

Another Look at Early *Chan*: Daoxuan, Bodhidharma, and the Three Levels Movement

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Abstract

As one of the earliest records pertaining to Bodhidharma, Daoxuan's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* is a crucial text in the study of so-called Early Chan. Though it is often thought that Daoxuan was attempting to promote the Bodhidharma lineage, recent studies have suggested that he was actually attacking Bodhidharma and his later followers. The present article suggests that such readings are incorrect and that Daoxuan was in fact attacking the followers of the Three Levels (*Sanjie*) movement founded by Xinxing, whose role in defining the meaning of *chan* during the seventh century has not been sufficiently appreciated.

Résumé

Étant un des premiers documents à parler de Bodhidharma, le *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* de Daoxuan constitue une source cruciale pour l'étude du "Chan primitif". Même si l'on considère le plus souvent que Daoxuan s'efforçait de promouvoir la lignée de Bodhidharma, plusieurs études récentes suggèrent qu'en fait il attaquait Bodhidharma et ses héritiers. L'auteur suggère que cette interprétation n'est pas correcte: en réalité Daoxuan s'attaquait aux adhérents du mouvement des "Trois niveaux" (*Sanjie*) fondé par Xinxing, dont la contribution à la définition du sens du *chan* pendant le VII^e siècle n'a pas encore été suffisamment appréciée.

Keywords

Buddhism, Chan, Daoxuan, Xinxing, *Sanjie* movement

In the words of Bernard Faure, “Although Bodhidharma’s biography is obscure, his life is relatively well known.”¹ Indeed, early records of this monk are so vague, and later hagiography embellishes him so extravagantly, that the best approach seems to be, as Faure ultimately suggests, that we treat Bodhidharma not as an individual but as a textual paradigm. In this view, Bodhidharma’s importance lies largely in his function as a literary trope.

But what kind of trope exactly? It would be a mistake, I submit, to take an understanding of Bodhidharma based on narrative material spanning several centuries and apply it uncritically to the very earliest of our sources. Yet, as I will argue in this article, some scholars have misread one key document pertaining to Bodhidharma in precisely this way, albeit with different results and to different ends. Correcting this mistake, moreover, may provide a new perspective on the development of *chan* (and Chan) in seventh-century China.

To clarify what I mean by this, a few definitions are in order concerning the problematic word *chan* 禪. In its most basic meaning *chan* is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word *dhyāna*, which, while referring on the one hand to specific stages of yogic attainment, is also used more generally for what in English we would likely call “meditation”;² in China the monks and nuns who specialized in this practice came to be known as *chan* masters (*chanshi* 禪師). By the Song dynasty, however, the title “*chan* master” usually referred to a special coterie of enlightened Buddhist masters (the “Chan lineage” *chanzong* 禪宗) who held themselves to be spiritual heirs of the then famous Bodhidharma. These masters and their characteristic teachings form what is usually referred to in English as “Chan Buddhism,” and it is in this meaning that I will use the term Chan (capital C).

The notion of a special lineage descending from Bodhidharma seems to have first appeared only in the late seventh century, more than a

¹ Faure 1986: 187. I would like to express my thanks to Robert Sharf, Koichi Shinohara, Chen Jinhua, Timothy Barrett, Jamie Hubbard, Robert Ashmore, and the anonymous reader for *T'oung Pao*, all of whom read drafts of this paper and offered numerous helpful comments. Chen Jinhua was particularly generous with his time, though in the end I have not followed all of his suggestions. Mistakes that remain as a result are entirely my own.

² But see Spoonberg 1986 on the difficulty of finding a Buddhist correlate to the word “meditation.”

hundred and fifty years after Bodhidharma's death. Thus, from a historical and analytical point of view, there are many figures, such as Bodhidharma himself and his immediate disciples, whom we should not consider as "Chan masters" even though they were integral to the mythology of the later Chan tradition. From the very beginning, however, Chan as an ideology seems to have arisen from monks who were indeed known in their time as *chan* masters (*chanshi*)—that is, meditation masters—or at least, to have looked back to them as its founders. We are thus confronted with a distinction that is lexically obscure yet analytically crucial, for early mediation masters do not necessarily have anything in common with later Chan, and later Chan did not necessarily emphasize meditation.

How and by whom the notion of a special transmission from Bodhidharma was developed is a complex issue, which mostly lies beyond the scope of this article. But I have dwelled on these definitions because part of what I am interested in is how *chan* as a concept and *chanshi* as a title came to mean something new while never fully shedding their old associations. Thus, in what follows I will argue that certain groups (such as the Three Levels movement) helped to change the meaning of *chan* during the seventh century; yet I am *not* making the claim that these groups had a direct historical connection with early Chan: rather, my intention is to suggest that early Chan, to the extent that it referred to itself as "Chan" and its proponents as "Chan masters", was building on a gradual evolution in the meaning of the word *chan* and in the social role of *chan* masters, which had begun long before.

Bodhidharma

One way to study this evolution is to look for concrete situations where the term *chan* was a site of contestation, where arguments were made as to who should count as a true practitioner of *chan*, whatever exactly that meant. And this is precisely what happens in one of the oldest sources to mention the monk Bodhidharma, Daoxuan's 道宣 (596–667) *Continuation of the Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳). In the concluding summary to the section on "*chan* practitioners" (*xichan* 習禪), Daoxuan presents his overall views on *chan* practice and his evaluation of the most eminent *chan* practitioners of recent times. This summary, which following recent precedent I will

call the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* (*Xichan lun* 習禪論), is interesting because it is there—rather than in the biographies proper, where he is often simply reworking other material such as mortuary inscriptions—that Daoxuan directly presents his own views and opinions.³

Because the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* mentions Bodhidharma it has naturally drawn the attention of scholars of early Chan. Yanagida Seizan, for example, believed that this text revealed Daoxuan's appreciation of the unique character of Bodhidharma's Mahāyāna wall-contemplation (*Dacheng biguan* 大乘壁觀) meditation methods, which he praised as being of the highest merit. According to Yanagida, this “clearly reflects the influence of the new Chan/*chan* movement of the Bodhidharma lineage at that time”.⁴ Yet, while it is no doubt true that later followers of the Bodhidharma lineage would view their founder's teachings as a new and unique form of practice, it is far from clear that Daoxuan himself held such a view. A full reading of the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* suggests, rather, that his actual interests were the generally more well-known meditation masters of the day, such as Sengchou 僧稠 (480–560), whom he repeatedly praises as exemplars of proper *chan* practice.⁵

³ This is not to say that Daoxuan was not indirectly expressing his own views in the selection and editing of his sources, and we will see examples of this below. On the compilation process of monastic biographies, see Shinohara 1988.

⁴ Yanagida 1967: 14–15. See also Yanagida 1970: 175–176. Because Yanagida is not making an analytical distinction between Chan and *chan*, I have here used both terms.

⁵ It has long been known that Sengchou was one of the most important Buddhist monks of the northern Qi 北齊 (550–577); though he is listed as a *chan* master of great renown, until recently little could be said concerning what kind of practice he may have advocated. A few texts attributed to him have been found on a Dunhuang manuscript, but there has been disagreement over their authenticity. Yanagida (1963, 1970) believed that these texts were all later Northern Chan works. Jan Yün-hua then published a series of articles arguing for their authenticity (Jan 1983a, 1983b, 1990b). More recently Okimoto Katsumi (1997) has supported the same view and has argued that Sengchou actually influenced the teachings of Northern Chan. Progress towards a better understanding of Sengchou may be more forthcoming in the light of recent archeological discoveries. Inscriptions from the outside of one of the so-called Xiaonanhai 小南海 caves near modern Anyang directly link this site to Sengchou (his picture is even carved inside the cave), and inscribed sutra excerpts allow us to identify the *Nirvana Sutra* passages that Sengchou used for meditation, a fact alluded to in his biography in the *Xu gao seng zhuan*. On the Xiaonanhai cave see Inamoto 2000 and Yan 1995 and 1998. See also the discussion in Tsiang 1996, which treats the Xiaonanhai carvings in the context of similar Qi dynasty sites in the area. Several recent dissertations have also been dedicated to the iconography of the Xiaonanhai cave (see Hsu 1999 and Kim 1995).

