Zhuo Xinping is one of China’s foremost religious scholars, and in the current volume he has collected a number of interesting and relevant articles on Christianity in the Chinese context by leading contemporary Chinese scholars. Most of the articles were previously published in Chinese, in the volume 当代中国宗教研究精选丛书:基督教卷 Dangdai Zhongguo zongjiao yanjiu jingxuan congshu: Jidujiao juan (Selected Contemporary Chinese Religious Studies: Christianity volume) (2007), but a few more have been added in this translated edition.

This collection goes beyond many other Chinese scholarly volumes on Christianity in that around half of the chapters deal with more or less contemporary perspectives. Often analyses of contemporary religious issues are deemed too sensitive to be published in the PRC, but Zhuo Xinping’s standing as a public intellectual and as leader of the Institute for the Study of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has probably made it possible in this case.

Besides Zhuo Xinping’s own introduction, Brill series editors Chloë Starr (Yale) and Ryan Dunch (Alberta) have added a second introduction, presenting further information on Zhuo and the other writers. This is a valuable addition for readers less familiar with Chinese religious studies. The volume is divided into five parts, “Studies in Christian Theology,” “Christianity and Chinese Culture,” “Christian ethics and Social Development,” “Christianity and Chinese Literature,” and “Christian Education and Cultural Exchange.”

Zhuo starts the first section himself with an analytical introduction to Christian (Protestant) theology in contemporary China. He distinguishes between “Chinese theology,” “Sino-Christian theology,” and “academic theology,” where the first category represents the efforts of the officially recognized church. “Academic theology” here refers to the academic study of theology, without any faith element, and Zhuo Xinping is a leading representative himself. Sino-Christian theology is sometimes also characterized as a “mother-tongue theology,” and one of its founders and early proponents, Liu Xiaofeng, has contributed an article to this volume. While Zhuo’s chapter shows solid scholarship, his analysis is limited to certain spheres of Chinese Christianity and leaves out the whole unregistered scene, Pentecostal and charismatic movements inside and outside the registered churches, and the Puritan and Calvinist trends among intellectual house churches.
Duan Qi discusses the “reconstruction of Chinese theology” in her chapter, and first gives a summary of indigenous developments before 1949 with special attention to Wang Zhixin, Wu Leichuan, and Zhao Zichen. Duan then presents a thorough analysis of developments in the 1950s and from the 1980s onwards, and unlike many other writers she does not focus exclusively on Bishop Ding Guangxun (K. H. Ting) but gives space also to Chen Zemin, Xu Rulei, and Xie Fuya. This is an important contribution, but Duan fails to step outside the context of government-recognized Christianity.

Liu Xiaofeng’s contribution on Sino-Christian theology is based on lectures from 1994, and has been published in English elsewhere, but its reprinting in this volume is still a welcome addition to the very limited English-language material on this topic. Liu’s article provides some core ideas in the field of Sino-Christian theology, especially in the important context of an alternative modernity, which Liu Xiaofeng has discussed extensively. Liu Xiaofeng rose to fame as the founding “Cultural Christian” in the late 1980s, and although the phenomenon as such has more or less receded and Liu himself has redirected his interest to other fields, the topic is still of great relevance as an inspiration for younger generations of Chinese intellectuals.

He Guanghu can also be considered part of the Sino-Christian sphere of influence, but his article in this volume is directed more toward Christian interaction with Chinese culture, especially Confucianism. Confucianism is the central theme of all three articles in part 2, and He Guanghu conducts an interesting comparative investigation about human dignity in Confucianism and Christianity. Hu Weiqing has carefully studied selected Western missionary writings on Confucianism and come to the conclusion that many missionaries studied Confucianism primarily as a means to advance their Christian work, and that their studies did not dispel their sense of cultural superiority. While this position may be debated and is not a representative standpoint, it is still an interesting hypothesis. Wang Xiaochao investigates the well-known philosopher Feng Youlan and his rejection of Christianity (although the title of his essay promises “modern Chinese philosophers” in the plural). Wang ends with a list of reasons for rejecting Christianity as a Chinese philosopher, and I could not help thinking of the famous 1923 debate on “science versus metaphysics” (Kexue yu xuanxue 科学与玄学), where loose groups of scholars debated these issues. Wang mentions this debate in relation to a book by Feng, but dismisses it (as did Feng himself) as too “abstract.” This debate was, however, a rare occasion for scholarly discussions on such issues in the modern Chinese context, not only from political or ideological standpoints, and it should not be set aside so quickly. Wang also makes some sweeping arguments