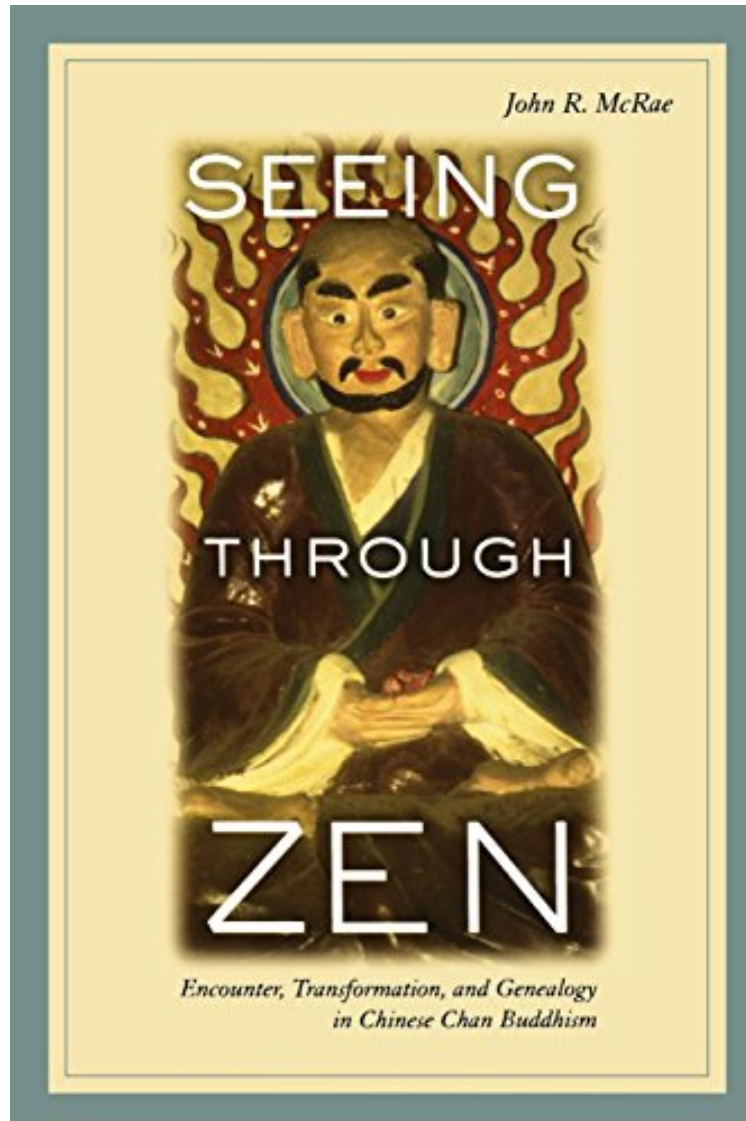


(Free) Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism

Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism

John R. McR

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#617363 in Books John R McRae 2004-01-19 2004-01-19Ingredients: Example IngredientsOriginal language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.70 x .58 x 5.90l, .72 #File Name: 0520237986224 pagesSeeing through Zen Encounter Transformation and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism | File size: 54.Mb

John R. McR : Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The title of this book may suggest it is meant ...By KenThe title of

