

REVIEW ARTICLE

# *A New Standard Reference Work on Bibles in China*

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*The Oxford handbook of the Bible in China*. Edited by K. K. Yeo. Pp. xxii + 878 incl. 43 ills. Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. £115. 978 0 19 090979 6

**A**s a relatively open academic atmosphere related to religious studies in general became manifest in the People's Republic of China in the early 1990s, new possibilities for studies of various forms of Christianity in greater China (the mainland and Chinese communities outside of the PRC) began to be realised both within China and overseas. Within the first decade of the twenty-first century, two major handbooks related to the study of Christianity in China were produced under the editorships of the Belgian Jesuit scholar, Nicolas Standaert (1959–)<sup>1</sup> and the German Protestant scholar, R. G. Tiedemann (1941–2019),<sup>2</sup> initiating what should be considered to be the most up-to-date and essentially new standard reference works regarding the study of all forms of Christianity that have had interactions with various Chinese persons over the period of time from the beginning of the Tang dynasty (seventh century) to the

<sup>1</sup> Nicolas Standaert (ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in China*, I: 635–1800, Leiden–Boston 2001, pp. xxviii + 964.

<sup>2</sup> R. G. Tiedemann (ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in China*, II: 1800–present, Leiden–Boston 2010, pp. xlii + 1050, with maps.

year 2000. Both volumes were large by any standard, the former being nearly a thousand pages in length, and the latter extending beyond a thousand pages. Both produced a state-of-the-art account of their particular historical coverage of varying forms of Christianity that came to or emerged within China during those periods. Notably, most of the supporting authors who contributed to those two massive volumes were foreign scholars of the history of Christianity in China and Chinese Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

Previous to these publications, perhaps the most influential general study of Christianity in China had been Kenneth Scott Latourette's *A history of Christian missions in China*, originally published in 1929.<sup>4</sup> As the title itself suggests, its focus was on foreign missions within China, and there was not as much about the indigenous expressions of Chinese Christianity that were given more space and documented more thoroughly in the two volumes produced by Standaert and Tiedemann. Nevertheless, ever since the 1980s there has been a growing literature on various aspects of the history of various expressions of Christianity within Chinese cultural contexts, not only in European but also in Chinese languages, many of them choosing to take a more restricted denominational or ecclesial perspective in order to give focused attention to a narrower range of materials. Some new historical studies have sought to balance a plethora of historical details with broader interpretive discussions, such as new histories of Christianity in China produced in English by Daniel Bays,<sup>5</sup> Anthony E. Clark,<sup>6</sup> Fenggang Yang<sup>7</sup> and others.<sup>8</sup> During the first two decades of the twenty-first century there have been many other important but more narrowly focused studies produced particularly in Chinese. Still, I have not found any volume produced within those twenty years, even in a Chinese medium, that carries the encyclopaedic coverage and academic richness of the volumes produced under the editorships of Standaert and Tiedemann.

<sup>3</sup> So, in the volume edited by Standaert, only one of the twenty-four contributing authors was ethnically Chinese (*Handbook of Christianity in China*, i, pp. xx–xxi). Notably, and somewhat in contrast, of the thirty contributors identified in the volume edited by Tiedemann, seven were ethnically Chinese: three were affiliated with institutions in Hong Kong, two with others in the USA, one from Taiwan and one from Shanghai (*Handbook of Christianity in China*, ii, pp. xxi–xxii).

<sup>4</sup> This volume has been republished many times during the twentieth century; a Chinese version was produced in 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel H. Bays, *A new history of Christianity in China*, Malden, MA–Oxford 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony E. Clark (ed.), *Chinese Christianity: from missionary to indigenous Church*, Leiden 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Fenggang Yang, Joy K. C. Tong and Allan H. Anderson (eds), *Global Chinese pentecostal and charismatic Christianity*, Leiden–Boston 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Among the most notable tomes containing a broader range of interpretive interests are Alexander Chow and Easten Law (eds), *Ecclesial diversity in Chinese Christianity*, Cham 2021, and Naomi Thurston, *Studying Christianity in China: construction of an emerging discourse*, Leiden 2018.

