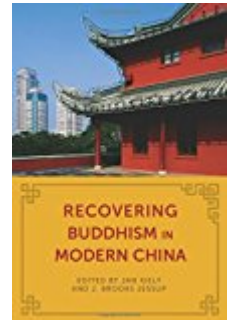


Jan Kiely, J. Brooks Jessup. *Recovering Buddhism in Modern China*. The Sheng Yen Series in Chinese Buddhist Studies. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. 400 pp. \$60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-231-17276-9.



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The study of modern Buddhism in China has long been underdeveloped. In the wake of the Communist revolution, Chinese Buddhism seemed to be irrelevant to the narrative of modern China. More recently, however, the emergence of large multinational Buddhist organizations in Taiwan and the resurgence of Buddhism in the People's Republic (PRC) have sparked a new wave of interest in the topic within religious studies. *Recovering Buddhism in Modern China* is an important contribution to this body of scholarship, but, as the editors' introduction spells out, it hopes to preach not just to the choir but to the "unconverted" China scholars who might still think Buddhism is irrelevant to understanding the modern era. The volume seeks to "recover" Buddhism not simply for its intrinsic interest but also for the "vantage points [it] opens up on modern Chinese history as a whole" (p. 4). This project is pursued in eight essays emerging from a conference held at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2012. Each is an empirically based case study, often based on archival research or field-

work, that retrieves some aspect of Buddhism that has been overlooked in the dominant historiography. The quality of the essays range from good to outstanding and while some succeed more than others in shedding new light on "modern Chinese history as a whole," all make valuable contributions.

Following a helpful editors' introduction surveying the state of the field, the chapters are divided into three parts: "Republican-era Buddhist Modernity," "Midcentury War and Revolution," and "Contemporary Social Practice." Part 1 opens with J. Brooks Jessup's "Buddhist Activism, Urban Space, and Ambivalent Modernity in 1920s Shanghai," which draws on periodical and archival sources to offer a sensitive and well-constructed analysis of the cultural positioning undertaken by the World Buddhist Householder Grove (*Shijie fo-jiao jushilin* 世界佛教居士林). The Grove was a highly successful lay organization that allowed its adherents to craft a deeply Buddhist lifestyle and identity in the heart of Shanghai, Republican China's most modern and cosmopolitan city. Jessup

shows that this was accomplished in part through the construction of a space that suspended the Grove's headquarters in a tension between the city's ostentatious commercial culture on the one hand and the austerities and numinosities of a monastery on the other. Jessup artfully characterizes this as an "ambivalent modernity" that "signals the remarkable ability to straddle both sides of cultural fault lines, accruing the strengths of both and the deficiencies of neither" (p. 71). Though some may find that a shade too rosy, Jessup's characterization is incisive and demonstrates that Shanghai elites were not simply mimicking Western modernity or reshaping "tradition" into acceptable forms but constructing literal and metaphorical space in which they could both participate in and offer alternatives to the dominant urban modernity of the time.

The following chapter, Erik J. Hammerstrom's "Buddhism and the Modern Epistemic Space," seeks to recover the role of Buddhists in the adoption and dissemination of the scientific episteme, focusing on the iconic science and philosophy of life debates. Hammerstrom draws an important distinction between *Science and the Philosophy of Life* (Zhang Junmai 張君勱, ed. *Kexue yu renshengguan* 科學與人生觀 [1924]), an anthology of famous essays in this debate, and the broader discussion that included numerous lesser luminaries. The former, he shows, included one important but neglected figure, Lin Zaiping 林宰平, who was a devout Buddhist and whose views on the limits of science tacitly drew from Buddhism. In the latter case, Hammerstrom establishes that Buddhist intellectuals accepted and propagated science's disciplinary classification of knowledge, even as they argued for its epistemic limits and contested the classification of Buddhism as a religion. Hammerstrom argues that these Buddhist intellectuals were "as active as their non-Buddhist peers in remaking the epistemic landscape of China, even as they altered the course of this remaking by resisting and redefining" some of these new ideas. His contribution lies not only in recovering Buddhists

participation in the debates but also in demonstrating that Buddhist engagements with science did not amount to a process of "removing" that which was deemed unscientific, but "of reorganizing, of transposing Buddhism into the key of modernity" (p. 105).

