

Undergraduate Course offered by Centre of Buddhist Studies in 2025-26

ELECTIVE COURSE
(OPEN TO ALL FACULTIES)

BSTC2024 The Buddhist Conquest of China (6 Credit) (Semester 1)

Lecturer: Dr. Mingyuan Gao

Email: TBC

Office: 4/F Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus

Schedule: TBC

Venue: TBC

Course Description

Buddhism was introduced to China from India over 2,000 years ago and it has successfully integrated itself into Chinese culture and society marking the development of Chinese civilization. In this course, we will examine how this foreign religion's conquest of China played out from a historical perspective and how it interacted with Chinese society, culture, and other religions. The aim of this course is to examine the trials and tribulations of Buddhism establishing itself in China and how it became an integral part of the Chinese culture.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students will acquire basic knowledge of the origin, development, philosophy, and historic figures of Chinese Buddhism, and will be able to connect Chinese Buddhism with Chinese history and World history. This course will lay a foundation for students to further study Buddhism and Chinese culture.

Teaching and Learning Method

Lectures and class discussions.

Lecture Schedule (tentative):

Lecture 1. Overview: Chinese Buddhism—an Indian Religion or Chinese Culture?

Supplementary Readings: Pace, David. "Structuralism in History and the Social Sciences." *American Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (1978): 282–97.

Lecture 2. The Introduction of Buddhism into China: Adaptation to the Chinese Context

Supplementary Readings: *Mouzi's Treatise on Removal of Doubts*

Lecture 3. Buddhism in the Western Jin Dynasty and the Period of Sixteen Kingdoms in North China: National religion or individual faith

Supplementary Readings: *Laozi's Conversion of Barbarians*; Fotucheng's biography

Lecture 4. Buddhism in the Eastern Jin Dynasty: the Indian and Chinese understandings of emptiness

Supplementary Readings: *Huiyuan's Idea of the Immortality of Soul*; *Chao Lun: The Treatises of Seng-chao*

Lecture 5. Buddhism in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (History): Buddhist impact on Chinese society

Supplementary Readings: *Essay on Abstaining from Meat and Wine*

Lecture 6. Buddhism in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (Thoughts): Creative Chinese Buddhist philosophy

Supplementary Readings: *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*

Lecture 7. Buddhism in the Sui Dynasty: The Tiantai School and *The Lotus Sūtra*

Supplementary Readings: *Lotus Sutra*

Lecture 8. Buddhism in the Early Tang Dynasty (1), Faxiang School and Vinaya School: Xuanzang's journey to India and his influence

Supplementary Readings: *Mahāyānasamgraha*

Lecture 9. Buddhism in the Early Tang Dynasty (2), Huayan School and Tantric School:

Supplementary Readings: *Daśabhūmikasūtra*

Lecture 10. Buddhism in the Tang and Song Dynasties, Pure Land School and Chan School

Supplementary Readings: *Platform Sutra*

Lecture 11. Buddhism in the Song Dynasty: Cultural interaction

Supplementary Readings: *The Gateless Barrier*

Lecture 12. Chinese Buddhism after Yuan Dynasty: Secularization

Supplementary Readings: *Liao-Fan's Four Lessons*

Course Assessment

Class Participation	20%	Attend lectures, and actively participate in class discussion
Mid-term Quiz (First class after the Reading Week)	15%	Covering the course content from lecture 1 to lecture 6
Site-visit Reflection (800-1000 words, deadline: 19 th Oct 2025)	20%	Visit a Chinese Buddhist temple or exhibit (or online virtual tour of Dunhuang), and write a reflective response connecting what you observe about Buddhist historical influences on Chinese culture (architecture, ritual, symbolism, etc.).
Final Quiz (Last class)	15%	Covering the course content from lecture 7 to lecture 11
Group Project: Historical Role-Play Presentation (Reviewing week)	30%	In groups of five, students will create and perform a 6–10 minute skit set during a key moment in Chinese Buddhist history. Scripts must be historically grounded and original. A script outline and individual reflection should also be submitted before the performance (deadline: Nov 30 th). For details, see attachment.

Faculty Grade Expectations: http://arts.hku.hk/grade_expectations.pdf

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. The University upholds the principle that plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and any student found plagiarizing is liable to disciplinary action in addition to failing the assessment concerned. Please read the following webpage on "plagiarism" for details:

<http://arts.hku.hk/current-students/undergraduate/assessment/plagiarism>

Disability

Any student who has a documented disability and may require special arrangements (seating, testing, later submission, etc.) should consult the instructor in person at the beginning of the course so that provisions can be made.

