
This collection of essays is based on the discussions of evangelical scholars at a conference in Hong Kong, May 2008. Those discussions focused on Christian (in particular, evangelical) identity in China and around the world. The papers that feature in After Imperialism address this complex issue from historical, textual, and contextual perspectives.

The first section takes a historical perspective. The papers discuss the historical origins of modern evangelicalism, the relationship between missions and imperialism in China, and the approaches of Chinese evangelical house churches to the issue of social and political engagement. The second section focuses on the biblical text. The papers look at the importance of contextual awareness in biblical exegesis, the theme of divine warfare in the Old and New Testaments, and the writings and theology of Paul. The final section of the book contains three papers on contextual theology. Two of the papers examine contextualisation in China, and the final essay wraps up the collection with a discussion on theological education.

One of the obvious objectives of the collection is to challenge and move beyond the association of Christianity with imperialism. Focusing on nineteenth-century China, Richard Cook argues that the missionaries’ involvement in post-Opium War political negotiations stemmed from an unselfish desire to ‘serve the interests of the Chinese people they loved while furthering opportunities to share the Gospel’. Papers from the biblical section also attempt to show that the Christian religion is not intrinsically imperialistic. Tremper Longman and David Pao, for example, claim that the notion of holy war and the conquest narratives of the New Testament do not offer justifications for violence and imperial power. Rejecting the view that Western orthodoxy has universal validity, some of the papers in this collection promote the development of localised Christianities across the world. Ka Lun Leung asserts that Christianity, in order to break its association with Americanisation, ‘must stand firm in its effort to de-Americanize and remain intentionally localized.’ Other papers in the collection explore this important theme with reference to China. Drawing on Paul’s ideas about table fellowship, Maureen Yeung puts forward the Ricci-esque argument that ‘ethnic expressions’ (such as Chinese ancestor worship) should be respected as long as they are not viewed as conditions of salvation. Turning to theology, David Lee suggests that churches in China should contextualise the all-important notion of the God-man by emphasising Jesus’ identity as both a holy sage and the embodiment of Divine Wisdom.

This book will appeal to historians, biblical scholars, and theologians who wish to understand how evangelical scholars are addressing the issue of Christian identity in a post-colonial and globalised world. One of the most refreshing features of the book is the openness that some of the scholars show to cross-cultural dialogue, and their recognition of the fact that Christianity is a variable religion that constantly transforms in response to diverse cultural environments around the world.

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