In fact, Hu Shi once proposed an opposite reading of Daoxuan's intentions regarding Bodhidharma. Commenting on a comparison Daoxuan makes between Bodhidharma and Sengchou, Hu suggested that Daoxuan was subtly criticizing Bodhidharma's "non-standard" (*bu zhengtong* 不正統) meditation methods.⁶ A more detailed investigation along these lines was undertaken by Jan Yün-hua, who likewise concluded that the comparison between the two monks was intended to highlight Sengchou's superiority, and that other attacks found later in the text were aimed at Bodhidharma as well.⁷

Continuing this approach, Chen Jinhua has recently presented an even more detailed study in which he supports Jan's argument and adds some important historical information and conclusions.⁸ Chen has been able to show that Daoxuan, usually thought of as a *vinaya* master (*lüshi* 律師), also had a life-long interest in *chan* practice. This observation was an important discovery, as past scholars had sometimes wrongly asserted that Daoxuan believed the decline of Buddhism during the so-called "final age" of the Dharma (*mofa* 末法) had rendered meditation ineffective.⁹ Moreover, Chen has suggested that since Daoxuan himself was a third-generation "descendent" of Sengchou,¹⁰ his comments on *chan* practice were not those of a disinterested observer and that his preference for Sengchou and disparagement of Bodhidharma may have been based in a factional rivalry between the later followers of these two monks.¹¹

⁶ Hu 1930a: 303–304.

⁷ Jan 1990.

⁸ Chen 2002a.

⁹ Such, for example, was the opinion of Takao Giken (Takao 1937: 15). The passage that Takao uses to show that Daoxuan did not believe in the efficaciousness of meditation comes from the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners*, but it seems that Takao has taken Daoxuan's hypothetical interlocutor, whose views Daoxuan refutes, to reflect Daoxuan's own position. This mistake is repeated by Lewis 1990: 212–213.

¹⁰ Japanese scholars studying the early history of *chan* practice in China have generally resorted to a description of *chan* "lineages" complete with generational lineage charts. See for example Mizuno 1957, Yoshida 1983, and Furuta 1980. Since many so-called *chan* monks studied or were associated with multiple masters, these charts become quite complicated. However it is unclear exactly what kind of "lineages" these may have been—they clearly do not represent the kind of factional exclusivity characteristic of later Chan, nor do they seem based on any unified notion of transmission or inheritance.

¹¹ The possibility of a factional rivalry between the followers of Bodhidharma and Sengchou was first suggested by Furuta Shōkin (Furuta 1980).

As further support for this argument, Chen examined the religious genealogies of the monks associated with the famous Changding temples 禪定寺 in Chang'an, which are mentioned in the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* as centers of *chan* practice during the Sui dynasty.¹² He observed that with the exception of the followers of Bodhidharma, representatives of all the “groups” of meditation practitioners that Daoxuan mentions were invited to reside at these temples.¹³ This led him to suggest that during the Sui dynasty the followers of Bodhidharma were deliberately excluded from the most prestigious center for *chan* practice in China—a temporary setback which, he believes, may have allowed them to flourish during the early Tang free from any problematic association with the prior regime.¹⁴

If correct, Chen's theory about a rivalry between the later followers of Sengchou and Bodhidharma would have a major impact on our understanding of the social and intellectual context for the rise of Chan during the late seventh century. However, I will suggest in what follows that this conclusion still involves unjustified assumptions about the importance that Bodhidharma had for Daoxuan. Through a close reading of the relevant passages of the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* I will argue that there is no reason to believe that Daoxuan's attacks were directed at Bodhidharma or his “followers.” Rather, I believe it far more likely that Daoxuan's targets were the followers of the monk Xinxing 信行 (540–594), the founder of the so-called Three Levels (*Sanjie* 三階) movement.

As is well known, the Three Levels movement was one of the most popular Buddhist groups of the Sui and early Tang.¹⁵ For reasons that

¹² The first of these temples was established by Emperor Wendi 文帝 (r. 581–604) in 603 to commemorate the death of the Empress Dugu 獨孤皇后 (533–602); the second was commissioned by Emperor Yangdi 煬帝 (r. 604–617) in 605 to commemorate the death of his father the previous year. Chen's conclusions about the Changding temples and their relevance for understanding the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* are mentioned in Chen 2002a, but for a full treatment including the history of the Changding temples see Chen 2002b: 181–211. A convenient list of all known monks associated with these temples can be found in Okimoto 1997: 89–98.

¹³ Chen 2002a: 366–367.

¹⁴ Chen 2002b: 231–232.

¹⁵ The original study of the *Sanjie* movement was done by Yabuki Keiki (Yabuki 1927). The most up-to-date Japanese scholarship can be found in Nishimoto 1998. Western-language sources begin with the many works of Jamie Hubbard (see Hubbard 2001 for a complete list), a short study by Mark Lewis (Lewis 1990), and some works by Antonino

are not entirely clear it was repeatedly suppressed by the government,¹⁶ resulting in its gradual disappearance and in the loss of its texts, until their rediscovery at Dunhuang and other sites during the last century. These recovered materials have allowed scholars to reconstruct many principal Three Levels doctrines, though much of the history of this movement remains obscure.

Daoxuan does not explicitly name the person or persons he is criticizing. Nor is it clear that he has only one single coherent target in mind. But the “erroneous” understandings of *chan* practice that he presents bear enough similarity to the Three Levels doctrines to suggest a connection. Moreover, an examination of the history of the Three Levels movement from the late sixth through the seventh century suggests that Xinxing’s followers, who had a powerful institutional base in the capital, were famous enough as *chan* masters for Daoxuan’s failure to praise them explicitly in the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* to be interpreted as a deliberate omission. Furthermore, a previously unrecognized connection between Xinxing’s followers and the recurring debates concerning clerical reverence to the emperor suggests that Daoxuan would have had every reason to attack this group.

In short, I will argue that Xinxing’s followers formed a major part of the unmentioned other against which Daoxuan framed his discussion of *chan* practice, and that the Three Levels movement may have played a hitherto unappreciated role in the evolution of the meaning of *chan* that was occurring at this time. For this reason, a full understanding of how *chan* (and Chan) was understood during the seventh and eighth centuries must take them into account.

Forte (Forte 1985, 1990). Another useful though often overlooked study is Françoise Wang-Toutain’s work on the cult of Kṣitigarbha, which contains many details on the relationship between the Three Levels movement and the worship of that bodhisattva (Wang-Toutain 1998), though a number of her conclusions in this regard have been disputed by Ng 2007. A helpful overview of a number of major studies of the Three Levels movement (including Western scholarship) is found in Nishimoto 1998: 5–19. The most comprehensive summary of secondary scholarship is Jamie Hubbard’s web page, <http://sophia.smith.edu/~jhubbard/publications/books/materials/>.

¹⁶ Five suppressions under three rulers are recorded: the first was carried out in 600 by Wendi, the second and third were carried out by Empress Wu in 694 and 699, and the last two by Xuanzong in 721 and 725 (Hubbard 2001: 190). It should be noted that it is difficult to judge the extent to which these proscriptions were ever put into practice.

The *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners*

To understand fully the implications of the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* it is necessary to give careful attention to its overall structure. I will therefore begin by summarizing the contents of the text in order to provide an overview of the relative place and importance of each section. References are to the Taishō edition (volume 50, number 2060), and I have numbered the sections to facilitate reference.

1. Daoxuan presents a general introduction to the meaning of *chan* and declares that it is the necessary first step for ending mental afflictions (595c26–596a8).
2. Daoxuan gives a history of *chan* practitioners in China through the time of Emperor Wu of the Liang (596a8–23).
3. A hypothetical interlocutor suggests that in the final age of the Dharma (*mofa* 末法) the practice of meditation is unsuitable. Daoxuan explains at length that this view is incorrect (596a23–b17).¹⁷
4. Daoxuan presents a correct and incorrect view of how to practice *chan*. According to him, *chan* can only be practiced by separating oneself from disturbing circumstances and seeking quietude. The ideal place for this is away from cities.¹⁸ Daoxuan then criticizes those who try to seek for calmness while living in the midst of worldly activities and asserts that in recent times there have been many who erred in this way (596b17–29).¹⁹
5. Daoxuan discusses the legacy of two famous monks of the northern Zhou and Qi dynasties: Sengshi 僧實 (476–563) and Sengchou (596b29–c8).

