REVIEW ARTICLE

ZEN AND THE ART OF DECONSTRUCTION

The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism.
Pp. xii+400.

Chan and Zen studies in the West have blossomed over the last decade, led in part by a new generation of scholars who combined their academic training in the West with study in Japan under the tutelage of the leading Japanese authorities on Zen history. These younger Occidental scholars are often understandably awed by their Japanese mentors, whose penchant for meticulous philological research, coupled with their prodigious command of the vast corpus of East Asian Buddhist literature, has made the Japanese the undisputed leaders in the study of Zen. It is thus not surprising to find Western scholars enthusiastically embracing the Japanese research agenda—an agenda that has proved quite fruitful to date. In applying their research skills to literally hundreds of newly discovered Chinese, Korean, and Japanese documents, Japanese scholars have seriously challenged the image of Zen Buddhist history recounted in canonical sources. As a result, we have now come to recognize the historical importance of a multitude of Tang Chan movements traditionally ignored or marginalized by medieval chroniclers, including the "heterodox" Baotang, Oxhead, and Northern lineages. Similarly, we now recognize the role of the much maligned Daruma sect in the evolution of Japanese Sōtō Zen and the role played by Ōbaku monks in stimulating the Tokugawa revitalization of Rinzai. Be that as it may, many Western students of Zen, following the lead of their Japanese mentors, have yet to shake themselves free of traditional historiographic models: in shifting their attention to previously marginalized lineages and teachers, contemporary scholars unwittingly reaffirm the traditional view of Zen Buddhism as comprising a lineage of inspired and
iconoclastic meditation masters who demythologized Buddhist cosmology and refused to countenance traditional forms of Buddhist piety.

The Rhetoric of Immediacy by Bernard Faure is in many respects the first major Western study of Chan and Zen to depart significantly from the Japanese agenda and to inveigh against long dominant "elitist" conceptions of Zen monastic practice. Indeed, the author dedicates much of the book to an analysis of religious phenomena that Westerners do not typically associate with Zen at all. Thus we find two full chapters devoted to a discussion of thaumaturgical practices and wonder-working Buddhist saints, while another two chapters focus on the nature of Buddhist funerary ritual and the worship of icons and relics. There are also individual chapters on the subjects of dreams, sexuality, and the importance of ritual in Zen monasticism. In each case, the author marshals a wealth of historical data in order to demonstrate the integral role played by such phenomena in the Zen tradition.

Faure, a French scholar teaching in America who spent many years studying Chinese Buddhism in Japan, readily concedes that his interest in the "margins" of the Zen tradition may be associated with the fact that he feels "marginal to that tradition and to the academic traditions as well" (p. 6). Like Dorothy (another outsider), who peeks behind the curtain to discover the true face of the Great Oz, Faure looks behind the veil of Zen rhetorical sublimities, directing his gaze toward all that has been concealed, ignored, or disavowed by traditional polemicists and modern scholars alike—from the veneration of mumified masters to dream divination and tales of promiscuous prelates. In so doing, Faure has produced what is no doubt the boldest and most stimulating book to appear on Zen Buddhism in many years.

The Rhetoric of Immediacy opens with a methodological preamble (see below), after which Faure launches into a critical analysis of the doctrinal foundations of Zen Buddhism as found in the dialectical opposition of sudden versus gradual enlightenment. In brief, the gradual view holds that enlightenment is difficult to attain owing to the depth and intransigence of delusion; thus enlightenment requires the expenditure of considerable time and effort. The sudden or "subitist" view holds that attachment to any view, including that of "sudden" or "gradual," constitutes an impediment to awakening; one need simply abandon attachment to all conceptual structures in order to attain enlightenment "here and now." Enlightenment, in other words, is the full realization that ultimately there is no delusion to eradicate or enlightenment to attain. This conceptual complex exhibits a homologous logical structure to the Mahayana doctrine of "two truths" (absolute vs. contingent truth): the absolute, which is by definition unmediated (and hence "sudden"), is paradoxically (but of necessity) mediated through contingent ritual, symbolic, and iconic forms. Faure's often brilliant analysis of Zen dialectic includes a discussion of the sociopolitical "stakes" riding on these ideological formations—the manner in which the rhetoric of sudden and gradual was wielded in the interests of garnering patronage, authority, and power.

