

Chapter 5

*From the Chinese Vinaya Tradition  
to Chan Regulations*  
Continuity and Adaptation

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CHINESE CHAN hagiographers have viewed the establishment of pure rules (*qinggui* 清規), or Chan monastic codes, as a decisive moment in the history of the Chan tradition, and the codes themselves as declarations of independence from other Buddhist schools, especially the Vinaya (Lü 律). Traditionally, Chan Master Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (749–814) was thought to have initiated this watershed movement by drawing up a set of innovative monastic rules for his own community, resulting in his commemoration as one of the great patriarchs of Chan along with Bodhidharma and Huineng 慧能 (638–713). This picture, however, has recently been challenged by modern scholars, most notably T. Griffith Foulk (1987 and 1993), who argue that Baizhang's position as the pioneer of the monastic code and the independent Chan monastery is, in fact, a fiction created during the Song dynasty (960–1279). Furthermore, as demonstrated by Morten Schlütter in this volume, the "Vinaya school monasteries" from which Baizhang is supposed to have separated the Chan school turn out to be simply a reference to the hereditary monasteries that constituted the majority of all Buddhist institutions. The earliest Chan monastic codes dating from the Song are still extant. Although scholars have studied this material, little attention has been paid to the question of whether such codes can be understood as declarations of independence by the Chan school.

In this essay I will place Chan regulations in the context of Chinese translations of vinaya literature and commentaries on that literature. When we examine the earliest extant Chan monastic code, the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* (*Chanyuan qinggui* 禪苑清規, 1103), we find that a great deal of its source material and content

is based directly on vinaya and on the works of the great vinaya advocate Daoan 道安 (312–385) and the vinaya master Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667). The many textual parallels between vinaya and the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* challenge the widely held belief that Chan monasteries were unique and distinct from those run according to vinaya procedures. In the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* we find not a rhetoric of distinction but an often word-for-word transmission of vinaya rules. Such an appropriation and adaptation of vinaya rules clearly shows that Chan was not a movement born of an innovative declaration of independence. At the same time, however, a close look at the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* brings to light another discovery: its incorporation of Chinese governmental policies and traditional Chinese etiquette based on Confucian ideology, both of which are absent from the vinaya texts. The *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* elaborates on certain rules and regulations with respect to the influence of Chinese social and cultural norms. Given these additions, one is compelled to ask if they merely demonstrate the inevitable infiltration of Chinese norms into Chan practices based on Indian vinaya or if the Chan school as represented by the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* was self-consciously calling into question the legitimacy of a purely Indian vinaya by developing a more sinicized one.

Using the earliest extant Chan monastic documents available, we can, through an examination of the differences or similarities that existed between the Chan tradition and monastic procedures based on vinaya regulations, demonstrate both a clear sense of continuity traceable to the original vinaya texts from India and an adaptation to the surrounding Chinese culture. Due to the length of the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries*, it is impossible to discuss the entire work in this essay. Instead, I have selected only those portions that will help determine which textual elements may be identified as having been adopted from the vinaya and which reveal traces of Chinese cultural influence.

Because the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* was written for use in public monasteries, it provides us with a wealth of information about monastic life in twelfth-century Song China. The code offers very specific guidelines for itinerant monks, emphasizes the importance of studying under masters at various monasteries, prescribes the proper protocol for attending retreats, and details the procedure

for requesting an abbot's instruction. A significant portion of the text is devoted to administrative hierarchy within the monastery, including the duties and powers of monastic officers. An equal amount of attention is given to the proper social deportment of monks of various ranks vis-à-vis one another, especially with regard to decorum at tea ceremonies, chanting rituals, and monastic auctions.