¹⁷ Chen Jinhua provides a detailed discussion of Daoxuan's views on the various "three periods" theories that were in vogue at the time (Chen 2002a: 336–338). The most recent and comprehensive English-language study on the doctrine of the three periods can be found in Natier 1991. Hubbard 2001: 36–76 discusses the situation in China during the fifth and sixth centuries, particularly with regard to the doctrine of decline advocated by the Three Levels movement. See also Chappell 1980.

¹⁸ I translate this passage below, p. 88–89.

¹⁹ See the translation of this passage in Chen 2002a: 339. Note that Chen does not translate or discuss the first part of this section.

6. Daoxuan discusses Bodhidharma (596c8–13).
7. Comparison and Critique
 - a. Daoxuan compares the styles of Sengchou and Sengshi (whom he groups together here) and Bodhidharma, and (as I will argue in detail below) praises them both (596c13–17).
 - b. He again criticizes the unnamed *chan* practitioners (596c17–27).²⁰
8. Daoxuan discusses other famous practitioners of *chan*, including Huisi 慧思 (515–77), Zhiyi 智顛 (538–97), and several other lesser known ascetic wonder-workers. This section also includes a summary of the circumstances surrounding the founding of the Changding monasteries in Chang'an during the Sui dynasty (596c27–597a13).
9. Daoxuan discusses Huizan 慧瓚 (536–607) and his disciple Huichao 慧超 (597a13–21).
10. Critique and Praise
 - a. Daoxuan criticizes those *chan* practitioners who neglect doctrinal study (597a21–29).
 - b. He then praises Zhiyi and Huisi for their emphasis on the combination of doctrinal study and meditation (597a29–b5).
11. Daoxuan attacks those *chan* practitioners who lack respect for the *vinaya* (597b5–b18).²¹
12. Daoxuan concludes by reasserting the need to master both wisdom (*hui* 慧) and *chan* (597b18–23).

Sengchou and Bodhidharma

Daoxuan's depiction of Sengchou suggests a certain discomfort with this monk's fame, which can be seen as an instance of the more general

²⁰ As I explain below, Jan Yün-hua and Chen Jinhua believe that these attacks are linked to Bodhidharma and his followers because they come immediately after the mention of Bodhidharma.

²¹ Chen translates this passage at Chen 2002a: 341–343.

tension between the dual roles of court monk and mountain monk.²² Such tension is a common feature of Chinese monastic hagiography, but it was particularly acute in the case of monks known for their practice of *chan*.²³ As spreading Buddhism among the aristocracy was at least one of the aims of monastic hagiography, biographers were naturally interested in emphasizing that past rulers materially supported eminent monks.²⁴ Indeed, by virtue of their otherworldly power famous ascetics who could be persuaded to accept invitations to the capital brought considerable prestige to the ruling class. The paradox, however, was that the very source of these monks' power lay in their seclusion, so that official recognition of their status threatened to undermine its very foundations.

As we saw above, in section four Daoxuan states that true *chan* can only be accomplished while secluded from the world, and he explicitly criticizes those who try to cultivate *chan* in cities or towns. How then can he explain that certain eminent *chan* practitioners like Sengchou and Sengshi were known to have had extensive dealings with the court? Let us look at how Daoxuan presents these two monks in section five of the text, and then compare it to the description of Bodhidharma that follows.

高齊河北，獨盛僧稠。周氏關中，尊登僧實。寶重之冠，方駕澄安。神道所通，制伏強禦。致令宣帝擔負，傾府藏於雲門。冢宰降階，展歸心於福寺。誠有圖矣。

North of the river in Qi, [in the area ruled by the] Gao family [i.e. the territory of the Northern Qi dynasty], Sengchou was uniquely prominent. [Under the rule of] the Zhou family in the area between the passes [i.e. near Chang'an, the northern Zhou dynasty], Sengshi was venerated and elevated. As examples of highly

²² Sengchou is reported to have had a particularly close relationship with the Qi emperor Wenxuan 文宣 (r. 550–559). Wenxuan is portrayed by Buddhist sources as a model patron of Buddhism, on par with the more famous emperor Wu of the Liang. Daoxuan was particularly fervent in depicting him as the ideal Buddhist ruler (see his comments elsewhere in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060: 50.548c27–549a5). On the other hand secular histories portray Wenxuan as a tyrant and a drunk. Alexander Soper has attempted to make sense of these conflicting portraits in his article on imperial cave chapels (Soper 1966: 261–263). A more detailed appraisal of Wenxuan's connections with Buddhism can be found in Suwa 1988: 223–293. Other studies of Wenxuan and times include Holmgren 1981 and Eisenberg 2008: 93–102.

²³ Shinohara 1992: 136.

²⁴ Kieschnick 1997: 7.

honored [monks], they matched [Fotu]deng [佛圖]澄 (d. 348) and [Dao]an [道]安 (312–85).²⁵

Wherever their holy way extended, powerful people submitted to them.²⁶ This resulted in emperor Xuan [r. 550–559] [offering to] carry [Sengchou] on his back,²⁷ and pouring the national treasury into [Sengchou's temple at] Yunmen. [It also resulted in] the prime minister [of the Zhou] descending the steps [of the palace] and displaying his mind of devotion [to Sengshi] via the Fu[tian] 福[田] temple.²⁸ Truly there was a reason for this!²⁹

²⁵) On these two famous monks, see Wright 1948 and Link 1958.

²⁶) Chen translates 制伏強禦 as “forcible existences were subdued” (Chen 2002b: 151). I am unsure exactly what he means by this, but given that this line is sandwiched between two sentences that discuss the honors that rulers bestowed upon these monks, we might read 強禦 as a noun meaning “nobility” or “powerful people.” Moreover the term appears frequently in this sense in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* itself, particularly in the phrase 不避強禦, meaning that a monk “did not avoid powerful people,” i.e., that he frequented the aristocracy.

²⁷) This story is found in the biography of Sengchou, T.2060: 50.555a27–b6.

²⁸) Given that this section concerns how powerful people responded to the spiritual might of Sengchou and Sengshi, it makes sense to interpret the line 展歸心於福寺 (lit.: “displayed his mind of devotion at/in the Fu[tian] temple”) as referring to the construction of that temple. This is also Chen's position (2002b: 151n6), but he notes that according to the biography of Sengshi in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* itself, the Futian temple was actually constructed by Emperor Wu 武 (r. 560–578) to commemorate the death of Sengshi, whereas the Zhou “prime minister” (actually the first emperor) Yuwen Tai 宇文泰 (507–556, 太祖文皇), whom Chen takes to be the referent of 冢宰, had died seven years earlier. However, there is a passage in Daoxuan's chronological history of Buddhism, the *Shijia fangzhi* 釋迦方志, which notes the building of five temples in Chang'an for Sengshi and his followers by Yuwen Tai, here posthumously referred to as Emperor Wen 文 (T.2088: 51.974c13). Moreover close examination of the reference to the Futian temple in Sengshi's biography reveals that it was probably not constructed by Emperor Wu. The passage in question describes emperor Wu's reaction to Sengshi's death in 563: 帝哀慟泣之，有勅圖寫形像，仍置大福田寺 “The emperor grieved and wailed over [Sengshi's death]. He also commissioned a portrait [of Sengshi], and placed it as before in the great Futian temple” (T.2060: 50.558a22). Chen has probably read 置 to mean “build,” but it may make more sense to take this as the installation of Sengshi's portrait in the Futian temple “just as” (仍) Sengshi had resided there during life. If so, this would imply that the Futian temple was probably one of the five temples that Yu Wentai built for Sengshi.

