

Daniel Bays. *A New History of Christianity in China*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. 252 pages. \$44.95.

Students of Chinese Christianity have long hoped for and desperately needed a book like Daniel Bays's magisterial yet concise history of Christianity in China. Such a book has only become possible in the last few years with the rising tide of monographs and articles that have dealt with different aspects of Chinese Christian history. Nobody has been better positioned to synthesize these new findings and assess their importance in the longer narratives of Chinese and Christian history and historiography than Daniel Bays. This contribution is brimming with testaments to Bays' erudition, sympathy, and insight, all of which have been carefully and judiciously applied after long years of consideration.

Each of Bays's chapters is deceptively simple. His crisp, matter-of-fact prose hides the thoughtful discernment that has been invested in highlighting the most relevant scholarly findings and smoothly placing them in a flowing narrative of China's fitful adoption and rejection of Christianity over many centuries. Bays's characteristically pithy and penetrating introduction sets out three themes that guide his analysis. The first is the relationship between foreign missionaries and indigenous Chinese Christians. The second is the relationship between Christianity and the political authorities. The last is the adaptation of the Christian message to indigenous Chinese cultural and religious concerns. Newcomers to the field of Chinese Christianity should have little trouble following Bays's arguments and the stakes involved in his explications of these themes from the seventh century to the contemporary era.

As Bays indicates, the heart of the book are the middle four chapters, where the "basic tension between (foreign) mission and (Chinese) church is played out over a century and a half." (2) These four chapters display some of the book's greatest strengths. A vast amount of scholarship on the activities of missionaries and native Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, is distilled and examined in the light of late-Imperial and Republican policies. Important points of tension are spelled out and traced to their root causes. Bays covers a broad spectrum of interlocutors whose disagreements helped to define Chinese Christians: central political authorities, local elites, non-Christian neighbors, and foreign missionaries.

At the same time, these chapters also reveal the limits to Bays's methodology. In focusing on the interaction between foreigners and Chinese during this critical "century and a half", Bays is following a longer tradition of historiography based on Western interests, languages, and available materials. For instance, because the actions of the missionary and Chinese elite were so well documented in European languages, Bays devotes significant attention to the development of the so-called "Sino-Foreign Protestant Establishment" (SFPE). And yet, the long-term significance of the SFPE is questionable if not negligible. Foreign directed and even joint Sino-foreign Christian enterprises have had relatively little lasting influence on contemporary Chinese Christianity. As Bays admits in his final chapter, most of the explosive growth of Chinese Christianity has taken place in the absence of western missionaries and guidance. The type of Christianity that has become popular was first propounded by Chinese leaders who had ambiguous or hostile relationships with foreign missions—Bays astutely suggests antecedents in John Sung, Watchman Nee, Wang Mingdao, and the True Jesus Church (186). And yet, Bays discusses Cheng Jingyi more than John Sung and the life of Marcus Cheng (Chen Chonggui) is given much more attention than that of Watchman Nee. The two Chengs were deeply involved in Western Christian enterprises, while Sung and Nee's lives and ideas intersected with Western interests at angles more difficult to comprehend. Similarly, this

reviewer wishes that Bays would have spent more time seriously analyzing the beliefs and practices of the Taipings, “China’s first indigenous Christian movement” (53). Instead, as has so often been the case with Western historiography, the balance of interest favors the Boxer Uprising.

In this sense, Bays’s book functions as both an excellent summary of the scholarship to date and a promising glimpse into the shape of scholarship yet to come. Much more work is yet to be done in spelling out the roots of contemporary popular Christianity and pseudo-Christian sects not only in relation to the Taipings but also to non-Christian millenarian sects. On the other end of the spectrum, the elite liberal theologies of Wu Leichuan, Zhao Zichen and Wu Yaozong could be fruitfully compared and contrasted with the Christianity of China’s urban elite, cultural Christians, and Sino-Christian theologians. The broad space that encompasses and mediates these elite and popular Chinese adaptations of Christianity beckons, inviting productive analysis. For all such projects, Bays is an invaluable, wise guide, well familiar with the terrain behind and clear-eyed about the promise of the path ahead.

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