Gregory Adam Scott concludes part 1 with "A Revolution of Ink: Chinese Buddhist Periodicals in the Early Republic." In his essay, Scott looks at the three earliest Buddhist periodicals, demonstrating that Buddhists were actually at the forefront of the print revolution. Although each of the three journals was short-lived, they defined, in Scott's account, a set of archetypes that continued to inform subsequent Buddhist publishing. The first, *Buddhist Studies Magazine* (*Foxue congbao* 佛學叢報, 1912-14), represents the "literary miscellanea": a broad compendia of authors and genres aimed at an equally broad audience that was unaffiliated with any organization. In contrast, the second periodical to appear, the *Buddhist Monthly* (*Fojiao yuebao* 佛教月報, 1913), represented the "association organ": a magazine serving as the public face of a particular organization, a mouthpiece for its leaders, and the center of its social network. Finally, the *Awakening Society Collectanea* (*Jueshe congshu* 覺社叢書, 1918-19) exemplifies a third archetype midway between the two: the "society publication," which while associated with a particular organization nonetheless drew from a wider variety of authors and addressed a broader public. Scott's chapter provides a valuable account of the style and contents of each of the three exemplars and a useful framework for thinking about subsequent Buddhist publishing, though it might leave some readers wishing for a few more pages sketching out how these paradigms played out in subsequent history.

Part 2 turns its focus to the era of war and revolution from 1937 to 1976. In the first contribution, "Resurrecting Xuanzang: The Modern Travels of a Medieval Monk," Benjamin Brose weaves a fascinating narrative of the divisions

and translations of a relic of Xuanzang, showing the monk to be no less peripatetic in death than in life. Brose demonstrates that though they were framed in new ways, relics retained an undiminished social power and never quite secularized charisma. This is seen in the role Xuanzang's skull relic and its offspring have played in nationalism and in international relations, at times as tokens of unity and goodwill and at other times as literal bones of contention. The occupying Japanese, who uncovered it in 1942, used it as a symbol of shared Buddhist heritage and after the war, the PRC government drew on the relic's charisma in exchanges with Japan, India, and Taiwan, while the repatriation of a fragment of a fragment from Japan to Taiwan rather than the PRC caused a minor diplomatic incident in the 1950s. Brose sets each of these episodes in historical context, illuminating the particular significance attached to the relic at certain moments in time. For example, the Chinese attempt to have the fragment returned to the PRC rather than Taiwan derived its importance not simply from the status of Xuanzang but also its resonance with the effort to repatriate the Chinese war dead.

The following two chapters examine the way in which the early Communist state coopted and ultimately dismantled Buddhism. Xue Yu's "Buddhist Efforts for the Reconciliation of Buddhism and Marxism in the Early Years of the People's Republic of China" focuses on the ideological dimension, looking at efforts by progressive Buddhist intellectuals to bring the religion in line with socialism through comparisons of Buddhism and Marxism. As he notes, however, this was an uneven playing field. Marxism was beyond criticism, so where difference was identified, it was Buddhism that had to be reinterpreted and restructured. While these progressive Buddhists may have hoped to secure space for the tradition's survival through these exercises, Xue Yu argues, they only hastened its demise by aiding the "conversion" of Buddhists to Marxism. Xue Yu argues that this naïve subordination did even more to dismantle

Buddhist institutions than mechanism of state power, such as the United Front and Bureau of Religious Affairs. While the relative weight assigned to these factors may be debated, the chapter does provide a clear demonstration of the extent to which certain progressive Buddhists were willing to abandon or distort doctrine in the hope of securing a place in the new order.