*Overview*

In the light of the contributions already mentioned, the volume under consideration here stands out as a new standard reference work related to the history, production and influences of various Bibles within Chinese contexts, while simultaneously setting a number of new precedents with regard to its authorship and content.

This massive volume is a cornucopia of forty-seven articles, handling issues not only related to how the Bible itself has been rendered into Chinese and other languages spoken and read by Han and minority peoples, but also exploring ways in which biblical content has been received, expressed, publicised and interpreted in various media. ‘The Bible in China’ has notably become influential in a wide variety of cultural and historical situations, a reality that may surprise many Anglophone readers. Produced by forty-nine scholars, it is important to note that forty-two of them are ethnically Chinese, ten of whom are female academics (as are two of the non-Chinese contributors<sup>9</sup>). This should be seen as a great contrast and immense advance in Chinese scholarship that was not evident in the two volumes produced by Standaert and Tiedemann. There has been a seismic shift in competent biblical scholarship within contemporary Chinese cultural settings, a fact that this remarkable volume has underscored and highlighted. Most of these authors have produced their own chapters, though there are three chapters written by pairs of scholars.<sup>10</sup> A good number of the authors are major contributors to the fields they are describing and analysing,<sup>11</sup> while some others are relatively well established scholars and academics who are primarily interpreters and critics of the various themes they address.<sup>12</sup> Being produced during the years from 2018 to 2020 (that is, in a period when Christian communities and persons in the PRC were beginning to experience various levels of newly imposed public and private restrictions), this tome serves at the very least as a testimony to the breadth and depth of biblical research occurring in Chinese contexts, constituting a formidable minority within contemporary Chinese academic and spiritual communities.

Notably, among the Chinese authors involved in this handbook project, twenty-seven are from mainland China, seven from the USA, three from

<sup>9</sup> Claudia von Collani of the University of Würzburg and Chloë Starr of Yale.

<sup>10</sup> All three pairs of scholars are ethnically Chinese, but in at least two of those cases they come from very different cultural backgrounds. See chapters xv, xxi and xxxviii.

<sup>11</sup> At least thirteen of the authors have not only interpreted the area of interest they address, but also participate in that same realm of creativity. These include theologians, translators, literary writers and active artists in various media.

<sup>12</sup> My standard of judgement requires the author(s) to cite their own previously published works within the endnotes to the chapter they have written. Thirty-two of the forty-nine contributors did so.

Taiwan and one each from Australia and Germany.<sup>13</sup> Among all forty-nine authors, I can identify at least twenty-nine Protestants and eight Roman Catholics; there may be others as well, including at least one Chinese Russian Orthodox scholar, but I have no means to confirm the religious commitments of some of the contributors. What this indicates, at the very least, is that nearly 75 per cent of the authors identify themselves as Christians. Clearly, the locations where these authors come from have influenced what they have to share within their assigned chapters, a fact that sometimes involves shortcomings that I will address in what follows. So, for example, at least five of them are living in Hong Kong, though readers might now count them among those from mainland China. This reveals some interpretive perspectives that need to be highlighted under certain circumstances.

Though in what follows I will offer some critical comments about this collection of essays, for the sake of a future revised edition that I would be glad to see produced, I thoroughly recommend this extraordinary volume to interested readers. It is a foundational and encyclopaedic resource for anyone studying the multifaceted historical phenomena associated with the ancient, modern and contemporary versions of the Christian Bible within Chinese cultural contexts. This tome should also become a standard reference work for any person interested in Christianity in China; all libraries representing institutions interested in the development of Christianity among Chinese persons in East Asia and internationally should have a copy in their collections.

In terms of the framework of this large work, it is presented as a volume exploring four modes by which the Bible is encountered in Chinese contexts: by translation, literary and cultural expression, theological and academic interpretation, as well as political and cultural reception.<sup>14</sup> With regard to the four main sections of the volume, a balanced number of chapters occurs in all but the last section. The first part is devoted to 'Translation through Versions', and includes ten chapters (pp. 21–197); the second, 'Expression in Literary and Religious Contexts', is constituted of eleven chapters (pp. 201–378); the third, 'Interpretation and Methods of Reading', is elaborated in eleven more chapters (pp. 381–571), while the fourth, 'Reception in Institutions and the Arts', completes the contributions by authors in fourteen chapters (pp. 575–825). These forty-seven chapters are followed by two indices that add to the volume's searchability.

