ch. 13: His acceptance of an invitation to teach chemistry and Bible in order to help his family financially. His marriage to the bride chosen for him by his parents. Social awkwardness arising from his Americanization. The uproar caused by his refusing to bow to the picture of Sun Yat-sen; loss of his job as a teacher. Becoming a full-time worker for the Hingwa Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Ch. 14: First efforts at itinerant evangelism, preaching in English. Travelling Bible school.

Ch. 15: Preaching further afield. Denouncing liberal theology. Opposition from communists, the government, and liberal church leaders. Admired for his knowledge of the Bible. Began forming evangelistic bands. Consistent neglect of his young family.

Ch. 16: Benefits of re-entry period: discerning youthful faults; re-learning Chinese culture; learning how to deal with idolatry and demon possession; mastery of the Bible; learning the importance of a simple message, prayer, songs, Bible teaching, the fullness of the Spirit, training leaders.

### **Part 4**

#### *The Door Period: Openings (1931-1933)*

Ch. 17: Traveling north to attend conferences and meet Christian leaders. Encountering leaders of the Social Gospel movement in China. Rejecting their work as lacking lasting value and affirming his commitment to the biblical gospel. Gaining the admiration of leading evangelicals. First invitation to join the Bethel Band.

Chs. 18–19: Turning point: Preaching in Nanchang. The descent of the Spirit. Revival: Confession of sin, seeking the fullness of the Spirit, sharing the gospel with others. Friendship with the Rev. William Shubert. Dealing with his own sins before calling others to repent. Revivals in Shanghai.

Ch. 20 Joining the Bethel Band. Preaching in the North. Learning that prayer is the key to revival. Spirit-filled by not Pentecostal. Love is the greatest gift. First healing service.

Ch. 21: Preaching in Shanghai and the South. Editing *Guide to Holiness* magazine. Learning to crucify self. Growing conflict with Bethel Band teammates.

Ch. 22: Joining the Bethel Mission, despite reservations. Revivals in the North.

Ch. 23: More conflict with Bethel Band and Mission.

Ch. 24: Leaving the Bethel Band and Mission. What he had gained from Bethel. What he had given to Bethel.

## **Part 5**

### *The Dove Period: Time to Soar (1934-1936)*

Ch. 25: Setting out on his own. “Crazy” for China’s salvation. Sung begins praying in tongues but does not emphasize spiritual gifts. Increasing attacks on Modernist theology and preachers. Calls for the Chinese church to be independent of foreign money and control. Prohibited from preaching in “mainline” churches in the North. Warm reception in the South.

Ch. 26: “Xiamen shaken.” 5,000 attended meetings for 12 days. Movie theaters and gambling dens shut down. Many healed through prayer after confessing their sins. Growing criticism from Modernist missionaries for “emotionalism” and focus on the Lord’s return.

Ch. 27: Ministry in the South and then the North. Began to preach messages aimed at strengthening the faith of believers. Criticized for his healing ministry because of those who weren’t healed and Sung’s claim that those who believed would be healed; alleged stubbornness and autocratic leadership; “seeping denunciations of Christian leaders.” Others, however, described “transformation of lives, the friendlier attitude of non-believers towards Christianity, a significant increase in church attendance, and the enthusiastic activities of the evangelistic bands” (191). Stressed the importance of family worship but missed the births of his children.

Ch. 28: Beginnings of Sung’s overseas missions. Lasting impact from ministry in the Philippines. Month-long Bible institute in Hangzhou went through entire Bible. First trip to Singapore, Malaya, and Sumatra. “Singapore Pentecost.” Lasting impact of his ministry there. Ministry in villages of central and north China, based on God’s leading. Outbursts of anger. Lasting impact of his preaching in Taiwan, where he emphasized, “repentance, new birth, filling of the Spirit, sanctified living, and witnessing” (197). Second national Bible Institute in Xiamen (1936). Second Southeast Asia tour. Great success in Singapore.

## Part 6

### *The Blood Period: War-Time Spiritual Warrior (1937-1939)*

Ch. 29: Practicing the way of love. Beginning in 1937, Sung announced that God wanted him henceforth to walk the way of love. Ministry in South China. Revival. “A new song of joy” on the lips of believers as a result of his ministry. A much gentler person. Christian leadership and the Holy Spirit.

Ch. 30: The Sino-Japanese War. Nanjing, Hangzhou, and the North. The Third Nationwide Bible Institute (1937): “fervency of heart, knowledge, and power.” “The toughest journey in Sung’s life.”

Ch. 30: To Fujian, French Indochina, and Yunnan. Northern Fujian ministries: “Many were converted, and ‘many more who had been nominal Christians have been revived and brought into vital relationships with Christ,’ including pastors, Bible women, and teachers” (215).

Ch. 31: To Fujian, French Indochina, and Yunnan. An ordained Elder of the Methodist Episcopal Church. French Indochina. An indelible mark: “the results of this revival were both widespread and deep.” Yunnan: “Much confession of sin followed by a new zeal for the salvation of the lost” (219).

Ch. 32: Thailand, Singapore, Malaya, and Indonesia: a four-month trip. “Many reserved ladies sang along the road with joy like a drunkard. They talked and talked about their new life” (221). Ten years later, “We dare say that the Chinese churches in Java are still alive today only through the blessing of the revival brought by Dr. Sung” (223).

Ch. 33: Final Expedition to Southeast Asia. Seven months of non-stop travel and preaching “took a toll on Sung’s health” (224). Extreme pain, but “he still kept his daily meeting schedule” (225). People returned home from a Bible institute “on fire for the Lord” and “filled with the Holy Spirit. . . A new zeal in evangelism and a deepening of Christian faith and life [were] evident” (225). Some converts from nominalism “became key leaders in the Church” (225). Effects were “converting nominal Christians, renewing potential leaders, checking decline in ‘new members received,’ and imparting spiritual stamina to face the conflict ahead” (226). “The impact of Sung’s ministry in Java ‘was immeasurable and the spiritual results remain to this day’ [1960s]” (229).

## Part 7

### *The Tomb Period: Pastoral Years (1940-1944)*

Ch. 34: Six surgeries from March 1940 to his death. Agonizing pain. Suffered this for over 30 years. Didn’t follow medical advice, seek medical help, or take care of his body until 1939. His disease: anal fistulas, an “unmentionable disease.”

Ch. 35: “Pastoral” Duties, Agony, and Peace. A sense of being chastened by God for his ill temper, stubbornness, criticism of missionaries, inability to work with others, neglect of his family, lacking love, “and many hidden sins” (242). Intercessor *par excellence*. Masterful letters

to the evangelistic bands and prayer bands. Intensive Bible study. Group Bible studies and prayer. Allegorical messages for his companions. Many came to him. Extended time with his family, at last! A long and painful death. Bedridden for the last 18 months. Never wavered in his faith. "Pray much, the work henceforth will be the work of prayer" (246). Wang Mingdao called him "the "iron-Preacher of China" (247).

