As the preceding pages have indicated, the encounter of Christianity and Chinese society has been extraordinarily complex. The ‘Western’ religion came to China in different guises and was practiced by Chinese believers in a variety of ways. The *Handbook* has introduced a number of themes and perspectives. However, constraints of space have precluded exhaustive treatment of all the topics. At the same time, it has not been possible to list every relevant item in the bibliographical and ‘sources’ sections. Many aspects of this bewilderingly rich experience deserve more careful and comprehensive scholarly attention. Much has been accomplished in recent years, but more needs to be done, especially now that mission studies and the study of Christianity in China have achieved a degree of legitimacy in the academic communities in China and abroad. The *Handbook of Christianity in China* has been produced with the aim of pointing scholars in the right direction and stimulating further research.

The contributions to this volume have also shown that the motives for and experiences of propagating, accepting or opposing Christianity have been mixed and varied. It is obvious that Christianity in China was far from being a monolithic movement. Crude generalisations, although still commonly practiced by PRC officials and postcolonial scholars, are surely inappropriate. What is needed is a more sophisticated approach to the study of Christianity in China, one that recognises its variety, contradictions and contributions. It would, of course, be helpful if the motives of politicians and academics for interpreting the Christian presence in China in a particular way were known. The creation of a psychological profile for individual scholars would be a start.

Since the propagation of the Christian message was the overriding concern of the missionary enterprise, it is appropriate to conclude with an overview of the reception of the Bible in nineteenth and twentieth-century China.
In recent studies of the Christianity in China, much has been accomplished in the areas of missionary enterprise (education, medicine, social service and publication), foreign diplomacy, cultural exchange, state-church relation, and biography. One overlooked area of research, however, is Chinese biblical interpretation except for issues concerning translation, even though Protestant missionaries often made it their primary task to translate the Bible into Chinese dialects spoken in their mission fields. Different interpretations of the Bible have led Chinese churches to take contending positions on matters of religion, politics, and society. The Bible as Holy Scripture functions as a “foundational document” of Christianity to define its belief system and self-identity as a religion and regulate its life patterns and mission purposes as a social group. Biblical text is broadly embedded in the catechisms and liturgies of Catholic and Orthodox churches. Its divine authority is held prominent in the theologies and sermons of Protestant and Evangelical churches. Its teaching has been compared to that of the Chinese classics and has captivated the hearts and imagination of numerous Chinese readers. Thus, one cannot fully understand the character and activities of the Christianity in China without taking into account the interpretations and consequences of the Bible in China.

The history of the Bible in China from Late Qing to the present can be divided into four periods in correlation to major social-political changes of the nation. In each period the Bible plays significant roles in shaping Christian belief and practice and in addressing various crises of the Chinese society undergoing radical changes. In the nineteenth century, the Chinese Bible was made available and used by missionaries, who translated and taught it in churches and colleges, to introduce Christian faith to the Chinese literati. As a result, the transported Christianity gradually took root in the soil of China. In the twentieth century, the Bible was often interpreted and quoted by

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1 Lutz (1966); Fairbank (1974); Lin (1981); Ng (1995); Bays (1996).