this book may suggest it is meant to debunk Zen, but that did not seem to be the intention. I found that it made me more enthusiastic about practice again. Any religion that survives through the centuries has successfully come to support the power structure of its time - in the case of Zen, Japanese feudalism. In a practice so subtle and tinged with such a culture, how do you find the true core of understanding? This book takes us to the time of the religion's introduction into Chinese society and describes the beginnings of political accommodation. To me, it was inspiring and it led me to read more about the early Chinese masters and also about Taoism, and to start developing aspects of self in ways free from overtones of peasant farmer or samurai. 7 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Informative, but a slow read
By Lily Penny
In this book John McRae intends to write a history of Chan Buddhism in a manner different from his predecessors. He begins with a short list of rules he has come up with for studying Zen. These rules involve reading stories for content instead of truth, being untrusting of lineage assertions, taking facts and details as tell-tale signs of inaccuracy, and reading stories through realism. These rules create the basis for how he will write the rest of the book, and help lead him to his conclusion and main point at the end of the work. He takes the entire book to lead up to his main point, which is finally stated in full in the last chapter, "Climax Paradigm". In this chapter he pieces together all of the history and stories he has told throughout the book to claim that it was in fact the Song-dynasty instead of the Tang (which most writers assert) that was the climax and ultimate stability of Chan. Not being a scholar on Chan or really any other Asian history, I cannot evaluate McRae's conclusions and assertions based on historical accuracy. I wish to merely look at whether he follows his own rules which he laid out before the book began. For this we will need a good break-down of what he does in his first five chapters, the ones leading up to his argument and conclusion. In chapter one he discusses Chan lineage and how to properly use it to view Chan history. One of his biggest claims in this section is that we must avoid the "string of pearls fallacy" (McRae 9), which means not telling simply in terms of a list of important people and what they did. He says we need to look at the bigger picture of ideas and overall changes. In the second and third chapters he talks about Chan in different historical time periods and the developments and changes made during those times. He discusses which people were important to that time and what they did. The fourth chapter diverges from this slightly, in that it follows one type of structure in Chan, which is encounter dialogue. He follows this type of practice through the people who developed it, and the ways it was used with each person and time period. In the fifth chapter he discusses "Zen and the Art of Fund-Raising", which really turns out to be a discussion of the political connections that allowed Chan to flourish above other forms of Buddhism in the Song-dynasty. I think McRae's final chapter did a great job of showing Chan Buddhism and a different light than previous writers (at least based on what he says other writers did). He shows reasons why the Song-dynasty was the peak of Chan's influence, power, and stability with specific reason as well as larger concepts. His argument is well-formed and coherent. My problem, however, is with the first five chapters of the work. For the most part, he does not even follow his own rules when writing. He repeatedly gives specific details in his stories, which he originally claims implies inaccuracy. In addition, he takes the time to explain the "string of pearls fallacy" and then commits this very crime throughout the book. The simple fact is that there is no way to tell a history without talking about the individual important people involved. It seems that he was simply trying to make his book appear different from others at the beginning in order to make his argument at the end stronger. This is unnecessary; his argument is already strong, and he does not to prove himself to anyone by trying to make the rest of his book appear new and innovative as well. 17 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

Zen Students Beware
By Daniel M. Kaplan
I didn't get too far into this book before getting pissed off. And that's a GOOD thing! John McRae, as a zen student, has taken on the task of looking at the history and hagiography of zen and tried to sort out fact from fiction, uses of the fiction, implications for practice, and much more. As you read this book, if you are a zen student like I am, you will find some of your most cherished beliefs challenged in regard to zen. I find this a refreshing book. The early part on lineage is particularly interesting as most zen groups I am aware of place heavy emphasis on lineage and "proving" how they are descendant from Shakyamuni himself. This was a very rewarding read and I look forward to reading more by this author on Northern school of Zen.

The tradition of Chan Buddhism more popularly known as Zen has been romanticized throughout its history. In this book, John R. McRae shows how modern critical techniques, supported by recent manuscript discoveries, make possible a more skeptical, accurate, and ultimately productive assessment of Chan lineages, teaching, fundraising practices, and social organization. Synthesizing twenty years of scholarship, *Seeing through Zen* offers new, accessible analytic models for the interpretation of Chan spiritual practices and religious history. Writing in a lucid and engaging style, McRae traces the emergence of this Chinese spiritual tradition and its early figureheads, Bodhidharma and the "sixth patriarch" Huineng, through the development of Zen dialogue and koans. In addition to constructing a central narrative for the doctrinal and social evolution of the school, *Seeing through Zen* examines the religious dynamics behind Chan's use of iconoclastic stories and myths of patriarchal succession. McRae argues that Chinese Chan is fundamentally genealogical, both in its self-understanding as a school of Buddhism and in the very design of its practices of spiritual cultivation. Furthermore, by forgoing the standard idealization of Zen spontaneity, we can gain new insight into the religious vitality of the school as it came to dominate the Chinese religious scene, providing a

model for all of East Asia and the modern world. Ultimately, this book aims to change how we think about Chinese Chan by providing new ways of looking at the tradition.

About the Author John R. McRae is Associate Professor of East Asian Buddhism in the Department of Religious Studies at Indiana University.