# **Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment**

## **Heaven and Humanity in Unity**

**By Alexander Chow**

### **Part I**

Chow, Alexander. *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: H Heaven and Humanity in Unity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Despite a number of fundamental weaknesses, this book contains a great deal of information and insight and deserves careful engagement by those who seek to ponder ways in which the Christian message can be expressed persuasively to Chinese. Dense, tightly organized, and well-written, the volume deserves an extended description and evaluation.

#### **Contents**

“Sin, more specifically original sin, has often been cited as the principal obstacle for the Chinese people to accept Christianity” (xiii). With this opening sentence in the Foreword, the author’s dissertation advisor, Edmond Tang, both states the fundamental assumption of the volume and points toward the thesis, namely that “[t]heosis and related concepts like ‘ancestral sin’ [derived from Eastern Orthodoxy] can be useful in providing a strong theological foundation to complement the Christian theological dialogue in present-day China” (15).

Chow believes that Eastern Orthodoxy’s doctrine of sin (hamartiology), which speaks of “ancestral sin” instead of “original sin,” “can provide a mediating voice between the anthropologies of Chinese optimism and Augustinian pessimism” (15).

The “theological dialogue” of which he speaks includes, on the one hand, what he considers to be the “law-based” stance of Western Christianity, as it has been preached by missionaries, accepted by “fundamentalist” Chinese Christians, and recently reconsidered by Chinese intellectuals who have come to believe that there is something fundamentally wrong with humanity. On the other hand, the dialogue includes the traditional humanistic conviction of the “three teachings” (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism) that we are essentially good and, by our own efforts at self-cultivation, can achieve both personal virtue and a unity between Heaven and mankind that has always been the dream of thoughtful Chinese.

#### **A New Theological Typology**

Chow’s goal is to help formulate a truly indigenous theology, one which speaks to both China’s religious and philosophical tradition as well as to its current social, economic, and political context. To do so, he adopts a new theological classification, one he thinks is more suited to the real history and situation of Chinese Christians. Previous classifications, including those based

on contrasts between fundamentalism and modernism, “Confucian Activism” and “Daoist Pietism,” are inadequate to describe the complexities involved.

A more recent typology assigns various theological streams to one of three categories:

- Type A, with Tertullian as its prototype theologian, holds law as its central concept; sees God as Lawgiver and Judge; believes the creation is complete; defines sin as breaking the law of God; holds original sin to be inherited; believes that the human predicament is one of moral debt; and describes the work of Christ in terms of expiation, forgiveness, and the giving of a new law. The eschaton will bring a kingdom of law and order. Chinese representatives of this type would include Wang Mingdao, John Sung (Song Xhangjie), Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng), the later T.C. Chao (Zhao Zhichen), and most Protestant Christians today.
- Type B looks back to Origen. Its main theme is “truth”; God is seen as “ineffable One” and transcendent; it views creation as originally spiritual and to some degree ongoing; defines sin as “not contemplating the One”; restricts original sin to individuals; considers our predicament to be forgetfulness [of God] and obfuscation; describes the work of Christ as providing an example, teaching, and illumination. Its hope focuses on an eternity of contemplation and return to God. Meanwhile, Type B theologians are “deeply committed to liberation and transformation” (85). Chinese spokesmen for this type include the earlier T.C. Chao, L.C. Wu (Wu Leichuan), and Y.T. Wu (Wu Yaozong).
- Type C traces from Irenaeus. In this paradigm, the key theme is God’s revelation in history; God is divine Shepherd and Father; Creation has only begun; sin is “anticipatory disobedience” by Adam and Eve, adumbrating the sinful actions of all their descendants; original sin involves the solidarity of the human race in Adam, and leads to our subjection to death; the work of Christ brings victory over death and evil, and opens the future for us to become like God (*Theosis*); the eschaton will usher in a kingdom of freedom and further growth in God-likeness. (Table C.1, p. 160) In China, Chow finds only Bishop K.H. Ting (Ding Guangxun) as an exponent of this paradigm.

Each of these types takes a distinct view of the relationship of Christianity to Chinese culture: Type A mostly rejects, criticizes, or ignores the religious heritage of China. Type B values, accepts, and even seeks to incorporate traditional ideas into a sinicized Christian theology. In fact, “their fundamental outlooks primarily originate from non-Christian, philosophical truths” (85).

Following this introduction, the author proceeds to structure the body of his study in terms of the title but taking up the subjects in reverse order.

## **Two Chinese Enlightenments**

Chapter 1: “The Chinese Enlightenment,” opens with a description of the First Chinese Enlightenment, which began with the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and lasted throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Intellectuals believed that China’s traditional worldviews, including Confucianism, had blinded the nation, locking it into a workable and debilitating moral code and religious superstition. They touted the illumination and liberation that would flow from honoring “Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy.” Some Christian thinkers rejected “superstitious” elements of

the faith, such as the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of Christ and strove instead for a transformation of society based on human knowledge and effort. This movement paved the way for atheistic communism.

The Second Enlightenment reflected the profound disillusionment following from the sufferings of endless political campaigns, especially the “Great Cultural Revolution,” and then the killing of students and civilians on June 4th, 1989. With their faith in the essential goodness of mankind shattered, intellectuals began to reconsider Christianity’s teaching of original sin. Many have become evangelical Christians. Others sought to formulate a “Sino-theology” that returned to traditional Chinese values while accepting some major doctrines of Christianity.

### **Three Representative Theologians**

Next, Chow describes, analyzes, and evaluates three representative Chinese Christian theologians: Watchman Nee (Type A), T.C. Chao (Type B), and K.H. Ting (Type C). Limitations of space allow only the barest treatment of Chow’s detailed and, for me, extremely helpful exposition of their thought. I ask the reader’s indulgence and recommend that you study these chapters yourself.

Chapter 2: “Watchman Nee’s Spiritual Man,” finds Nee to expound a typical Type A Christianity, with emphasis upon personal salvation through faith in Christ, individual growth in holiness through conscious cultivation of intimacy with Christ, and the formation of congregations seeking to help believers obey Christ and preach this evangelical message. At the same time, Chow thinks that Nee, consciously or unconsciously, drew upon the basically “synergistic” view of the cooperation between Heaven and mankind, though he probably had little knowledge of Eastern Orthodoxy. Though Nee, like Wang Mingdao, adopted a “basically antithetical approach to the prevalent culture,” (65) he did not totally ignore the societal context of Christians, especially after 1949, when he encouraged believers to help build the New China and sought cooperation with the new Three–Self Patriotic Movement.