²⁹) Beginning with the line 誠有圖矣, the Taishō's “Palace Edition” 宮 (which represents the Fuzhou 福州 edition) has a large lacuna, which continues down until the line 四海徵引百司供給 (597a5). As Ibuki Atsushi has shown, the Fuzhou edition of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* is almost certainly the oldest (Ibuki 1992: 207). This can be determined via a comparison between that edition and citations of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* contained in the *Yiqie jing yinyi* 一切經音義 (T.2128) and other early sources. If this is so, we must ask ourselves if perhaps this section of the *Xichan lun* is also of later provenance. However, in this case, all the evidence indicates that the Fuzhou edition is simply missing the passage. We can determine this by examining the point at which the Fuzhou text picks up again, which occurs right in the middle of a discussion of the founding of the Changting temple during

故使中原定苑剖開綱領，惟此二賢。接踵傳燈，流化靡歇。而復委辭林野，歸宴天門。斯則挾大隱之前蹤，捨無緣之高志耳。終復宅身龍岫，故是行藏有儀耶？

Thus it was solely these two worthies who caused the elaboration of the guiding principles for “gardens of concentration” [monasteries] in the central plain [of north China]. [Others] followed in their footsteps and transmitted the lamp [of the Dharma], and their continuing influence did not cease.

However, [these masters] eventually departed from the wild forests and took up residence near the imperial gates. This was simply staying close to the model set by previous “great hermits.”³⁰ It was merely that they [temporarily] renounced their lofty intentions to be free of disturbing external conditions. But in the end, they returned to live among the dragon crags. Thus is this not a case of following the deportments of serving (行) and retiring (藏)?³¹

the early years of the Sui dynasty. Without the information contained in the latter part of the lacuna the discussion is obviously disjointed and makes no sense. In all likelihood the absence of this passage is simply a peculiarity of the Fuzhou text; as Ibuki himself has noted, the Fuzhou edition contains many dropped passages of this sort (Ibuki 1992: 208).

³⁰ This is an indirect reference to the famous poem of Wang Kangju 王康琚 (third century): “Lesser hiders (隱) hide in the hills and marshes / Greater hiders hide in the court and marketplace” (Berkowitz 2000: 145). On the development of the notion of “hiding within the court” during the early medieval period, see Wakatsuki 1977.

³¹ My reading of this important passage differs substantially from Chen, who reads: “Furthermore, [Sengchou later] retreated to the forest, returning to the ‘Gate of Heaven’ (Tianmen, i.e. Yunmen, literally the “Gate of Clouds”), where he dwelt peacefully. By doing this, he picked up the previous traces of the great hermits and took his abode in the lofty aspiration of the unconditioned. Eventually he rested his body at the “peak of dragon” (i.e. Longshan 龍山 where the Yunmensi was built). Therefore through this [we can see] some standards for involvement and retirement from [the secular world]” (Chen 2002b: 151–2). Chen thus reads 委辭林野 to mean “retreated to the forest,” and then reads 天門 as a reference to Sengchou’s temple, the Yunmensi 雲門寺. A few points are worth considering. First, 天門 “heaven’s gate” is a common word meaning the dwelling place of the emperor, and we would need a good reason to take it otherwise. Second, reading 天門 as referring to Sengchou’s temple leaves us wondering about Sengshi. The paragraph is clearly set up by Daoxuan as a reference to both monks, not just Sengchou. Moreover in the next sentence, Daoxuan assures us that their behavior was in fact “staying close to the precedents of former ‘great hermits’ 大隱.” In the vocabulary of reclusion, however, a great hermit is precisely one who does *not* stay secluded in the mountains (see above, n. 30). In the following line, Chen reads 捨 “abandon” as 舍 “dwell in,” and while these two characters may occasionally be interchanged, I think it makes more sense to stay with 捨. Thus the two monks *renounce* their “lofty aspiration” 高志 (another term found throughout the reclusion literature used to mean an official who remains aloof from society and does not serve in office) and their state of “freedom from disturbing external conditions” 無緣. Here Chen reads 無緣 as “unconditioned,” which while accurate as such seems too technical a reading for this context. 緣 can also serve to mean “object” of consciousness generally, and “disturbing external condition” more particularly, as in the term *pan yuan* 攀緣. This meaning is particularly common in treatises that deal with meditation (for example see Zhiyi’s *Xiao zhiquan* 小止觀, where among the preparatory steps necessary for meditation are a “ceasing

Immediately following this account of Sengchou and Sengshi, Daoxuan presents Bodhidharma (section six):

屬有菩提達摩者。神化居宗，闡導江洛，大乘壁觀功業最高，在世學流歸仰如市。然而誦語難窮，厲精蓋少。

In this context, there was a certain Bodhidharma. Propagating the holy way, he occupied the position of a revered ancestor,³² teaching and guiding throughout the land.³³ Great Vehicle “wall contemplation” was his highest practice. Students

of the various [disturbing] affairs and activities” 息諸緣務, T.1915: 46.463b14). Finally, though it is possible that *longxiu* 龍岫 (“dragon crag”) is an oblique reference to Mt. Long, the site of Sengchou’s temple, the term is also used generically to simply mean beautiful craggy scenery. Again, insisting that this refer to Mt. Long would narrow the focus of the passage to Sengchou alone.

³²⁾ The term 居宗 has given the other translators of this passage some difficulty. Faure reads “while remaining mysteriously fixed in the principle” (Faure 1997: 143), while Chen translates “taking divine transformation as his principle” (Chen 2002b: 156). The compound, however, is used by Daoxuan (who seems to take up the usage of the original *Gaoseng zhuan*) fairly consistently to mean something like “occupy the position of a teacher.” For example, we find the following in the biography of Lingrui 靈潤: 不久勅遣還住弘福，居宗揚化，涅槃正義惟此一人 “Not long thereafter he was pursued by imperial command, and came back to dwell in Hongfu [temple]. He occupied the *zong* and promoted the Buddhist teaching. [Of those who knew] the true meaning of the *Nirvana Sutra*, there was only him” (T.2060: 50.546c8–10). In the biography of the monk Daoyan 道顏, a disciple of Huiyuan of Jingying temple, we find: 後入京輦還住淨影寺，當遠盛世居宗紹業 “Later he entered the capital and dwelled at the Jingying temple. He was renowned in the world equally to [Hui]yuan, and he occupied the *zong* and carried on [Huiyuan’s] affairs” (T.2060: 50.676c10–11). In the biography of Senglang 僧朗 we read: 有比丘尼為鬼所著，超悟玄解，統辯經文，居宗講導 “There was a certain nun who was possessed by a spirit, [causing her] to have profound understanding and abstruse comprehension, and she comprehensively debated on the scriptural texts. She occupied the *zong*, teaching and leading” (T.2060: 50.650c21–23). In all these cases we see that the term *ju zong* 居宗 is either preceded or followed by a specific reference to the position of a Buddhist master in some form or other. The base meaning of the term *zong* is an ancestral temple (Wang 2002: 219), and it is thus interesting to see that in almost all the uses of the term *ju zong*, the monk in question is described as first taking up residence in a temple. To “occupy the *zong*” is thus to occupy the place of honor, to assume to role of a revered ancestor. The emperor is another person occasionally described in this fashion. Sengchou’s biography contains a dialogue with the Qi emperor in which we find the following: 稠曰：菩薩弘誓，護法為心。陛下應天順俗，居宗設化 “Chou said [to the emperor]: When the bodhisattva extends his vow, he takes protecting the dharma as his mind. Your majesty responds to heaven and causes the secular world to proceed smoothly. You occupy the *zong* and enact the transformation [of the world]” (T.2060: 50.554b9–11). It is possible that this is the primordial usage of the term, and that it was later extended to describe Buddhist monks.

³³⁾ The term *jiang luo* 江洛 presents some problems. Faure reads it simply as a place name, Jiangluo, but such a place name has not been identified in any known source (there is a Jiangluo *zhen* 江洛鎮 in modern toponym dictionaries, but it has existed only since the mid-20th century). Chen sees it as a reference to two places, the Jiang 江 river (i.e. the

of that era flocked to him in great numbers. However, it was difficult to reach the bottom of the words he spoke, so those who made a genuine effort were few.