As stated earlier, many Chan practices can be linked to scholar monks who studied vinaya and whose codifications preceded Baizhang. An examination of the works of Vinaya Master Daoxuan reveals that some of the major features of Chan regulations originated in the vinaya scholastic tradition initiated by Daoxuan and were implemented much earlier than has been suspected. But because Daoxuan himself largely preserved practices already codified by the earlier Daoan, through his works we can discern indirectly the number of Chan monastic practices carried out today that can be traced as far back as the fourth century. For instance, the use of the octagonal hammer and its stand, which occupy the center of the *saṅgha* hall (*sengtang* 僧堂) in Chan monasteries, is not a Chan invention but dates from the time of Daoxuan, who, in turn, inherited the practice from Daoan. The striking stand and hammer are described in Daoxuan's *Four Part Vinaya Practice and Service Comments* (*Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao* 四分律刪繁補缺行事鈔), his main commentary on the *Four Part Vinaya*. According to this commentary, during the ceremony of precept instruction, the rector stands at the "place for signaling quietness" (*dajing chu* 打靜處) with the roll-call stick (*chou* 籌) in his left hand and the hammer in his right. The text also provides instruction on how to strike the stand:

First the rector stands outside the gate, prepares his demeanor, and presses his palms together. He then enters through the side door and approaches the striking position. After standing with his palms closed, he lifts the hammer with his right hand and touches it to the stand silently. He then hits the stand with the hammer once, being careful not to do so too loudly. After this he silently rests the hammer on the stand, holding the handle. Then he presses his palms together and makes the appropriate announcements. If there is a meal offering, a chanting benediction, or a prayer to be made, all must wait until the rector has announced the proper procedure. The hammer cannot be used for any other purposes except to pacify the assembly. (Fasc. 27, T 40.146b16–21)

Thus the method of striking the stand with the hammer in a Chan monastery is very much like that found in the Vinaya tradition. (The *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* provides a more detailed description, however [fasc. 6, 217–224; see Yifa 2002, 200–201].) Various verses chanted by Tang- and Song-period Chan monks described in Daoxuan’s commentary can also be traced back to Daoan’s time. The “verse of five contemplations,” chanted by Chan monks before meals up to the present day, has its provenance in Daoxuan’s *Four Part Vinaya Practice and Service Comments* (T 40.84a9–12; 40.128b3–129a13).<sup>1</sup> The use of special objects to maintain vigilance during meditation in the *sarīgha* halls and the striking of a signal instrument to summon the assembly are both first depicted in the vinaya.

The *Ten Recitation Vinaya* (fasc. 40, T 23.288c20–289b6), for example, relates the following story of some monks who were unable to meditate without falling asleep. The Buddha allowed them to wash their heads to prevent drowsiness; when this did not succeed, he gave permission to other monks to pour water on them, or nudge them by hand, or cast balls at them. Eventually the Buddha allowed the use of a “meditation stick” (*chanzhang* 禪杖). This stick is held by one of the monks (exactly which monk is not specified) over his head, with one hand on each end. He strikes any monk who falls asleep and returns to his meditation position only when he is sure no one is asleep. Another item approved by the Buddha is the “meditation tablet” (*chanzhen* 禪鎮). A string is run through a hole in the tablet down either side of the head and tied to each ear; a monk falling asleep during meditation will cause the tablet to fall, waking himself up with a start.

Similar objects and practices appear in the *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* (fasc. 35, T 22.513a5–b7). Here a junior monk specifically is given charge of the meditation stick. Even if his teacher (*ācārya*) should fall asleep, the monk must wake him, out of respect for the Dharma. First, he shakes the stick in front of the sleeper three times. If this does not rouse him, the sleeper is poked in the knee with the stick. Once a monk is awakened, he must take over the stick duties. During cold weather, the Buddha allowed monks who were shivering and could not properly hold the stick the use of a cloth “meditation ball” (*chanqiu* 禪毬), which is cast in front of the sleeper.