<sup>13</sup> This does not include the seven non-Chinese persons who have contributed chapters. Two of them live in mainland China, two come from Germany and one each from Australia, Belgium and the USA. In some cases, these non-Chinese authors have affiliations in more than one country, but here I am only referring to the location where they are mainly active and living.

<sup>14</sup> As described in the editor's initial chapter at pp. 5–12.

Generally speaking, the initial chapter in each part offers an overview of the major theme,<sup>15</sup> and the chapters following elaborate and highlight various specific realms of concern. Though the chapters vary in length and complexity according to their topics, all of them include extensive endnotes and a final bibliographic section devoted to 'primary sources'. As would be normal in such volumes, the editor's own works appear quite regularly among the endnotes to many chapters, because Yeo's writings have inspired and informed many approaches to themes adopted by the various authors. As a consequence, the whole volume contains a wealth of information involving numerous details representing the best research available in this realm, and reveals much about the growth of the study of Christianity in China within Chinese academic contexts. Consequently, it can be employed to promote further research into areas that would supplement its 'state-of-the art' coverage as of the year 2020.

### *Notable thematic observations*

A very basic set of observations needs to be considered regarding the ambiguities inherent in the title of this massive volume. In discussing the Bible in China, the historical coverage is necessarily vast. Starting from the seventh-century Syrian and Persian monks' translations of Oriental Christian Scriptures, it moves through selective renditions and unpublished texts produced by Roman Catholic priests in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the plethora of Bible versions produced by foreign and Chinese Protestants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Subsequently, the volume includes accounts of the multifaceted explorations of biblical themes in contemporary Chinese art forms, involving necessarily a plurality of Bibles and a more nuanced sense of what counts as 'China' for any particular historical period. It is a fact that Chinese renderings of different forms of the Bible were produced across more than a millennium of differing Christian-Chinese cross-cultural encounters. For example, the earliest form of the Bible from Syriac traditions involved the Diatessaron rather than the standard four Gospels;<sup>16</sup> much later, Roman Catholic priests relied on the Latin Vulgate and its textual traditions to produce their selected versions of the Christian Scriptures (significantly used primarily, but not exclusively, for liturgical purposes).<sup>17</sup> These

<sup>15</sup> Specifically, chapters ii, xii, xxiii and xxxiv: Daniel Kam-To Choi, 'A history of the Chinese Bible', Claudia von Collani, 'Yin-Yang (*Yijing*) and the Bible', John Y. H. Yieh, 'A history of biblical interpretation in China' and Joseph Tse-Hei Lee and Christie Chui-Shan Chow, 'The Bible and popular Christianity in modern China' respectively.

<sup>16</sup> A point discussed in ch. iii at pp. 53–7.

<sup>17</sup> The Vulgate is the standard basis for Roman Catholic versions (pp. 82–3, 97).

also differed from the later Protestant texts relying on the *Textus Receptus*<sup>18</sup> and, starting in the later parts of the nineteenth century and extending to the present, developing more nuanced renderings of biblical passages due to the more systematic study of a much wider range of ancient texts in Hebrew and Aramaic (including studies of the Qumran scrolls), Greek (including not only codices but also papyri) and other ancient language versions.<sup>19</sup> In addition to all this, there are distinct textual traditions followed by Russian Orthodox monks who also produced Chinese translations of liturgical works and their Bible in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>20</sup> This diversity is accompanied by studies of the Bible versions produced in the four major Chinese dialects (Mandarin primarily in the north-eastern provinces, Wu 吳 focusing on Shanghai and neighbouring areas, Min 閩 as found in Fujian Province and Yue 粵 in the Cantonese speaking areas),<sup>21</sup> and also other linguistic media including the Hakka 客家 and Gan 甘 dialects (the latter found primarily in north-western China, discussed on pp. 118–19). When these are added to the research provided in this volume into the thirty-eight ‘minority languages’<sup>22</sup> from which Bible versions were made,<sup>23</sup> the complexity inherent in describing and studying this wide variety of biblical translation work is literally astounding. One could argue that the title of the handbook could justifiably be changed to ‘Christian Bibles’ rather than ‘The Bible’, in order to indicate the actual textual and linguistic diversities described and analysed in various degrees within this volume. Notably, however, though the title page to part I refers to ‘translation through versions’ in the plural, there are only three chapters that pluralise ‘the Bible’ or equivalent phrases within the whole volume to underscore this point.<sup>24</sup>

