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University of North Carolina, Greensboro

The Mirth of Enlightenment: Tales of Su Shi and Encounter Dialogues in Middle Period China

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4:00-5:30pm
HG 1010

Chinese poet Su Shi (1037–1101) is portrayed as both a paragon of humor and a famous Buddhist layman in premodern Chinese vernacular literature. While the Buddhist influence on Su's own literary writings is well studied, the relationship between Buddhism and Su Shi's image as a comic figure remains ambiguous. This talk draws from Song period (960–1279) anecdotes and Buddhist literature to show how encounter dialogues, commonly known as gong'an or kōan, a genre largely studied as religious texts, played a significant role in shaping elite and vernacular imaginations of Su Shi as a humorist.

Xiao Rao received his Ph.D. in East Asian Languages and Cultures from Stanford University in 2019. He is currently Assistant Professor of Chinese Studies at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. As a scholar of premodern Chinese humanities, his research interests include anecdotal literature, poetry, and the intersection between religion and literati culture in Middle Period China. He is also interested in studies pertaining to theories of emotion, particularly cultural studies of laughter and literary trauma studies. His current book project, *Tales of Wit and Enlightenment: Buddhism and Literati Humor in Song Dynasty China*, unveils a rich vein of connections between Chan Buddhist literature and various forms of entertainment preserved in Song period anecdotes.

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