Even the use of four nesting bowls at mealtimes, often thought

unique to the Chan monastery, can be found in the vinaya texts. The origin of the four bowls is related in the *Five Part Vinaya* (fasc. 15, T 22.103a23–27). After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha continued to enjoy the happiness of meditation. When five hundred merchants offered the Buddha honey, the Buddha suddenly perceived that all Buddhas in the past had received such offerings in bowls as will all Buddhas in the future. And now, he, too, was receiving food in a bowl. When the four guardian deities divined this thought, each one offered the Buddha a stone bowl that contained natural and pure fragrances. The Buddha accepted all four bowls with equal gratitude. He stacked them on his left palm and with his right hand pressed them into one. The *Four Part Vinaya* (fasc. 39, T 22.848b27–28) states that the Buddha permitted cream, oil, honey, and stone honey to be served in the bowls and ordered them stored “the smallest bowl (*jianci* 鍵瓷) [stacked] inside the second smallest, the second smallest into the third, and the third into the largest bowl.”

Ordination seniority as the key factor in determining the order of monks in their various activities is a concept emphasized both in Chan pure rules and in the vinaya. The vinaya explains that when monks did not know how to decide the seniority of members, some suggested that it be based on the caste system, others suggested appearance, still others suggested personal cultivation. The Buddha then told the well-known bird-monkey-elephant story. A bird, a monkey, and an elephant who lived near a tree were arguing one day about which one of them should be considered the senior of the group. The elephant insisted that he could recall that when he was young the top of the tree touched his stomach as he passed over it. The monkey contended that when was young he could bite the top of the tree. Finally the bird announced that long ago he remembered eating a piece of fruit and spitting out the seed from which the tree eventually grew. Thus the bird was regarded as the most senior. By way of analogy, the Buddha proclaimed that those who received full ordination first, who had been at the monastery the longest, should occupy the senior seats (*Five Part Vinaya*, fasc. 17, T 22.121a12–25; *Four Part Vinaya*, fasc. 50, T 22.940a7–27; *Ten Recitation Vinaya*, fasc. 34, T 23.242b15–c13).

The vinaya concept of dividing items or subjects into two categories—pure and impure (or soiled)—was also adopted in the Chan monastic code. According to the *Pure Rules for Chan Monas-*

teries, “pure clothes” (*jingyi* 淨衣), which include the monk’s robes, short overshirt (*pianshan* 偏衫; lit., “side clothes”), lined jacket, and vest, should be placed in the front knapsack. “Soiled clothes” (*chuyi* 觸衣) such as the bedsheet, cotton clothes, and undergarments are placed in the rear knapsack. Daoxuan’s *Exhortation on Manners and Etiquette for Novices in Training* (*Jiaojie xinxue biqiu xinghu liuyi* 教誡新學比丘行護律儀, T 45.873a24–25) indicates that in the bathroom the “pure pole” and the “soiled pole” are to be used for hanging only corresponding garments. The Chan code notes that the top half of the outside of a bowl is “pure,” while the bottom half is “soiled.” (According to Daoxuan, “the upper two-thirds of the outside of a bowl is considered ‘pure,’ the lower third is ‘soiled’” [T 45.871b26–27].) The walking stick that a Chan monk takes on his travels is also divided into two parts: The handle of the stick with twigs on it is considered the “soiled end” (*chutou* 觸頭), the tip with no twigs the “pure end” (*jingtou* 淨頭). For the most part, the handle of any object is considered “soiled”: In Daoxuan’s works the part of the ladle that dips into the water is regarded as “pure,” but the handle is “soiled.” Stipulations as to which foot must be used first to enter a door or gate in a Chan monastery and rituals and ceremonies such as the auction of a deceased monk’s possessions, the offering of food to all sentient beings, and the burning of incense while circumambulating the hall—all of these have clear precedents in the vinaya.