Chapter 3: “T.C. Chao’s Spiritual Fellowship,” shows that, at least in his earlier writings, Chao (1888-1979) and others of his type “embraced their Chinese context, both in terms of sociopolitical concerns and religiophilosophical legacy.” Chow quotes Stephen B. Bevans, who calls this “the anthropological model of contextual theology,” which seeks “the establishment or preservation of cultural identity by a person of Christian faith.” Any challenge of the culture “is always viewed with suspicion that the challenge is not coming from God as such, but from a tendency of one (Western, Mediterranean) contextual perspective to impose its values on another” (65).

Chao insisted that Christianity must engage in dialogue with Confucianism if it was to be relevant to contemporary Chinese, as well as being open to the scientific mind of the First Enlightenment. Thus, “the essence of Christianity and the spiritual heritage of Chinese culture [i.e., Confucianism] can be united into one single whole. The religious life of Christianity can be injected into Chinese culture and become its new life blood, and the Chinese spiritual heritage can provide the media for the expression of Christianity” (67). Chao hoped that the resulting

contextualized Chinese Christianity could “contribute to a ‘universal homogenous consciousness’ that aids the realization of Christianity’s catholicity in the global society” (69).

Even after his imprisonment, Chao nevertheless resembled a type C theologian in that he believed that salvation enabled people to do good and realize God’s kingdom on earth, at least to some degree. In his early years, he was committed to “liberation and transformation,” (85) not only for individuals but for society, as humans worked with God to realize their true potential.

Insisting that God’s fundamental attribute is love, Chao taught that the authenticity of faith could only be expressed through “free acts of love and service” (76). Like others of his type, he worked for the transformation of society rather than looking for the coming of Christ to establish a righteous kingdom, but without divine aid. Instead these theologians adopted a kind of “humanistic monergism—one can reach salvation by choosing to follow the moral example of Jesus, without any explicit initiation from God” (85). That is because “[t]heir fundamental outlooks primarily originate from non-Christian, philosophical” worldviews (85).

Chao was imprisoned by the Japanese in 1941. While incarcerated, Chao underwent a profound spiritual and intellectual transformation, which in fact had already begun before the war with Japan. As the result, he realized that “the whole world—himself included—was ‘drowning’ in sin” (79). Previously defining sin as selfishness, he now saw it as guilt, a crime against God. The atonement of Christ now became the only means by which he and others could be cleansed, forgiven, and freed from the guilt, penalty, and power of sin. Without this, neither the individual nor society could be improved substantially.

As for Chinese culture, Chao now held that “Christianity is what Chinese culture does not have, is fundamentally in contradiction with Chinese culture and is able to save Chinese culture from this contradiction” (81). His former liberal stance, which exalted human reason, now became one of Augustinian *fides quaerens intellectum*—faith seeking understanding.

This return to “Type A” Christianity’s doctrine has resonated with Chinese intellectuals, including the leaders of urban churches. Chow sees a problem here, however: How will this view of mankind relate to the resurgence of traditional Chinese optimism about human nature?

Chapter 4: “K.H. Ting’s Cosmic Christ,” describes the theology of Ding Guangxun (1915-2012), the leader of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) beginning in the 1980s and the leading—perhaps only—prominent theologian in the state-supported Christian organization.

He was influenced by Liberation Theology, but declared that, after 1949, China no longer needed any liberation. Following Teilhard de Chardin’s evolutionary theology with its view of a Cosmic Christ, Ting taught that Christ is not just savior, but also creator, and that he cares for all people in the world, believers and non-believers alike. Finally, with the process theology of Alfred North Whitehead, Ting emphasized that God is love, and that this love overrode all other attributes of God. He is Cosmic Lover, and we participate in his love for the world, and his ongoing creation of it, as we work towards the eschaton, which is the ideal human community.

Ting was highly critical of “fundamentalist,” Type A theology, which distinguishes between faith and unbelief, and therefore, in his eyes, fractured the harmony of society. Instead, he taught

a “justification by love” which called everyone into the continuing salvation process as collaborators with God. Christ’s Atonement meant little to him; instead, he focused on the Incarnation. He preferred to speak of people as “sinned against” rather than as “sinners.” God is our fellow sufferer and does not condemn us for our sins but sees the potential in everyone. Ting held to an “optimistic” view of human nature. Christians can cooperate with communists who, like them, seek to construct a better world.

Chow observes that while Ting sought to reconcile Christianity and communism, his theology ended up being “more divisive than helpful in the unity of the Chinese church,” because his view of the human predicament is out of step with the Second Enlightenment’s rediscovery of the doctrine of original sin. At the same time, however, Ting’s thought resonates with Chinese intellectuals who seek a revival of China’s traditional teachings on the possibility of the unity of heaven and earth through a cooperative effort towards universal harmony.

### **Chinese Theology and Eastern Orthodoxy**

At this point, Chow pivots towards his point: Eastern Orthodoxy has something valuable to offer Chinese Christians who want to address their culture effectively.

In Chapter Five, he first reviews and expands on what he has said about Chinese theology. He avers that the main question has always been theological anthropology, the nature of individual humans, and their relationship to human society. Starting from the fundamental assumption that “[n]o Chinese contextual theology can exist without reckoning with the [sic] Chinese traditional teachings,” (115) he discusses “three major themes that have shown prominence in the two Chinese enlightenments and Byzantine theology: sin, synergy, and union” (116).

Because of the traditionally optimistic view of human moral potential and the recent awareness of the depth of human sin, Chow believes that a “realistic Chinese contextual theology . . . must bring together a strong understanding of both sin and the[sic] human potential” (120).

Likewise, Chinese have emphasized the cooperation between people and Heaven—synergy—more than ascribing moral causality solely to God. The author believes that Chinese Christians, reflecting their own immersion in Chinese culture, have also tended to shy away from Augustinian monergism and ascribe a vital role to human will and action. Even the recent interest in Calvinism seems to stem from “the need for a stronger ecclesiology and to engage in a public theology,” rather than an acceptance of Calvinistic soteriology (123).

Finally, this “synergistic activity is closely related to the Chinese religious ethos that searches for a unity between heaven and humanity (*Tian ren heyi*)” (124). Here again, Chow believes that Chinese theologians of all types have propounded a kind of union between Heaven/God and earth through the synergistic collaboration of the divine and human.

Chapter 6: “Theosis and China,” seeks to tie all the previous material together, and focuses on the three topics of sin, synergy, and union by way of the Eastern Orthodox of Theosis. Orthodox theologians, he says, believe that sin is ancestral, not inherited, that we receive from our ancestors not guilt, but the penalty of death, which tempts us to sin. We have two wills, one of which, the gnomonic will, “seeks the passions of our mortal bodies against the natural will that

leads to God” (134). This accords with Chinese thought that defines sin as selfishness, “rather than an inherent evil trait” (135). Likewise, Greek theology emphasizes the seed of human potential, as do traditional Chinese thinkers. We can be “perfected through self-cultivation” (135).

