

Book Review

Andrew T. Kaiser, *Encountering China: The Evolution of Timothy Richard's Missionary Thought (1870-1891)*

Reviewed by J. Nelson Jennings

Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, July 2019

Kaiser, Andrew T. (2019). *Encountering China: The Evolution of Timothy Richard's Missionary Thought (1870-1891)*. Anthony Casey et al., eds., Evangelical Missiological Society Monograph Series. Pickwick Publications, xix + 261 pp., ISBN: 978-1532664137.

As many mission scholars are aware, there is a great deal of published information, including freely accessible online summaries and analyses, about Timothy Richard (or 李提摩太 - *Li Timotai*, the Chinese name he adopted), the widely influential Welsh Baptist missionary to China. Richard's life (1845-1919) stretched over the worldwide expansion of western imperialism. His years in China (1870-1915) spanned a major famine there, deepening Western missionary inroads, and the beginnings of China's monumental mid-twentieth-century socio-political changes. Within those crucial time periods, Richard stands tall among the several noteworthy missionary figures in Chinese Christian history.

Kaiser's *Encountering China: The Evolution of Timothy Richard's Missionary Thought (1870-1891)* adds to the extensive body of literature about Richard. This book is Kaiser's 2014 Edinburgh PhD dissertation in published form. As such there are ample footnotes and an extensive 2-page bibliography, plus two helpful appendices ("Selected List of Chinese Terms" and "Publications by Timothy Richard") and an index. While appropriately scholarly, the book reads smoothly through its introduction and three parts - coherently organized as "Richard Encountering China," "Richard Encountering Famine," and "Richard Encountering Conflict." Mission practitioners should not fear erudite or technical language often present in academic studies, while university professors should not hesitate to offer Kaiser's study to students at all levels.

The book makes at least two particular contributions to Richard studies and indeed to mission studies as a whole. First, as Kaiser points out the study is "the first critical work of length on the early half of Richard's missionary career" (vii). As such the book covers Richard's three formative "encounters" with Chinese realities, with social relief, and with criticisms from various mission entities without trying to encompass the entirety of Richard's colorful life and career. Second, *Encountering China* examines Richard, his settings, and his corresponding development on their own terms rather than by staying boxed inside of monoculturally familiar and "simplistic conservative/liberal dichotomies" (vii) that have all too often been used to explain how cross-cultural missionaries grow and adjust to unforeseen, unmanageable, and deeply formative contextual realities. One cannot help but infer that Kaiser can intimately relate to Richard's experiences, thus enabling this examination to paint an empathetic yet critical picture of one of the most representative missionary figures of modern times.

The (North American) Evangelical Missiological Society is to be commended for publishing Kaiser's book in its Monograph Series. With Kaiser, the series editors must have recognized Richard's "persistent identity as an evangelical missionary" (230) amidst both his personal,

foundation-shaking China encounters and the broader, "multiple trajectories" operative in late-nineteenth-century Protestant missions (228). *Encountering China: The Evolution of Timothy Richard's Missionary Thought (1870-1891)* is most definitely worth a careful read and wide use in mission studies.