

Undergraduate Course offered by Centre of Buddhist Studies in 2026-27

ELECTIVE COURSE
(OPEN TO ALL FACULTIES)

BSTC2028 Making Sense of Chan Buddhism (6 Credit) (Semester 2)

Lecturer: Dr. Mingyuan Gao

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Tutor's Office: 4.22, 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 6th-7th 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 Fayuan

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

Class Participation	20%	Attend lectures regularly and actively contribute to class discussions. Attendance will be recorded from Week 3 to Week 12.
Weekly Chan Moment Photo Log	20%	Beginning in Week 3, whenever you unexpectedly encounter a moment in daily life that evokes a sense of Chan, capture it with your smartphone or camera. Each week, select your favorite image and provide a brief caption indicating the time, place, your mood, and a reflection (keep it as concise as possible). Submit the entry as a PDF file each week. A total of 10 submissions is required.
Aesthetic Critique: Finding Chan Beyond Buddhism (1200 – 1500 words) Submission deadline: TBC	20%	Choose an artistic work that is unrelated to Buddhism or Chan but that, in your view, embodies the spirit of Chan. The work may be a visual artwork, a piece of music, a film scene, or a literary passage (e.g., from a poem or novel). Write a critical reflection (1200–1500 words, excluding quotations) analyzing how the work evokes Chan

		ideas or aesthetics. You are encouraged to connect the work with your own experiences and reflections. Your essay should demonstrate both sensitivity to the artistic medium and a clear understanding of Chan concepts. You may also draw on secondary sources to strengthen your argument. • Students must attach an AI Declaration form at the end of the report by declaring the extent to which they used AI in writing it. • All references should follow the <i>Chicago Manual of Style</i>, 17th edition. <u>Any reference lacking correct page numbers will be regarded as a fake reference.</u>
Individual Project: Expressing Chan through Art Submission deadline: 5th Sunday after the Reading Week	20%	Imagine yourself as an artist and create an original work that expresses the spirit of Chan. You may produce a hand-drawn artwork, a short video (maximum 3 minutes, .mov format), a simple installation, or another creative medium of your choice (excluding photography and poetry). The work must be your own original creation. Along with the project, submit a brief statement (maximum 250 words) explaining how the work reflects key ideas of Chan.
Oral Test (3 mins/person) The class day during the Revision Period (TBC)	20%	Students will be asked various questions related to <i>gong'an</i> stories. Questions may vary according to the situation at the time of the examination. Students are expected to respond flexibly and spontaneously in a manner informed by Chan understanding.

Timelines: For the assignments submitted later than the deadline without approval of the course tutor, 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:

https://arts.hku.hk/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/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 tutor 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 20th 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.
42. Wright, Dale S. 1998. *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
43. Wu, Jiang. 2008. *Enlightenment in Dispute: the Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China*. 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:

54. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buddhism-chan/>
55. Video: *The Zen of Steve Jobs: A Closer Look.*
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 (Mandarin)