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Book reviews

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- 1 *Shanghai Sacred* offers a detailed examination of religious life in Shanghai. Benoît Vermander, Liz Hingley, and Liang Zhang aim to map religious diversity and its related social dynamics in one of the biggest metropolises in the People's Republic of China (24 million inhabitants in 2016). The study is the result of fruitful collaboration between the three authors, each having conducted fieldwork and interviews throughout the city. The book is enriched with comprehensive maps of the fieldwork sites, together with full-colour photographs.
- 2 The book's title, *Shanghai Sacred*, reflects the authors' approach,

which considers the notion of sacredness as a social construct influenced by personal experience. Throughout the study, sacredness is intimately linked to the numerous spaces that form Shanghai's religious landscape. Not limited to the five religions officially recognised by the Chinese state (Buddhism, Daoism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam), the study's strength is the focus given to the multiple facets of religiosity in Shanghai's sacred urban spaces. Organised into spatial metaphors, the five chapters carry the reader into different communities and their religious practices, from the Buddhist practice of animal release to the Hindu Festival of Lights (Diwali) and the Muslim Festival of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha).

- 3 Chapter One provides an historical account of Shanghai's urbanisation and religious development from the thirteenth century to the present. Through the depiction of religious landmarks and buildings, one can comprehend the city's historical legacy and religious evolution. The authors explain how different religious practices spread in Shanghai. For example, Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism established themselves in the city quite early, riding waves of migration. When Shanghai became a commercial centre in the seventeenth century following the lifting of the imperial ban on maritime trade, many migrants settled in the city and formed associations and temples. We learn that Islam today is mainly represented by the Hui people, who arrived in Shanghai during the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64) and constructed several mosques. Churches and chapels were built by Jesuit missionaries when "Shanghai became the cradle of Catholicism" (p. 21) in the seventeenth century, while Catholicism and Protestantism were driving forces of modernisation in Shanghai. The foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 led to the creation of a legal framework for the five official religions, although many places of worship were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. In the late 1970s, Shanghai was the first city to encourage the construction of religious buildings. Today, Shanghai is divided into micro-districts where various communities live, leading to complex interactions between the municipal authorities, religious groupings, and city dwellers.
- 4 Chapter Two offers a sample of the religious customs and festivals experienced and performed by several communities in present-day Shanghai. To do so, the authors rely on a complementary framework that combines "sacred temporality" (calendrical rituals) with the religious buildings (mosques, temples, churches, etc.) erected in Shanghai. In this city, "sacred temporality" is marked by the Chinese, Gregorian, and Islamic calendars that correspond to various religious practices. Giving voices to their informants, the authors carefully examine diverse festivals such as the Tomb Sweeping festival, the Double Yang festival, and the birthday of the prophet Muhammad, while also providing a detailed account of religious buildings from which the symbolic geography of the city develops.

- 5 Chapter Three is dedicated to religious life from the perspective of local communities. Formed by Chinese and foreigners, the various communities of Shanghai experience their faith in their own way, according to particular social dynamics and local codes. This is the case in Chuansha New Town, a former fishing village located in the southeast of Pudong where two religious communities, Catholic and Buddhist, share common local traditions and interact in a complementary way. In their local mosques, Muslim communities have access to a myriad of social activities (courses in Arabic and Islamic history, etc.) while the Jewish expatriate community maintains a variety of religious practices in their three centres.
- 6 Following the hypothesis that “religious landmarks operate at the frontier of the public and the intimate,” Chapter Four explores how sacredness is enshrined in the private realm. Many anecdotes show how home practices confer a sacred quality to believers’ everyday lives. For some people, moving into a new house requires specific ritual gestures, such as reporting to the God of the Soil that one has moved into a different dwelling. Shanghai’s religious landscape is also characterised by the presence of non-institutional places of worship, such as “house churches” or churches for migrants that offer a different sort of sociability for those hoping to avoid state interference.
- 7 The final chapter is dedicated to “religious waterways,” namely the canals that structure Shanghai’s religious geography and networks. The authors argue that religious waterways link homes, compounds, and landmarks into a complete urban history. It shows how both old and new religious expressions create original connections.
- 8 *Shanghai Sacred: The Religious Landscape of a Global City* is a distinctive portrayal of religious life in Shanghai. Numerous anecdotes and stories witnessed by the authors shed light on how religious practices are challenged in a Chinese metropolis. The authors not only recount religious activities, but also offer a comprehensive insight into connected social practices. The analysis underlines how the frontiers and functions of religious spaces can be porous and in flux. Nonetheless, while the book offers a detailed study of Shanghai’s religious practices and communities, it is sometimes quite difficult to understand how these different religious communities interact with each other. Indeed, the various communities and their religious practices are depicted as if they were completely separate entities in the city. Furthermore, while the authors pay close attention to each religious community, they devote little space to the role of the Chinese state in shaping all these religious practices. Even if the purpose of the book is not to investigate the relationships between the religious communities and the authorities, a greater emphasis on the topic would have brought better insight on religion in Shanghai, especially for religious movements that are not officially recognised by the state (Orthodox Christianity, for example). Finally, a few more comparisons with religious practices in other parts of China would have been very

welcome in order to highlight the similarities and differences between local religious activities throughout the country.

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