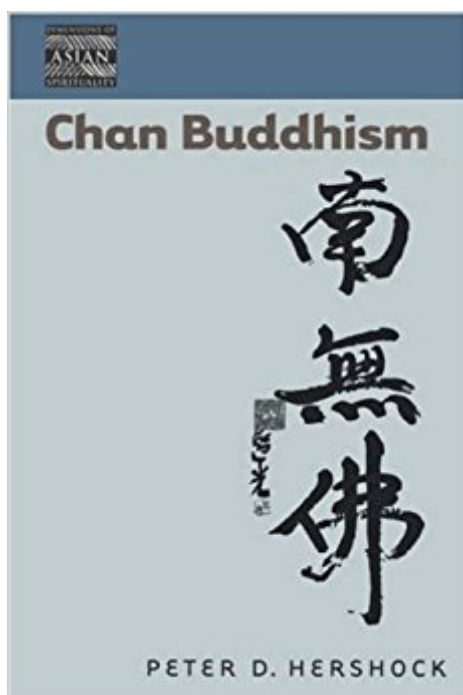


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Chan Buddhism (Dimensions Of Asian Spirituality)



Synopsis

Chan Buddhism has become paradigmatic of Buddhist spirituality. Known in Japan as Zen and in Korea as Son, it is one of the most strikingly iconoclastic spiritual traditions in the world. This succinct and lively work clearly expresses the meaning of Chan as it developed in China more than a thousand years ago and provides useful insights into the distinctive aims and forms of practice associated with the tradition, including its emphasis on the unity of wisdom and practice; the reality of "sudden awakening"; the importance of meditation; the use of "shock tactics"; the centrality of the teacher-student relationship; and the celebration of enlightenment narratives, or koans. Unlike many scholarly studies, which offer detailed perspectives on historical development, or guides for personal practice written by contemporary Buddhist teachers, this volume takes a middle path between these two approaches, weaving together both history and insight to convey to the general reader the conditions, energy, and creativity that characterize Chan. Following a survey of the birth and development of Chan, its practices and spirituality are fleshed out through stories and teachings drawn from the lives of four masters: Bodhidharma, Huineng, Mazu, and Linji. Finally, the meaning of Chan as a living spiritual tradition is addressed through a philosophical reading of its practice as the realization of wisdom, attentive mastery, and moral clarity.

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Customer Reviews

A superb introduction to a highly influential form of Buddhist spiritual practice. Both highly readable

and philosophically rigorous, Hershock's book would make an excellent secondary source in any college-level course on Chinese religion or philosophy, Buddhism, or contemporary religious practice.-- "Southeast Review of Asian Studies"

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Without picking or choosing, how to review this book? There's much helpful history here. Did you know that in one Buddhist university, Nalanda, there were at least 10,000 students and 2,000 faculty in residence by the 7th century. That in 707 as much as 80% of the total wealth of the Chinese empire may have belonged to Buddhist organizations and, as such, been untaxed? That in the 8th century, 1 out of 85 Chinese were either a Buddhist monk or nun? That between 755 and 764 A.D. two-thirds of all Chinese either died or were missing (missing to where?). That it was the persecutions of Buddhists that led to Chan's special place as a surviving Buddhist teaching, because it depended much less than on Buddhist teachings on the texts that were to a large extent destroyed during the persecutions. There's much helpful insight from Hershock into the relevance of Chan to Buddhist practitioners then and now. That willful control would only lead to further need to control. That the positive qualities of a Buddha don't rise above the ordinary world. That moral clarity is important but cannot be contained in rules but instead requires skillful improvisation. That compassionate engagement is more important than finding any correct posture. That teachers have nothing to teach and students nothing to learn. That without complete confidence in yourself, you will proceed in confusion. That there is no time to step back to consider because life is moving ahead too quickly. That we must somehow, as a famous koan said, stop picking and choosing. That we need not to waste energy because we need it to have complete presence. And more. Where did Hershock acquire so much wisdom? Undoubtedly in good measure from his study of Chan and from his own Buddhist practice but not every Buddhist or scholar has so much to offer.

This is an excellent book. I have read it now a number of times and continue to read it again -- it is so rich, what is here so clearly applies to practice -- I highly recommend this for anyone with a Chan or Zen practice -- and for those who have any interest in these areas.

Really helpful. Hershock's writing style is very accessible and precise.

Good overview of Buddhism's start and spread around Asia and how it was adapted by other countries and regions. Well written and interesting for group discussions.

This is one of the required readings in my Buddhism training. A great book which gives us some application, history and information. It's not the easiest book to get through, but it isn't hard either. If you're looking for layman's terms on Buddhism, you might check out Buddhism Plain and Simple, or the Complete Idiot's Guide to Buddhism, or Buddhism for Dummies.

Need this book for Chinese philosophy. My professor was in love with this book. For me person, I am not too keen on Chinese philosophy but this isn't to say the book was not clear and concise. Gear towards those with a keen interest in philosophy with a focus on Chan Buddhism. Overall the book was in perfect condition practically brand new.

The title of this book is misleading and should be renamed to fit the content more accurately. I originally bought this book because of the above review and because I am finishing a college degree in a Prior Learning experience program. Because I spent 6 years as a Zen Buddhist monk I am writing huge essays on my learning for credit. So here I am reading several books on the history of Buddhism trying to put together a history based on several sources. I am not writing my own book, but several large thesis's. I buy this book with several others under the impression that it would contain an in depth history of Chan Buddhism, instead I find it's not written by a scholar but reads like a college thesis paper written by someone with a huge cultural chip on their shoulder. Skip the introduction, do yourself a favor on that one. Sure, there is some history in the book but it is combined with just really poorly written and ethnocentric personal philosophy. He may be a scholar but he does not give a clear history of Chan compared with Dumoulin. The book is history interwoven with the author's personal beliefs about what Buddhism represents in a cultural, anthropological view. But Peter Hershock writes it as if he thinks he's a Dharma master. If you want a book on Buddhist philosophy then buy one on that, if you're looking for a book on Buddhist history then buy one for that. This book attempts to be both but is not. One of the real give aways to Hershock's inexperience and ethnocentric nonsense comes when reading the author's explanation of how and why Indians cremate their dead. As I spent many months in India and weeks in Varanasi, I have witnessed the burning ghats where people are cremated 24 hours a day. As a

monk you have to go there to meditate upon death. If you've been to India and seen this, when you come to this part in the book you'll know this author has no idea what he's talking about and has never seen it with his own eyes. Not a useful book in any form. No philosophical gnosis and at the same time no evidence of strong intellectual mastery over the history of Buddhism. Try Ayya Khema if you want real Buddhist dharma, John Snellings Buddhist Handbook if you want something more accurate and scholarly than the complete idiots guide but just as easy to read. If you want serious history of Chan try Heinrich Dumoulin or Noble Reat or learn Japanese, Chinese and Sanskrit.

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