

Adam Yuet Chau ed., *Religion in Contemporary China. Revitalization and Innovation*, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, 244 pp.

Author of *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China* (Stanford University Press, 2006), reviewed in an earlier issue of this periodical (See Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 156-159), the editor of this collection of articles is well-known for his research on the interrelations of politics and religious revival in contemporary China. His first publication, just mentioned, thoroughly examines how such a context is more stringent in the Chinese countryside. Lecturer in Anthropology of Modern China in the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge, the United Kingdom, Adam Chau has deepened his research on the various transformations that in many ways have affected the Chinese religious world in its age-old multi-faceted traditions during the most recent decades. To do so, in agreement with Routledge editor Peter Sowden, he launched the project of producing “a volume on the theme of revitalisation of religion and religious innovations in reform-era China”.

Such a topic has already been the focus of recent publications, for instance by Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank eds., *Making Religion, Making the State. The Politics of Religion in Modern China*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009, 304 pp. [reviewed in CCC 7.4, p. 184-190] or by Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 2011, xi, 464 pp. [reviewed CCC 9.2, pp. 151-155]. The book now under review (in the “Routledge contemporary China series”, volume No. 59) gathers new insights insofar that its historical scope is more recent (the reform-era China) and therefore narrower but at the same time it presents research that goes deeper into their analyses and constitutes the nine chapters of the volume.

In his Introduction, the editor sets the stage for the inquiries that will follow. Aware that religious revivals and innovations, anywhere and anytime, do not happen without exerting challenges, he tackles first what he calls ‘the thorny question of “tradition”’, which includes ‘transmission’ and ‘creative innovation’, as is well-known by the religious world. Yet among the present transformations of Chinese society as a whole, the issue has already and for many decades included the politically difficult legitimization of the elusive religious revival, not to speak of innovative practices. All these aspects of living tradition and traditions show that the religious question is part and parcel of the political activities and socioeconomic development. This is somehow the hidden link that runs throughout the reading of the following studies and transforms them into a fascinating panorama of inventive and multifaceted “survivals”. General bibliographic references conclude the Introduction.

It is beyond the scope of this review to summarise and critically appreciate the contributions of the authors in their common attempt to present a comprehensive view of their object of study. All chapters, including the Introduction, are built along a similar model, that is, an article, fully documented with a Chinese character list, end notes and bibliographic references. Such a pattern makes them fairly independent from each other. But the editor has chosen to regroup them by field of study.

Even if Buddhism’s revival shows some tendencies towards a “secularized revival” (Ji Zhe, pp. 32-52), the traditional production, circulation and distribution of “morality books” [善书 *shan shu*] (Gareth Fisher, pp. 53-80) among Buddhist communities is commonly practised throughout contemporary China. Daoist transmission faces another challenge (Yang Der-Ruey, pp. 81-107): traditionally based on the formation of ritual skills, it has adopted a more scholarly style through discursive knowledge, at least in Shanghai. But the very old tradition of “cloudlike wandering” [云游 *yunyou*] of Daoist monks (Adeline Herrou, pp. 108-132) continues to be practised, linking monks and temples in different kinds of networks. The management of temples (Solia Ching Chan and Graeme Lang, pp. 133-153) risks transforming them into enterprises particularly in the cities, large or small, with their religious activities, charitable services and relations with public authorities. There is then no wonder that, in certain regions as in Hebei (Stephen Jones, pp. 154-181), the “revival” is mixed with “amateur ritual associations”. Such effervescence might also be observed in the *Qigong* [气功 *qigong*] movement (Davide A. Palmer, pp. 182-202), where “religious innovation” as in the case of 中功 *Zhonggong* is particularly evident. Finally, as far as Christianity is concerned, Henrietta Harrison (pp.

203-221) presents a particularly meaningful case with the Shanxi Catholic Church: when “global modernity, local community and spiritual power” are blended together, you meet with a striking instance of a “revival” that goes beyond the needs of any survival.

Limited as they are in their specific topics, these various contributions offer glimpses on the state of the main religious traditions present in the Chinese world. Even assembled from a socio-political and anthropological point of view, they could nevertheless be viewed as several small, even duplicated pieces of a much larger puzzle, taking shape on the horizon of Chinese history. A generous Index (pp. 223-244) at the very end of the volume obviously does not pretend to draw any conclusion: on the contrary, its many annotated references to Chinese religious traditions are like paths criss-crossing rediscovered territories, opened further afield to necessary spiritual studies.

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