審其[所]慕，則遣蕩之志存焉。觀其立言，則罪福之宗兩捨。詳夫，真俗雙翼，空有二輪。帝網之所不拘，愛見莫之能引，靜慮籌此，故絕言乎？

Investigating what he revered,³⁴ we see that he possessed the will to discard [partial views]. Contemplating the words he put forth, we see that he abandoned the dual poles of sin and merit. He thoroughly understood the paired wings of the true and the mundane, the two wheels of emptiness and existence.³⁵ That which is not caught by Indra's net cannot be led along by views [tainted by] desire—quieting his mind, he considered this [fact], and thus he abstained from words.

Changjiang 長江, the Yangtze) and the Luo 洛 river. Thus, he says that Daoxuan presents Bodhidharma as the leader of a meditation tradition based “in some areas around the Rivers Yangtze and Luo” (Chen 2002b: 150). However the Luo river (which passes by Luoyang, in the north of China) and the Yangtze, the main river of south China, are nowhere near each other. Thus it seems better to understand the two terms as simply code for north and south China respectively—in other words, everywhere. Note that Daoxuan's biography of Bodhidharma says that he arrived in the south, and then later traveled to the north (T.2060: 50.551b29–c1), and that he seems to make a point of portraying Bodhidharma as a teacher who traveled about a great deal without a fixed abode. Yanagida, however, sees this reference to north and south as an attempt by Daoxuan to reconcile two conflicting earlier traditions about how Bodhidharma came to China (Yanagida 2001: 84–88): one claimed he came by sea to the south, the other had him arriving in the north along the overland route.

³⁴ As noted by both Hu Shi (1930a: 304) and Tang Yongtong (2001, vol. 2: 455), the parallelism suggests that a character has dropped out of the text, and 慕 probably goes with another character either before or after (and not as a binome with 則). I have here followed the emendation of 所 suggested by Tang Yongtong.

³⁵ This passage presents a certain difficulty. Most authors have read the passage from 詳夫 to 故絕言乎 as a single sentence (Hu 1930a: 304; Tang 2001, vol. 2: 455). These authors do not provide a translation, but it may be presumed from their punctuation that they understand the meaning analogously to Chen, who translates as: “On investigation, the two wings of the true and provisional and the two wheels of emptiness and being cannot be caught even by Indra's net, nor can they be brought into tainted views. Was it because he was enlightened to this [truth] through meditation that Bodhidharma chose to abstain from words?” (Chen 2002a: 350; 2002b: 156). Though this reading may be correct, if we follow the logic of Mādhyamika dialectics, at least as they were understood in China, what Indra's net catches, and what tainted views are, is precisely “the two wings of the true and the provisional and the two wheels of emptiness and being.” As we will see below, the term *liang she* (兩捨 “dual abandoning”) is used in many texts to refer to the abandoning of the extreme positions of “emptiness and being” (*kong you* 空有) in favor of the truth of the middle way. The notion, then, that these “extreme” positions are *not* caught by Indra's net seems to me exactly backwards, and I have thus translated as above. Daoxuan thus suggests that Bodhidharma had either abandoned or fully understood all dualities, but that he refrained from words because he realized that silence was the only way to be free of “views tainted by desire.”

We can see from Daoxuan's summary of the careers of Sengchou and Sengshi that he was conscious of the possible contradiction between his earlier assertion that *chan* must be practiced away from cities and the known fact that these two monks associated with their respective emperors. Daoxuan thus uses the vocabulary of secular reclusion to portray these monks as analogous to the "retired gentleman" (*ju shi* 居士) who comes out of hiding to serve the court, temporarily renouncing his "high-minded intention" (*gaozhi* 高志) without becoming attached to worldly life. The important point is that Daoxuan never suggests that these monks permanently adopted city life.³⁶ Fundamentally, Sengchou was just as much a hermit as Bodhidharma, and his visits to the city were but temporary aberrations from his true calling as a recluse. I thus disagree slightly with Bernard Faure, who suggests that in these passages the surface opposition between Sengchou and Bodhidharma is subverted by a deeper structural interdependence. Rather, it seems to me that Daoxuan is overtly attempting to minimize the difference by placing both monks within a unified vision of what it means to be a *chan* master.³⁷ Despite his attempt to break free from teleological perspectives vis-à-vis Bodhidharma, Faure still approaches the text as if Bodhidharma were the intended main subject, and thus concludes that Daoxuan viewed Sengchou's meditation methods as "of an inferior variety," which cannot be correct.

In contrast, Chen Jinhua suggests that Daoxuan is criticizing not Sengchou but Bodhidharma:

In this short passage, Daoxuan uses three Chinese words with highly negative connotations in talking about Bodhidharma and his meditation group—*qian dang* 遣蕩 ("discard and negate"), *liang she* 兩捨 ("double-abandoning"), and *jue yan* 絕言 ("abstaining from the use of words"). This demonstrates his attempt to characterize Bodhidharma's meditation teaching in highly critical terms.³⁸

To determine if this is correct we need to look closely at the terms in question and see what kind of connotation they may have had for Daoxuan and his contemporaries.

³⁶ Nor, in a move that would become characteristic of later Chan, does Daoxuan suggest that from the absolute perspective there is no difference between city and mountain life.

³⁷ Faure 1986: 193.

³⁸ Chen 2002a: 350. The commentary in Chen 2002b differs in a few stylistic points.

As Chen suggests, *qiandang* could be literally translated as “discard and negate.” However, beginning in at least the early sixth century this term came to be used in Buddhist texts to indicate the Mādhyamika teaching of the middle-way (*zhongdao* 中道) as embodied in the Chinese translations of the *Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāparamitā)* sutras and the commentaries of Nāgārjuna. Jizang 吉藏 (549–623) and Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) are two of the first exegetes who employ it in this manner, and a few examples from their writings should suffice.³⁹

First, in Jizang’s commentary to the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Jin’gang bore shu* 金剛般若疏, we read:

問：此經以何爲宗？答：釋者不同。有人言，以無相境爲宗。所以者何？明此經正遣蕩萬相，明無相理，故以無相之理爲此經宗。⁴⁰

Question: What does this scripture [the *Diamond Sutra*] take as its main point? Answer: There are various explanations. Some people say that it takes the formless realm as its main point. What does this mean? [This explanation] clarifies that this scripture correctly *discards and negates* the myriad forms. As it makes clear the principle of formlessness, [some people] take the principle of formless to be the main point of this scripture.

Or again, in his commentary to the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Fahua you yi* 法華遊意:

問：蓋是中論遣蕩之言，對邪之術耳。未知法花明佛，其相云何？⁴¹

³⁹⁾ That Jizang and Zhiyi share a great deal of technical vocabulary is not surprising. As has been emphasized by recent scholarship, almost all of Zhiyi’s writings passed through the hands of his disciple Guanding, a former student of Jizang. See for example Hirai 1986, who notes the indebtedness of Zhiyi’s Lotus commentaries to Jizang. However it should be noted that neither Zhiyi nor Jizang were the first to use this term in connection with the *Prajñāparamitā* corpus. In a repentance text entitled *Mohe bore chanwen* 摩訶波若懺文, preserved in the *Guang hong ming ji* and attributed to Emperor Wu of the Liang, we read: 豈知，妙道無相，至理絕言，實法唯一，真如不二。諸佛以慈悲之力，開方便之門，教之以遣蕩，示之以冥滅，百非俱棄，四句皆亡。然後無復塵勞，解脫清淨，“How could I have known that the sublime Dao is without mark, that the ultimate principle is the severing of words, that the true Dharma is the single unique suchness that admits no duality! All the buddhas, via the power of their compassion, open up the gate of skillful means, teaching beings to *discard and negate*, revealing to beings the mysterious extinction [i.e. nirvana]. The one hundred negations are all discarded, and each of the four parts of the tetra-lemma is forgotten. After this, there is no longer any defiling dust, and liberation is pure and unstained” (T.2103: 52.332b6–9).

⁴⁰⁾ T.1699: 33.87c4–6.

⁴¹⁾ T.1722: 34.641c6–8.

Question: The *discarding and negating* words of the *Treatise on the Middle Way* is a method for countering error. But I don't yet know, what is the Lotus [sutra]'s explanation of the characteristics of the Buddha?

That Jizang's hypothetical interlocutor is here most interested in the *Lotus Sutra* is unsurprising given the context. The point is simply that the term *qiandang* is taken as characteristic of the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, the most important work of Nāgārjuna.

