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Preface

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Since the early nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries of diverse denominational backgrounds have arrived in the Chinese land and endeavored to spread their gospel to the pagan Chinese. They gained local converts, built chapels, established schools of all levels, set up outposts in important cities, and, in the end, brought about a flourishing “Christian missionary enterprise” in China. This period of history, as a success story of Western missiology or as a national trauma in the eyes of many Chinese, has been much discussed. Not all Christian churches, however, were affiliated with the Western denominations. A few Chinese Christians established their own churches, espousing the principle of self-reliance, self-support, and self-propagation. These independent churches, notably the Local Churches and the True Jesus Church, created an indigenous Christianity the legacy of which lasted even after the Chinese Communist Party came to power. The development of this type of Chinese Christianity, too, has been highlighted by many scholars.

A less heeded phenomenon is the continued progress of the Chinese indigenous Christianity into the era of globalization. After a series of political campaigns and religious suppressions after 1949, these Chinese churches not only survived but thrived. They evangelized the land of non-believers with great fervency, expanding their church networks into almost every province of China. Their counterparts in Taiwan, thanks to greater religious freedom, made much effort to preach overseas. The evangelistic activities accelerated after China implemented its reform policy in 1979 and Taiwan lifted its martial law in 1987.

With the aid of international trade, tourism, overseas studies, migrations, and, most importantly, the popular usage of the world-wide web and other forms of advanced communication technology, Chinese indigenous Christianity has appeared in drastic transformations, if not transfigurations. Now this Christianity is no more local or Chinese than it used to be but global or multi-national. The Local Churches claim to have established 4,000 local churches worldwide, with a membership of 250,000 in 6 continents, not including the incalculable millions of followers in China. The True Jesus Church also has its branches consolidated in 60 countries, with most of its 1.5 million members residing in China. Protestant Christianity was once introduced into China and became localized before the mid-twentieth century, but now the Chinese indigenous Christianity has started sending its missionaries to various part of the globe, including back to the countries that were bastions of China mission, to proclaim the gospel.

As the gravity of Christianity has rapidly shifted out of the West, the recent development of Chinese indigenous Christianity, against the context of globalization, deserves our serious attention. Critical terms such as “local” and “global” are in urgent need of being redefined, and it is high time to rethink the history, contents, and implications of “Chinese Christianity.” Is Chinese Christianity just another one-hundred-and-first branch of Western Christianity with a local branch title called “Chinese”? Is Chinese Christianity the same as Sino-Christianity which seems to have indiscriminately translated post-Nicene Western theologies and imposed them on the Chinese context? Are these indigenous Christian churches “heretical,” “extremist,” or “heterodox” when they promote certain parts of ante-Nicene theologies, rituals, and ethics different from those of post-Nicene Western Christianity? Why have they grown faster and expanded further than most of the “mainline” churches established by Western missionaries? How could they contribute to world evangelism not only in other Third World countries but also in the homelands of Western Christianity which is now in rapid decline or degeneration?

Categorized in two parts (Theologies and Case Studies), the nine essays in this book try to answer these questions and demonstrate that Chinese Christianity has undergone a holistic “transfiguration” (Mt 17:1–13) which both truthfully restores ante-Nicene Christianity and successfully adapts to the cultural contexts of Chinese and other societies. The theoretical and theological diversity of this book is consistent with that of traditional Chinese religious writings as well as that of the ante-Nicene fathers but may be deemed un-theoretical, un-academic, or un-theological by those theologians who received Western theological training, as that

tends to be too hegemonic, emotionless, and archaic in the eyes of lay believers.

