The main purpose of this abundantly documented small book is to present the fate of Chinese religions in the context of modernity before the watershed seizure of power by the Communist Party in 1949. In a nod to Joseph Levenson’s classical text *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*, Katz presents us with a very important thesis: religious change was afoot in China for more than half a century before the People’s Republic. These changes were wide-ranging, some destructive of religion, others creative and contributing to a renewal of practice and devotion. Katz describes three types of developments: actions by the state against the practices of popular religions since the late Qing, the phenomenal expansion of religious literature during the Republican period, and the depth and commitment of modernizing social elites to their religious beliefs. What emerges from this richly documented account is a nuanced rebuttal to the view that China fell prey overnight to Communist attacks on religion, as well as the equally faulty view that all modernizing elites were anti-religious. To serve that end, Katz uses data collected in a three-year research project funded by Academia Sinica, undertaken with Vincent Goossaert: “1898–1948: Fifty Years that Changed Chinese Religions.” That project aimed to contribute to a major change in scholarly perspectives on modern China by showing that during that period, Chinese religion experienced a major transformation “into a modern, globalized religious culture” (xv).

The book demonstrates this point by considering three forms of change. The first chapter looks at the campaigns to destroy temples, framed as an attack by the state against society. The second chapter examines one of the responses to that onslaught, in the form of a remarkable expansion of religious publishing. Finally, the third chapter focuses on urban elites and shows that modernizers with positions in politics, the military, or business were often also people engaged in new forms of religious practice. The three chapters are based on three lectures Katz gave in Jerusalem in 2012, and although each of them could stand alone as a text suitable for graduate students, they are linked together to serve the central purpose of the book. The writing style is engaging, and Katz introduces us to his colleagues and friends as he displays to us the accumulated evidence he has collected with them. Some readers may be overwhelmed by the nomenclature of temples destroyed or converted to a variety of uses, the detailed descriptions of publication catalogues in religious bookstores, and the personal details of the religious life of the elite. In the end, however, the breadth and depth of religious life in China before 1949 that
emerges from these pages should put to rest the trope that China was always a uniquely non-religious country. A related myth that Katz seeks to debunk is the facile contrast between a populace attached to its superstitions and enlightened elites who are indifferent to or critical of religion.

The story that Katz tells us is a complex one. Religious zealots also damaged shrines, as evidenced by the destruction of ninety-seven temples, classified by the state as “Buddhist,” during the Taiping Rebellion in the Shanghai region, in contrast to the “only” nineteen temples that suffered a similar fate during the war against Japan (47). Katz underlines that during the Republican era the campaigns against religion met with resistance or were not supported by all, as they affected less than 24 percent of the temples falling under the category “Buddhist” (47), and less than 37 percent of the temples labeled as “Daoist)” (48). The 2,186 temples still standing in Shanghai in 1949 reveal that despite the earlier campaigns (44), the KMT campaigns were far less lethal than the ones undertaken later by the Communist Party. The phenomenal expansion of religious publishing during the Republican period described by Katz demonstrates that religious groups were not passively reacting to state policies and the campaign against religions (107): instead, they creatively engaged in publicizing their beliefs and developing religious knowledge. Using data about the Illuminating Goodness Bookstore, which operated in Shanghai between 1931 and 1949, Katz describes how far religions had adapted to the new circumstances of modernization, through the categorization of religious knowledge, the reliance on sophisticated business models for management, and the development of extended networks for the distribution of religious literature.

Finally, after these macro-scale overviews of religious life in relation to the state and voluntary associations, Katz focuses on individual elites, at the micro scale of religious life during the Republican period. He chooses as an example Wang Yiting, a renowned Shanghai businessman, politician, and artist, but also a philanthropist and devoted Buddhist who also supported the development of Daoist institutions, redemptive societies, and the spirit-writing tradition. This portrayal serves to summarize the paradox of religious life before 1949: a phase of modernization that saw religious tradition reshaped, in spite of all the challenges aimed against it.

Katz is among the few scholars who look at religion as a central element of Chinese society and he sheds light on many aspects of its politics that were hitherto neglected. In particular, he questions the idea that China’s modernization equaled secularization, and to this end he presents a remarkable amount of evidence collected with other researchers in the most modernized parts of the country during the first half of the century: the Jiangnan region, i.e., Shanghai and its environs, as well as Wenzhou. These primary sources are