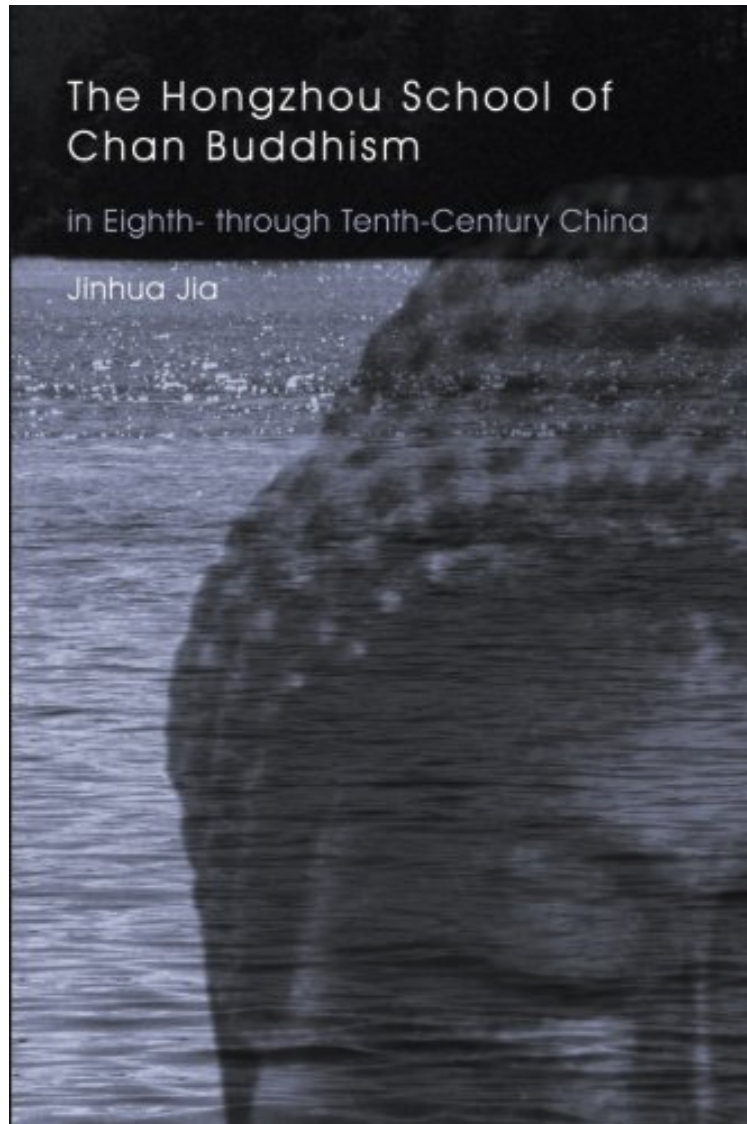


# The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism in Eighth- through Tenth-Century China

*Jinhua Jia*

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**Jinhua Jia : The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism in Eighth- through Tenth-Century China** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism in Eighth- through Tenth-Century China:

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. "But you shall shine more bright in these contents than unswept stone..."By Crazy FoxWhat are the chances that two excellent books on the Hongzhou School would be published

