



The Religious Question in Modern China

By Vincent Goossaert, David A. Palmer



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Recent events—from strife in Tibet and the rapid growth of Christianity in China to the spectacular expansion of Chinese Buddhist organizations around the globe—vividly demonstrate that one cannot understand the modern Chinese world without attending closely to the question of religion. *The Religious Question in Modern China* highlights parallels and contrasts between historical events, political regimes, and cultural movements to explore how religion has challenged and responded to secular Chinese modernity, from 1898 to the present.

Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer piece together the puzzle of religion in China not by looking separately at different religions in different contexts, but by writing a unified story of how religion has shaped, and in turn been shaped by, modern Chinese society. From Chinese medicine and the martial arts to communal temple cults and revivalist redemptive societies, the authors demonstrate that from the nineteenth century onward, as the Chinese state shifted, the religious landscape consistently resurfaced in a bewildering variety of old and new forms. *The Religious Question in Modern China* integrates historical, anthropological, and sociological perspectives in a comprehensive overview of China's religious history that is certain to become an indispensable reference for specialists and students alike.



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Editorial Review

Review

“Building on a burgeoning wave of scholarship on Chinese religion over the past fifteen years, Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer offer a highly convincing narrative framework for understanding what religion was in late imperial China, what it became under the secularizing agendas of China’s twentieth-century governments, and what it might become in the global world of the future. In *The Religious Question in Modern China*, we are in the ring with religions and the secularized states that would like to remodel or rid themselves of them—and we get to watch them flail away at each other. This is a tremendous scholarly achievement.”

(David Ownby, University of Montreal)

“This is a pioneering and original work of scholarship that redefines the role of religion in modern Chinese history. With significant new data that provide a powerful challenge to conventional secularist narratives of China’s modernization, this book will contribute to a major rethinking of religion’s importance in Chinese modernity. Experts and casual readers alike will benefit immensely from its publication.”

(Paul R. Katz, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan)

“*The Religious Question in Modern China* is a timely contribution to a maturing field of inquiry. Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer assemble a comprehensive overview of the role of religion in Chinese society from the late nineteenth century to the present. This milestone work simultaneously represents the state of the field and defines the agenda for future studies.”

(Philip Clart, University of Leipzig, Germany)

“Indispensable for anyone seeking to understand the religious landscape and state-religion interactions in modern and contemporary China.”

(*Choice*)

“Those who want to learn about the situation of religion in modern China should start here.”

(*The China Quarterly*)

“[Goossaert and Palmer’s] book takes into account the huge wealth of insights into Chinese religion accumulated by the new research, and gives a very clearly written account of a truly remarkable event: the destruction of one of the world’s richest religious traditions and its replacement by a congress of competing traditions, faiths, and beliefs.”

(*New York Times Book Review*)

“A brilliant synthesis and update of the research undertaken by Chinese and Western scholars over the past

two decades on the relationship between the political and the religious spheres in China since the Hundred Day Reform. . . . This book represents a masterful introduction to the complexity of Chinese religiosity, but it will also constitute a source of inspiration for many research agenda.”

(China Perspectives)

“This outstanding book provides valuable findings and insights on the centrality of religion in modern China.”

(Journal of Asian Studies)

“*The Religious Question* is an excellent work, and it makes an ideal textbook for both undergraduate and postgraduate classes on Chinese religion.”

(Etudes chinoises)

“The sheer scope of [the authors’] research and their ability to channel formidably diverse material into a cogent narrative make for a masterly summation of the changes in China’s religious landscape over the past century.”

(Times Literary Supplement)

“Goossaert and Palmer’s volume on the religious question in modern China is one of the best books on this topic in recent years.”

(Religion)

“A landmark book that will be a point of reference for the field for many years to come.”

(Religious Studies Review)

“The most remarkable feature of the work is the example that it sets for interdisciplinary collaboration, bringing together insights from history, religion, sociology, and anthropology.”

(Journal of Interdisciplinary History)

“This book raises important religious questions and deserves to be read not only by China specialists and the sociologists of religion, but by anyone who is interested in the modern history of China.”

(Sociology of Religion)

“This volume will probably remain a must-read for years to come for anyone hoping to gain a wider grasp and deeper understanding of what its title calls the religious question in modern China.”

(Chinese Cross Currents)

“Goossaert and Palmer succeed wonderfully in their attempt to unpack complex, intertwined issues and to highlight lines of intelligibility facilitating our understanding of the present situation. The result is a seminal work which will undoubtedly have a long-lasting impact on the field.”

(The China Journal)

“This book provides an impressive synthesis of the burgeoning literature on religion in China.”

(CSSH Notes)

“Goossaert and Palmer give us a holistic, comprehensive analysis of the religious system in modern China, along with the trajectory of religion-modernity-secularism. . . . With its broad scope and comprehensive analysis, [*The Religious Question in Modern China*] is especially inspiring to scholars based in mainland China. The socio-historical approach is highly appreciated.”

(Ching Feng)

About the Author

Vincent Goossaert is deputy director of the Groupe Sociétés, Religions, Laïcités at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris. He is the author of *The Taoists of Peking, 1800–1949: A Social History of Urban Clerics*, among other books. **David A. Palmer** is assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Hong Kong. He is the author of *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China*, among other books.

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David Shields:

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Walter Burchett:

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