Zhiyi's commentary to the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* uses the term as the specific characteristic of the *Prajñāparamitā* sutras:

第一明教相大意者。諸經同明體宗用，赴緣利物而有同異者 (...) 至如華嚴廣明菩薩行位，三藏偏說小乘，方等破小顯大，小品歷法遣蕩會宗。⁴²

First, I will clarify the meaning of the [various] forms of the teaching. The various scriptures equally clarify the essence and revere the function. But in their according with conditions in order to benefit beings, there are some differences...as for the *Huayan* [sutra], it broadly clarifies the stages of bodhisattva practice, the three baskets [i.e. the Hinayāna canon] extensively explain the lesser vehicle, the *Vaipulya* [scriptures] smash the lesser to reveal the greater, and the Larger [*Prajñāparamitā* scriptures] enumerate dharmas so as to *discard and negate*, thereby realizing the essential.

Similar examples can be found throughout Zhiyi's works.⁴³

Perhaps even more to the point, Zhiyi also uses the term to represent an essential step of meditative insight. For example, in the *Fajie cidi chumen* 法界次第初門 we find the following explanation of the practice of *dhyāna* [i.e. *chan*]:⁴⁴

若菩薩始從初修自性禪，終至清淨淨禪。雖有大功德神通智慧之用，而禪定是門戶，詮次階級之法。若不善以十八空慧，照了遣蕩，或於所證諸禪三昧中，十八有法隨滯一有。則不得無礙解脫，縱任自在。⁴⁵

If the bodhisattva begins by practicing the *dhyāna* of self-nature, he ends up by arriving at pure *dhyāna*. Though this has the function of [creating] great merit,

⁴² *Weimojing xuan shu* 維摩經玄疏, T.1777: 38.561b27–c4.

⁴³ Such as in the *Mobe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀 (T.1911: 46.1b28), the *Miaofa lianhua jing xuan yi* 妙法蓮華經玄義 (T.1716: 33.795b2 and T.1716: 33.800b24), and the *Zhongguan lun shu* 中觀論疏 (T.1824: 42.157b12).

⁴⁴ Because *chan* is here used in a technical sense and means more than just "meditation," I render the word in its Sanskrit form.

⁴⁵ T.1925: 46.689b22–26.

spiritual power, and wisdom, nonetheless *dhyāna* concentration is [only] the entranceway, a step-by-step level-by-level practice. If one is not proficient in using the wisdom of the eighteen emptinesses to illuminate completely and *discard and negate*, then it is possible that within the *dhyāna-samādhis* that one has realized, one will be become stuck in one of the eighteen existing *dharmas*, and thus not achieve the unobstructed liberation, the carefree state of ease.

We can see that in all of these examples the term *qiandang* clearly has a positive connotation. Whether it is used to describe certain classes of revered texts or as an active technique of meditation, Jizang and Zhiyi both indicate that what is being discarded and negated is something bad—attachments, false views and the like.

Is it possible that *qiandang* has this meaning only within technical Buddhist exegesis? The term is rare in secular literature, and it is not found in any of the major dictionaries.⁴⁶ Moreover Daoxuan does not

⁴⁶ Within the Buddhist canon, the term *qiandang* does appear in two contemporaneous non-technical works, the *Bian zheng lun* 辯正論 (compiled by Falin 法琳 in 626) and the *Guang hong ming ji* 廣弘明集. In the *Bian zheng lun*, the word occurs as a description of the style of Laozi and Zhuangzi:

至若史書所述，全關倣儻。春秋之言，彌在研射。儒風亡於攻戰，老莊過於遺蕩，國語尚虛左丘譏詐。(T.2110: 52.541c29–542a2)

As for what the books of history relate, they entirely pertain to what is extra-ordinary. The words of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* are all about finding fault (?). The style of the *Ru* scholars died amid their warring, Lao[zi] and Zhuang[zi] err in their *discarding and negating*, while the *Discourses of the States* esteems the superficial and the *Zuozhuan* is disparaging.

We can thus see that in some contexts the term *qiandang* came to mean the free and easy ways associated with these two mythical personages. It is true that this current section of the *Bian zheng lun* seems to have a negative view of such attitudes. But notice that the author is compelled to qualify that they “err in” in order to force a negative reading, just as the *Ru* scholars are said to have “died amid.” This suggests that even in this context we should not take *qiandang* as inherently negative. In the *Guang hong ming ji*, we find a letter written to the *chan* master Huiming 慧命 (d. 569) by his lay disciple Dai Kui 戴逵 (d.u.). Having lauded Huiming’s practice, Dai Kui says of himself:

弟子業風鼓慮，欲海沈形，泊渚宮淪覆將歷二紀。晝倦坐馳，夜悲愕夢。未能忘懷彼我，歸軫一乘，遺蕩胸衿，朗開三達。(T.2103: 52.279c25–28)

As for this disciple, the winds of karma drum up my thoughts, and my body is sunk in the ocean of desire. Soon it will be twenty-four years since my boat has moored at the palace of Zhu [i.e., since entering government service]! In day, I grow fatigued at my inner racing mind, while at night I grieve over my frightening dreams. I am not yet able to forget my concern for self and other, return to riding on the one vehicle, *discard and negate* [the worries of] my mind, or open up into clarity the three masteries.

seem ignorant of its technical background. The first clue to this, as we will see below, is that the term *liangshe* 兩捨 (“double-abandoning”) is also a technical term drawn from the same genre of texts in which we find *qiandang*, as is the “principle of emptiness” (*xu zong* 虛宗), which Daoxuan will later use to characterize Bodhidharma’s approach. This suggests that Daoxuan may have been consciously associating Bodhidharma with this body of texts.

Turning then to *liangshe*, the second term which Chen has suggested demonstrates Daoxuan’s negative opinion of Bodhidharma, we find that its pedigree is slightly older than *qiandang*, as it appears in Sengzhao’s 僧肇 early fifth-century collection of commentaries to the *Vimalakīrti* sutra, the *Zhu Weimojie jing* 注維摩詰經:

捨是道場，憎愛斷故。肇曰：夫慈生愛，愛生著，著生累，悲生憂，憂生惱，惱生憎。慈悲雖善，而累想已生。故兩捨以平等觀，謂之捨行也。⁴⁷
 [The sutra says] abandonment is the site of practice, because love and hatred are cut off [there]. [Seng]zhao comments: Affection gives rise to love, love gives rise to attachment, and attachment gives rise to bondage. Pity gives rise to worry, worry gives rise to distress, and distress gives rise to hatred. [Thus] though affection and pity are good, ensnaring thoughts have already arisen [in them]. Thus to *abandon both* and have an impartial view is called the practice of abandoning.

Later in the text Sengzhao uses the term again, this time to describe the fact that one should cling neither to good (善) nor evil (惡).⁴⁸

The term also appears in many of the same works surveyed earlier in connection with *qiandang*. We find it discussed in Zhiyi’s commentary to the *Diamond Sutra*,⁴⁹ Jizang’s commentary to the *Diamond Sutra*,⁵⁰ Zhiyi’s *Xuanyi* commentary to the *Lotus Sutra*,⁵¹ and Jizang’s *Lotus*

Here, *qiandang* denotes freedom from the worries and binding ties of official life, and “discard and negate” is an inadequate translation. We may thus provisionally conclude that in non-technical contexts *qiandang* means the unconstrained position of a person at one with the Dao and free from the entanglements of the world, and seems to have a generally positive connotation.

⁴⁷ T.1775: 38.364b8–11.

⁴⁸ T.1775: 38.386b4–7. In his commentary to the *Vimalakīrti* sutra Jizang cites Sengzhao’s comments at both of these places and discusses the issue further (T.1781: 38.951b6–8).

⁴⁹ The *Jin’gang bore jing shu* 金剛般若經疏 (T.1698: 33.80c1–3).

⁵⁰ The *Jin’gang bore shu* 金剛般若疏 (T.1699: 33.107a12–15).

⁵¹ The *Miaofa lianhua jing xuan yi* 妙法蓮華經玄義 (T.1716: 33.785a7–11, 789c6–8).