That leads to a belief in synergy, by which God and humans cooperate in salvation, as we accept God’s grace and press towards moral likeness to God. Chow believes that Eastern orthodoxy corrects flawed Western views of divine grace, which is seen as created and working monergistically “along hard determinist . . . lines” (138). In contrast, Orthodox theologians stress the freedom of humans to cooperate with God in his work of transforming them unto perfection. “Grace is the presence of God within us that we must actively respond to within” (140).

Finally, Orthodox Christianity teaches a unity of God and mankind that can resonate to some degree with traditional concepts of *Tian ren heyi*. Man is, indeed, co-creator with God in the continuing renewal of the cosmos. The Incarnation united all humans in Christ, so that we may realize our inherent potential for moral perfection.

Chow also believes that Orthodoxy has potential for relating to the Second Enlightenment’s concern for modernity and the transformation of society, though these elements are as yet undeveloped.

## **Conclusion**

Despite decades of communist atheistic education, Chinese are now showing that they are essentially religious people. Any contextualized theology must speak to their traditional religious concepts, Chow says. Most Chinese theologians, including Nee, have, implicitly or explicitly, worked out their thought in terms that make contact with these religious traditions.

Finding “Type A” and “Type B” theological attempts unsatisfactory for today’s China, he suggests that a new “Type C” theology, informed by Eastern Orthodoxy, may enable Christians to “find a ‘rootedness’ . . . in the dual identities of ‘Chinese’ and ‘Christian’” (166). Perhaps it could be a mediating way between the “two extremes” of Type A and Type B theologies.

## **Evaluation**

By now it should be clear that Alexander Chow has given us a treatise of significant worth. It is a vigorous, even brilliant, attempt to construct a Sino-theology within the context of conversations with Christians and others from the Second Chinese Enlightenment, major Chinese Christian theologians, and Eastern Orthodoxy theology. Chow offers us careful exposition of these different points of view. He makes real efforts to be fair and balanced where possible. His suggestion that Eastern Orthodox theology may be a useful complement or supplement to, not a replacement of, Western theological views is irenic in tone.

There is much more to be said in favor of Chow’s volume.

On the other hand, his monograph suffers from several significant weaknesses. These include internal problems, significant omissions, and questions of fact. The second part of this review will discuss these and conclude with a theological critique.

# Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment

## Heaven and Humanity in Unity

By Alexander Chow

### Part II

Chow, Alexander. *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Though Alexander Chow's book possesses a number of extremely helpful features, it also suffers from several significant weaknesses. These include internal problems, omissions, and questions of fact. The second part of this review will discuss these and conclude with a theological critique.

#### Internal problems

1. To begin with, though his adapted typology of three different types of theologies has some value, its simplicity and brevity necessarily entail over-simplification and even error. The most obvious example would be the characterization of Type B theologians as concerned primarily with "truth." Would not the same apply to the other two types, especially Type A? Only in the Conclusion, and then only in an aside, does Chow correctly say that a better word would be "philosophy," not "truth," since all Type B theologians begin with alien philosophical assumptions, as Chow points out.

Likewise, saying that the major concern of Type A theology is "law" would certainly arouse loud protest from its proponents. Would Augustine, Luther, Calvin, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Carl F. H. Henry—to name only a few—ever imagine that someone would use "law" to distinguish their understanding of God and his ways with the world?

2. Confusing categories:

*Monergy vs. synergy*

Perhaps this is because of my lack of understanding, but sometimes Chow seems to speak of divine-human synergy or monergy at the beginning of the process of a person's salvation; that is, the event/time/process by which one enters into a state of grace. At other times, he clearly means to refer to growth in holiness, the process by which believers become more mature and increasingly like God in their character and conduct.

This lack of clarity results, it seems to me, in frequent attempts to compare "apples and oranges." He contrasts "Augustinian" monergism (his word) before one begins life with Eastern Orthodoxy's "synergism" in the long process of Christian maturation.

### *Pessimistic vs. optimistic views of human nature*

Likewise, his characteristic of “Augustinian pessimism” about human nature, as distinct from Chinese and Orthodoxy’s “optimistic” views frequently seems to fail to distinguish clearly and consistently whether we are talking about before or after regeneration, and what this means for the concept of *Theosis*. All Christian theologians believe that regenerated people can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, grow in grace into greater and greater Christ-likeness, and that they will eventually, when Christ returns, be transformed into the glory that belongs to God.

3. Problematic presuppositions dilute the force of Chow’s thesis.

### *Sin and the Chinese*

The entire argument rests on the assumption that the concept of original sin, as a fundamental defect of human nature that entails guilt, is alien to the Chinese religious and philosophical tradition. Chow admits, nevertheless, that many Chinese Christians, like Watchman Nee, John Sung, and Wang Mingdao, have believed something like the “Western” understanding of sin, and thinkers of the Second Enlightenment are accepting this view of our fallen condition. In the past one hundred years, tens of millions of Chinese of all classes have responded to a message based on the radical need of mankind for salvation from sin, and the substitutionary atonement of Christ as the only way such deliverance can be found.

Danny Hsu has shown that Chow’s fundamental assumption is flawed. In a forthcoming paper (“Contextualising ‘Sin’ in Chinese Theology: A Historian’s Perspective,” *Studies in World Christianity*, December 2016), he demonstrates that Chinese intellectuals and religious believers have for centuries evinced a profound awareness of ineradicable sin and consequent guilt. In other words, the dominant narrative about the idea of sin being repugnant to Chinese many apply more to a few academic Confucianists than to the broad populace, across all educational strata.

### *Augustine’s theology*

Equally problematic is his assumption that Augustine’s theology, Chow’s *bete noire*, closely resembles the portrait adopted by the Orthodox theologians Chow admires, and obviously by Chow himself. If his depiction of Augustine is incorrect, then much of the argument loses force.

### **Omissions**

Though Chow demonstrates familiarity with the thought of Watchman Nee, T.C. Chao, K.H. Ting, and several ancient and modern theologians in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, he does not appear to be equally knowledgeable of Western theology, including the commentarial tradition. This is a fundamental weakness, since Chow’s thesis rests upon the assumption that Eastern Orthodoxy has things to offer to the Chinese church that are missing in Western theology. In particular, he appears not to have studied Augustine in much depth.

A few examples:

- Participation: Not only the Greeks, but also Western theologians have taught that we participate in God’s life through faith in Christ, the Word, and the sacraments, by the

Holy Spirit. A glance at the Index of books on the theology of Augustine will yield numerous references to our participation in God through Christ by the Spirit.<sup>18</sup> It was an essential fact for him. Luther insisted on the “real presence” of Christ, and our communion with him, in the Lord’s Supper; Calvin wrote of our union with Christ. Jonathan Edwards’ works are replete with this theme. As Chow points out, J. Hudson Taylor loved to talk about union with Christ and abiding him.