The final section of this essay will focus on Chan regulations in the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* that include elements foreign to the original vinaya texts—elements that, as stated above, incorporated traditional Chinese etiquette. Prevailing Chinese customs exerted a major influence on the composition of Chan Buddhist monastic codes and can themselves be traced in large part to the ancient Confucian scriptures known as the *Book of Rites* (*Lijing* 禮經), or the *Three Rites* (*Sanli* 三禮): namely, the *Zhouli* 周禮, the *Yili* 儀禮, and the *Liji* 禮記. In adopting many aspects of Confucian governmental protocol, the Buddhist monastery came to resemble the imperial court in miniature with the abbot as emperor, including the design of the abbot’s residence and the method of his sermons in the dharma hall. Furthermore, the hierarchical staff of the monastic administration was created in direct imitation of civil and military positions in the Chinese government. The rules of decorum for the highly ritualized monastic tea ceremony have their direct

precedents in the literature of Confucianism, and worship of the ancient legendary emperors as national deities in Confucian tradition also found its way into the ceremonies held in Buddhist monasteries. For example, if we examine the layout of buildings in a Buddhist monastery of the Song period, paying special attention to details surrounding the abbot, we see how this is so. The abbot's residency is modeled after the private quarters of the emperor, the original conception of which can be found in the *Book of Rites*. In most monasteries, the abbot's quarters (*fangzhang* 方丈) were built behind the dharma hall, the two bridged by an intermediary chamber known as the *qintang* 寢堂. The abbot gave sermons in the dharma hall on formal occasions but withdrew to receive visitors and give more private sermons in the *qintang* and retired to the rearmost quarters to sleep—an arrangement largely adopted from imperial custom. In the annotation to the *Liji* (see the *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏, 1982, 1.1362a), the Chinese glyph *qin* 寢 refers to the rear section of an imperial ancestral temple, a meaning clearly explained by the annotation to the *Liji*: “The front part of the [ancestral] shrine is called the ‘*miao*’ 廟; the rear part is called the ‘*qin*.’” More detailed annotation is given in this commentary (1982, 1.1362a–b): “The *miao* is where deities are received; it is considered a place of honor and therefore it is located in the front. The *qin* is where [the ancestral] clothing is kept; it is considered inferior and therefore it is in the rear. Attached to the east and west sides of the *miao* are two chambers, separated by partitions; the *qin*, however, is just one large room.”

From the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* it is evident that the tea ceremony, held on a variety of occasions, was a major component of social life inside the Chinese monastery. The abbot and the prior (*jianyuan* 監院) as the chief of administrators held tea services to commemorate the transfer of duties from old to new administrators or from old to new chief officers. At the commencement and closing of the summer retreat, the abbot, the prior, and the chief seat of the *saṅgha* hall (*shouzuò* 首座) all sponsored tea ceremonies. The abbot was also expected to hold tea services for visiting government officers. Tea services were sponsored by junior monks as well. Even those who were not members of the administrative staff were responsible for holding a tea ceremony for the abbot and administrators. The abbot's dharma heirs and select disciples (*rushi dizi* 入室弟子) sponsored a tea ceremony for the abbot. These ceremonies

were indispensable for acquainting members of the assembly with administrators and were so frequent that descriptions of ceremony procedures, down to the most minute details, constitute a central part of the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* and all subsequent monastic codes.

During the Song the tea service became an important part of social life throughout China. It seems clear that the Buddhist community simply adopted a custom predominant in secular society. The development of commerce and industry as well as the growing trend toward urbanization exposed people to a far greater level of material comfort than they had previously known. The drinking of tea was no longer restricted to the aristocracy but became a habit of the common people. Tea was now an indispensable item, as much a daily staple as rice and salt even for the peasant in the countryside. Over time many temples began to grow tea on their estates for their own needs or to sell. Vinaya and Tiantai monastic codes of the later Yuan period contain sections describing tea ceremony protocol, indicating that other schools were eventually affected by the prevailing tea culture and followed practices similar to those found in Chan regulations.

Although Buddhist monasteries adopted the practice of drinking tea from secular society, the Chan tea service undoubtedly wielded its own influence on social customs outside the monastery. Any visitor to a Chan monastery would have been treated to the sweetened drink served in the context of a tea ceremony and would have seen the skillful production of tea on the premises. The monastery helped promote a ritualized conception of tea drinking that ultimately extended beyond its walls, and may have served directly as a major distributor of tea for the Chinese market as well. The extremely meticulous tea service etiquette outlined in monastic regulations—including instructions on where each person should walk, who should bow or speak to whom and when—cannot be found in the original vinaya; it is an invention of Chinese Buddhism that reflects a culture rooted in classical Confucian works, particularly the *Yili*.

