

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

ELECTIVE COURSE  
(OPEN TO ALL FACULTIES)

**BSTC2028 Making Sense of Chan Buddhism (6 Credit) (Semester 1)**

Lecturer: Dr. Mingyuan Gao

Email: TBC

Office: 4/F Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus

Schedule: TBC

Venue: TBC

**Course Description**

Chan Buddhism is the most important and influential Buddhist school in China. It is characterized by its enigmatic stories and dialogues about religious epiphany, known as *gong'an*. This course introduces the origin, development, basic doctrines, and cultural impact of Chan Buddhism, along with prominent masters such as Bodhidharma, Huineng, and Mazu Daoyi. Students will learn to appreciate and interpret some well-known *gong'an* stories. The course will also explore how the spirit of Chan is expressed and can be sensed in artworks and literary texts, encouraging students to reflect on the connections between Chan thought, aesthetics, and creative expression.

**Course Objectives**

After completing the course, students will have acquired a fundamental understanding of Chinese Chan Buddhism as a philosophy of life. Through close readings of classical *gong'an* stories and comparative analysis of artworks and literary texts, they will develop the ability to interpret Chan ideas both philosophically and aesthetically. The course encourages students to critically engage with the spirit of Chan as it manifests across various forms of cultural expression. It will lay a foundation for further study of Chinese Buddhism and the intellectual and cultural traditions of East Asia, while fostering the ability to engage Chan ideas in dialogue with contemporary Western philosophical perspectives.

**Teaching and Learning Method**

Lectures and class discussions.

### Lecture Schedule (tentative):

Lecture 1. Chan Characters and Methodologies

Lecture 2. Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch of Chan Buddhism

Lecture 3. The Development of Chan Lineage in the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Century

Lecture 4. Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch of Chan Buddhism

Lecture 5. The *Platform Sutra* and the Southern School of Chan

Lecture 6. Two Lineages: The Hongzhou School and the Chan Practice of Shitou Xiqian

Lecture 7. Five Houses: Weiyang and Linji

Lecture 8. Five Houses: Caodong, Yunmen and Fayen

Lecture 9. Gong'an (Ko'an) Collections

Lecture 10. The Integration of Chan Buddhism and the Pure Land School in the Song Dynasty

Lecture 11. The Impact of Chan Buddhism on Chinese Culture

Lecture 12. The Prevailing of Chan Buddhism and Its Spread in East Asia

### Course Assessment

<b>Class Participation</b>	15%	Attend lectures, and actively participate in class discussion
<b>Weekly Chan Moment Photo Log</b>	20%	Each week, when you unexpectedly feel a sense of Chan in daily life, take a photo with your smartphone/camera. Select your favorite image of that week and write a brief caption noting the time, place, your mood, and a reflection as short as possible. Submit it as a PDF file weekly. In total you will submit 10 times.
<b>Aesthetic Critique: Finding Chan Beyond Buddhism</b> (800-1000 words) Submission deadline: The first class in November.	25%	Choose an artistic work that is not explicitly about Buddhism or Chan, but which, in your view, expresses the spirit of Chan. This could be a piece of visual art, a scene from a film, or a passage from literature (such as a poem or novel). Write a critical reflection (800–1000 words, excluding quotations) analyzing how the chosen work evokes Chan ideas or aesthetics. You are encouraged to connect the work to your personal experiences or reflections. Your analysis

		should demonstrate both sensitivity to the artistic form and a clear understanding of Chan concepts.
<b>Individual Project: Expressing Chan through Art</b> Submission deadline: 4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Reading Week (16 Nov)	25%	Imagine you are an artist. Create a work that expresses the spirit of Chan. You may write a poem, draw a painting, compose a piece of music, produce a short video (under 3 minutes, .mov), design a simple installation, or use any other medium, EXCLUDING taking a photo—as long as it is your own original creation.  Along with your work, submit a brief introduction (under 250 words) explaining how it reflects key ideas of Chan.
<b>Oral Test</b> (3 mins/person) The class day during the Revision Period (TBC)	15%	Various types of questions will be asked according to in-site situation. Students are expected to answer flexibly in the Chan's way.