The controversy of sudden versus gradual and the doctrine of the two truths serve as the conceptual matrix through which Faure explores a vast complex of Chan and Zen "mediations"—religious symbols, images, and ritual practices.
(such as mortuary ritual and the worship of sacred relics and icons)—that negotiate the logical “gap” between absolute and contingent truth. As mentioned above, these mediations have heretofore been systematically excluded from the field of Chan and Zen studies, on the pretext that they are extraneous to “authentic” or “pure” Zen; pure Zen is properly concerned only with the immediate and absolute. On those rare occasions when the presence of such practices is grudgingly acknowledged, they are typically explained away by reference to the Buddhist doctrine of upaya (“expedient means”), or by invoking the dubious distinction between “popular” and “elite” religion. Whether summarily dismissed under the indigenous rubric of upaya, or relegated to the margins under the more “scientific” rubric of “popular religion,” the sacerdotal, supernatural, and sacramental elements of Chan and Zen Buddhism are rarely taken seriously by Buddhist scholars.

Attempts to exclude mediating structures from the purview of Chan and Zen studies under the pretext of elucidating the “essence” of Zen betray a superficial appreciation of two-truth dialectic. As Faure shows, efforts by the Zen tradition to negate mediations were themselves always framed in mediating structures, just as attempts to negate the symbolic were themselves always symbolic and the rejection of ritual was itself a ritual move. In short, “even if Zen can be characterized as what exceeds or subverts the structure, it remains an effect of this structure and cannot exist apart from it, just as ultimate truth cannot exist apart from conventional truth” (p. 308). Indeed, one of the most significant contributions of Faure’s work is his documentation of the central role Buddhist sacerdotal and sacramental practices played in Chan and Zen monastic culture: “these mediations were always present, even (or precisely) when they were most vehemently repudiated” (p. 305).

What is most striking about Faure’s book is the intensity of methodological self-reflection: the sustained appreciation of the historical and ideological conditions of his own discourse, the discourse of contemporary Western Chan and Zen scholarship. Faure is acutely aware of the degree to which the polarities, dichotomies, and epistemic commitments that structure traditional Chan and Zen discourse also structure our own discourse about Chan and Zen. The dichotomy of sudden and gradual, for example, is recapitulated in the modern debate between those who advocate a “phenomenological” approach to Chan and Zen, versus those who argue for a strict historicist method (the celebrated debate between Hu Shih and D. T. Suzuki comes to mind).1 Faure explores both the exegetical dangers (projection and transference), as well as the hermeneutical opportunities (fusion of horizons) made possible through recognizing points at which both traditional and contemporary conceptual paradigms appear to converge.

Nonetheless, according to Faure, the problems of transference and projection are virtually intractable. As such, it is impossible to maintain “two separate, watertight areas, the ‘primary’ discourse of the tradition and the secondary discourse

of scholarship—in other words, to ensure the objectivity of a historical discourse aiming at an accurate mimesis” (p. 304). Faure is similarly wary of the “teleological tendencies of controlled narrative” (p. 4)—the search for closure at the expense of the overdetermined complexity of the material. Accordingly, he opts to abandon the naïve pretense of “historiographic objectivity” (p. 304), substituting what he terms “methodological pluralism”: “an attempt to mediate between—or rather hold together—conflicting approaches such as the hermeneutical and the rhetorical, the structural(ist) and the historical, the ‘theological’ and the ideological/cultural” (p. 9).

This “methodological pluralism” is evident throughout The Rhetoric of Immediacy, in which Faure draws on a legion of contemporary philosophers, literary critics, and social theorists to analyze or illustrate this or that point. The list of distinguished authorities to whom Faure refers encompasses virtually every leading European and American postmodern theorist; Faure is nothing if not well read, as seen in the fifty-two-page bibliography of secondary sources. One cannot help but notice, however, that, despite Faure’s avowed suspicion of the distinction between primary and secondary texts, the writings of medieval Buddhist masters are held in very different regard than are those of his postmodernist peers. The former are invariably treated with the most discerning “hermeneutic suspicion”; they are, after all, the subject of Faure’s penetrating “cultural critique.” The latter, on the other hand, appear to be held entirely above criticism—they are cited throughout the study as veritable “proof texts,” and areas of controversy and discord among the contemporary theorists he draws on are largely ignored.

