Bookreview on *Chinese Christianity: An Interplay between Global and Local Perspectives*

by Peter Tze Ming Ng. Boston: Brill, 2012.This is the fourth volume in the Religion in Chinese Societies series by Brill.

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This volume contains papers written by Peter Ng over a period of fifteen years, presented in chronological order of publication with the purpose of illustrating his own intellectual journey, "especially regarding the concept of 'Chinese indigenous Christianity,' and the re-discovery of 'local Christianities' and 'the Chinese side of the story.'" His goal is to elaborate on the theme of "a new understanding of Chinese Christianity from a global-local perspective." (2)

His academic background in both theology and education let to Ng to study the history of Christian higher education in China. He gradually began to search for new paradigms for understanding the interplay between Western and Chinese influences in the modernization of China and of education in particular. Eventually, the term "glocalization" was coined to emphasize this mutual interaction of East and West in the development of higher education and of Chinese Christianity in general. Local distinctives must always be kept in mind when studying any particular embodiment of the Christian faith.

Along the way, he discovered that we must "re-discover the Chinese side of the story" by mining Chinese-language sources, which have hitherto been scarcely employed in writing the history of Christianity in China.

Seeking to understand why the Three Self concept, already known and practiced occasionally in the nineteenth century, did not "take off" in China, he discovered several obstacles, including a focus by missionaries on numerical growth rather than training of Chinese pastors, and the "empire-building" which created so many schools, hospitals, and other institutions that were too expensive to be supported by Chinese Christians alone.

Ng's main goal is to develop and understanding of Chinese Christianity a "one typical model of World Christianity." (17)

The first four chapters "deal with various aspects of Chinese (Protestant) Christianity in global and local perspectives. Chapter 1 surveys the "changing paradigms and perspectives in the study of Chinese Christianity among scholars from China and the West." Xi Entitled, "From 'Christianity in China' to "Chinese Christianity,'" it shows how new opportunities for scholars in China to study the history of Christianity in their country; a new realization among Western writers that they must change to a "China-centered" paradigm, emphasizing Chinese sources, Chinese Christians, and the impact of Chinese culture upon Christianity; new materials from Chinese archives; a new awareness that Christianity contributed to the modernization of China; a new focus on the bi-directional nature of cultural influences, with the flow from China to the West now in purview also.

Ng and others have found the study of Christian colleges in China fruitful example of this interplay between Chinese and Western cultures. (See also Daniel H. Bays and Ellen Widmer, eds. *China's Christian Colleges: Cross-Cultural Connections, 1900-1950).*

Their history points out the fundamental differences, even conflicts, between Christianity and Chinese culture as understood by the educated classes, who could not accept the exclusive claims of the Christian message, and were all too aware that it "was a religion that changed customs, called into question accepted ideas, and, above all, threatened to undermine existing situations." (30) Christianity thus remained on the margins of society and "would never be reckoned as playing any significant role in the social life of China except as part of 'anti-government' or 'revolutionary' movements" – a condition that, to seem degree, persists to this day, at least among leading Party officials. That is why, then and now, religious education in the schools was not approved by the government. Ng concludes, "Hence, the sociological and cultural perspectives were significant in the study of history of Christian higher education in China too." (31)

Ng relates how he and fellow researchers have also come to appreciate the significance of indigenous Chinese Christianity, which Daniel Bays said was "the most important feature" of the period starting at the turn of the twentieth century. (35) Denominationalism was not only foreign to the Chinese, but a positive hindrance to the indigenization of the gospel.

The introductory chapter ends with Ng's proposal that "the term 'local contexts' should be reckoned as a qualifier of global Christianity." (39, 42) Thus, we should speak of "American Christianity" or Chinese Christianity" as local expressions of "World Christianity." He opines that Chinese Christianity will "turn out to be a new kind of Christianity, which is yet another local representation of 'World Christianity.'" (41).

In particular, he believes that house churches did not arise just because of "resistance to the control of the Chinese government," but as expressions of "a new kind of Christianity." (41) I would go further and say that house churches in China have

reminded the world church of the only model given to us in the New Testament, and a more effective way of living out what the Bible says about life in Christian community.

Chapter Two examines three instances Christian higher education in china after the Boxer Movement, and shows how this traumatic event turned out to be a spur not only to an increase in both Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries, but to greater cooperation among previously independent missionary efforts in this field of ministry.