The Chan monastic code offers many examples of “humble speech,” the ritualized verbal exchanges demanded at auspicious moments between members of the monastery. Characterized by hyperbole and extreme deference, the self-deprecating nature of these expressions can be seen in the following exchanges. An abbot offers



tea to a visiting government official: “We would now like to offer our low-grade tea (or low-grade sweetened drink) and we will follow all of Official X’s instructions.” If the official offers a compliment, the abbot is ready with a scripted reply: “This low-grade tea is merely a token of our sincerity. It is not worthy for you” (fasc. 5, 177–183). At the end of a ceremony sponsored by the prior or chief seat, the host thanks the abbot: “Today our humble low-grade tea (or, Today our inferior sweetened drink . . .) has received your grace, master, for out of kindness you have stooped to receive it; and for this we are extremely grateful” (fasc. 5, 184–189). Similarly, after a ceremony sponsored by the assembly, the monastic host expresses the assembly’s gratitude with these words: “Today’s tea (or, Today’s sweetened drink . . .) was served specially for X and Y. Although the tea is of a low grade and the seats are uncomfortable, they came anyway. For this fact we are extremely grateful.” As a show of appreciation to the other guests, the host repeats his expressions of gratitude: “Today the tea (or sweetened drink) was served especially for X and Y. I am afraid that this ceremony was not worth bothering you [i.e., the other guests accompanying them]” (fasc. 5, 193–193).

Such formalized language expressing humility and indebtedness has clear precedents in the Confucian book of protocol, the *Yili*, which provides this account of a duke inviting foreign dignitaries to a banquet:

The invitation is extended to them [through envoys] in the following form: “Our unworthy Prince has some inferior wine, and, wishing your honors to spend a little time with him, he sends me to invite you.”

To this [the messengers of the guests] reply: “Our unworthy Prince is a feudatory of yours, so let your Prince not incur disgrace by conferring benefits on us mere messengers. Your servants venture to decline.”

The messenger [of the host] then replies: “My unworthy Prince insists on saying that the wine is of poor quality, and sends me to press the invitation on your honors.”

To which the [messengers of the] guests reply: “Our unworthy Prince is a feudatory of yours, and your Prince should not demean himself by showing kindness to mere messengers. Your servants venture to persist in declining.”

The messenger [of the host] again replies: “My unworthy Prince persists in saying the wine is of no quality, and he sends me to urge his invitation on you.”

They then answer: “As we have failed to secure permission to decline, dare we do other than accept?”<sup>2</sup>

From this brief exchange we can discern rules of decorum that will later be standardized in the monastery. Some of these unspoken rules include a depreciation of anything of one’s own and observing the pattern of two humble refusals, under the pretense of unworthiness, followed by a seemingly reluctant acquiescence. Highly rhetorical language, so typical of Confucian etiquette, is evident in the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* when, for example, a candidate humbly refuses to accept a proposed abbacy out of respect for the soliciting monastery. Only when the envoys come with a third pressing invitation should the abbot accept the new appointment (fasc. 7, 250–252).