**Word limit:** For the essays (excluding bibliography) that exceed the specified maximum length by 10% or under the minimum word count without the approval of the course instructor, the mark will be deducted by 5 percentage points. The penalized mark will not be deducted below the pass mark. For the essays whose mark is below the pass mark, no mark deduction will be made.

**Timelines:** For the assignments submitted later than the deadline without approval of the course instructor, the mark will be deducted by 2 percentage points per day. The penalized mark will not be deducted below the pass mark.

**Faculty Grade Expectations:** [http://arts.hku.hk/grade\\_expectations.pdf](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.

## Recommended Reference Books

1. Abe, Masao. 1985. *Zen and Western Thought*. Edited by William R. LaFleur. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
2. Adamek, Wendi. 2007. *The Mystique of Transmission: An Early Chan History and Its Contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press.
3. Addiss, Stephen et al. ed. 2008. *Zen Sourcebook: Traditional Documents from China, Korea, and Japan*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
4. Broughton, Jeffrey L. 1999. *The Bodhidharma Anthology: The Earliest Records of Zen*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
5. Buswell, Robert E. Jr. 1987. "The 'Short-cut' Approach of K'an-hua Meditation." In *Sudden and Gradual Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*. Edited by Peter N. Gregory. Honolulu: Hawaii University Press: 321-77.
6. Cleary, Thomas. 1978. *Sayings and Doings of Pai-chang*. Los Angeles: Center Publications.
7. \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. *Unlocking the Zen Koan: A New Translation of the Zen Classic Wumenguan*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
8. \_\_\_\_\_. trans. 2005. *The Blue Cliff Record*. Boston: Shambala.
9. Daoyuan. 2015. *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*. Translated by Randolph S. Whitfield. Books on Demand.
10. Dumoulin, Heinrich. 2005. *Zen Buddhism: A History, India & China*. Translated by James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter. Bloomington: World Wisdom.
11. \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. *Zen Buddhism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Translated by Joseph S. O'leary. New York: Weatherhill.
12. Faure, Bernard. Ed. 2003. *Chan Buddhism in Ritual Context*. New York: RoutledgeCurzon.
13. Ferguson, Andy. 2011. *Zen's Chinese Heritage: The Masters and Their Teachings*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications.
14. Gardner, Daniel K. "Modes of Thinking and Modes of Discourse in the Sung: Some Thoughts on the *Yü-lu* ("Recorded Conversations") Texts." *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 50 no.3: 574-603.
15. Gimello, Robert. 1992. "Marga and Culture: Learning, Letters, and Liberation in Northern Sung Ch'an." In *Paths to Liberation: The Marga and its*

- Transformation in Buddhist Thought*. Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 371-437.
16. Grant, Beata. *Mount Lu Revisited: Buddhism in the Life and Writings of Su Shih*. Honolulu: Hawaii University Press.
  17. Gregory, Peter N., and Daniel A. Getz, eds. 1999. *Buddhism in the Sung*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
  18. Heine, Steven, and Dale S. Wright, eds. 2000. *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
  19. \_\_\_\_\_. *Opening a Mountain: Ko'ans of the Zen Masters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  20. \_\_\_\_\_. 2005. *Zen Classics: Formative Texts in the History of Zen Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  21. \_\_\_\_\_. 2017. *From Chinese Chan to Japanese Zen: A Remarkable Century of Transmission and Transformation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  22. Hershock, Peter D. 2004. *Chan Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
  23. Ibuki, Atsushi 伊吹敦. 2001. *Zen no rakish 禅の歴史* [History of Zen]. Kyoto: Hozokan.
  24. Jia, Jinhua. 2006. *The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism: In Eighth- through Tenth-Century China*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
  25. Jorgensen, John A. 2005. *Inventing Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch: Hagiography and Biography in Early Chan*. Leiden: Brill.
  26. Levering, Miriam Lindsey. 1978. "Ch'an Enlightenment for Laymen: Ta-hui and the New Religious Culture of the Sung." Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University.
  27. McDaniel, Richard B. 2016. *Zen Masters of China: The First Step East*. Tuttle Publishing.
  28. McRae, John R. 1986. *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*. Honolulu: Hawaii University Press.
  29. \_\_\_\_\_. 2003. *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*. Oakland: University of California Press.
  30. Melby, Caleb. 2012. *The Zen of Steve Jobs*. Hoboken: Wiley.
  31. Nan, Huai-Chin. 1995. *The Story of Chinese Zen*. New York: Charles E. Tuttle Company.
  32. Olson, Carl. 2000. *Zen and the Art of Postmodern Philosophy: Two Paths of Liberation from the Representational Mode of Thinking*. New York: State University of New York Press.
  33. Poceski, Mario. 2007. *Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