within months of each other? So it is, though. Jinhua Jia's "The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism" and Mario Poceski's "Ordinary Mind as the Way" (Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism) both add much to our knowledge of this otherwise relatively understudied but immensely influential aspect of Chan/Zen Buddhism in Tang China, and both came out just recently in 2007. Independently and spontaneously, no less, according to the inscrutable operations of some scholarly zeitgeist. Both too are indispensable in their own ways. By rights I should be focusing more on Jia's book here. As happenstance would have it, though, I just finished reading Poceski's book about a week ago or so, and my impressions are still too fresh to make this anything but a rather comparative evaluation. Like Poceski, Jia convincingly undercuts the eccentric and iconoclastic images of Mazu, Baizhang, and the Hongzhou school, showing through careful and judicious use of reliably datable texts that they were very much conservatively monastic monks with a thorough grounding in the Buddhist scriptural canon. Jia's method is much more rigorously and thoroughly philological, and she leads the reader along in an intricate process of uncovering different layers in the encounter dialogues (sources ruled out by Poceski), bits of which seem to be authentic historically according to her. Sometimes this seems tedious at first, but then when Jia marshals all the details and makes her points, it all falls into place and the reader's patience is rewarded. Also like Poceski, Jia first establishes what can be known historically about Mazu and his school, and then goes on to examine their characteristic religious doctrines and practices. In Jia's case, though, she gives more focus to the Hongzhou School's later attempts to achieve orthodoxy and explores within that process its supposed schism with the Shi-tou School [please pardon the hyphen], arguing in conclusion that this split was a retrospective narrative cooked up considerably later for clear polemical reasons. She also succeeds in shedding fascinating new light on an old tangle, the authorship of the monastic regulations attributed to Baizhang which supposedly initiated Chan's institutional independence. Jia compellingly examines the existing sources (including a few previously overlooked ones) and demonstrates clearly that these rules are neither the creation of Baizhang Huaihai himself as per the standard normative narratives nor a Song Dynasty invention from scratch as per the academic debunkers--and, a surprise for both sides, far from freeing Chan from reliance on the Vinaya rules, they originally reinforced that reliance. If there is one thing that's annoying about this fine study, it's that Jia sometimes speaks in terms perhaps a bit too categorically certain--that something MUST be a forgery or MUST be authentic. Surely, despite Jia's considerable acumen here, we are dealing with high probabilities rather than absolutes. That said, I imagine few have done the requisite textual homework to call her bluff. In the end, too, it is highly instructive to read this book soon after Poceski's: both take off from very similar starting points and reach similar overall conclusions, and yet the details in their discussions diverge and their investigations branch off in differing directions. If nothing else, lots more interesting work awaits in this area, but a good start has been made with these two pivotal studies. Jia's is not nearly as smooth a read, but it makes up for that in methodological brass tacks. Highly recommended. 2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Loved it!

By A Halaw  
Of all the great Zen ancestors--Dahui, Huineng, Linji, Chinul, Yunmen, Layman Pang--I would have to say that Mazu touches me the most deeply. His directness--"Ordinary Mind is the Way"--and unwavering insistence on revealing the spiritual life of this mind and this body are just remarkable, and inspire my life and Zen practice. To say that Mazu is a Zen giant is an understatement. Almost every Zen school in history can trace its lineage back to either him or Shitou, so naturally I want to learn as much as I can about this iconic figure in Chan history. I first encountered his teaching in Sun-Face Buddha, a book I recommend to everyone, and then more critically in Zongmi's polemical criticism of the Hongzhou school (see previous post). Zongmi, last patriarch in the Heze school of Zen and a young contemporary of Mazu's students, considered the Hongzhou approach iconoclastic, antinomian, and morally myopic. And yet, whenever I read Zongmi's criticism of Mazu's teachings, such as "All dharmas are Buddha's liberation. All dharmas are liberation," and "The Way does not belong to cultivation," I kept thinking, What are you talking about, Zongmi? Mazu is the man! Everything he said resonated with me. This has led me on a quest to learn more about Mazu's highly inspirational and influential Hongzhou school. My first stop is Jinhua Jia's The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism, a fascinating exploration of myth versus reality in the historical development of Chan through the 8th and 10th centuries. Zen history abounds with lore, or "apocrypha" as scholars like to call it. And part of what Jinhua Jia does is dispel a lot of the fabrications that Zen has accumulated. For instance, Jia challenges the idea that Baizhang composed the monastic code that he is famous for developing. Jia attributes this to Baizhang's students, whom he credits with much of the success that Mazu's Hongzhou school garnered after the great master's death. Jia even reveals that much of what scholars and Zen students have identified as the "golden age of Zen" during the Tang dynasty is in fact inaccurate, a historical embellishment of Song-era Chan students. This includes the very idea that Mazu was an iconoclast who eschewed Zen practice. Much of Hongzhou's trademark encounter dialogues--exchanges between a student and master--were fictional, composed after the masters were long dead, and only retroactively inserted as if they had existed since the Tang dynasty. But don't take my word for it; Jia does a much better job at convincing readers than I ever will. What Jia develops is a lucid, humanized account of Mazu's life and unique approach to Zen. He stresses time and again, that though Mazu's Zen was criticized as being heretical, Mazu was simply making explicit teachings from the Tathagatagarbha literature that had hitherto been implicit. What I walked away from The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism with was a richer understanding of Mazu and his brilliant Hongzhou school, as well as how he fit into the