To return to the tea ceremony, members of the *saṅgha* must show extreme humility when bowing and walking. Once again, we find protocol that mirrors the meticulous courtesies described in the *Yili*. According to the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries*, the master of ceremonies (*xing fashi ren* 行法事人; lit., “the person who presides over the service”)<sup>3</sup> performs the ritual as follows:

After the midday meal, the bell is struck in front of the *saṅgha* hall. Everyone is seated and the master of ceremonies stands by the south [left] side of the front gate facing the Holy Monk. With his hands clasped, the master of ceremonies slowly bows and, leaving his position, comes up to the Holy Monk and again bows. Having done this, he stands before the incense burner, bows, opens the incense case, and with his left hand lifts up the incense. Having completed this, he steps back slightly and again bows. Once he has done this he goes to the rear door and bows to the guest of honor. He then turns to the south, approaches the Holy Monk, and bows. Then he turns north and bows to the abbot. He then circumambulates the hall and comes to the first seat from the north [right] side of the rear door. Bending his body, he bows and then moves to the first seat on the south [left] side and, bending his body, bows. If the master of ceremonies then moves to the outside section of the hall, he should bow first to the right-hand section and then to the left, reenter the hall, and approach the Holy Monk. He then bows, returns to his original position, bows, and then remains standing with hands clasped. (Fasc. 5, 184–189)

Here is an excerpt describing an offering of wine to a guest of honor from the chapter “The Banquet” in the *Yili*:

The master of ceremonies walks to where he can wash his cup and stands to the south of the vessel, facing northwest. The guest of honor then descends, and, standing to the west of the westernmost steps, faces east. The master of ceremonies then begs pardon for the undeserved honor of his company, and the guest replies in the proper fashion. Then the master of ceremonies, facing north, washes his hands and, sitting down, takes the drinking cup and washes it. The guest advances slightly and declines the honor [of accepting the drink]. The master of ceremonies, still sitting, places the drinking cup in the basket and, rising, responds with the appropriate words, whereupon the guest returns to his seat. When the master of ceremonies finishes the washing, the guest, with a salute, ascends [the platform] followed by the master of ceremonies. The guest bows in acknowledgment of the washing, and the master of ceremonies, standing at the guest's right side, lays down the drinking cup and responds with a bow. (Steele 1917, 1.125, with slight modifications)

Thus the protocol for the tea ceremony depicted in Buddhist codes reflects the rituals described in Confucian works, which, in turn, stem from carefully prescribed practices carried out by the imperial court and the nobility. In fact, it is possible that a great deal of monastic ritual was adopted directly from the highest levels of Chinese society. Many of the most renowned monks were sponsored by the court or by aristocrats and may have been influenced by their benefactors. At the same time, members of the gentry made social calls or extended visits to monasteries, and their presence may have had an effect on daily monastic life.

In this essay I have attempted to demonstrate that the earliest known records of the Chan monastic code were directly influenced by the vinaya texts, vinaya literature, and the Chinese cultural milieu of the times. These Chan texts, therefore, cannot be said to represent a departure from historical Indian Buddhism any greater than the gradual changes experienced by other contemporary Buddhist schools in China. If one were to isolate any single element of the Chan school that may be considered unique to the tradition, one could perhaps look to the practice of *gong'an* 公案 (J. *kōan*) introspection, which is a later development. In studying the earliest Chan codes, however, I have found no evidence that these regulations distinguish the observances of the Chan tradition from those customarily kept in monasteries governed by vinaya regulations or regulations devised in other Chinese Buddhist schools. In short,

this Chan monastic code can in no way be considered a declaration of Chan independence from the vinaya tradition although it offers some rather interesting points for further investigation into the subject of Chan identity vis-à-vis India or China. Thus we are left with a question for future inquiry: To what degree does the *Pure Rules for Chan Monasteries* reflect an attempt at a further sinicization of Buddhism?

### Notes

1. The five contemplations are: (1) to ponder the effort necessary to supply this food and to appreciate its origins; (2) to reflect on one's own virtue as insufficient to receive the offering; (3) to protect the mind's integrity, to depart from error, and, as a general principle, to avoid being greedy; (4) to consider the food as medicine and bodily nourishment that prevents emaciation; and (5) to receive this food as necessary for attaining enlightenment.

2. This English translation is from John Steele's *The I-li: Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial*, 1:145. The words in brackets are my own.

3. The master of ceremonies is usually the host of the ceremony. When the abbot sponsors a tea ceremony for the assembly, however, his attendant usually presides as the master of ceremonies.