

	<p><i>Ateliers</i></p> <p><b><i>Anthropologie comparée du bouddhisme</i></b></p> <p><b><i>2014-2015 : Le champ religieux (suite)</i></b></p> <p><i>Nicolas Sihlé (CEH) et Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière (CASE)</i></p>	 <p>CENTRE D'ÉTUDES HIMALAYENNES</p>
<p>Ateliers cofinancés par le programme « DYNAMIQUES ASIATIQUES »</p>		

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Atelier n° 2 :

## **Genre et champs religieux bouddhiques**

30 janvier 2015 (9h30 – 18h)

Centre d'études himalayennes, bâtiment D, salle de conférences (rez-de-chaussée)  
7, rue Guy Môquet, 94800 Villejuif  
(station Villejuif Paul Vaillant-Couturier, ligne 7 en direction de Villejuif)

9h30 – 9h50 :

**Nicolas Sihlé** (Centre d'études himalayennes [CNRS])

### **Introduction**

*[Présentation en anglais]*

The present session of our workshop cycle “Buddhist religious fields”, following several sessions devoted to particular components of these fields (monasticism, etc.) and their relations with the wider field, takes up a more transversal theme: gender. In what ways is gender (re)configured in these (monastic, spirit-medium, lay and other) contexts? Do we see contextually specific or perhaps also broader, transversal gender logics and dynamics underlying and shaping Buddhist religious fields?

9h50 – 10h55 :

**Peter A. Jackson** (Dept. of Gender, Media and Cultural Studies, Australian National University)

### **Religious and Gender Multiplicity in Thailand: Contextualisation as a Strategy for Living Across Radical Difference**

*[Présentation en anglais]*

Many studies of gender and religion in Thailand, and across Southeast Asia more broadly, have argued that these and other cultural domains are marked by a high degree of contextuality. In contrast to being structured by a single, overarching pattern of gender or religious norms, it has been argued that these fields reflect multiple, overlapping systems of gendering and of religious ritual. Canadian anthropologist Penny Van Esterik has labelled this pattern a “palimpsest” of multiply overwritten cultural patterns. In this paper I argue that the much-noted phenomenon of Southeast Asian contextualisation is a systematic and strategic response to living across cultural borderlands marked by multiple, intersecting influences. Most current analyses of cultural intersection, such as hybridity theory, explore power relations at sites of intersection of two

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cultures, one positioned as dominant and the other as subordinate. However, Thailand and most of its Southeast Asian neighbours are locales of many more than two sets of intersecting religious, gender and other cultural influences. We currently lack models of the forms of cultural intersection that emerge at sites where three, four or more major cultural traditions overlap and where each has a distinctive and different hierarchical relationship to all of the others. Drawing on studies of religion, gender and language in Thailand, I argue that the much-noted phenomenon of contextuality in cultural formations reflects a vitally important but comparatively under-theorised strategic negotiation of multiple intersecting power differentials. I argue that the multiplicity of co-existing religious traditions in Thailand -- where “animist” and Brahmanical practices parallel and influence a dominant Theravada Buddhism -- provides a discursive template or foundation for the strategy of contextualisation that is observed across the cultural field, including in gender. I hope to use this analysis to reflect on the broader question of how societies build social order and establish cultural patterns at sites of intense fluidity and mobility marked by multiple, competing modalities of power and influence. What are the processes that societies draw upon to negotiate the complexities of living at and across sites of intersection and crossing of multiple cultural boundaries? This is no longer a question relevant only to Southeast Asian studies. In the globalising world of the early 21st century, most world societies are now struggling with the question of how we are to live with mobility and irreducible multiplicity as central and indeed defining features of our social and cultural lives.

[10h55 – 11h10 : pause]

11h10 – 12h15 :

**Joanna Cook** (Dept. of Anthropology, University College London)

**Thai Buddhist nuns (*mae chii*), *vipassana* meditation and the paradox of ascetic power**

[*Présentation en anglais*]

The monastic office of ‘*mae chee*’ – or ‘lay Buddhist nun’ – is complicated in Thailand. It is conveyed through the ritual adoption of religious vows and is usually undertaken for life. However, *mae chee* ordination is only partial and its status is far below that of monks. The ambivalence found in the roles and changing status of *mae chee* in a meditation monastery presents some interesting dilemmas for the anthropologist. On the one hand, through practicing and teaching meditation *mae chee* are being recognized as religious professionals in previously male-defined spheres. They are being accorded considerable respect and prestige. On the other hand, the media through which such change is being enacted (through *mae chee* embodying moral norms such as humility, equanimity and servitude) engage precisely those idioms that have historically marked and ensured their subordination to male authority. Why then might religiously motivated women choose to subordinate themselves to men? Through an ethnographic consideration of gender hierarchy, power and monastic duty in a meditation monastery in northern Thailand, I argue that *mae chee* seek to transcend gendered attachment through meditative discipline.