- Sin as self-love: The author rightly examines different perspectives on sin, including sin as infraction of divine law, as in—he claims—the West, and sin as selfishness, or self-love. But Augustine, in the *Confessions* and many other places, speaks of sin as self-love rather than love of God. Protestant theologians define sin more broadly than simply law-breaking. Calvin, for instance saw sin as turning from God and his gracious covenant.
- God as uncreated light: Augustine often refers to God as light. So does Jonathan Edwards.
- God as Father: Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and modern evangelicals such as Carl Henry, Millard Erickson, and Wayne Grudem, all emphasize God as Father to all believers, who have become children of God through regeneration and adoption.
- Theology as worship: Augustine and Calvin are clear on worship as the goal of theology, as are, for example, Jonathan Edwards and Carl Henry. Wayne Grudem ends each chapter in his *Systematic Theology* with a hymn.
- The necessity of both love and knowledge: No major Western Protestant theologian would countenance the idea that simple knowledge of, or even assent to, theological truths is sufficient; all would say that true knowledge leads to love for God. In fact, this was a major locus of controversy with Roman Catholics in the dispute over the nature of saving faith.
- “*Theosis*”: Known in Western theology as the possibility of growth unto holiness and of eventual glorification in heaven. All seminary students are taught about Irenaeus’ striking statement about “deification,” but the word has not been used widely because of the possibility of misunderstanding.
- Beginning with Augustine, Western theologians have taught that believers can and should grow in Christ-likeness and that they will, at the return of Christ, be glorified. Chow emphasizes Augustine’s depiction of unregenerate, post-lapsarian people as

---

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, a recent PhD dissertation says it is “one of the core ideas in Augustine’s philosophical thought.” Yonghua Ge, “Participation and Creation in Augustine and Aquinas.” *Tyndale Bulletin*, 66.1. 2015. 157. Note that the author is Chinese.

“not able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*),” but fails to do justice to the other two stages in the growth of the recipient of God’s grace: “able not to sin”—and thus to increase in faith, hope, and love in this life—and, “not able to sin”—the state of resurrected and eternal glory.

- Of course, Western thinkers have disagreed about the degree to which a believer can reflect God’s glory in this life, but none has held that we can become “glorified” before we are resurrected from the dead at Christ’s return (or the soul’s departure from this life, according to some). Nevertheless, the necessity and potential for significant moral and spiritual advance in this life have never been absent from Western theology, though some have emphasized it more than others.
- Christ as federal head of all mankind: Augustine taught this, as did Calvin and his successors. In fact, that is the point of his highly-criticized (and misunderstood) exegesis of Romans 5: Adam represented all human beings when he disobeyed God. Likewise, Christ as federal head of his people has been a standard, and central, concept in Western theology, from Augustinian to modern thinkers such as Carl Henry. “Federal theology” has been a controlling theme in some branches of Reformed thought.
- Unity of Heaven and earth: Western theologians and Bible scholars have spoken of Jesus Christ as the one who reconciles God and mankind, and in whom God will unite “all things in heaven and earth” (Ephesians 1:10). Usually, they have taken this to mean all believers, who are united in one body, the body of which Christ is head, along with God and the angels. (See Ephesians 2:13-22).

By ignoring these well-known features of Western, and especially Protestant and “Augustinian” theologies, Chow has set up a straw man which he proceeds to topple with the supposed unique riches of Eastern Orthodoxy.

### **Questions of fact**

Chow’s volume contains some statements which may not be accurate, most of them connected with his descriptions of “Augustinian” theology.

- Determinism: Chow consistently applies the label “Determinism” to Augustinian soteriology. Augustine never teaches determinism; he always speaks of men choosing freely, as they are empowered by God’s grace. The same goes for Calvin, Edwards, and other Reformed theologians.
- “Mechanical” views of causality. There is nothing in Augustine, Luther, Calvin, or later Protestants such as Owens, Edwards, and Carl Henry, that remotely approaches a mechanical view of causation. This is a caricature and overlooks the sophisticated and biblically-based arguments for God’s sovereignty which “Augustinian” theologians employ.

- “Rational” basis of predestination: This old canard ignores the actual writings of Augustine on predestination and salvation, which are almost entirely expositions of Scripture; nowhere does he appeal to logic or philosophy. The same goes for Luther, Calvin, Owen, Edwards, Henry, and others in this tradition.
- Augustine’s supposed Neo-Platonism: Again, this is a common charge against Augustine, one which can be largely refuted from within his own works, notably the *Confessions* and the *City of God*, where he admits the truths he finds in the Platonists and their errors when compared with the Bible. Of course, Augustine shares some concepts with the Neo-Platonists, such as the relative insignificance of the body in comparison to the soul, but this idea can be found in the teachings of Jesus and of Paul as well. Of critical difficulty for Chow’s thesis is that Augustine’s soteriology owes nothing to Neo-Platonism, as his works on sin and grace, which are based solely in Scriptural exegesis, demonstrate beyond doubt.
- Analysis of Nee’s thought: Though I found Chow’s exposition of Watchman Nee’s theology quite helpful, his assertion that Nee adopts a synergistic understanding of the relationship of God and humans in the process of salvation at any stage seems to conflict with Nee’s repeated insistence that we cannot do anything without God’s grace working upon us first.

### **Theological critique**

Since Chow clearly appreciates certain features of Eastern Orthodox theology, brief comments on a few controversial topics may be in order.

Unknowability and ineffability of God: Both Eastern and Western theologians have stated that God is unknowable as to his essence, or fundamental being, and that we cannot say anything really accurate about anything except his attributes and activities (or “energies” in Palamas’ thought). We can only say what God is not, not what he is. This is called apophatic or negative theology, in that it proceeds only by negation. The notion of the unknowability and consequent ineffability of God really confuses the distinction, often made by recent evangelical theologians, that though we can never know God exhaustively, we can know him truly, because he has disclosed much about himself in the Scriptures. Since God has revealed himself truly in the Bible, we can speak truly of him on the basis of that self-revelation.

No one claims that the Bible contains all that there is to know about God, or that we can ever say all that there is to know about God, but evangelicals such as Carl Henry, Millard Erickson, Wayne Grudem, and Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis (authors of *Integrative Theology*) argue from Scripture itself that we are not left in the dark about God’s fundamental character, and that we can speak meaningfully and accurately about God, as long as we are faithful to Scripture.