Chapter Three, "The Other Side of 1910: The Development of Chinese Indigenous Movements Before and After the Edinburgh Conference," sketches the development of home-grown Chinese Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the former period, there were two stages: The "'Three-Self' movements initiated by the missionaries in the Mid-19th century in some parts of China," including Amoy, Swatow, and the aborted efforts of Charles Gutzlaff. The second stage saw the development of "indigenous movements started by local Chinese Christians in response to the Boxer Movement at the turn of the century." (69) Despite well-meaning efforts, however, other efforts by missionaries largely failed to bear fruit.

After 1900, however, Chinese took the lead, forming various organizations to build a truly local Christian church, which would eventually result in the formation of the National Church of Christ in China, "formed by Jingyi Cheng (C.Y. Cheng) in Shanghai in 1927. Cheng, who had spoken powerfully at Edinburgh 2010,receives approving treatment from Ng both in this chapter and in other places (e.g., …. In IBMR<) as a pioneer of, and spokesman for, indigenous Chinese Christianity. Under his leadership, the goal of a fully independent nationwide Christian body was realized in the formation of the Christian Church n China in 1927.

There were others, of course, not connected with large "Mainline" organizations, such as The True Jesus Church, Wang Mingdao, the "Jesus Family" led by Dianying Jing, and the "Little Flock" or Assembly Hall begun by Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng). Ng offers statistics to show that the combined efforts of missionaries and independent Chinese Christians were responsible for a ddramatic increase in the population of Christians after 1920, and makes a good case that most of this growth resulted from the work of the indigenous Chinese groups rather than those connected with foreigners. After all missionaries left in the early 1950s the church seemed to wither and even die, but the explosive expansion in the 1970s and 1980s occurred entirely apart from foreign missionary involvement, at least on the surface.

(Here we should note, however, the very substantial contribution of foreign Christians since the mid-1980s, though of course they have worked openly as "missionaries.")

Both the independent movements and the Christian Church in China sought release from Western control and the stigma that Christianity was a Western religion. At this point in history, the Chinese church has (largely) been delivered from the oppressive burden of Western denominationalism and Western control, something which Cheng and others envisioned more than one hundred years ago.

Chapter Four continues to study the interactions between globalization and localization, especially as seen in the history of Christian higher education in China. Another way of describing this complex relationship is the interplay between "internationalization" and "indigenization." When Christian missionaries brought the gospel to China, they were introducing an international element into the local setting, and they were met with strong local responses, which resulted in various forms of indigenization.

When the Nationalist Chinese government came into power, it imposed regulations on Christian colleges that reflected China's traditionally secular view of education. In the process of conforming to these new rules, Christian colleges had to re-asses the nature of Christianity as one religion among many, and of Christian higher education as an arena for studying other religions as well as Christianity.

Ng further elaborates his theory of "glocalization" in this chapter, stressing that as a "world" religion, Christianity must invited locals into the process of forming a truly local expression of this universal faith. Only thus will they feel respected as individuals and empowered to join in the task of creating a truly indigenous Chinese expression of Christianity.

The next seven chapters discuss "glocalization" through the stories of individual missionaries, missions scholars, and Chinese Christian leaders.

Chapter Five is an extended panegyric on Timothy Richard, whom Ng considers to be a prophet who saw far ahead of his time and dared to speak uncomfortable truths. Richard was, indeed, a man of great abilities, energy, and achievements, and he gained the respect of non-Christian Chinese leaders in his time and in ours. In that sense, he "succeeded." On the other hand, Ng notes that China's intellectuals, while accepting the modernization program of Western civilization which Timothy promoted, did not, by and large, accept the Christian foundation on which much of it rested, as Richard had hoped they would.

Ng lauds Richard for having a broad-minded attitude toward non-Christian religions, and charges Hudson Taylor with a "rigid and uncompromising" approach that prompts Ng to say that he "failed" in his mission to "Christianize China." Several aspects of this assessment invite further discussion. Though Richard certainly remained faithful to his calling as a missionary, both at the time and since, some have questioned whether he maintained the same fidelity to the message of the New Testament. Like other more liberal missionaries, he switched his emphasis from a "gospel of love and forgiveness" to a "gospel of material progress and scientific advance," believing that "China could find national salvation only through a massive program of Westernization and economic modernization." (121) Whereas others sought conversion of individuals, Richard "put forth his grand plan for the national conversion of China'" through higher education. (122)

Chapter Six, "C.Y. Cheng: The Prophet of Chinese Christianity," mostly replicates the contents of Chapter Three.