[12h15 – 13h30 : pause]

13h30 – 14h35 :

**Alexander Soucy** (Dept. of Religious Studies, Saint Mary’s University, Nova Scotia, Canada)

**Superstitious Spaces: The Buddhist Field and Gendered Practice in Vietnamese Buddhism**

[*Présentation en anglais*]

Buddhist spaces in Vietnam have been, for the most part, thoroughly feminized. At most temples there are few men who are involved, and those that are involved, particularly monks, are often seen as being effeminate. Part of the reason for this is the construction of gender in Vietnam, which has viewed Buddhism, and religion more generally, as antithetic to a modern, rational and masculine

identity. Buddhism, particularly during the period in which Communist ideology held the most sway, has been disparaged as backwards superstition. Nonetheless, many women continued Buddhist practice and some men still joined the *sangha*, despite the prominent anti-religious discourse emanating from the state and its instruments: the legal system, the media and the academy. This paper answers the question of why, despite the pervasive marginalising discourse, many women, and a few men, still engaged in Buddhist practice. Drawing on Bourdieu's work, this paper will examine how the construction of Buddhism as a distinct field with its own rules and symbolic capital, has allowed for Buddhists to persevere in their practice.

14h35 – 15h25 :

**Catherine Despeux** (INALCO, Paris)

**Chan Buddhist nun in China / Nonne dans le bouddhisme Chan en Chine**

[*Présentation en français*]

En Chine, le bouddhisme Chan s'est positionné comme une école au-delà des différences quelles qu'elles soient, notamment celles entre l'homme et la femme. Néanmoins, la réalité n'est pas à la hauteur de la rhétorique. Il existe peu de femmes dans cette école, et aucune n'occupa la place de maître dans une lignée de transmission d'un courant. Certaines, cependant, ont été enregistrées comme disciples réalisées de maîtres prestigieux et les femmes sont plus présentes dans le Chan que dans d'autres écoles. Toutefois, le contexte concernant la place, l'image et le rôle de la femme dans la société chinoise aux différentes époques de l'histoire l'emporte bien souvent sur les conceptions véhiculées dans le discours Chan.

La Chine du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, et plus particulièrement celle d'après la Libération, prône un discours égalitaire entre l'homme et la femme de même que l'association bouddhiste, qui au niveau national, comme autrefois le bureau des religions au Palais impérial, régit les affaires bouddhiques et impose son orthodoxie. On pourrait donc s'attendre à une évolution du statut de la femme dans le Chan. À travers la vie de Yinkong, abbesse d'un temple Chan dans la province du Jiangxi, nous essaierons de voir ce qu'il en est et poserons quelques questions relatives à l'asymétrie sexuelle dans le Chan contemporain.

[15h25 – 15h40 : pause]

15h40 – 16h45 :

**Nicola Schneider** (CRCAO, Paris)

**Humble and discrete: holy women in Tibet / Humbles et discrètes: femmes saintes au Tibet**

[*Présentation en français*]

In Tibetan Buddhism, women are clearly subordinated to their male counterparts: they are hardly represented in the clerical hierarchy, they do not have access to all rituals and sacred places, and they are frequently told to pray to be reborn as a man. However, Tibet has also a number of holy women who seem to transcend some of these traditional gender roles. Drawing on fieldwork with a contemporary holy woman (*khandroma*), I will show how these figures challenge perceptions of the female in both kinship and monastic settings. An investigation of the trajectory of this woman will draw attention to aspects of religious career where the feminine is highly valorized. It also shows that women, in contrast to their male counterparts, are subject to discretion explaining eventually why most of them have been kept hidden from official discourses and written documents until today.

16h45 – 18h :

**Discutante et discussion finale : Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière** (Centre Asie du Sud-Est [CNRS/EHESS])

*Suggestions bibliographiques :*

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