

Chinese Buddhism: Suggestions for Further Reading

Below are a few excellent sources of basic information about Buddhism and its development in China. They provide a good starting point for further reading and reflection.

General Works on Buddhism

Gethin, Rupert. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford, 1998. An excellent exposition of those ideas and practices that constitute a “common heritage” of an otherwise complex and diverse religious tradition. Contains chapters on Buddhist scriptures, core doctrines and their elaboration in the Abhidharma literature, the religious community, Buddhist cosmology, meditative practice, and Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught*, rev ed. New York, 1994. The classic introduction, still timely, to basic Buddhist doctrine and practice from the perspective of the Theravāda tradition. Does not discuss Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Schumann, Hans Wolfgang. *Buddhism, An Outline of its Teachings and Schools*, translated by Georg Feuerstein. Wheaton, Ill., 1973. A serviceable overview of the tradition for the general reader, particularly with respect to the foundational doctrines of early Buddhism.

Williams, Paul, with Alexander Wynne and Anthony Tribe. *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*. 2d. ed. New York, 2012. Considerably more detailed than most of the works above, and free from many of the sectarian limitations of their discussions. Summarizes a great deal of more recent scholarship on the development of Buddhism in India.

Williams, Paul. *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, 2d ed. New York, 2009. If Williams’s introduction to Buddhist thought in India has whetted your appetite for a deeper dive into the Mahāyāna, then this book is the main course. Includes chapters on the Huayan and Lotus traditions in China.

Buddhism in China

Ch’en, Kenneth K.S. *Buddhism in China, A Historical Survey*. Princeton, 1964. A detailed examination of the topic, from earliest times through the modern period, with considerable attention to both institutional and doctrinal history.

Ch’en, Kenneth K.S. *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*. Princeton, 1973. A detailed look at the influence of Buddhism on Chinese ethical, political, economic, literary, and educational life.

Wright, Arthur. *Buddhism in Chinese History*. Stanford, 1959. This little (127 pages) book remains the best overall introduction to the growth and assimilation of the tradition in China. As the title indicates, it emphasizes the large-scale social, political, and institutional forces that bore upon the process.

Yü Chün-fang. *Chinese Buddhism: A Thematic History*. Honolulu, 2020. As the title indicates, this useful and clearly written book considers the tradition topically, with chapters on festivals, cults of Buddhist divinities, and doctrinal and devotional schools. The two concluding chapters, on Buddhism and gender

and Buddhism in modern China, treat important topics not typically covered in general surveys of the tradition.

Textual Anthologies

Conze, Edward, *Buddhist Scriptures*. Harmondsworth, 1959. Useful especially for its grouping of texts by topic.

Conze, Edward et al., eds. *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages*. New York, 1964. Texts from the Mainstream (largely, Theravāda), Mahāyāna, and Tantric traditions, concentrating on issues of doctrine and religious practice. Chinese and Japanese texts receive only brief attention.

deBary, Wm. Theodore et al., eds. *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China, and Japan*. New York, 1969. Representative texts from India, China, and Japan, with brief introductions.

deBary, Wm. Theodore and Irene Bloom, comps. *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol 1, *From Earliest Times to 1600*. 2d ed. New York, 1999. Part Three, “Later Daoism and Mahāyāna Buddhism in China,” contains a representative selection of Buddhist texts of importance in China, with excellent introductory discussions. Important also for its coverage of “Dark Learning,” or *xuanxue* (see the Glossary for a brief definition) and the development of the Daoist church.

Reference Works and Websites

Buswell, Robert E. and Donald S. Lopez, Jr.. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton, 2014. A meticulously written and edited dictionary, with more detailed explanations than are usually required by the general reader. Nonetheless, the comprehensive scope of this work makes it invaluable for serious students of the tradition.

Klcey, Michael. *Buddhism, A Guide to Research*, 2d ed. <https://research.lib.buffalo.edu/buddhism/home>. From the University of Buffalo comes this “comprehensive overview of the most authoritative scholarly and popular resources on the life and teachings of the Buddha, the origins, history, ideas, beliefs, and practices of Buddhism across the globe, and a selection of links to further digital resources.” A useful bibliographical tool and a good starting place for further research.