Sutra commentary.⁵² In all of these texts the term denotes abandonment of the extreme positions of emptiness (*kong* 空) and existence (*you* 有) and taking up the middle way (*zhongdao* 中道). Daoxuan seems to have been aware of these associations, and we see that he attributes to Bodhidharma the abandoning of such extremes in the same breath that he uses the term.

Moreover, just like *qiandang*, *liangshe* eventually entered the technical vocabulary of meditation. In his long treatise on the stages of meditation, the *Shi chan boluomi cidi famen* 釋禪波羅蜜次第法門, Zhiyi uses the term to describe what the meditator does while passing into the eighth and final stage of meditation, the sphere of neither thinking nor non-thinking (非有想非無想):

從初禪以來，但有遍捨，無有兩捨故，未與棄捨之名。今此非想，既有雙捨有無故，名棄捨。⁵³

From the first *dhyāna* onward, there has been partial abandoning, but there has not been dual abandoning (*liangshe*), and therefore [these stages] have not yet been given the name “renouncing.” Now, having already [reached the stage of] non-thought, one doubly abandons (*shuangshe*) being and non-being, and therefore it is called “renouncing.”

Similar discussions occur in the *Mohe zhiguan*,⁵⁴ and the *Fajie cidi chumen*,⁵⁵ also texts we saw above in conjunction with the word *qiandang*. Thus, both *qiandang* and *liangshe* seem to be technical terms closely associated with emptiness philosophy as well as with specific kinds of advanced meditation. In none of the examples explored above does either of these terms carry an inherently negative connotation.

The final term that Chen Jinhua believes has negative connotations is *jueyan* 絕言 (“refraining from words”). If, however, Daoxuan’s discussion of Bodhidharma up until this point has been positive in

⁵² The *Fabua yishu* 法華義疏 (T.1721: 34.543a27–b2).

⁵³ T.1916: 46.528c3–5.

⁵⁴ T.1911: 46.71b15–18.

⁵⁵ T.1925: 46.674b24–28. It is also interesting to note that in this text the term *liangshe* is used by Zhiyi to describe the final stage of the so-called “sixteen extraordinary and victorious methods” 十六特勝法, which is called the “concentration of dual abandoning” 兩捨之定. As it turns out, what little we know of the meditation methods of Sengchou suggests that he practiced a method with this same name (see Sengchou’s biography in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060: 50.553c12–13).

tone, then it seems likely that *jueyan* is also functioning as praise, linking Bodhidharma to venerable exemplars of silent wisdom like Vimalakīrti.

But the strongest evidence that he did not intend this term as criticism is that earlier in the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* Daoxuan criticizes meditation practitioners who try to talk about emptiness. While discussing certain recent trends in *chan* practice (section four), he states: “Having explained emptiness as ‘nothing but form,’ they discuss it with their minds and mouths.” And then: “The activity of their spirit drowns in words and orders, and the marks of concentration rot upon their lips [as they try to explain them].”⁵⁶ In this same discussion Daoxuan also uses the term *jianwang* 兼忘 (“joint-forgetting”) to describe what these dullards are unable to do: “In recent times those who follow this way have been many. Is it not that their energy is insufficient for the path of joint-forgetting, that their spirit is too dull for the province of severing thought?”⁵⁷ This line clearly implies that “joint-forgetting” and “severing thought” are just what proper *chan* practitioners should do. The term *jianwang*, originally from the *Zhuangzi*, seems similar in meaning to *liangshe*, and this gives us further reason to believe that in describing Bodhidharma with the term *liangshe* Daoxuan could only have intended praise.⁵⁸

We now turn to the short section that immediately follows Daoxuan’s conclusions regarding Bodhidharma. In these brief yet crucial lines, Daoxuan explicitly contrasts the legacies of Bodhidharma and Sengchou:

然而觀彼兩宗，即乘之二軌也。稠懷念處，清範可崇。摩法虛宗，玄旨幽蹟。可崇，則情事易顯。幽蹟，則理性難通。

However when we look at these two principles, they are like the dual wheel-track of the very same vehicle. [Seng]chou embraced the “stations of mindfulness,” and this pure model was able to be honored [by the world]. [Bodhidhar]ma took as a model the principle of vacuity, and his abstruse purport was recondite and mysterious. [Sengchou] was able to be honored, thus his affairs were easily made visible. [Bodhidharma] was recondite and mysterious, thus the nature of his truth was difficult to understand.

⁵⁶) These passages are dealt with below, p. 89.

⁵⁷) See T.2060: 50.596b26.

⁵⁸) On the term *jianwang*, see Sharf 2002: 65.

The crux of this passage is perhaps the phrase 即乘之二軌, which scholars have interpreted in a number of ways. Tang Yongtong thought that it meant “two different vehicles” and suggested that Daoxuan was implying that Bodhidharma followed the “greater vehicle” (*dasheng* 大乘), in contrast to Sengchou who followed the “lesser vehicle” (*xiaosheng* 小乘).⁵⁹ On the other hand Bernard Faure translates this line as “two wheels of the same cart,” which he takes to imply that the two masters were seen as somehow complementary.⁶⁰ As for Chen Jinhua, he reads it as “two separate tracks for vehicles,” which he believes indicates that the two approaches were diametrically opposed, and since Daoxuan praised Sengchou this must imply a negative view of Bodhidharma.⁶¹

A purely linguistic analysis seems to support the idea that *er gui* 二軌 refers to two different tracks and not the two wheel-ruts of a single vehicle. Indeed, the basic meaning of the word *gui* is “the width of the two wheels of a cart,”⁶² as we see, for example, in famous words of the *Zhongyong* 中庸: “Now, under heaven all carts have the same wheel-spacing, and writings have the same script” 今天下車同軌書同文.⁶³ In this meaning, two *gui* would indeed be two incompatible systems.

However it is also possible that Daoxuan intended the term *ergui* to mean the two individual ruts (or perhaps a single “dual track”) produced by one vehicle. Indeed, on other occasions Daoxuan uses a similar notion of “dual track” to express the idea of complementarity. For example, in one of his many essays on proper monastic decorum, the *Shimen guijing yi* 釋門歸敬儀, he writes: “Looking at it this way, then we understand the two paths of mind and bodily form, the dual cart-track of principle and phenomena” 觀斯以言，則識形心兩途，事理雙軌。⁶⁴ In this passage Daoxuan is discussing the need for monastic

⁵⁹) Tang 2001, vol. 2: 454.

⁶⁰) Faure 1986: 192; 1993: 130. Faure’s translation seems to me at odds with his main conclusion. His point, as I understand it, is that the actual textual interdependence of Sengchou and Bodhidharma is concealed by a surface opposition similar to the way that later Chan texts would pit Huineng 慧能 (638–713) and Shenxiu 神秀 (d. 706) against each other. I would thus have expected Faure to translate this line as, on the surface level, reinforcing rather than downplaying the contrast.

⁶¹) Chen 2002a: 362.

⁶²) Wang 2002: 1388, citing the *Shuowen* 說文.

⁶³) Legge 1971: 424. The translation is my own.

⁶⁴) T.1896: 45.855a5–6. On this text, see Fujiyoshi 2002: 341–343.

discipline to affect both exterior bodily demeanor and the inner mind. Though here we have *shuang gui* 雙軌 rather than *ergui*, the meaning and usage seem analogous.

Moreover, if we look beyond Daoxuan's own writings we find that a number of prominent sixth- and early seventh-century Buddhist writers used the image of the two wheels of a single cart to represent the balance between skillful means (such as precepts, or the bestowal of worldly blessings) and wisdom, a contrast that lines up nicely with the relatively accessible Sengchou (skillful means) and more aloof Bodhidharma (wisdom). Though in these cases we find the term "two wheels" (*erlun* 二輪) rather than "two tracks" (*ergui*), Daoxuan may have been inspired by this image, especially as it is found in many of the same texts that feature our earlier terms *qiandang* and *liangshe*.