What is both notable and important within this handbook is the diversity of interpretive positions that is catalogued and explained from outside Christian communities of any sort. Not only can one find extensive

<sup>18</sup> I have not found this explicitly mentioned within this volume.

<sup>19</sup> Here the relevant literature is vast, and though modern and contemporary Chinese versions did adjust to these textual discoveries, I have not found this aspect discussed in the volume. In the supplemental chart added to the fifth revised edition of the Greek New Testament edited by Barbara and Kurt Aland *et al.* (the 2016 version), in addition to ancient Greek documents, there are also portions and versions in Old Latin, the Vulgate, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Georgian and Ethiopic.

<sup>20</sup> This is elaborated in detail in ch. iv (pp. 63–78), with an explicit discussion about the differences in biblical texts and interpretations between ‘Eastern and Western Churches’ (p. 67).

<sup>21</sup> As categorised in a chart found at pp. 41–2.

<sup>22</sup> Notably, some of these ‘minority languages’ are majority or ‘world-wide’ languages, such as Korean, Kyrgyz, Mongolian, Russian, Tibetan, Uyghur and Uzbek.

<sup>23</sup> As documented in a chart at p. 143.

<sup>24</sup> That is in the titles of ch. vii, ‘Development of Chinese dialect Bibles’ (p. 113), ch. viii, ‘Bible translations for ethnic minority groups in China’ (p. 129) and ch. x, ‘Chinese Protestant Bible versions and the Chinese language’ (p. 163).

accounts of the varying forms of Christianity that have entered Chinese geographical spaces during the past 1300 years and more, there are also studies dealing with how sectarian and heretical groups, Marxist literary figures and mainland film producers have responded to various aspects of Christian influences stimulated by Bible reading and the Bible's presence. For example, not only are there accounts of the interpretations of early Protestant versions of the Bible by representatives of the nineteenth-century Taiping Tianguo 太平天國 (the 'Taiping Rebellion' or 'Taiping Movement') presented in many places throughout the volume, but also accounts of biblical interpretations by the Little Flock, the True Jesus Church, Seventh-day Adventists and even the 'Eastern Lightening' heretical group, also referred to as 'The Church of the Almighty God'.<sup>25</sup> An interesting problem of 'bibliomancy' – using the Bible as a 'divine object' to communicate with God<sup>26</sup> – suggests also some ways of interpreting the secularised use of the Bible in certain contemporary Chinese films<sup>27</sup> and modern Chinese fiction,<sup>28</sup> as well as in spiritually-motivated calligraphy, such as the 'hand copied' Chinese Union Bible version produced in 2017.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the ways that post-secular Chinese literary figures, post-secular resistant Chinese Marxists, and other more strategically open-minded Chinese Marxists, have 'handled' and responded to biblical texts and their ideas is documented and elaborated. It is sometimes done in the form of poetry,<sup>30</sup> or short stories,<sup>31</sup> or in public platforms that receive quite a bit of attention at key points in time.<sup>32</sup> There are in fact many different 'faces' of Jesus Christ in Chinese publications and images.<sup>33</sup> Intriguingly, there are also clear expressions of 'sinified Christian images' among printed Jesuit documents from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>34</sup> More than this, special studies are found within this volume dealing with aspects of conceptual and vocabulary influences in

<sup>25</sup> These later groups are identified and described in ch. xxxiv (pp. 580–5), among others.

<sup>26</sup> As discussed in at pp. 582–3. Unfortunately, 'bibliomancy' is not included in the index.

<sup>27</sup> This is in fact a poignant visual cue in Chinese Christian televised programmes as well as Chinese Christian films (that were not included in the study in ch. xlv [pp. 765–81]).