Furthermore, apophatic (negative) theology is self-refuting. It claims modesty and humility by asserting that we cannot speak about God’s essence except by way of denial; we can only say what God is *not*, not what he *is*, but this position assumes two things: first, that God has an

“essence” that is different from his “attributes,” or “energies.” But if God’s essence cannot be known, how do we know that it exists? Second, if God’s essence is unknown to us and therefore ineffable, how can we say anything about it, including that it exists and that it is unknowable and ineffable?

For more on this question, see Keith Yandell, “On Not Confusing Incomprehensibility and Ineffability: Carl Henry on Literal Propositional Revelation,” *Trinity Journal*, Volume 35 NS, No. 1, Spring, 2014, 61-74; and Carl Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, Volume 5, chapters 18-20.

Separation of God’s essence from his energies, or attributes: Carl Henry has argued (*God, Revelation, & Authority*, Volume Five, chapters 5-6) that this distinction is both unnecessary and dangerous. If we speak of him as, say, holy, loving, just, righteous, and wise (“attributes”), how do we know that in his inner being, his essence, he is not defiled, malevolent, unjust, unrighteous, and foolish? When John says that “God is light” and “God is love,” does he speak only of his energies/attributes, or of his fundamental nature?

Romans 5:12: Like many before him, Chow charges Augustine with faulty exegesis of Romans 5:12, which, it is claimed, is based on a bad translation of the Greek. Instead of “in that all sinned,” they say the text should be rendered, “in whom [i.e., Adam] all sinned.” There are problems with Augustine’s interpretation, to be sure, but part of Chow’s criticism is not quite correct, since both in Greek and in Latin, the relative pronoun could be masculine or neuter, and can thus be rendered either “whom” or “that.” (<https://bible.org/seriespage/14-study-and-exposition-romans-512-21>)

More importantly, even if Augustine’s translation is incorrect, it really doesn’t matter, because:

1. Sin is the cause of death (Romans 5:12); they are inseparable.
2. Paul implies that all sinned, even if they did not sin as Adam did, in violation of a command, but in Adam, their federal head.
3. Judgment and condemnation came to all mankind through Adam’s sin (Romans 5:16, 18). This means that we inherit guilt, which deserves judgment, and thus death.
4. Adam’s disobedience somehow made all men sinners. We are accounted as sinners because of our union with Adam (Romans 5:19).

Furthermore, the Eastern claim that death leads to sin does not reflect Paul’s argument that sin leads to death. Without denying the truth of Hebrews 2:15, we must admit that the sequence in Paul’s argument in Romans 5-8 is always, first sin, then death, both in Adam and in our own life.

Penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement: Chow does not say that this view needs to be abandoned, but he seems to favor the “Christus Victor” position held by Eastern Orthodoxy and some modern interpreters such as Gustaf Aulen and perhaps N.T. Wright. Though the Scriptures definitely portray the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ as a decisive victory over sin, Satan, and demons, they also portray his sacrifice as a substitutionary sacrifice that frees us from the deserved wrath of God. Decades ago, Leon Morris, in *The Cross of Christ*, and

more recently, John Stott, in *The Cross*, have marshaled overwhelming biblical support for this understanding of Christ's atoning work.

Glorification/deification in this life: There is little if anything in the Bible to support the idea that we can be morally "glorified" or "deified" in this life, as some Eastern theologians seem to have believed, or at least held open as a possibility. Not even John Wesley believed that.

Man, as mediator: This concept is not found in the Bible, where only Christ is assigned this title and role.

"Rooted in culture": In my opinion, Chow's most problematic assumption, which animates the entire volume, is that he seems to affirm the desire of Chinese Christians "to find a rootedness . . . in the dual identities of 'Chinese' and 'Christian'" (166). If he only means that Chinese Christians must learn how to communicate the Christian faith in a way that speaks to Chinese cultural concepts and conditions, then there can be no objection. On the other hand, the Bible makes clear that our fundamental identity is only found in Christ, in whom alone believers are to be "rooted and built up" (Colossians 2:7). Chow seems to oscillate between these two very different approaches, leaving himself open to misunderstanding, and to the charge that he leans a bit too far in the direction of the kind of humanism with which, in many places, he clearly disagrees.

## **Conclusion**

Alexander Chow is to be congratulated for making a bold, stimulating, and very helpful contribution to the necessary project of formulating a truly indigenous Chinese theology. Much of his analysis of different theologians is fair, balanced, nuanced, and extremely insightful. Operating from a basically "evangelical" and traditional framework, he tries hard to avoid the errors of those whom he critiques.

He is right to remind us that Eastern Orthodox theology and spirituality have insights that other Christians would do well to ponder. In fact, Thomas Torrance in Scotland and Douglas Kelly in the United States have made dialogue with the Eastern branch of Christianity a major priority. The first volume of Kelly's *Systematic Theology* contains a very sympathetic treatment of the Orthodox distinction between the essence and energies of God, for example.

A second edition of this work would benefit from more interaction with the Western theologians mentioned above, major Western commentaries on the relevant biblical passages, as well as Chinese Christians such as Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng, 1904-1996), who penned substantial works on systematic theology and contextual theology, and Daniel Wu (Wu Daozong), who has written both scholarly commentaries on the New Testament and books on apologetics and systematic theology.

For some possible implications of Chow's book, see

<http://www.reachingchineseworldwide.org/blog/resources-for-constructing-a-truly-indigenous-chinese-theology-reflections-on-alexander-chows-theosis-sino-theology-and-the-second-chinese-enlightenment?rq=resources%20for%20constructing>

**True Son of Heaven**  
**How Jesus fulfills the Chinese Culture**  
**By David B. Marshall**

Marshall, David B. *True Son of Heaven: How Jesus fulfills the Chinese Culture*. Seattle, WA:  
Kuai Mu Press, 2002.

True blessing (*fu*) comes from a God who made this earth and will redeem it, and who meanwhile can give satisfaction of heart and soul to those who seek him, without denying the goodness of the physical world.

Confucius knew that he was not perfect and could not speak clearly or confidently about Heaven. Buddha's denial of desire collides with the natural love of this life so characteristic of the Chinese. Guan Yin promises to deliver but can't always deliver on her promises. The First Emperor could prepare for his death, but not avoid it.

Laozi spoke of the Way, but only in paradoxical riddles. Confucius longed for a true gentleman to appear. The Gate of Heavenly Peace reminded commoner and aristocrat alike that behind its doors sat an absolute monarch in a Forbidden City. The Emperor himself prayed to an unknown God in a temple without idols, seeking forgiveness for himself and his people at the Altar of Heaven.

Only Jesus can bring fulfillment to desire. He alone could rebel against injustice without shedding anyone's blood by his own. Unlike either the Emperor or his unruly subjects, Jesus could submit to authority, demonstrate care for the weak, and rule with humility. The tomb of the First Emperor permitted no escape, but the empty hole in the Garden points to a Risen Savior for all who will come.