Faure’s methodological pluralism, coupled with his tendency to support a particular reading of the Zen tradition through the invocation of an array of modern philosophers and social theorists, occasionally results in an unsettling confusion of narrative voices. Note, for example, the following passage on page 28: “In contrast to the belief in the retrieval of some metaphysical truth through laborious practice, we find the view of those rugged individualists like Linji, who claim that there are no arcana because, as Veyne points out, ‘if one believes that arcane domains accessible only to others exist, research and invention are paralyzed.’” Is this Linji’s voice? Or Veyne’s? Or Faure’s? This kind of conflation of voices may indeed reflect Faure’s conscious desire to blur the distinction between “primary” and “secondary,” or his explicit intention to “question or unsettle Chan discourse from within” (p. 7). The danger, of course, is that, in abandoning the distinction between primary and secondary material or the fiction of scholarly objectivity, one may also relinquish the challenge of grappling with the “otherness” of the “other.” In my view, the observation that it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish between “our” constructions and “theirs” does not in itself constitute sufficient grounds for abandoning the project altogether. There may indeed be deep homologies between the categories and polarities that structure Zen discourse and the categories and polarities that structure our own, but surely part of the hermeneutic challenge is to iden-

2 The list of contemporary theorists repeatedly invoked by Faure includes Mikhail Bakhtin, Catherine Bell, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Fredric Jameson, Paul de Man, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Richard Rorty, Jonathan Z. Smith, Victor Turner, and Hayden White, to name but a few.
tify and elucidate points of disjunction between the two. The earnest desire to
deal with transference and projection through unrelenting methodological "self-
reflection," coupled with the principled rejection of "scholarly objectivity" as a
laudable if unattainable ideal, threatens to result in an obsessive and immobiliz-
ing narcissism. Fortunately, Faure's mastery of the primary sources and his
patent interest in historical exegesis prevent him from falling into this method-
ological cul-de-sac. There are, nevertheless, discernible tensions between his in-
terest in lucid historical reconstruction and his rejection of such an enterprise as
methodologically flawed.

Faure is motivated, it would appear, by a desire to subvert the specious and
largely sterile construction of a "pure Chan" propagated both by traditional ex-
egetes and contemporary apologists. By "pure Chan" I refer to the notion of a
univocal tradition embodying an unvarying essence (the "mind-to-mind trans-
mission"). Faure is willing to concede, however, that he himself does "suc-
cumb at times to the temptation of idealizing the tradition—for instance when
[referring] to ambiguous 'ideal' Chan figures such as Bodhidharma and Linji"
(p. 82). Yet the book's tendency to indulge in dubious idealizations goes be-
yond the handful of references to "ideal types": it may indeed be inherent in
the very structure and method of The Rhetoric of Immediacy. Faure eschews a
historical or chronological presentation of his material, presumably because it
would contribute to the construction of yet another fictive narrative. Instead,
the book is structured thematically, with individual chapters devoted to
specific doctrinal issues, mythic archetypes, cultic practices, and so on. Faure's
formidable erudition is on display throughout the study, which draws on a host
of primary texts covering some 1,300 years of religious history and three
different cultural spheres: China, Japan, and (to a lesser extent) Korea. Faure's
narrative continually moves back and forth from China to Japan, from Tang to
Meiji, from mountain-dwelling ascetic to urbane literatus, from lyric verse to
scholastic disquisition. While readers will undoubtedly come away with an ap-
preciation of the scope of Chan and Zen religious culture, the tendency to
move almost indiscriminately across time and cultures ultimately contributes
to just the kind of idealization that forms the subject of Faure's critique. For
while Faure occasionally alludes to differences in the socioeconomic situations
in China and in Japan, or to the institutional and ideological disjunction be-
tween the Buddhism of the Tang and Song dynasties, in the final analysis sur-
prisingly little attention is paid to either historical or cultural context. Rather
than dwell on local detail, Faure reaches beyond the particular to the immuta-
ble "structures of thought" and "ideal types" that run throughout the Zen tradi-
tion. In his own words: "My research remains structural inasmuch as I attempt
to bring out mental structures, whether these structures turn out to be 'long-
term prisons' or patterns of a certain freedom, and to show how various levels
of Chan practice and doctrine are structured by a few paradigms such as
mediacy/immediacy, sudden/gradual, center/margins, orthodoxy/heterodoxy, her-
meneutics/rhetoric, description/prescription, communication/performance" (p. 9).
In emphasizing continuity over disjunction, synchrony over diachrony, typol-
ogy over singularity, Faure may be intellectually closer to Mircea Eliade than
to Michel Foucault, one of his averred "cardinal and tutelary deities" (p. xi).
Faure himself would, no doubt, resist such a characterization, as he is adamant in his insistence that we move beyond the rarefied notion of a univocal tradition: “The ideological work of the tradition has been to hide the diversity and contingency of its origins behind an apparent consensus of orthodoxy, repeated ad nauseam in all the texts. Would-be historians should therefore avoid replicating this view in their own writings and try, on the contrary, to reveal and deepen the inner divide” (p. 16). Yet his focus on “structures of thought” may contribute to precisely the kind of spurious hypostatization that he hopes to circumvent, as it deemphasizes the role of “local knowledge”: the divergent meanings that a single formulation can acquire as it is transposed from one historical or cultural milieu to another.

