This book is in Understanding Faith series, under editorship of Frank Whaling. The purpose of this series is to provide reading in world religions for undergraduate students. Joachim Gentz is the
Chair professor of Chinese Philosophy and Religion in the University of Edinburgh. He begins with a long reflective chapter at the beginning. In chapter one, “What is Chinese religion(s),” Gentz explains some systematic problems related to Chinese religions and examines the roots of confusions associated with Chinese religions. Then in chapter 2, “The Landscape of Religions in China,” the author offers a new systematic approach to explain Chinese religions before presenting the main religious traditions in their historical perspective in the following five chapters.

On the basis of ancient doctrinal writings, Chinese religion is partitioned into three main types plus the syncretistic popular religion. The discussion in this book is restricted to the Three Teachings – Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, and also popular religion. It focuses on doctrines and beliefs as well as religious practices. It does not use critical theory to provide non-traditional readings of religious texts. It is not a sociological study of people’s religious life and rituals. Author does make an effort to point out the inclusiveness of Chinese religious traditions that the unity of three teachings is always in the mind of Chinese elites and people.

In the final chapter, “Understanding religion and secularization in Modern China,” Gentz surveys religious policy and discourse in the ROC and the PRC after 1949, new religious movements (including Falun Gong), religious policy institutions, and religions at the local level in the PRC, which provide a very good description of modern Chinese religions.

This is a short book with only 138 pages of content and an additional seven pages of timeline of important events, fourteen pages of bibliography, and six pages of index. It has four illustrations; among them a table of the sexagenary 十支Ganzhi-cycle for date recording. It would be more useful if Chinese characters together with English words are provided in the index. As a short introduction that is accessible and engaging to students this book both fills a gap and does it admirably. However, a work of such brevity is of limited use for the instructor who wants to have a text for the entire semester. Only in a course on world religions or Asian religions, this book will be suitable as a brief introduction to Chinese religion. For instructors looking for a textbook for the whole semester, Mario Poceski’s Introducing Chinese Religions will be a better text.

T. Timothy Chen
Grace Chinese Christian Church
of Greater Memphis