Textbooks

1. Zürcher, Erik-Jan. 2007. *The Buddhist Conquest of China*. Leiden: Brill.
2. Ch'en, Kenneth K. S. 1964. *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Further Readings

1. Chan, Sin-wai. 1985. *Buddhism in Late Ch'ing Political Thought*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
2. Ch'en, Kenneth K. S. 1973. *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
3. Demiéville, Paul. 1973. "Le bouddhisme chinois". *Choix d'études bouddhiques*. Leiden: Brill.
4. Faure, Bernard. 1998. "Voices of Dissent: Women in Early Chan and Tiantai." In *Annual Report of the Institute for Zen Studies* 禪文化研究所紀要, no. 24: 25-42.
5. Gernet, Jacques. 1995. *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to Tenth Centuries*. Translated by Franciscus Verellen. New York: Columbia University Press.
6. Gregory, Peter N., and Daniel A. Getz, eds. 1999. *Buddhism in the Sung*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
7. Johnson, Steven R. 2003. *Where the World Does Not Follow: Buddhist China in Picture and Poem*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.
8. Kieschnick, John. 1997. *The Eminent Monks: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
9. Kohn, Livia. 1995. *Laughing at the Tao: Debates among Buddhists and Taoists in Medieval China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
10. Liebenthal, Walter. 1968. *Chao-lun: The Treatises of Seng-chao: A Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Appendices*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
11. Nan, Huai-Chin. 1998. *Basic Buddhism: Exploring Buddhism and Zen*. Translated by J.C. Cleary. Samuel Weiser.

12. Overmyer, Daniel. 1976. *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
13. Soothill, W. E. 1973. *The Three Religions of China: the Interrelationship between Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Incorporated.
14. Tan, Qixiang 谭其骧. *Zhongguo lishi dituji* 中国历史地图集 [*The Concise Historical Atlas of China*]. Beijing: Zhongguoditu chubanshe.
15. Tsukamoto, Zenryū. 1985. *A History of Early Chinese Buddhism: From Its Introduction to the Death of Hui-Yuan*. Translated by Leon Hurvitz. New York: Kodansha America.
16. Kent, Richard K. 1994. *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism, 850-1850*. Honolulu: Hawaii University Press.
17. Weinstein, Stanley. 1987. *Buddhism Under the T'ang*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.
18. Welter, Albert. 1992. *The Meaning of Myriad Good Deeds: A Study of Yung-ming Yen-shou and the Wan-shan t'ung-kuei chi*. New York: Peter Lang.
19. Wright, Arthur F. 1951. "Fu I and the Rejection of Buddhism." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XII: 33-47.
20. _____. 1959. *Buddhism in Chinese History*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press,

Online Sources:

21. A Comprehensive History of Chinese Buddhism:
<https://www.hinduwebsite.com/buddhism/history/chinesebuddhism.asp>
22. Online Chinese Buddhist Canon (with Chinese-English Dictionary):
<http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/>
23. Film: Buddhism in China. 1972.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIksQYTzkFU>
24. Digital Dunhuang 360 degree views of 30 Buddhist cave shrines in northwestern China: <https://www.e-dunhuang.com/index.htm>
25. Dispersed Chinese Art Digitalization Project:
<https://caea.lib.uchicago.edu/dcadp/en/>

• Attachment: Group Project—Historical Role-Play Presentation

Overview

In groups of five, you will collaboratively research, write, and perform a short historical skit (10±2 minutes) that imagines life during a significant moment in Chinese Buddhist

history. This project encourages you to combine historical research with creative expression, helping you understand how Buddhist thought and culture shaped people's lives in different times and social roles.

Assignment Components

1. Historical Context Presentation (by 1 member):

One group member will give a brief explanation of the historical context when necessary, accompanied by a PowerPoint slide with references. This includes:

- (1) The dynasty and general political/cultural background
- (2) The specific Buddhist historical event or development
- (3) At least two related academic sources (books or articles)

2. Scripted Skit Performance (by the other 4 members):

The remaining four members will perform a role-play skit dramatizing the chosen event. The script should be original, historically grounded, and reflect how Buddhism influenced individual or group actions. Roles may include but are not limited to an emperor, court official, Chinese monk, lay Buddhist, foreign monk or translator, a Daoist or Confucian critic, Buddhist artist, refugee, prisoner, or common devotee, etc.

3. Script Outline and Individual Reflection Submission:

Before the performance, each group will submit a brief outline or script (around 2-3 pages), with footnotes indicating where historical details or dialogue were drawn from sources. At the end of the script outline, each student will write a short reflection (<250 words) answering what you learned through this project and your contribution to the group work.

Grading Criteria

- Historical accuracy and use of sources
- Creativity and engagement
- Clarity and coherence of presentation and performance
- Evidence of collaboration and preparation
- Depth of individual reflection

Examples of Possible Events

- The arrival of Buddhism in China in the Han dynasty
- Kumārajīva's life
- Persecution of Buddhism
- A debate between a Buddhist and a Confucian or/and a Daoist at court
- The commissioning of a Buddhist temple mural
- The spread of Pure Land teachings among laypeople