The structuralist project is similarly discernible in the imposition of what Faure admits to be “heuristic” typologies, such as the opposition between the “thaumaturge” and the “trickster.” Faure concedes difficulty in clearly delineating the two types and talks of “transitional” figures such as Budai, Hanshan, and Shide. Yet he also talks of a historical shift of emphasis from thaumaturge to trickster, which “reflects a change from a world-denying to a world-affirming attitude” (p. 117). I am not as convinced as Faure that this pair is in fact of heuristic value: the traditional Buddhist abhijñā (supernatural powers), the possession of which is said to be a distinguishing characteristic of the thaumaturge, are by no means “world denying”; nor would I characterize many of Faure’s “tricksters” as necessarily “world affirming.” Indeed, the opposition of “world affirming” and “world denying,” with its distinctly Weberian overtones, may be misleading when applied to East Asian Buddhist phenomena. (Note that the similarity between the Western opposition of “world affirming” and “world denying,” and the East Asian distinction between genze riyaku [“benefits in this life”] and gose riyaku [or raise riyaku, “benefits in a future life”] is largely superficial—the Asian pair is predicated on a specifically Buddhist cosmology and soteriology.)

The tendency to hypostatize the Chan/Zen tradition is further aggravated by the manner in which Faure moves from explicitly Zen material (e.g., material drawn from kōan collections or from “discourse records” [goroku] of Zen lineage monks) to phenomena that have little specific connection with Chan or Zen at all but are rather ubiquitous features of East Asian Buddhism. The twin chapters on dreams and sexuality, to pick the most obvious example, seem somewhat out of place; while the material is fascinating in its own right, and Faure’s analysis is characteristically trenchant, very little of the material bears any specific relevance to the Zen tradition. Most of the detailed examples of dreams or dream exegesis are by figures, such as the Kegon monk Myōe or the Tokugawa writer Tominaga Nakamoto, whose connection with Zen is tenuous and largely immaterial. And the chapter on sexuality (which Faure admittedly titles a “digression”) seems to be included more because of the “liminality” of the material than for any insight it sheds on Zen per se. The chapter concludes, rather disingenuously, with the following caveat: “Unlike in Christianity, sexuality never really became in Chan/Zen the object of an elaborate discourse, despite a relatively similar process of individuation, studied in the Western case by Foucault. Perhaps this is precisely because, in the Chan/Zen case, the
individuation process was always denied theoretically and emerged only as a side effect of the discipline” (p. 257). Faure neglects to mention that sexuality did not become the object of an elaborate discourse in most other East Asian Buddhist schools either. In the absence of comparative material from competing schools, such phenomena may tell us more about East Asian Buddhist monasticism in general than they tell us about Chan and Zen in particular.

The tendency to refer to “Chan” or “Zen” when reference to “East Asian Buddhism” would be more appropriate also characterizes much of the discussion pertaining to funeral rites, the cult of relics, and the veneration of local deities and ancestors, all of which were common features of East Asian Buddhism irrespective of doctrinal affiliation. In many respects Faure’s treatment of the differences between various schools of East Asian Buddhism is surprisingly traditional; it follows twentieth-century Japanese scholarship, which is itself unduly influenced by Japanese sectarian polemics, and tends to exaggerate the institutional role of “school” or “sect” in Chinese Buddhism. In post-Tang China, Buddhist “schools” were differentiated more on the basis of lineage than on the basis of doctrine or philosophy, and doctrinal differences themselves typically had little effect on institutional and ritual patterns, which tended to remain more or less uniform from one monastery to the next.