The first four chapters of this book discuss the theologies of Chinese Christianity. Cheng-tian Kuo's "Ninety-Nine Theses of Chinese Christianity" calls for a return to ante-Nicene theologies based on which Chinese Christianity should be rebuilt. It entails a substantial transformation of exegesis, church-state relations, and ethical positions adaptable to the Chinese context. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's "Legitimate Diversity or Heretical Deviation" tries to make a distinction between a real, true heresy and an acceptable diversity of beliefs, doctrines, and practices, best named "heterodoxy." But one can argue that Kärkkäinen's paper still reveals an ethnocentric bias against most "heterodoxies" in non-Western societies. Why cannot they be called orthodoxies on par with Western Christianity? What if these Chinese heterodoxies developed their theologies and practices closer to that in the Bible than to the post-Nicene Western Christianity? Allan H. Anderson exposes the conceptual and empirical problems of "heterodoxy" in his "Contemporary Chinese 'Pentecostal' Churches in a Globalized World." He urges truly interdisciplinary studies of Pentecostalism be applied to the social, historical and cultural context in China before labelling some Chinese churches, such as the True Jesus Church, as heterodox Pentecostal churches. Peter Tze Ming Ng's "Re-defining 'Globalization' and 'Christian Mission'" challenges the old Western dichotomy of "globalization" and "localization" in the studies of contemporary Chinese Christianity. Among other new traits, Chinese Christianity is no longer a replica of Western Christianity; it constitutes and defines Global Christianity; it is on par with, and ready to conduct a dialogue with American Christianity or European Christianity.

Part Two consists of five case studies of Chinese Christianity. In his chapter on "The Breaking of the Outer Person," Paul H. B. Chang studies the theological works of Watchman Nee, the founder of the Local Church in China. Chang argues that Nee's special emphasis on self-denial as the core of individual spirituality and congregational life enabled his ministry to reach beyond both his Chinese context and the Western teachers who influenced him. Yun-hsuan Kuo and Fu-chu Chou's "Evaluation of Chinese Bible Translation by Rhetorical Analysis of John 13–17" begins with a standard exegetic/rhetorical analysis of John 13–17, then, continues to explain the theological advantages of repeated Chinese translations of "in person" in John 13–17 in the Restoration Version of the Chinese Bible used by the Local Church in order to portray, depict, develop, expand, and construct a mutual indwelling and abiding relationship between the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the disciples. Ke-hsien Huang proposes a "class-culture approach" to study the "Emergence and Development of Indigenous Christianity in China" with a focus on

the True Jesus Church. Against dominant Western evangelists, a group of Chinese fundamentalist laypersons, with high economic capital but little cultural capital, founded an indigenous movement of Christianity (the True Jesus Church), in which literalist interpretation of the Bible and exuberant, improvised, Spirit-led practices were well accepted. David A. Reed's "Restoration and Revelation in the True Jesus Church" traces parts of the fundamental beliefs (restoration and revelation of the True Jesus Church to North American Restorationism and Pentecostalism). But as these restorationist-revelational themes were carried transnationally on the wave of the missionary movement, their role in the True Jesus Church functioned to dull the fingerprint of the missionary movement and thereby produce a uniquely indigenized expression of Christianity. Finally, Ray Yun Wang compares church-state relations in China and Vietnam in his "MAX WEBER IS ALIVE AND WELL in Ho Chi Minh City." Vietnam shares many similarities in politics and economy with China, but varies greatly in terms of church-state relations. Wang combines Max Weber's thesis on the Protestant spirit of capitalism with both international and domestic institutional factors to explain this puzzle. Vietnam's weak international status is an advantage for many Christians to enter and more effectively drive international pressure on church-state relations. In China, the division between registered and underground congregations is critical, although in Vietnam the line is complicated by ethnic and geographic differences. Registered churches and temples in Vietnam's, but not China's, urban regions become vital sources of activism to express support for victims of religious repression and provide activists a base for a broader social agenda.

In sum, all the nine chapters of this book challenge the hitherto Western theologies or theories of Christian globalization and localization in the Chinese context. Instead, Chinese Christianity has undergone a theological and empirical transfiguration that requires new definitions and theologies in order to fully understand both Chinese Christianity and Global Christianity.

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Finally, we would like to thank and apologize to the two anonymous reviewers of this book. It was difficult to find reviewers for a book of such theoretical, methodological, and theological diversity. It is even harder to convince those reviewers who are trained in Western theological traditions to appreciate the innovative theoretical and theological diversity in this book. Therefore, we have encouraged all contributors to this book to revise their chapters according to the reviewers' comments, but only under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.