<sup>28</sup> As noted in the use of the 'physical Bible' in various modern Chinese fictional stories (pp. 270–2).

<sup>29</sup> A fact noted in the chapter devoted to calligraphy and Christian Bible versions (p. 762).

<sup>30</sup> As in the tragic case of the poet Haizi 海子 (literally, 'son of the sea', 348).

<sup>31</sup> As described in ch. xvi on 'The Bible in modern Chinese fiction' (pp. 267–81).

<sup>32</sup> Some of the most transgressive interpretations appear in ch. xxxvi dealing with 'socio-political' impacts of the readings of Chinese Christian Bibles (particularly pp. 610–17).

<sup>33</sup> Discussed in detail in ch. xxvii (pp. 447–61).

<sup>34</sup> As seen in chs xxviii (pp. 463–93) and xl (pp. 675–89). Here one could suggest that the definition of the technical Italian aesthetic term, 'convenevolezza', part of

Chinese Bible translations from Daoist, Chinese Buddhist and Ruist (or ‘Confucian’) traditions, as well as interactions between their representatives and persons from various expressions of Christianity.<sup>35</sup> When one considers that all these discussions are found within this single volume – accompanied by detailed endnotes, bibliographies of primary sources and copious indices – the value and importance of this large collection is undeniable.

### *Critical interpretive issues*

From the perspective of understanding the varying meanings of ‘China’ in different historical and cultural settings, the discussion of John Y. H. Yieh related to this problem is worth highlighting.<sup>36</sup> The Bible first appeared in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Chinese public contexts during periods of ‘radical changes’, so that biblical interpretation is more precisely emerging from within ‘a [Chinese] history of social revolution’.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, any discussion of bible translation, church teachings, public discussions in broader society and research in university and seminary contexts<sup>38</sup> should be framed within four distinct historical periods. These periods Yieh astutely typifies and dates as periods of ‘Antiforeignism and “Difficult Infancy” (1807–1860)’, then ‘Popularists’ Uprising and “Traumatic Childhood” (1860–1911)’, and subsequently ‘Student Protests and “Challenging Adolescence” (1911–1949)’, extending to ‘Communist Rule and “Growing Pains” (1949–2019)’.<sup>39</sup> In other words, there is never a historical period within modern and contemporary Chinese settings when there are not some contested issues involved in traumatic cultural changes. This suggests that those who have interpreted the Bible in any of these periods would often feel obliged to address those troubling concerns, and this in fact is the case among some of the most significant Chinese and foreign Bible interpreters. To this I would add that simultaneous to these periodic distinctions there are dynamic cultural-geographical areas that possessed unusual emphases in Christian promotion: specifically, the Roman Catholic communities and activities stemming from Macau, a wide range of Christian communities and

the main theme of ch. xxviii, should have appeared much earlier in the essay; currently it appears only in the conclusion (p. 474).

<sup>35</sup> Specific discussions appear in chs xiii–xv (pp. 219–65). Ruist influences related to names for deity and ethical conceptions are identified and elaborated in other chapters.

<sup>36</sup> See John Y. H. Yieh, ‘A history of biblical interpretation in China’ (pp. 381–97).

<sup>37</sup> Quotations from pp. 382–3.

<sup>38</sup> This summarises the discussion at pp. 386–91. ‘Seminaries’ should also be dealt with in discussions of ‘research in the universities’.

<sup>39</sup> As discussed at pp. 383–5.



activities promoted and extending from Hong Kong, and some important Roman Catholic and Protestant communities, institutions and universities that have grown and developed special influences in and through Taiwan. This handbook does address all these periods of biblical interpretation, adding many insights from earlier periods. Nevertheless, it is not so consistent in addressing relevant developments related to biblical translation, interpretation and application outside of ‘mainland China’, that is, in Macau, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Here a more detailed explanation of these matters is worth pursuing, especially for the sake of future revisions of this historic and impressive handbook.

