



## UBC INTENSIVE PROGRAM ON BUDDHIST STUDIES

(Segment 2)

August 7-11, 2018

### The Institutional Evolutions of Buddhism in Contemporary China

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Lecturer: Zhe Ji (INALCO-CEIB)



Based on both exploration of historical materials and fieldwork, this course provides knowledge and insight into different aspects of the institutional evolution of Han Buddhism in contemporary China: Sangha education, lay Buddhist movements, official Buddhist organization, monastic economy, and rituals.

“Institutions” here refers to the prescriptive modalities for organizing collective activities. They determine and justify the rules and means of transmission (of

doctrines and lineages) and mobilization (of personnel and materials), so as to sanction the related religious discourses and practices. The institutional changes constitute substantive moments in the transformation of religion. At the same time, they reflect the structural political and cultural changes of a society in which the religion in question exists. Therefore, the objective of this course is twofold: first, to map the institutional landscape of contemporary Chinese Buddhism, and second, to identify some key logics of the politico-economic configurations in a post-Mao regime.

## Program

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*Aug 7, 8:30am-10:30am*

### **1. Buddhism in Contemporary China: General Situation and Crucial Issues**

At the beginning of the 1980s, Buddhism began to recover from the three-decade violent suppression in the People's Republic of China, when the policy of "reform and opening up" was carried out in the country. From then on, Buddhism progressively regained favour among the people, and it has even thrived in the past twenty years or so. According to the Chinese government and certain authors, Buddhism has become the most important institutionalized religion in China, with millions of believers and practitioners. The first lecture will offer an overview of the Buddhist revival since 1980 and investigate some major issues relating to this revival. A couple of research perspectives will be examined and a special attention will be given to the institutional approach.

*Aug 7, 2:00pm-4:00pm*

### **2. Sangha Education and the Buddhist Academy System**

The first institution to be studied in this series of lectures is "Buddhist academy" (佛学院). Appeared in the early 20th-century China, it has become a main pattern of elite production of Chinese Buddhism since 1980. With the first-hand data gathered from long-term fieldwork, we will explore the development of Buddhist academies at the national level during the last thirty years, present a case study about the students, teachers, curriculum, and pedagogy of the Buddhist Academy of China (中国佛学院) in Beijing, and analyze the different positions in the debates on sangha education.

*Aug 8, 8:30am-10:30am*

### **3. Lay Buddhist monuments and their organizational models**

Another remarkable phenomenon of contemporary Chinese Buddhism is the new organization of lay Buddhists. Lay Buddhism is situated at the center of the configuration of double power relations, which are between politics and religion, and between sangha and laity. The third lecture will examine the organizational models and social engagements of lay Buddhism and its political contexts. In the ongoing Buddhist revival, lay Buddhism has much less political space for

development than sangha Buddhism, since the Post-Mao communist state consistently tries to limit the religious mobilization out of official frameworks. However, since the end of the 20th century, a number of new forms of lay Buddhism have emerged in the PRC under the influence of transnational Buddhist organizations based on other Chinese societies. Such diversification and globalization of lay Buddhism have propelled a challenge for both the authority of sangha and the efficiency of the PRC's religious policy.

*Aug 8, 2:00pm-4:00pm*

#### **4. Buddhist Association under State Corporatism**

This lecture will examine the role played by the official Buddhist Association of China (BAC, 中国佛教协会) founded in 1953. The BAC is obviously an instrument of the PRC State for regulating Buddhism. However, the lecturer discerns three paradoxes in such a secularisation through the BAC: (1) In order to exercise an efficient control, the government of the Communist Party needed a unified and specialized apparatus of Buddhism as a hold. Thus, it was the state's attempt to have Buddhism well in hand that brought out the first monopolist Buddhist national system of mobilisation in Chinese history. (2) This official institutionalisation led to a nationalization of Buddhism in the framework of a state corporatism. But the nationalization also confers on Buddhism a form of legitimacy to survive and even to thrive today in China. (3) Since the religious field is reopened, the more rigorous the control of the religious institution exercised by the state, the more prosperous the individual, sectarian and other non-institutional religiosities are, and so the less easily the state manages religious affairs.

*Aug 9, 8:30am-10:30am*

#### **5. Zhao Puchu, the Buddhist Association of China, and "Buddhism for the Human Realm"**

Zhao Puchu was the leader of the state-run Buddhist Association of China from the 1950s until his death in 2000. A lay practitioner in pre-Communist Shanghai, Zhao had extensive ties with the Communists and was thus tasked with the management of the association under the new regime. He performed ably in diplomatic functions when Buddhism served as a tool in forging links with other Buddhist countries in Asia, and was particularly appreciated for his poetry and calligraphy. He served the party loyally and thus presided over considerable destruction of the Buddhist church, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, although he did try to repair some of this damage in later years. By exploring various sources, including Zhao Puchu's biographies, publications and the BAC's documents, this lecture will investigate how Zhao Puchu defined his "Buddhism for the human realm" (人间佛教), and how the forms and contents of Buddhism are reinvented during this production of discourse.

Aug 10, 8:30am-10:30am

## 6. Monastic Economy in the Market with Chinese Characteristics

The evolution of monastic economy in contemporary China is in parallel with the construction of a statist market economy. This double process changes the relations of monasteries with lay believers and the state. Buddhism has gotten necessary resources from its commercialization for its reconstruction, but the profit-making operations brought criticism from many Buddhists who stress religious purity. The contribution of monasteries in the commercial and service sectors has provided Buddhism with a new source of political legitimacy. Local governments have shown great enthusiasm for the construction or renovation of Buddhist sites to attract tourists and to develop local economy. However, conflicts over economic interests between the two parties can also be intense, since the communist state is the only proprietor *de jure* of the land used by temples and an interested player in the market. This lecture will focus on the restructuring of monastic economy and its consequences.

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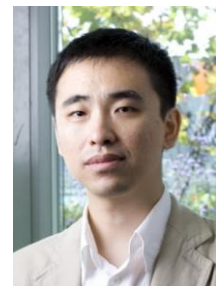
Aug 11, 8:30am-10:30am

## 7. Buddhist Summer Camp as a Ritual Invention

Finally, the Buddhist reconstruction in contemporary China concerns not only strategic adaptations to local economic-political conditions, but also innovative responses to modern challenges on a more global level, such as the low rate of youth participation in rituals caused by the increase in individual autonomy and mobility. Through a case study of a Buddhist summer camp, the last lecture will analyze how the camp constitutes a new form of religious mobilization for youth. Beyond the limits of stable community and traditional calendar, the camp creates a temporary and ambiguous context of collective practice, in which the boundaries between believers and non-believers, and between the religious and the non-religious become flexible, so as to better meet young people's needs for the opening up of identity and social experimentation. Since 2010, more than one hundred Buddhist summer camp are held each year in China. To a certain extent, these events witness the younger generation's enthusiasm for Buddhism.

### Lecturer

Ji Zhe 汲喆 is professor of sociology at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), and Director of Centre d'Etudes Interdisciplinaires sur le Bouddhisme (CEIB) in Paris. His main study areas are Buddhism and the relationship between religion and politics in modern and contemporary China. His recent publications include *Religion, modernité et temporalité : une sociologie du bouddhisme chan contemporain* (CNRS Editions, 2016), *Making Saints in Modern China* (co-edited with David Ownby and Vincent Goossaert, Oxford University Press, 2017), *Buddhism after Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, and Reinventions* (co-edited with Gareth Fisher and André Laliberté, University of Hawai'i Press, forthcoming).



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