The Sage and the People
The Confucian Revival in China

Prof. Sébastien Billioud (University of Paris-Diderot)

5pm, Nov 18, Rooms 8 & 9 FAMES

Based both on fieldwork carried out over almost a decade and on a cross-disciplinary approach (anthropology, sociology, history), this book explores the popular revival of Confucianism that has taken place in China since the beginning of the twenty-first century. It does not primarily focus on intellectual or normative discourses but on the reappropriation and reinvention of popular practices in society. Analyzing empirically cases and narratives of activists involved in this “revival,” it attempts to understand their motivations, aspirations, difficulties, and achievements, as well as their ambiguous relation to Chinese politics. The Confucian revival is studied within the broader context of emerging challenges to Western categories (religion, philosophy, science etc) and great modernization narratives that prevailed throughout the twentieth century. Finally, by means of a comparison between state cults carried out in both Mainland China and Taiwan the book discusses the articulation of the political and the religious and, beyond that, the contemporary fate of the Chinese cosmological tradition.


Sébastien Billioud is Professor of Chinese studies at University Paris-Diderot, Sorbonne Paris Cité, and Head of the East Asian Studies Department. Based on a cross-disciplinary approach, his research focuses on the modern and contemporary fates of Confucianism. His latest publications include *Thinking through Confucian Modernity, A Study of Mou Zongsan's Moral Metaphysics* (Brill, 2012) and, in collaboration with Joël Thoraval, *The Sage and the People, The Confucian Revival in China* (Oxford University Press, 2015 and CNRS Editions, 2014). He is currently writing a new monograph exploring among other topics the appropriation of Confucianism by the Yiguandao (“Way of Pervading Unity”), a religious organisation quickly expanding in Asia and beyond.