Read more critically, in the discussion of the Bible and the teaching of biblical languages in Chinese universities, the lack of references to courses and developments in universities (not to mention seminaries) in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan indicates where there could be some further research and exploration.<sup>40</sup> Here also it should be underscored that the biblical languages should include Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, with the Vulgate versions taking precedence among Roman Catholic scholars, and ancient Slavonic versions among Russian Orthodox scholars.<sup>41</sup> In addition, though there are discussions of visual Christian images in early Jesuit publications and their sinification, as well as images studied during the period from 1911 to 1949,<sup>42</sup> one would delight in having comparisons made with some of the many beautiful Christian art works and paintings produced by Tao Fung Shan 道風山 in Hong Kong in the post-1949 era.

One larger linguistic and interpretive issue that lingers within the volume is the following: are the Ruist (‘Confucian’) terms *sheng* 聖 and *shengren* 聖人 properly rendered as ‘sacred’ and ‘saint’, or as ‘sagely’ and ‘sage’?<sup>43</sup> This is a very important controversy that has raged between Roman Catholic and Protestant translators of Ruist canonical texts for more than two centuries, with the latter pair of terms taking precedence now in the vast majority of academic and theological circles in the twenty-first century. Such a controversial matter should be backed by

<sup>40</sup> Noted in chs ix (pp. 147–62) and xxiv (pp. 399–413).

<sup>41</sup> In one place, the *linguae sacrae* are stated to be ‘Hebrew, Greek, Latin’ (p. 147), but elsewhere Aramaic is properly included with Hebrew and Greek (p. 182). It should be noted also that the deuterocanonical work, Tobias, is written in Aramaic (p. 309), and that ancient Slavonic is the language of the ancient Russian Orthodox Bible (pp. 64–74).

<sup>42</sup> As discussed in ch. xli (pp. 691–711), where some of the images attached at the end of the chapter immediately remind one of those from Tao Fung Shan.

<sup>43</sup> As discussed in ch. xxxiii (pp. 557–71). Also, within that chapter, the term *shen* 神 is translated as ‘divine’ rather than ‘spiritual’ or ‘numinous’ in a passage of *The Mengzi* (or *Mencius*, 568). No English translation of that passage by sinologists renders that term in this way, and to present such a claim without further explanations is highly problematic.

scholarly research along with informed and nuanced sinological assessments.<sup>44</sup>

Significantly, the fact that the chapters on Christian calligraphy and biblical content in contemporary Chinese films do not include any visual images to accompany those discussions feels terribly inadequate.<sup>45</sup> Also, when it is claimed that calligraphy is ‘the quintessence of Chinese culture’ (p. 756), this statement, left without explanation, may mystify those Anglophone readers who have little or no experience of living within Chinese cultural contexts. One fact cited in favour of this claim is that a handwritten version of the Chinese Union Bible (*Heheben* 和合本), originally published in 1919 – and still the most popularly employed Chinese Bible version in contemporary Chinese cultural contexts<sup>46</sup> – was published as an aesthetic artefact and made available to mainland Chinese readers in 2017 (p. 762). Naturally, further elaborations of the cultural and spiritual importance of such an act would surely be appreciated.

In addition, though the many visual images provided for articles dealing with Roman Catholic themes are very welcome, one could at least hope that a future version of the work would include images of some of the minority script Bibles, examples of the Romanised script (or ‘vernacularised’) Bibles of various sorts, and perhaps specialised discussions and pictures of sacred spaces and sacred images (Chinese icons, stained glass windows, calligraphed biblical sayings) within Russian Orthodox and Protestant churches that are found in contemporary China (including in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan).

More significant are important issues discussed in various chapters that are controversial or reveal some important inadequacies. For example, when ‘Romanised’ script Bible versions are introduced (p. 41), they should include the reasons why they were so important. In fact, many Chinese in the nineteenth century, particularly women, were illiterate when it came to reading Chinese characters, but the creation of Romanised script versions meant that they could sound out and learn to read rather easily, catapulting them into literacy and spiritual fruitfulness.<sup>47</sup> Also, within the discussions of ‘Confucian classics and the Bible’ (ch. xv), there is no reference to relevant dimensions in the massive multi-volume translation *corpus* of major missionary-scholars (those in English by James Legge 理雅各 (1815–97), in French and Latin by

<sup>44</sup> Notably, in other parts of the handbook the term ‘sage’ is preferred, as by the Taiwanese Ruist scholar, Lin Anwu (p. 257), and others (p. 416). The Roman Catholic preference for rendering it as ‘saint’ is also expressed at p. 455.