In the final chapter of this section, "The Communist Dismantling of Temple and Monastic Buddhism in Suzhou," Jan Kiely turns to the social and economic dimensions. In this much-needed and highly interesting contribution, Kiely offers an archive-based case study of the impact of early PRC religious policy on Chinese Buddhism in Suzhou. Where much recent scholarship has highlighted the continuities of Communist religious management with that of the preceding republic and even the late imperial era, Kiely's essay instead paints a picture of a "profound rupturing of urban social culture, the costs of which have yet to be fully calculated" (p. 247). He begins by investigating the state of Suzhou Buddhism in the republic, uncovering "a thick" and "durable" fabric woven of major monasteries and small neighborhood temples. This fabric was quite purposefully ripped asunder by the Communists. Kiely argues that over-attention to the oscillations of policy at the national level has obscured what was from the beginning an unrelenting assault on religion. He shows that, at least in the case of Suzhou, this took the form of a "conventional Marxist-Leninist delegitimation of the economic and social-cultural bases" of Buddhism (p. 245), a progressive squeeze in which viable sources of monastic and temple income were taken away until all that remained was "productive labor," which served as a conduit to channel clerics into the proletariat. The institutions that survived the 1950s were much weakened and highly dependent on the party-state. Although the contemporary revival is often presented as a direct continuation of the republic, Kiely points out that it was this state Buddhism that was first revived in the wake of the Cultural

Revolution. Thus, contemporary Buddhism is deeply marked by the events of the 1950s. As Kiely himself acknowledges, a single case study cannot be taken as representative of all of China, but this chapter offers an important window on the concrete workings of the Communist state's machinery as well as its human costs.

Part 3 includes two fieldwork-based essays that bring the collection up to the present. In "Mapping Religious Difference: Lay Buddhist Textual Communities in the Post-Mao Period," Gareth Fisher argues that the concept of textual communities offers a framework that can enrich our understanding of contemporary Chinese Buddhism, uncovering dynamics and diversities that are occluded by reigning market or ecology metaphors. Following the advice of George Marcus to "follow the book," Fisher traces out three different types of Buddhist communities defined by their engagement with particular types of texts: "teaching-centered communities" focused on texts on a particular type of Buddhism or method of practice; "master-centered communities" focused on texts authored or approved by a particular teacher; and "free-distribution communities" centered on the production and circulation of free texts. Each is characterized by a particular mode of exchange: commodity, reciprocal gift, and religious gift, respectively. Fisher is not content to simply lay out a nifty typology, however. He makes a strong case for its explanatory power. The lack of overlap between communities, he argues, can be attributed to the incompatible moralities of exchange associated with each, while the tendency of individuals of certain ages and classes to enter certain groups is tied to the accessibility of the various modes of exchange and the themes of the texts (for example, spiritual crisis versus moral decline). Fisher thus recovers a diversity of contemporary Buddhisms hiding beneath the unitary category and offers a perspective that enriches our understanding of the contemporary revival.

Neky Tak-Ching Cheung brings the book to a close with a consideration of gender dynamics in her "'Receiving Prayer Beads': A Lay-Buddhist Ritual Performed by Menopausal Women in Ninghua, Western Fujian." Cheung's essay focuses on "receiving prayer beads" (*jiezhu* 接珠), a ritual performed by menopausal women in which the initiates are empowered to recite the Buddha's name and earn merit. Cheung demonstrates that the ritual serves several important functions. It is, first of all, a rite of passage helping women to negotiate the transition between stages of life: religiously, from a stage in which menstruation and pregnancy renders them "impure" to one in which they are empowered as practitioners; and socially, from a stage in which they are defined by their reproductive and caregiving roles within the family to one in which their identity derives from membership in a women's religious community. The ritual also serves to secure status through opulent display and gift giving. This elaborate gift giving also activates an alternative social network outside of the patriarchal family. For instance, daughters who have married and have left the patrilineal family provide a key set of gifts, thus affirming their continuing bond with their mothers. Finally, it serves as a reward, a gift given by women to themselves in recognition of a lifetime of service. Though not always lucid, this account retrieves a local, nonelite, gendered Buddhism in rich, vivid detail. Given the propensity of the field to focus on elite men of national stature, this is an invaluable contribution.

In sum, this is an excellent book that deserves to be widely read. Scholars of modern Buddhism will find much of interest, of course, both substantively and theoretically. True to its ambition, the book also has much to offer scholars of modern China and it is very much to be hoped that it reaches that audience. Graduate students looking for a single book on modern Chinese Buddhism for their generals list will certainly want to choose this one not only for the breadth of its coverage but also as a sampler plate of an exciting emerg-

ing field. Certain chapters might even be assigned to advanced undergraduates in relevant classes.

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