

Anthony E. Clark, ed., *China's Christianity: From Missionary to Indigenous Church*

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Conceived during the “China’s Christianity” symposium at Whitworth University, this edited volume emerges from the central question, “What happened after the agency of manufacturing a Christian culture in China was removed from foreign missionaries and transferred into the hands of native Chinese Christians” (2)? Through a method of historical Revisionism and by approaching the central question from various scholarly interests and disciplines, such as history, American Studies, theology, and art history, the essays in this volume provide a rich and nuanced picture of the landscape of Christianity in China as it transitioned to an indigenous Church.

The opening essay “Christianity Along the Warpath: The Anti-Christian Movement in Shantou during the Eastern Expedition (1925)” by Joseph Tse-hei Lee depicts the turbulent years of the Republican Era (1911–1949) and the complexity of the Anti-Christian Movement in South China at the grassroots level. Marked by the expansion of Christian missions and the rise of nationalism, the early twentieth century China witnessed the intricate relationship between the Christian Church as it struggled for autonomy and the state as its power expanded, a relationship that nonetheless continued after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China.

Among the body of the essays collected in this volume, three chapters are focused on the Protestant missionary and Chinese experiences, including American Presbyterian missionaries, German Weimar Mission schools, and Chinese Seventh-day Adventist Christians. Joseph W. Ho, in Chapter 2, “Imaging Missions, Visualizing Experience: American Presbyterian Photography, Filmmaking, and Chinese Christianity in Republican China,” demonstrates the depiction of Chinese Christianity through missionary photography and filmmaking produced by two American Presbyterian missionary families and accentuates the undeniable agency of Chinese Christians indicated in the visual materials “in spite of historical silences and shifts, fragmentary meanings, and often decontextualized existences” (82). Lydia Gerber, in Chapter 5, “Testing the Limits of Proper Behavior: Women Students in and beyond the Weimar Mission Schools in Qingdao 1905–1914,” examines archival and published sources from the German Weimar Mission and explores the student agency that was demonstrated by women who challenged school policies set by the Weimar Mission Schools and became Christian leaders in their community. Christie Chui-Shan Chow, in chapter eight “Indigenizing the Prophetess: Toward a Chinese Denominational Practice,” traces the history of Seventh-day Adventists in China. More specifically, she examines the translation and use of Ellen White’s books through ethnographic fieldwork and archival research. Chow offers a case study of the preservation of the unique ecclesial and denominational identity by Chinese Adventist Christians even in post-1949 China.

There are five chapters centered on the indigenization of the Catholic Church in China. The progression of the Papal attitude in Rome toward indigenization from the Chinese Rites Controversy to the current openness seems to be a shared influence in these five chapters. In chapter three, “The 1670 Chinese Missal: A Struggle for Indigenization Amidst the Chinese Rites Controversy,” Audrey Seah examines the Roman Catholic attempt to develop the Chinese Rites and Chinese liturgy. She demonstrates the invaluable witness of the little analyzed 1670 Chinese missal to “early Chinese missionary strategies and forms of liturgical enculturation from which today’s global Church can continue to learn” (119). Anthony E. Clark, in chapter four “Sealing Fate and Changing Course: French Catholicism and Chinese Conversion,” considers the mixed legacy of French Catholicism during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, which was simultaneously oppressive and instructive to Chinese Catholics in terms of empire-building. By turning attention to Lu Zhengxiang (1871–1949), the former Chinese ambassador for the Qing Empire and Republic of China who later became a Roman Catholic monk in Brugge, at the closing of the essay, Clark illustrates “a new expression of the Universal Church, within which Confucius and Christ can both occupy the same cultural landscape without converting one voice into a mouthpiece of colonization” (138). Robert E. Carbonneau and Amanda C. R. Clark, in chapter six and chapter seven, by focusing on the lives and legacies of Father Leonard Amrhein and Charles McCarthy respectively, suggest that the indigenous Chinese Church in China flourished by the unifying force of the shared experience of suffering and compassion among Catholics, both foreign and Chinese, while collectively enduring the challenging times of Japanese occupation and the Maoist era. Jean-Paul Wiest, in Chapter 9, “The Making of a Chinese Church: As Lived by Chinese Christians,” gives voice to Chinese Catholics in China by presenting four accounts of the stories he collected during his fieldwork in China and urges for the “grassroots interviews” that depict “the ups and downs of intercultural relationship, transcultural evangelization, and the Sinicization of the Chinese Church” (264).

The closing chapter “Rapid Progress and Remarkable Accomplishments: The Study of Christianity in China by a New Generation of Chinese Scholars” by Xiaoxin Wu is of great importance, as it illustrates the ways in which Chinese scholars have contributed to the study of Christianity in China “from a politically restricted area of interest to a field of scholarship during the past twenty-five years” (267). Through surveying the landscape of the study of Christianity in China by Chinese scholars, both Protestant and Catholic, Wu expresses his optimism and enthusiasm in the promising contribution of mainland Chinese scholars to the field.

This collection of essays is a valuable and long-awaited resource in the study of Christianity in China. Clark is right in his confidence that “all the essays in this book offer new views, based on new scholarship, of a new manifestation of Christianity that was transported from old China to a post-1949 ‘New China’” (18). It will be a rewarding read for anyone who is interested in gaining new insights into the historical transition of China’s Christianity from a missionary Church to an indigenous one.

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