complex historical milieu of Chan. I have a yearning to learn as much as I can about Mazu, and Jinhua Jia's book has both fed and fueled that quest. He has left me intrigued as to how much influence Mazu and his Hongzhou school had on Korean Seon, Kanhua Chan, and Seung Sahn's lineage in particular. If you are at all interested in how Zen developed--and I certainly am!, because I want to know where it came from--then read this book. Jia's scholarship is meticulous, his conclusions fascinating, and his prose incisive. 3 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A good reference, not much more. By Gregory O. Schnurr If you want a history lesson, written in the style of an academic, with endless foot notes and references, this is the book for you. If you however are a layman seeking Chan information, I would pass. It was interesting, with a lot of history, but my search is far more personal so I walked away from it rather disappointed. The author has done his homework, but it is rather a boring read, It's more of a text book, and not a very interesting one at that.

A comprehensive study of the Hongzhou school of Chan Buddhism, long regarded as the Golden Age of this tradition, using many previously ignored texts, including stele inscriptions. This book provides a wide-ranging examination of the Hongzhou school of Chan Buddhism the precursor to Zen Buddhism under Mazu Daoyi (709-788) and his successors in eighth- through tenth-century China, which was credited with creating a Golden Age or classical tradition. Jinhua Jia uses stele inscriptions and other previously ignored texts to explore the schools teachings and history. Defending the school as a full-fledged, significant lineage, Jia reconstructs Mazu's biography and resolves controversies about his disciples. In contrast to the many scholars who either accept or reject the traditional Chan histories and discourse records, she thoroughly examines the Hongzhou literature to differentiate the original, authentic portions from later layers of modification and recreation. The book describes the emergence and maturity of encounter dialogue and analyzes the new doctrines and practices of the school to revise the traditional notion of Mazu and his followers as iconoclasts. It also depicts the strivings of Mazu's disciples for orthodoxy and how the criticisms of and reflections on Hongzhou doctrine led to the schism of this line and the rise of the Shitou line and various houses during the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods. Jia refutes the traditional Chan genealogy of two lines and five houses and calls for new frameworks in the study of Chan history. An annotated translation of datable discourses of Mazu is also included. What Jia develops is a lucid, humanized account of Mazu's life and unique approach to Zen. If you are at all interested in how Zen developed then read this book. Jia's scholarship is meticulous, his [sic] conclusions fascinating, and his [sic] prose incisive. Zen and Back Again This is a gem of sinological scholarship the author's research diligence is impressive indeed. Any specialist in Chinese religions allowed to take only a single secondary work on this crucial middle period of Chinese Chan history to some imaginary desert island would certainly select this volume for its encyclopedic citation of primary and secondary sources, its integrated strategy of critically defining a corpus of authentic documents followed by their systematic analysis, and its closely reasoned analysis of historical and doctrinal issues. H-Net Reviews (H-Buddhism) There is certainly much to admire in this work, which will be consulted in future by all scholars working on the development of Chan, especially for its accounts of long-disputed sources. Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies Jia critically surveys the available scholarship in Japanese, English, and Chinese, and puts forth her own conclusions supported by extensive citations of traditional Chinese sources that have generally been overlooked. Steven Heine, author of *Dogen and the Koan Tradition: A Tale of Two Shobogenzo Texts*

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**About the Author** Jinhua Jia is Assistant Professor of Chinese Literature at the City University of Hong Kong.