

Foundations of Chinese Intellectual History II

Chinese Buddhism

The diffusion of Buddhism from India to China beginning in the first century of the Common Era was one of the most consequential cultural transmissions in history, bringing two great civilizations of the ancient world into contact with one another. In many respects Buddhism represented a world view wholly alien to the Chinese, and yet at the same time it contained within it ideas and practices that resonated with elements of indigenous Chinese thought developed centuries earlier. Over the next several hundred years Buddhism would gradually transform Chinese intellectual and religious life, but, as with everything that came into contact with Chinese civilization, it would itself be transformed. The Sinicization of Buddhism took the Indian religion in directions different than its counterparts in South and Southeast Asia and Tibet, and, through its secondary diffusion to Korea and Japan, played an important role a millennium later in the creation of a Buddhist presence in the New World.

These lectures are a continuation of our overview, begun last fall, of the intellectual history of China, taking up where the previous lectures ended near the beginning of the Common Era and tracing the development of Chinese Buddhism from its origins as an obscure foreign cult to its fully acculturated status as one of the “Three Teachings” (Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism) that constitute the core of Chinese religious practice. The topic is extraordinarily complex, so our approach will focus on major themes: doctrine (of course), but also—and equally important—church-state relations, social organization, religious practice, and relations with indigenous Chinese traditions. Running through all the lectures will be the most fundamental question of all: Where does Buddhism fit in the intellectual history of China?

Topics and Format

The course comprises six lectures, which can be attended either in sequence *or* as stand-alone presentations, enabling attendees to pick and choose the topics they are most interested in.

1 APRIL	LECTURE ONE: INDIAN BUDDHISM: THE FIRST 500 YEARS
15 APRIL	LECTURE TWO: CHINESE RELIGION BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF BUDDHISM
29 APRIL	LECTURE THREE: HOW BUDDHISM BECAME CHINESE
13 MAY	LECTURE FOUR: THE MATURE TRADITION: HUAYAN AND Tiantai
27 MAY	LECTURE FIVE: BUDDHIST DEVOTIONALISM: THE PURE LAND TRADITION
10 JUNE	LECTURE SIX: DOES A DOG HAVE THE BUDDHA NATURE? CHAN BUDDHISM

All classes will be held at the Heritage Center (Redding Community Center) at 11:00.

Classroom Materials

Download the classroom materials by clicking on this link or copying and pasting it into your browser:
<https://github.com/mcummingsny/Chinese-Buddhism>

About the Instructor

Mark Cummings holds degrees in East Asian (MA, 1976) and religious studies (MA, 1978; MPhil, 1980) from Yale University and has taught courses in the religious traditions of South and East Asia at Hunter College in

New York and Brown University. In 1982 he was hired by Macmillan Publishing Company to serve as the in-house editor and project manager for Asian philosophies and religions in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (16 vols., 1987), leading to a professional career in reference and educational publishing. Since then, he has served, variously, as development editor for multivolume reference works at Oxford University Press, editor in chief of the *Encyclopedia Americana*, and vice president and publisher of the reference division at Scholastic Library Publishing.