Indeed, Marshall's thesis is that "God's fingerprints are all over Chinese culture. He has, you might even say, prepared China for the news of Jesus Christ." Thus, Jesus does not "come as a stranger to the Chinese people" but, in the words of the book's subtitle, "fulfills the Chinese culture."

Like others before him, Marshall points to a few Chinese characters—blessing (*fu*), happiness ("double blessing" – *xi*); forbid (*ji*); come (*lai*) to explicate some of the hidden longings of the Chinese and their fulfillment in Christ. He does not claim too much for this analysis, which is rejected by most China scholars, but he does draw out their intriguing hints of Someone to come.

Marshall takes us on journeys to Mount Tai, Confucius' birthplace, the Silk Road, the Forbidden City, and the Temple of Heaven. Along the way, he introduces us to Confucius, Laozi, Buddhism, and significance of gates as pictures of the real blessing that comes with faith in Christ. This work of apologetics includes persuasive arguments for the reliability of the Gospels and the resurrection of Christ, but he does so in a non-argumentative fashion.

Once I realized what the author was trying to do, I began to enjoy this book immensely. At first, I thought that he was attempting to prove that certain elements of Chinese culture are virtually the same as fundamental components of Christianity. To some extent he does make that claim, but he is really aiming to demonstrate to Chinese that Christ offers them the answers to questions posed by their heritage.

In other words, Marshall does not join the chorus of those who level all religions, blurring distinctions and merging them into one common search for God. On the contrary, he posits Christ as the only Way to heaven, the real traveler of the Silk Road to bring blessing to China, the only gate to the Father and lasting heavenly peace. He is, as the title says, the true Son of Heaven.

Thus, he does not assert that the ancient Chinese really knew and truly worshiped the one true and living God (which is explicitly denied by Romans 1:18-32, to mention only one of many Scripture passages). He only—but powerfully—shows how God “did not leave Himself without witness” among the nations (Acts 14:17).

The artful, even elegant style of this book greatly enhances its appeal and persuasive power. Personal anecdotes, historical facts, quotes from Chinese classics, legends, and proverbs, and increasingly pointed references to the Bible weave a lovely tapestry of many threads that paint a beautiful portrait of Christ.

Marshall, who has lived and traveled widely in China and in Taiwan, has clearly thought carefully about the beauties, the aspirations, and the mysterious hints of something Other among the Chinese over the past several millennia.

On the other hand, he is not blind to the dark side, the ugliness, and the sordid reality that casts a shadow over the bright ideals. Child prostitution, devaluation of women, tyrannical rule by cruel despots—all of these alert him to the eventual futility lurking beneath the noble maxims of China’s revered teachers and beloved deities.

It seems to me that Marshall has followed in the footsteps of C.S. Lewis, who told us that our desires are too weak, not too strong; and of Blaise Pascal, who urged Christians to show how lovely, how utterly delightful, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The *True Son of Heaven* presents us with effective contextualization of the Christian message without dilution of its essence. Usually very critical of such efforts, I found only one or two statements that seemed a bit unguarded. Overall, this book is a success.

Non-Chinese can benefit from Marshall’s information and insights as background to their own study of Chinese culture and clues to effective communication of the Good News to their Chinese friends. Chinese who read English fluently will find it attractive and perhaps compelling.

If a Chinese translation is not already in the works, it should be, but Marshall’s style, both poetic and colloquial, requires a translator of the very highest skill in both English and Chinese to render the beauty and subtleties of this fine work of art.

**Wise Man from the East: Lit-Sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng)  
Critique of Indigenous Theology; Critique of Humanism**

**Edited by G. Wright Doyle, Translated by G. Wright Doyle and Samuel Ling**

Chang, Lit-Sen. *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng): Critique of Indigenous Theology; Critique of Humanism*. Edited by G. Wright Doyle. Translated by G. Wright Doyle and Samuel Ling, Wipf and Stock, 2013.

Beginning with the “Nestorian” (Church of the East) missionaries in the Tang dynasty, both foreign and Chinese Christians have sought to find ways of expressing the Christian faith in ways that communicate its truth in genuinely Chinese forms. The search continues, and different approaches vie for acceptance. Previous articles and reviews in these pages have chronicled some aspects of this ongoing project.

Substantial portions of my recent book, *Reaching Chinese Worldwide*, feature some preliminary thoughts on this complex subject.

*Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng)* contains translations of two shorter works by this once-influential but now largely forgotten theologian: “Critique of Indigenous Theology” and “Critique of Humanism.” Chang (1904-1996) was once an ardent believer in China’s “Three Teachings”—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, especially Zen Buddhism. Converted to Christ at the age of fifty after a distinguished career in the academy and in the government, he re-examined his former convictions in the light of the Scriptures and then wrote extensively to show how the Bible offers what other religions could not.

His “Critique of Indigenous Theology” attempts to counter the efforts of Chinese theologians in the twentieth century who ventured to make Christianity more acceptable to Chinese intellectuals by combining it with one or more of the traditional belief systems of China. In the process, he subjects them and others like them to a scathing critique, one which has relevance for today, when learned scholars and ardent evangelists still try to find fundamental points of contact between Christianity and Chinese thought, and even to claim that essential similarities can be found and emphasized.

As co-editor (with Dr. Carol Lee Hamrin) of the Wipf and Stock series, “Studies in Chinese Christianity,” to which this volume belongs, I supplied an introduction which sets Chang’s writing in the context of the Indigenous Theology movement and a translation of the “Critique of Indigenous Theology.” (“The Critique of Humanism” was translated by Dr. Samuel Ling, editor and translator of two other books by Lit-sen Chang, *What Is Apologetics?* and *Asia’s Religions: Christianity’s Momentous Encounter with the East*).

## **Introduction**

Chang begins by noting that the search for an “indigenous” theology begins in the Old Testament, when the Hebrews at various times in their history tried to amalgamate the faith they received from Yahweh with the religions of their pagan neighbors. He briefly notes that the proponents of indigenous theology in the first part of the twentieth century were deficient in their understanding of God, heaven, Christ, the Holy Spirit, religion, and salvation. He then tells his own story of deliverance from what he calls bondage and blindness into the light and liberty of faith in Christ.

## **Historical Review**

Almost from the beginning, Christians have been tempted to mingle biblical truth with non-biblical philosophical concepts and assumptions. In two chapters, Chang traces first the history of “indigenizing” efforts in the Western church, and then the same endeavor in Chinese Christian history. The “Nestorians” (Church of the East) tried to express Christian truth in Buddhist terms and produced an enervating confusion. Roman Catholic missionaries did the same with Confucianism, with similar results. Liberal theology surrendered to Western humanism and naïve faith in science. Under its influence many modern Chinese theologians have sought to integrate Western humanist philosophy with traditional Chinese beliefs, concocting a hybrid faith that departs significantly from the Scripture.

