Chapter 7

Chinese Christianity
A ‘Global-Local’ Perspective

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Introduction

Christianity came to China in four distinctive periods. The Nestorian missionary, Alopen, came to China in early Tang Dynasty, in 635 CE and the religion was banned in 845. The Mongolians brought Christianity back again in the thirteenth century, yet it was gone after the fall of Mongolian rule in 1368. The third period was the arrival of Roman Catholic missionaries—the Jesuits, the Franciscans, the Dominicans and the Augustinians in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The most famously known were Matteo Ricci and Francis Xavier. Catholic missionaries were expelled in the early eighteenth century. Protestant Christianity came to China since the early nineteenth century, with the arrival of Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society. Since the Qing government had already adopted a closed door policy, no foreign missionaries were allowed to enter China and Morrison had to work in Macau and Canton as an interpreter. It was only after the opening of treaty ports in China in 1842 that Western missionaries could re-enter and preach in China.

This chapter attempts to give a comprehensive account of Christianity in modern China from a ‘global–local’ or ‘glocalization’ perspective (Quanqiu diyuhua), that is, to embrace both the global and local elements in the development of indigenous Christianity in China, with special attention to the interplay between global and local perspectives. The most important issue of Christianity in China has been the question whether it was a religion from the West (Western Christianity) or it was truly a global religion. The quest for Chinese Christianity was especially demanded in the mid-nineteenth century, and developed extensively throughout the country after the turn of the twentieth century. There was a significant move, from ‘Christianity in China’ to ‘Chinese Christianity’, and the development of ‘Christianity with Chinese characteristics’. Discussion will also be made on the issue of Church-state relationships since the Communist regime, and three cases of Protestant churches would be recalled as illustrations.
What's New in a New History of Christianity in China

In the mid-1980s, Daniel Bays started his huge project on a History of Christianity in China, which was funded by the Henry Luce Foundation, Inc. He succeeded in the collection of nineteen research papers from most recent scholars in the field and added an excellent chapter of his own, entitled: ‘The Growth of Independent Christianity in China, 1900–1937’, and the huge volume was published by Stanford University Press in 1996, entitled: Christianity in China—The Eighteenth Century to the Present. Then Bays started writing his own book, A New History of Christianity in China, which was published by Wiley-Blackwell in 2012. What is new in this book was the attempt to provide a more comprehensive account of Christianity in China by incorporating the work and thought of Chinese Christians/indigenous Christian leaders and giving them due respect as the ‘owners’ of the Chinese church. (Bays 2012: 1). Hence, he began to look for more local sources, by studying Chinese documents and making personal interviews with Chinese Christians, exploring how Chinese Christians understood their social and political contexts and lived out the Christian faith in their situations. What is new in this book was the attempt to provide a more comprehensive account of Christianity in China by incorporating the work and thought of Chinese Christians/indigenous Christian leaders and giving them due respect as the ‘owners’ of the Chinese church. As one reviewer says, ‘What he (Bays) provides is not only the most complete coverage of Chinese Christianity to date, but also a new and convincing framework for understanding Christianity as a religion of the Chinese people’ (China Review International).

Bays also reported of his experience of a cross-cultural process, in similar ways as Andrew Walls described in his book, The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History. (Walls 2002: 149–171). Bays affirmed with the statement that ‘the result of which (the cross-cultural process) has been the creation of an immensely varied Chinese Christian world in our day’ (Bays 1996: 1). He even suggested that the transformation of Christianity in China could be seen as a successful example of cross-cultural transmission of (Global) Christianity (Bays and Widmer 2009). Hence, in his book, Bays has given more attention to the tension between (foreign) mission and (Chinese) Church, and the cross-cultural process between Chinese and Western cultures. He mentioned in particular the role of the Chinese state, or political regime, ‘to monitor and control religious movements; as a result Christianity was usually seen not only, indeed