34. Sasaki, Ruth Fuller and Thomas Yuho Kirchner, trans. and eds. 2011. *The Record of Linji*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
35. Schlütter, Morten. 2008. *How Zen Became Zen: The Dispute Over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-Dynasty China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
36. Suzuki, D. T. *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. New York: Grove Press.
37. Thich, Nhat Hanh. 2010. *You Are Here: Discovering the Magic of the Present Moment*. Boulder: Shambala.
38. \_\_\_\_\_. 2021. *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet*. New York: HarperOne.
39. Watson, Burton. 1993. *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi*. Boston: Shambala.
40. Welter, Albert. 2006. *Monks, Rulers, and Literati: The Political Ascendancy of Chan Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
41. \_\_\_\_\_. 2008. *The Linji lu and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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45. 刘长久. 中国禅门公案. 上海: 知识出版社, 1993. **FPS Books [中] BQ9262.9.C5 .L58 1993 / Online**
46. 黄河涛. 禅宗公案妙语录. 北京市: 中国言实出版社, 2006. **FPS Books [中] BQ9267 .H833 2006 /Online**
47. 李潤生. 禪宗公案. Ontario, Canada: 加拿大安省佛教法相學會, 2016. **FPS Books [中] BQ9262.9.C5 .L488 2016**
48. 楊咏祁. 禪語今釋. 南京: 江蘇人民出版社, 2003. **FPS Books [中] BQ9267 .Y36 2003**
49. 周中一. 禪話. 臺北: 東大圖書有限公司, 1978. (not arranged by stories, but by topics) **FPS Books [中] BQ9267 .Z48 1978**
50. 蕭武桐. 禪之花 : 禪的公案的解說. 台北: 長鯨出版社, 1979. **FPS Books [中] BQ9289.5 .H75**
51. 平田精耕. 無門關. 臺北: 大展出版社有限公司, 1993. **FPS Books [中] BQ9289.H843 H5612 1993**
52. 魏道儒. 禪宗無門關. 臺北: 佛光文化事業有限公司, 1997. **FPS Books [中] BQ9289.H843 W45 1997**
53. 吳怡. 公案禪語. 臺北市: 東大圖書股份有限公司, 2004. **FPS Books [中] BQ9289.5 .W828 2004**

**Online Sources:**

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<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buddhism-chan/>
55. Video: *The Zen of Steve Jobs: A Closer Look.*  
[https://youtu.be/lxfDI70ODu8?si=I8NW1N\\_edj1EzuFE](https://youtu.be/lxfDI70ODu8?si=I8NW1N_edj1EzuFE)
56. Film: Biography of the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng. (English subtitle).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMceiRBHhjY>
57. Film: Biography of Master Bodhidharma. (English subtitle).  
<https://youtu.be/OZFQU8ekR2w?si=YxiZw9XXDpWDlh-2> (Cantonese) /  
[https://youtu.be/J\\_mb2RZJe-M?si=BVUYbORFi3fxbmoN](https://youtu.be/J_mb2RZJe-M?si=BVUYbORFi3fxbmoN) (Mandarin)