Chapter Seven, "C.M. Wei: Bridging National culture and World Values," tells the story of Dr. Francis C. M. Wei, who "became a channel for the cultural exchange between the Western world and China." (143) Along with T.C. Chao, Wei was also one of two outstanding liberal theologians. A distinguished scholar and academic, Wei was the first Chinese president of Huachung (Central China) University, now called Central China (Huazhong) Normal University. A strong critic of Western denominationalism, he was a leader in the National Council of Churches and in the World Council of Churches.

Wei believed the World Christianity must find expression in local cultures, and "attempted a new way of synthesizing Eastern and Western cultures, by interpreting Christianity in terms of Chinese culture (a process of localization) and by transforming Chinese culture with Christian world values (a process of globalization), hence demonstrating a vivid interplay between Chinese and Western cultures (the process of glocalization) and the construction of an 'ideal, universal and ecumenical culture''' (165)

"T.C. Chao: Builder of Chinese Indigenous Christian Theology" (Chapter Eight) traces the career of Zhao Zichen, one of two prominent liberal theologians in the first half of the 20th century. Starting out as a Methodist, Chao became an Anglican priest in 1941. His theology went through three stages: in the fist period, he subscribed to the prevalent liberal theology of "mainline" denominations, and emphasized Jesus as our moral examplar and Christianity's similarities to Confucianism. During the Japanese war, disillusioned by the atrocities committed by the Japanese, he turned to the Karl Barth's neo-orthodoxy, affirming the sinfulness of man, the dual nature of Christ, his work on the Cross for our redemption, and the uniqueness of Christianity.

After the communists came to power, he saw them as liberators of the church from the scourges of Western denominationalism and foreign domination, and became a major leader and spokesman for the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). In his later years, his focus on social reconstruction led him away from any commitment to the historic Christian faith. In all periods, his views were shaped by the social context which the church was facing.

Chapter Nine – "David Paton: Christian Mission Encounters Communism in China" describes the ways in which missionaries like David Paton and George Hood responded to the expulsion of missionaries after the communist victory in 1949. Heavily influenced by the writings of fellow Anglican Roland Allen, Paton believed that missionaries had failed to leave the churches they had founded soon enough, and had instead stayed on to rule them, thus not only discouraging, but also preventing, the development of truly indigenous Chinese churches.

Thus, the foreignness of almost every aspect of missionary-connected churches, the connection of Christianity with foreign imperialism, the control by foreign missionaries, and the continued existence of Western denominationalism earned unnecessary

opprobrium for Chinese Christians. The forced departure of missionaries represented not only the judgment of God but also freedom for Chinese Christianity to escape from its Western captivity and fulfill the potential that earlier movements toward indigenous Chinese Christianity had already evinced.

Chapter Ten presents a balanced critique of Y.T. Wu (Wu Yaozhong), a founder of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, while Chapter Eleven is a sustained panegyric on K.H. Ting (Ding Guangxun), who led the TSPM for many years and founded the China Christian Council. He praises Ting for building on the work of Y.T. Wu, in particular his efforts to separate the political functions of the TSPM from the Church-focused work of the CCC and his leadership in breaking out of the isolation from Christians in other parts of the world in which Chinese Christians had been held since the early 1950s.

Ng lauds Ting's Theological Reconstruction campaign, which sought to "deliver" Chinese Christians from fundamentalist and conservative views, by "watering down"(Ting's words) the doctrine of justification by faith, with its clear demarcation of believers and non-believers and the concept of hell as the destiny of the latter. Ting's view of "the Cosmic Christ" and his emphasis on God's love allowed him to state that God loves all Chinese and wants Christians to show their love for their neighbor by joining in the construction of a harmonious society under the leadership of the Communist Party.

The concluding chapter re-states Ng's thesis, that the concept of "glocalization" can help us understand both the importance of worldwide Christianity and the necessity of examining various local expressions of it. He notes with approval the growing awareness among scholars that the stories of Chinese Christians must be told in order for us to understand the distinctive nature of Chinese Christianity.

Being a collection of previously published papers, the volume contains a good bit of repetition, but it is not too distracting. More careful editing would have removed some duplicate passages and many egregious grammatical errors, especially the habitual violation of the English sequence of tenses that characterizes much writing by authors from Hong Kong.

This is a well-researched book from the standpoint of liberal, ecumenical theology. Its treatment of leading liberal Chinese theologians needs to be augmented by discussions of the same period from the evangelical side. In particular, *The Critique of Indigenous Theology* by Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng), offers a helpful perspective.[1]

[1] Lit-sen Chang, *Critique of Indigenous Theology*, in *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng)*, edited and translated by G. Wright Doyle. Wipf & Stock, 2013.