## **Philosophy, Culture, Religion**

The next three chapters show how advocates of indigenous theology compromised with non-biblical philosophy, culture, and religion. In each case, they failed to distinguish between general revelation and special revelation. The former does, indeed, offer us some truth, but is always incomplete at best and vitiated by errors at worst. Only special revelation can show us the way to God through faith in Christ. Its fundamental premises differ essentially from those of non-Christian world views, and so the two can’t really be welded into a coherent system.

## **Humanism**

Chang sees all non-biblical thought and belief systems as basically humanistic. In that sense, both East and West have been guilty of the same error, namely, of starting with human understanding and reason, and making man the center of the universe. The Bible alone gives us the accurate perspective on reality, which is God-centered. Humanism in all forms is a dead end, for it cannot give us life and true blessedness; these come to us through the saving work of Jesus Christ for us, received by faith.

## **Indigenous Theology and Indigenous Church**

Chang fully supports the goal of building a truly “Chinese” church, with its own unique way of expressing biblical truth. At the same time, he disagrees with the movement to build such an indigenous church on a rejection of the rich heritage of Christian theology which has come through the West. A truly indigenous church will not be founded on Chinese culture, but on Christian revelation.

## **Christian Doctrine and the Substance-Use [Essence-Application] Principle**

Christian truth, as revealed in the Bible comes from heaven, and does not change with time or place. Indeed, even many theological formulations which we have inherited from our spiritual forebears have a similar, though of course derived and therefore secondary, value as abiding truth. The ecumenical creeds would also fall into this category, along with some of the major confessions of faith.

On the other hand, these ancient, unchanging truths must and can be fleshed out in uniquely “Chinese” words and ways. By misunderstanding this basic distinction, supporters of indigenous theology have introduced unnecessary, and debilitating, errors into the church.

### **Conclusion**

Chang ends with the example of Paul, who applied his understanding of the Bible and of Greek and Roman religion and philosophy to build a solid theological foundation for the church, as well as to “tear down strongholds” of pagan thought. Chang sees himself as a warrior in the same assault on soul-killing falsehood and urges other educated Chinese Christians to join in the campaign to apply Christian truth to all domains of human thought and activity.

### **Evaluation**

As editor and translator of part of the volume, I cannot comment on the merit of this book as a whole, but I can say with assurance that, even in a very inadequate translation, Chang comes across as an original, penetrating Christian thinker and as a powerful, even elegant, writer. This short summary cannot do justice to the comprehensive scope of his analysis of “indigenous theology” throughout the ages and in modern China, or to the relevance of his brilliance and zeal for us today.

**Witnesses to Power**  
**Stories of God's Quiet Work in a Changing China**  
**By Tetsunao Yamamori and Kim Kwong Chan**

Yamamori, Tetsunao and Kim Kwong Chan. *Witnesses to Power: Stories of God's Quiet Work in a Changing China*. London, England, and Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, an imprint of Authentic Media, 2000, reprinted in 2006.

Despite its brevity, *Witnesses to Power* contains a wealth of information. As Ralph Covell observes in the Foreword, this slim volume is marked by breadth, diversity, balance, and challenge. These stories come from one end of China to the other. They speak of rural and urban evangelism; healing and exorcism, compassionate care for needy children, community life of the Jesus family, church planting and growth in remote areas not penetrated by outside Christian witness, and the impact of the gospel to produce economic prosperity.

Balance is observed also by inclusion of testimonies from both Three–Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and unregistered churches.

He concludes, as the authors do, that “the best way for outside groups to be involved in China will be in the use of ‘unconventional mission methods.’ These will include holistic ministries helping churches both to evangelize and to seek the economic well-being of Christians and the societies, both Han and minority, in which they live.”

The remarkable growth of the church in China has been, to some degree, “silent.” It has come about mostly because of “the living faith of many ordinary Chinese Christians,” who are “unknown, ordinary people, with extraordinary stories to tell.” *Witnesses to Power* contains twelve such stories, from a wide range of people.

This gallery of Christian heroes includes a highly-educated Christian who migrated to western China to share the Gospel with Muslims, an old grandmother in Hebei who single-handedly started and led a church during the hard years of communist persecution, a Lisu pastor who ministers not only to his own tribe but also to other ethnic groups in areas inaccessible by vehicular travel, and a lone Christian who established an entire school system for poor children.

We are introduced also to the serene faith of Christians who lost their homes and church building in a fire that destroyed the whole village, the promotion of Christianity by local governments in their efforts to eradicate opium addiction and poverty, and the holistic ministry of the Lisu church.

The book's wide sweep takes in the Jesus Family, whose vibrant and harmonious community life inspires local communist officials; a pastor whose congregation lives and meets in large caves; and a woman whose faith was kindled during the Boxer rebellion, waned in her middle years, and revived when she called out to God in distress.

A full and meaty Introduction is supplemented by concise introductions to each chapter. Academic study, time in China, and extensive interviews give the two authors a breadth and depth of insight that place the testimonies into their wider context.

They remind us, for example, that the TSPM is “not a monolithic entity, but a loose fellowship with diverse views.” Some house churches have developed into large networks, “autonomous Christian communities” (ACC), with training and extensive publications. Overseas Chinese Christians contribute to church growth by bringing in literature, providing training, radio broadcasts.

The much-heralded rapid economic since the 1980s has been matched by “overpopulation, low productivity, and serious weaknesses in infrastructure. Most are suffering from high inflation and loss of security.” Resentment at government corruption runs deep and wide. Churches face government control and restriction, while local corruption leads to more harassment in many areas.

The particulars of personal testimony and local examples provide evidence for the authors’ isolation of eleven factors, aside from the work of the Holy Spirit, that have led to growth, outlined on pages xiv-xvi. Briefly, Christianity:

- Is seen as, in some sense, an improvement on traditional Chinese beliefs.
- Has a highly flexible and successful organizational form.
- Benefited in the 1980s and 1990s from the prestige of the West.
- Grows as children are brought up in families or communities that have been Christian for a long time.
- Is strengthened by its evangelistic nature, particularly Protestantism.
- Offers attractive forms of worship.
- Builds self-respect and enhanced personal identity.
- Respects young people and women.
- Gives young believers “a sense of mission in life” through evangelism.
- Provides hope for the future with its strong “eschatological tone.”
- Is less expensive to observe than are traditional faiths and customs.

In addition, growth of rural churches may be partly attributed to disillusioned Red Guards who had been sent down to the country, believers who suffered in labor camps, Overseas Chinese with Bibles and other literature, and radio.

Above all, however, throughout this book we see an emphasis upon radical discipleship, a willingness to give up all to follow Christ that shames comfortable believers in the West and exemplifies both the core of this book and the chief lesson which we can learn from our brothers and sisters in China.