The influence of Japanese sectarianism and twentieth-century Buddhist apologetics is perhaps most evident in Faure’s conception of Tantra. Faure follows received scholarly convention, for example, when he associates the use of dhārani (“incantations”) and kaji (“ritual empowerment”) with Tantra or Tantric influence (p. 293). But the notion that such practices are peculiar to Tantra is itself a product of Japanese apologists, who insist that “pure” or “original” Mahayana is essentially free of such “magical” or “popular” accretions. In fact, many religious phenomena considered to be definitive of Tantra—for example, the ritual use of icons, dhārani, and visualizations in order to invoke the presence of a deity, who then serves as the object of ritual offerings and contemplation—are as old as Mahayana itself; such practices have textual precedents in China ever since the Lokakṣema translation of the Pratyutpanna-samādhī-sūtra (Banzhou sanmei jing) in A.D. 179. In the final analysis, the notion that the presence of various ritual and magical “excesses” such as dhārani constitute evidence of Tantric influence is itself related to the “myth of pure origins,” coupled with the uncritical appropriation of later Japanese Shingon polemics.³

Indeed, the “myth of pure origins” constitutes one of the central tenets of Chan and Zen orthodoxy, a tenet that Faure is at pains to expose as a polemical and ideological formation of dubious value when it comes to reconstructing

³ I do not intend to deny the influence of Tantric doctrine and rituals on Chan and Zen. The evolution of a “Chan” conception of lineage and transmission in eighth-century China was no doubt influenced by the teachings of several celebrated Indian Tantric masters who flourished under imperial patronage. Moreover, the influence of Shingon and Tendai Mikkyō on the “Japanization” of Zen is beyond dispute: Zen kītō (ritual benedictions) and kirigami (paper strips containing esoteric inscriptions), to cite two obvious examples discussed by Faure, were clearly influenced by Mikkyō models. What I dispute is the notion that pre-Tantric Mahayana did not normally sanction the use of “magical” rites involving incantation and invocation, and thus that the presence of such elements in non-Tantric schools is necessarily due to Tantric influence.
early Chan history. In response to his own rhetorical question, “Is there an original, nonderived, Chan principle at the dawn of the tradition, or is one confronted merely with ‘traces’ in the Derridean sense?” Faure replies: “It may not be a case of a ‘pure’ teaching becoming ‘corrupted’ because of social factors. The very notion of the original ‘purity’ of Chan seems to have arisen simultaneously with or even posterior to the notion of its ‘degradation.’ Thus there is a danger in regarding the institutionalization of Chan as a deviation from a ‘pure’ Chan experience. One would thereby simply replicate a certain type of traditional discourse and end up reintroducing an ‘essence’ of Zen” (p. 25).

Despite his lucid and welcome deconstruction of the myth of pure origins, Faure seems unable to make a clean break with it—his frequent use of concepts such as “ritualization,” “routinization,” “banalization,” and “institutionalization” cannot help but evoke the image of an early or original Chan that eschewed both rituals and institutions. See, for example, his analysis of the shangtang ritual (“ascending the hall”) in which the Chan abbot delivered a highly mannered sermon from an ornate chair set high on an altar in the Dharma hall: “The shangtang (J. jōdō), originally intended to express the ultimate truth in a dialogue between master and disciples, soon became ritualized/routinized (perhaps toward the Northern Song, and generalized during the Southern Song).” The problem with this assertion is that we possess no evidence whatsoever pertaining to earlier less ritualized or routinized precedents for the shangtang rite. It is true that the shangtang was understood as a ritual reenactment of a spontaneous “expression of the ultimate truth” such as are modeled in thousands of anecdotes collected in Chan discourse records. However, there is little compelling reason for scholars to treat such anecdotes as anything other than charming (and perhaps doctrinally profound) stories collected at a time when the notion of a Tang “golden age” had captured the imagination of the Song clergy. In short, the shangtang may best be viewed as the ritual instantiation or performance of a mythic narrative, rather than the ritualization or routinization of an earlier, more spontaneous, historical event.

Faure similarly slips into the language of “pure origins” in his discussion of Chan death verses, which he suggests “may have originated as spontaneous expressions of an enlightened mind” only to become “rigidly codified” (p. 187). Given Faure’s own rigorous deconstruction of the “rhetoric of immediacy,” it is difficult to know what epistemic or ontic value he wants to cede to such “spontaneous expressions of an enlightened mind.”