<sup>45</sup> Referring to chs xliii and xliv respectively (pp. 751–81).

<sup>46</sup> As affirmed on pp. 34, 181, 575.

<sup>47</sup> As noted subsequently at pp. 175, 371–2, 579–80.

S raphin Couvreur 顧賽芬 (1835–1919), in German by Richard Wilhelm 尉[衛]禮賢 (1873–1930), and in Portuguese by Joaquim Guerra 戈振東 (1908–93)). This unfortunately leaves a glaring historical and cross-cultural gap in the coverage of that topic.

Regrettably, there are no intra-textual references between chapters offered within this handbook, but in fact there are a good number of overlapping themes that a diligent reader can identify by studying the index. Intra-textual references within the main body of each chapter would add to the volume’s richness, allow for a greater internal consistency in its claims and make it a more helpful research tool. It would also be an added advantage to readers to have Chinese-English bilingual texts in discussions devoted to poetry,<sup>48</sup> since English translations of original Chinese poems are always produced under necessary linguistic limitations.

From my own reading of the whole work, only one chapter within the volume is flawed in both its presentation and argument; the vast majority of all the other forty-six chapters are excellent. Cao Jian’s contribution<sup>49</sup> is entitled ‘Adoption of Christian anthropology by Chinese intellectuals’, but is actually a meandering description of how the Old Testament idea of God was linked to various questions related to human nature, the problem of suffering and the conception of ‘a perfect world’, with additional accounts of how some non-Christian Chinese intellectuals in the Republican Period before 1949 responded to them. Ironically, no mention of a New Testament idea of God is addressed; in addition, New Testament concerns about human nature or even the problem of suffering as seen through the cross of Christ Jesus are not even mentioned. What appears to be the ‘Christian’ aspect of the discussions Cao raises is based on the fact that Chinese Christian writers addressed these Old Testament themes in some of their writings. Obviously, however, this does not make what they wrote equivalent to an explicit, much less a systematic and comprehensive account of, ‘Christian anthropology’. Though some other chapter titles use the phrase ‘the Bible’<sup>50</sup> or the term ‘Christian’<sup>51</sup> in ways that are somewhat misleading and therefore awkward, no other chapter title is as misleading or discussion within the volume as confusing

<sup>48</sup> Discussed in chs xx and xxi (pp. 333–61). <sup>49</sup> That is ch. xix (pp. 317–32).

<sup>50</sup> For example, ‘The Bible’ within von Collani’s article on ‘Yin-Yang (*Yijing*) and the Bible’ is really discussing only Roman Catholic biblical interpretations (p. 201); similarly, ‘the Bible’ in Standaert’s ‘The Bible and iconography in China’ is really discussing ‘Biblical messages and Jesuit iconography during the Ming and Qing dynasties’ (p. 675). A number of the titles that refer to ‘the Bible’ actually mean ‘The Chinese Union Version’ of the Bible (as seen in the titles of chs xvi and xxi found on pp. 267, 347).

<sup>51</sup> For example, the phrase ‘Christian biblical tradition’ in Yanrong Chen’s ‘Christian biblical tradition in the Jing Chinese culture’ (p. 495) actually only includes European Roman Catholic biblical messages and texts within its discussion.

as Cao's chapter. As I have already stated, and can repeat again, the vast majority of the volume's contributions are of excellent quality, offering up-to-date discussions that are highly detailed and garnished with insightful accounts supported by precise documentation.

In spite of all these various concerns, *The Oxford handbook of the Bible in China* is an historic intellectual monument to the advance of Chinese scholarship on numerous biblically-related themes, providing detailed accounts of the immensely significant cultural and religious influences of the Christian Scriptures within a relatively wide variety of Chinese contexts. In light of recent troubles and restrictions faced particularly by Christian communities in recent years – including the demolition of crosses and church buildings in Zhejiang province in 2014 and 2016, and the harsher religious affairs restrictions instituted in 2018 – this volume should serve as a fecund resource and creative touchstone for future evaluations of the production, interpretation and reception of Chinese Bibles and their claims for many decades to come.