***Chinese Biblical Anthropology: Persons and Ideas in the Old Testament and in Modern Chinese Literature*. By Cao Jian. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2019. 206 pp. ISBN: 978-1-532-65566-1. $45.00, hardback; $25.00, paperback; $9.99, eBook.**

Cao Jian's study of the modern dissemination of the Old Testament (OT) in China is distinguished for introducing the creativity displayed by scholars encountering the text. The author has been engaged in studies of the reception of the OT in China at least since he registered for Biblical Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The thesis he completed in 2005 for the second degree discussed textual variations in Genesis 1–4 in the 1874 Chinese translation by S. I. J. Schereschewsky (1831–1906). In 2009, Cao Jian submitted his PhD dissertation, "Men and Ideas of the Old Testament in Modern Chinese Thought," thereafter establishing himself as an authority on intellectual developments surrounding the dissemination of the Bible in China through the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. The work under review is the culmination of the above-mentioned works and other publications of his, both in English and in Chinese, on the same inexhaustible subject. I return to Cao Jian's unique agency in the encounter between two cultures in my comments that seal this review.

The framework of the narrative is the Protestant-related scholarly network. Otherwise, this finely arranged and meticulous work does not concentrate on one scholar or specific translation. Rather, the author evenly divides attention between persons and ideas and their mutual relations. To be sure, the OT was one of many sources integrating into China's cultural scene in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike other agents of Christianity working in China from the late sixteenth century, the Protestants of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Cao observes, "refer more to story than to dogma, [and] concentrate more on biblical narrative than on creedal formulation" (xv). No less significant is the fact that the grip the authorities back home had on the Protestant missionaries' work in China was much looser than in the case of the Catholics.

Anticipating the encounter and the integrative process that followed, choices made in translating the Bible were vital. Bible translations opted for the use of the more widespread vernacular language (xxii). Owing to the nature of the Biblical text, its connectedness to a specific land and people, its adaptation to different places and people was complex. According to Genesis 12, the Hebrews are the chosen people (116) and their ancestor is Abraham (107), a narrative that precludes a Chinese perspective. Indeed, Cao carefully notes the rationality of avoiding literal translations (xix). The integration of the Bible into Chinese intellectual discourse owes to the readability and the interpretability of the translations. Language barriers made unavoidable the employment of educated Chinese co-translators. The nature of the enterprise entrusted great responsibility in their hands. As Cao observes, the co-translators integrated a strong Chinese element, making an invaluable contribution to the introduction of the Bible into modern Chinese discourse (12).

Once the OT was translated into Chinese and circulated in print, its interpretation and appropriation by both Chinese Christians and non-Christians was largely no longer controlled by missionaries (17). Whereas Jesuit and Protestant missionaries transmitted the text together with their commentaries, "here the Chinese are at last speaking" (134). In their engagement with the OT, as with other sources, both Christian and non-Christian intellectuals reveal the desire to make

sense of their reality (xii). As Cao observes with great insight, "Contextualization demands pluralism, and intercultural thinking indicates emancipation from all kinds of unitary explanations" (xxii). The new motifs and meanings produced throughout the encounter between Jewish, Christian, and Confucian traditions reveal the creativity of educated Chinese as agents of this process. Both the OT and its foreign creed became a part of Chinese tradition (xxi).

The encounter between the OT and Hebraic tradition and the Chinese literary scene tempted Chinese scholars and Western missionaries alike to rank their culture in relation to its other. Chinese commentators were preoccupied with determining whether either the Chinese (Confucian) or OT tradition was superior or whether they had equal status. Early on, Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851) proposed cultural equality. His motives notwithstanding, his writings suggest that Jewish history and its culture was as great and old as the Chinese (29). A late nineteenth century Chinese formulation claimed that Western learning originated in China (*Xixue Zhongyuan*). To support this view, Song Yuren (1857–1931) brings fifteen examples showing that the OT inherited Chinese shamanism (36).

Perhaps a more dominant opinion in China during the late nineteenth century was to view a disparity between the prior, high value of the tradition and its current actual situation. Some adopted Zhang Zhidong's (1837-1909) *tiyong* formula, articulated in 1898.[1] As early as 1848, Xu Jiyu (1795–1873), in his *World Geography*, expresses the confidence that the validity and final triumph of Confucian morality and virtues in the new world will eventually be affirmed. In the present, he concedes, however, China competes for survival in a world of states that seek legitimacy not in morality or virtue, but in industrial and military power (32). Due to its seeming affiliation with the sources of Western power, even conservative and orthodox Confucian scholars could not ignore the OT. Cao concludes that although such scholars rejected the concern with the OT, this rejection in fact allowed for an exploration of the reasons for cultural disparities (139).