Such incongruities in Faure’s text in some ways reflect the very real dilemma faced by those who would attempt a critical analysis of Zen ideology. The expressions of self-understanding that many scholars find within the Zen literary corpus include a nuanced appreciation of Zen’s own historical and cultural constraints, coupled with the claim to transcend those constraints through Mādhāyamika dialectic and the rhetoric of immediacy. Zen gestures of self-knowledge can be as sophisticated, as alluring, and as slippery as the postmodern critical apparatus wielded by contemporary theorists. In the meeting of Zen and critical theory, moments of rupture and tension may indeed be impossible to avoid.

Thus the rifts and ambiguities found in Faure’s study attest to the hermeneutic complexities of his task, rather than detract from his accomplishment. And
his accomplishment is certainly considerable: not only is *The Rhetoric of Immediacy* the most comprehensive presentation of Chan and Zen religious culture to date, but it also constitutes a radical yet persuasive assault on the very foundations of modern Zen scholarship by an academic with impeccable scholarly credentials.\(^4\) Analytical inconsistencies in a pioneering study of this kind are to be expected, and indeed, they have been anticipated by Faure. In what might be considered a prophylactic note, Faure suggests that internal inconsistencies are actually essential to the deconstructive process: “The dialectical affirmation of emptiness is essentially parasitic and cannot stand alone. This bears some analogy to the way in which the theoretical assertions in this book and others, usually found in the opening and concluding chapters (or in footnotes like this one), are constantly negated by the text itself, where the old categories constantly reemerge. But they in turn deconstruct these categories in the process, and deconstruction remains dependent on discursive constructions, just as the Middle Way rests on the two extremes” (p. 194, n. 39). Some may balk at Faure’s attempt to turn defect into virtue—to transform kleśa into bodhi—but it is difficult to fault him for trying. The book is, to repeat, a pioneering effort—perhaps the single greatest challenge to traditional Chan historiography since Hu Shih began to undermine the credibility of the “southern orthodoxy” in the 1930s using recently discovered documents from Dunhuang.

Faure’s prodigious background in contemporary theory places him in a unique position to reintroduce the intellectual pleasures of Chan and Zen to a wider scholarly audience beyond the narrow confines of Buddhology. Unfortunately, the book may not enjoy as wide a readership as it deserves, as it presents daunting difficulties to those unfamiliar with the field. *The Rhetoric of Immediacy* presumes considerable familiarity with Mahayana doctrine, East Asian Buddhist history, Chan and Zen scriptures, and with a legion of legendary and historical personages who comprise the “sacred pantheon” of the Zen tradition. While scholars of East Asian Buddhism will no doubt appreciate the ingenious juxtaposition of texts, the relentless questioning of orthodoxies, and the stunning originality of the argument, those who are not privy to the arcana of Chan and Zen may well be deterred by the copious references to texts, personages, lineages, cultural periods, and historical events that fly by at a dizzying pace. The problem is further exacerbated by the unabashed polemics of the work—it is a sustained assault on certain orthodoxies that dominate the somewhat insular world of Chan and Zen scholarship. Those who lack familiarity with the polemical context of Faure’s study may well question his relentless pursuit of the “margins.”

Be that as it may, it is impossible to underestimate the significance of *The Rhetoric of Immediacy* for the study of all forms of Buddhism. This is the first major work by a Buddhist historian to take seriously European and American postmodernist criticism, and the results demand a serious hearing by all those interested in Buddhist thought and institutions irrespective of their theoretical

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\(^4\) Note that this is Faure’s fifth book on Chan and Zen. Each of his previous four monographs (all written in French) and dozen or so articles attest to his historical and philological skills as well as to the breadth of his learning.
leanings. Even those Buddhologists who profess an aversion to Gallic intellectual fashions will find much of interest in the book, particularly the manner in which Faure attempts to undermine the dominant “Protestant” approach adopted by Zen apologists and scholars alike. By “Protestant” approach I refer to the tendency to mystify the Zen tradition through minimizing the importance of pietistic, ritualistic, iconic, and sacramental dimensions of Zen practice in favor of an emphasis on transcendent wisdom and meditative experience. Such an approach is by no means unique to Zen scholarship but is characteristic of the field of Buddhism as a whole—a field that has traditionally placed an inordinate emphasis on prescriptive scriptural ideals, while at the same time disregarding the cultural, political, and institutional contexts in which such ideals were propagated. Insofar as Faure succeeds in exposing the notion of “pure Zen” as an empty analytic construct, and insofar as he manages to underscore the social and ritual complexities of the Chan and Zen traditions, this book prepares the way for a veritable revolution not only in the field of Chan and Zen studies but in the larger field of Buddhism as well.

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