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Paris, CNRS Editions, 2016, 348 pp.

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/7498>

DOI: 10.4000/chinaperspectives.7498

ISSN: 1996-4617

Publisher

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 December 2017

Number of pages: 66-66

ISSN: 2070-3449

Electronic reference

Sébastien Billioud, « Ji Zhe, *Religion, modernité et temporalité. Une sociologie du bouddhisme Chan contemporain* (Religion, modernity and temporality: A sociology of contemporary Chan Buddhism), », *China Perspectives* [Online], 2017/4 | 2017, Online since 01 December 2017, connection on 24 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/7498> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.7498>

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- 1 For several years now and through a number of books and articles, Ji Zhe, professor at INALCO (France's National Institute for Oriental Languages and

Civilisations) and a member of l'Institut Universitaire de France (University Institute of France), has been replenishing our understanding of changes in Chinese contemporary Buddhism, analysing what they reveal of transformations in China as a whole. This long-awaited book under review, based on a doctoral thesis defended in 2007, is the latest of his works. His analysis of transformations in *Chan* 禪 Buddhism (better known in the West as *Zen*) also serves as an ambitious and larger sociological reflection on the issue of religious modernity and thereby on temporality. His initial premise is that any analysis of religious change cannot be divorced from a reflection on modernity, but that the failure of classical theories of secularisation (incapable of explaining persisting religious vitality) necessitates a deeper reflection on temporality that transcends the often dominant positivist approaches (for instance rational choice and “religious economy”). Thus, pursuing a “temporalist sociological” approach, Ji tackles how Chinese *Chan* Buddhism—legitimised a priori like most religions by tradition and the past—now articulates in a special manner the different dimensions of time (past, present, and future) in a modern general context (including postmodern, ultramodern, etc.) dominated by change, novelty, and the future, as well as by the idea of constant acceleration.

- 2 The basis of the analysis presented is particularly rich as it was carried out on three recent groups (founded in the 1980s) and evolving in three different contexts: the Chan Bailin temple, a monastery built in Hebei Province in China; the Modern Chan Society, in the south of Taipei; and Plum Village at Thénac, in Dordogne, France. The reconstruction of Buddhism's religious temporality is thus studied from four angles (institutions, discourses, practices, and authorities) and also transversally as the author relies on concrete examples drawn from the three places.
- 3 In Part I (entitled “Evoking the Past”), Ji examines the ways in which *Chan* Buddhism gradually acquired a new legitimacy as an institution, starting with China's opening up in the 1980s. Using the reconstruction of the Bailin temple (1988-2003) as an example,

he analyses the process of reconstitution or remobilisation of religious memory by evoking space arrangements, encoding objects (the planting of cypress symbolically re-actualising ancient precepts associated with the tree), commemorating heroes, or genealogical inscription. The past thus symbolically reconstituted helps remake an ahistoric religious temporality after a period of discontinuity.

- 4 Part II deals with the production of an innovative Buddhist discourse seeking to adapt to the expectations of secular, modern, and autonomous subjects concerned with progressive self-construction or self-realisation. Bailin temple thus promotes a “living *chan*” valorising the present (*dangxia* 当下), consciousness of what surrounds us, and “aestheticisation” and ethicisation of daily life without necessitating other-worldly asceticism (in fact, the living *chan*, a new form of “Buddhism in the world” accessible to everyone). The situation is close to that in Plum Village, whose founder, the Vietnamese-born Thich Nhất Hạnh, preaches “mindfulness” practice: centering oneself and focusing on the present to gain mastery over the self to achieve self-realisation. A series of concrete techniques are offered (recitation of stanzas, mindful breathing, walking meditation, etc.), effectively rupturing modern temporal awareness turned towards the future and in quest of constant novelty. The present is thus reinvested while being informed by a religious temporality further oriented to the past (the experiences of the Buddha and the enlightened ones who followed).
- 5 As religious modernity is characterised largely by a marginalisation of “church religions,” a “privatisation” of religion, and explosion of belief modalities, religious groups need to adapt to a context largely dominated by mobility. Part III analyses how the *Chan* groups studied, having largely shaken off traditional rules and calendars, devised strategies for gathering followers (summer camps at Bailin temple or communal reterritorialisation at Modern Chan Society) and offer new practices (for instance adapted or invented ceremonies), thus seeking to articulate religious and secular time.
- 6 The book’s last part, perhaps less directly linked than others to the central problematic of temporality, deals with the issue of authority through a reflection on lay Buddhists. They are traditionally in a situation of inferiority vis-à-vis monks, “religious virtuosi” whose charisma builds on continuity, repetition, and persistence. Using the example of Modern Chan Society and of its founder’s “prophetic” charisma, Ji describes an effort to valorise secular ethics and the institution of a “lay clergy,” facilitating the obtaining of salvation in modern conditions.
- 7 This remarkable book is very clear and well developed, stimulating in its depth and agreeable in form: detailed ethnographic descriptions alternate with meticulous historical contextualisations and ambitious theoretical discussions. The reflection on temporality presented via the case of *Chan* Buddhism would interest readers other than specialists in the religion, so relevant just when China is reappropriating (not without amnesia and in a selective, fragmented, fantasised, and often ideologised manner) parts or layers of its history (Confucian revival, fervour for Ming or Republican studies, recourse to Maoist references, etc.). Each of these reappropriations raises the issue of articulation of different dimensions of time. While often these ideological and official “productions of the past” superficially sanctify the present (and current authorities) rather than challenge the time order, there are cases—*Chan* Buddhism among them—wherein among the diverse social actors, the past informs the present and even the

future, also raising the larger issue of an eventual evolution of China's current "regime of historicity."

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