To the extent that the process reveals open-mindedness on the part of the Chinese, it also shows how traditional beliefs were preserved (xxii). An early example (1832) is seen in Liang Fa (1789–1855), who assumes the authority of the OT as a criterion for the reaffirmation of the Confucian tradition. He identifies areas where the OT is compatible with ideas in the tradition, thus maneuvering the former as a source that highlights the values of the latter. "For him, the OT complements Confucianism" (15). In a 1903 publication, Liang Qichao (1873–1929) raises the traditional wisdom of China, viz. the idea of degraded love (first consider the close ones) to justify the Jewish ethnocentrism he encountered in New York and elsewhere. He argues that one should not fault the Jews because the same is true for others as well. To be moral means to love one's own kind and benefit one's own group (51).

Furthermore, appropriations of Biblical ideas served educated Chinese to refine the deep beliefs of their tradition. As Cao observes, Confucians stress the continuity between the human and the cosmic and are generally inclined to view a partnership of the human and the Way (*dao*) (xxii). To be sure, many of their comments regarding the Biblical narrative were in line with these ideas. Wang Guowei (1877–1927) argued critically in 1904 that all world religions have dualistic elements (90). But, in most cases, commentaries on Biblical issues concentrated on the worldly rather than on the transcendent (25). Writing in 1936, Zhao Liutang (n.d.) argued that unlike Jesus, Moses, in

[1] "Chinese learning for [spiritual] substance (*ti*) and Western learning for [material] function (*yong*)."

his conduct and in his thinking, reveals mundane deficiencies in several instances—which make him more acceptable and hence inspiring for the Chinese (124).
Some associated the stance of this-worldliness that is characteristic of the Confucian tradition with an optimistic bent. Around 1902, Liang Qichao argued that although China's ancients also dreaded punishment from *tian* (Heaven), they did not believe that *tian*'s might was unlimited and could not conceive of a *tian* that destroyed all living creatures in a fit of rage. Therefore, when telling the myth of the flood (Genesis 6-8), they did not say that the flood was caused by an enraged *tian* but emphasized that the flood receded because of *tian*'s blessing (95). A similar optimistic appreciation applies to the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). Li Rongfang (1887–1965), in 1937, saw in the consequential scattering of many people over the face of the earth a positive triggering of the evolution of many different languages. He concluded that God sought the betterment of humanity because a people can develop only when separated from others and independent (106).

Chinese critics of OT ideas further reveal essentials of Chinese culture and add new perspectives to the understanding of the Bible. According to Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940), writing in 1915, it is not religious doctrines like the Ten Commandments but "human conscience" (*liangxin*) or the will to be moral that is the only true criterion of human values (84). Zhao Zichen (1888–1979), writing in 1921, opines that the human being is the main concern of the Bible (Gen 9:6) because God, living in man, is the center of the whole world (106). Some intellectuals compared Chinese historians and sages with the OT prophets (126–27). Others argued that the OT prophets, like Chinese sages, were interested in this world and believed that individual effort brings its own reward. Cao notes that in 1924, Lucius C. Porter joined the discussions proposing a four-point comparison of prophets and sages (127). To Li Rongfang, in 1930 (and in 1936), since humans must love God and other people to complete the law, the prophet Amos introduced to the Jews a God of universal love for all nations (9:7) (105).

This exemplary study of a cultural and religious encounter shows how Chinese scholars incorporated the Bible into their intellectual discourse, a process indistinguishable from the historical context they lived. Worded differently, the interpretations often reveal the conditions with which writers grappled. Liang Qichao compared the God in the Bible with *tian* and observed that the Chinese are no less justified to claim their place in the world than the believers in God (96). Inspired by Moses, in 1934, Liu Tingfang (1891–1947) and Yang Yinliu (1899–1984) exclaimed, "How can we live in such ease and comfortably while our [Chinese] compatriots are still groaning bitterly?!" (115). Lu Xun (1881–1936), in his 1932 "Zai shamo shang" (In the Desert), depicted the Jews and their suffering in the desert as a mirror for the contemporary Chinese people, and Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), in 1924, observed that the Chinese need a Joshua (112). Liu, in 1933, identified Moses with the new (114). Moreover, in 1936, Li Rongfang cited Jeremiah for the belief that destruction eventually is required to accommodate the construction of the new. For this purpose, he assumed upon himself a mission to destroy, remaining immutable even upon becoming the public enemy of his people (133).

From my personal perspective, a noteworthy quality of this book is the confluence of scholarly efforts. Irene Eber (1929–2019), who wrote the foreword, a Jewish Holocaust survivor who mastered Chinese studies in the US and later affiliated with The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, established herself in the process as an authority on the encounter between the Jewish/Hebrew and the Chinese culture (among her other scholarly expertise). Cao Jian, born in

Changsha, came to Jerusalem to work together with Prof. Eber on his studies of the reception of the Bible in modern China. Each journeyed a distance to study and understand the other. What more can one expect!

Gad C. Isay
Tel-Hai College

The views, opinions, and positions expressed in all articles published by the *Journal of Interreligious Studies (JIRS)* are the authors' own and do not reflect or represent those of the *JIRS* staff, the *JIRS* Board of Advisors, or *JIRS* publishing partners.