For example, Jizang's commentary to the *Vimalakirti* sutra states that "to be endowed with both blessings and wisdom is like the two wheels of a cart, like the two wings of a bird" 若具福慧，如車之二輪，鳥之雙翅。⁶⁵ Similarly Huiyuan's 慧遠 (523–592) commentary to the *Nirvana Sutra*, the *Daniepan jing yiji* 大般涅槃經義記, states: "Maintaining the precepts and having deep wisdom is the same as the two wheels of a cart and the two wings of a bird. Maintaining the precepts is a worldly blessing, while deep wisdom is liberation" 持戒深智合車二輪及鳥兩翼。持戒是福，深智是解。⁶⁶ The original source for this metaphor is a passage from the *Nirvana Sutra*, where it refers to the necessity of simultaneously maintaining the precepts and having deep wisdom.⁶⁷ But as the quotation from Jizang above makes clear, it would later designate a more general balance between worldly benefits (*fu* 福) and transcendent wisdom.

Zhiyi seems to have expanded the range of meaning even further, using the image to denote the need for balance in meditation practice between concentration (*zhi* 止) and insight (*guan* 觀). He writes:

譬如車有二輪，若一強一弱，則載不安穩。亦如刀刃，強軟不調，則無利用，此亦如是。今修此定，既定觀均等。⁶⁸

⁶⁵) T.1781: 38.954a29–b1.

⁶⁶) T.1764: 37.746b27–28.

⁶⁷) T.374: 12.450a3–7.

⁶⁸) *Shi chan bolomi cidu famen* 釋禪波羅蜜次第法門, T.1916: 46.547a3–6.

For example a cart has two wheels. If one is strong and the other weak, it will not be stable. Or it is like the fact that if a blade is not balanced between hardness and softness, it will not be useful.⁶⁹ The present case is also like this. In cultivating meditation, concentration and insight [must be] equally balanced.

Thus the metaphor of the two wheels of a cart is analogous to the other terms examined earlier. First found in more abstract philosophical discussions, it is eventually taken up by Zhiyi in his descriptions of meditation practice.⁷⁰ Moreover it is clear that Daoxuan was aware of Zhiyi's usage, and he employs it himself in the concluding lines of the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners*, stating that “parting from disturbance is the accomplishment of concentration, and seeing through delusion is the activity of wisdom—this is like [the fact that] with two wheels [the cart] will travel far” 離亂定學之功，見惑慧明之業，若雙輪之遠涉。⁷¹

Thus, had Daoxuan truly intended to separate forcibly Bodhidharma and Sengchou, he would probably have chosen a less ambiguous expression. If the rest of what Daoxuan says gives us no reason to think him critical of Bodhidharma, then it seems reasonable to read this line as a further effort by Daoxuan to present Bodhidharma and Sengchou as similar and/or complementary.

And indeed, the sentences that follow still do not give any reason to think that one monk is being praised at the expense of the other. Following the image of the two wheel-ruts, Daoxuan further contrasts Sengchou and Bodhidharma, asserting that “[Sengchou] was able to be honored, thus his affairs were easily made visible. [Bodhidharma] was recondite and mysterious, thus the nature of his truth was difficult to understand.”⁷² Chen Jinhua interprets what I have translated here as “recondite and mysterious” (*youze* 幽蹟) to mean “deep and complicated,” which he takes to imply that “Daoxuan makes no secret

⁶⁹ Presumably because if it is too hard one will not be able to sharpen it, and if it is too soft it will not be effective.

⁷⁰ In addition to the above passage, a similar idea is expressed in Guanding's commentary to Zhiyi's *Guan xin lun*, the *Guan xin lun shu* 觀心論疏, which states even more explicitly that “concentration and insight are the two wheels of a cart” 止觀二法爲車二輪 (T.1921: 46.619c5–6).

⁷¹ T.2060: 50.597b20.

⁷² See above p. 69.

of his preference for Sengchou's meditation group over Bodhidharma's: he praises Sengchou's meditation teaching for its clarity and applicability, while blaming Bodhidharma's for being ungraspable and impracticable.⁷³

A similar reading was proposed by Jan Yün-hua, who writes that "Daoxuan on the one hand laments that the *chan* method of Bodhidharma's lineage was deep and complicated and thus difficult to understand, and praises the *chan* method of Sengchou's lineage as a pure standard to be honored."⁷⁴ Hu Shi also used this passage as evidence that Daoxuan disliked Bodhidharma. He reasoned that while Daoxuan describes Sengchou's meditation program as the "orthodox" (*zhengzong* 正宗) practice of the four stations of mindfulness (*si nianchu* 四念處), Bodhidharma's meditation technique was "non-standard" (*bu zhengtong* 不正統) and would not have been appreciated by a conservative master like Daoxuan.⁷⁵

Hu Shi's reasoning can, I think, be easily dismissed—as we have seen, Daoxuan uses perfectly orthodox terminology to describe Bodhidharma's teachings.⁷⁶ Moreover, a close analysis of the terms that Jan and Chen take as blaming Bodhidharma suggests that Daoxuan is actually praising him. The term *youze* 幽蹟, for example, is used repeatedly in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* to designate the most profound Buddhist doctrines. Thus in the biography of Zhinian 智念 we read that "he visited various lecture halls, probed the empty profundity, and endeavored to exhaust the *recondite mystery*" 乃遊諸講肆，備探冲奧，務盡幽蹟.⁷⁷ Daoxuan uses nearly identical language in the biography of Huijue 慧覺: "[Hui]jue studied the extensive commentaries, contemplated the recondite purport in its entirety, grasped the meeting of the fords [the way to help beings], and bored into and sought after

⁷³ Chen 2002a: 362; 2002b: 172.

⁷⁴ Jan 1990: 33–34. Jan does not translate the citations from the original text into modern Chinese, so I have used Chen's translation for these sections.

⁷⁵ Hu 1930a: 304.

⁷⁶ Hu's conclusion that Daoxuan disapproved of Bodhidharma probably stems from his view that Chan represented a radical and revolutionary departure from traditional Buddhist understanding, and as such would surely be censured by a "traditional" monk like Daoxuan. The way in which Hu Shi's views on Chan are closely connected to his own position as an advocate of reform and modernization has been pointed out by a number of scholars (Yamazaki 1967: 219–221; Faure 1993: 94–99; McRae 2001).

⁷⁷ T.2060: 50.508c4–5.

the *recondite mystery*” 覺稟承宏論，備觀幽旨，領略津會，鑄求幽蹟。⁷⁸ Daoxuan does indicate, however, that Bodhidharma's teachings were difficult to penetrate (*nan tong* 難通), but we should probably understand this as oblique praise, an indication that Bodhidharma refused to lower the bar for his students. Note that it also serves to explain why Bodhidharma's followers were so few, a point to which I will return below.

After comparing Bodhidharma and Sengchou, Daoxuan begins to criticize his nameless opponents. He starts by stating:

所以物得其筌，初同披洗。至於心用壅滯，惟繁云之儔，差難述矣。⁷⁹

Therefore things found their fish-weirs, and in the beginning it was just like sifting and washing [to get to the essence].⁸⁰ But reaching those fellows whose activity of mind is blocked and who only talk too much, they, on the other hand, had difficulty carrying this on!⁸¹

⁷⁸) T.2060: 50.516a15–16.

⁷⁹) Yanagida suggests a different interpretation of this passage (Yanagida 1967: 440), translating it into modern Japanese as: それで、人々は彼等の教えの言葉を聞いて、始めは共に感激したが、内面的な心の態度となると、まどいははいよいよ増すばかりであった。二人は同格で差異をつけ難い (“Therefore, when various people listened to the words of their [Bodhidharma and Sengchou's] instructions, they were all initially inspired. But when it came to their internal, mental attitude, their confusions only increased. These two people [Bodhidharma and Sengchou] were of the same class, and any difference between them would be hard to explicate”). Though I am sympathetic to Yanagida's overall interpretation, my own reading of the grammar differs considerably. Note that the term *fanyun* 繁云, though not found in modern dictionaries, is attested in Buddhist commentaries as meaning “excessive talking,” and is usually used in the negative to indicate that the author is abbreviating a long list or a section of the original text (see for example T.1833: 43.947a23; T.1794: 39.517c12). The term also occurs in this meaning elsewhere in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* (T.2060: 50.482c22).

⁸⁰) The term 披洗 is somewhat enigmatic. One possibility is that 披 is being used for 被 (read *bei*) as either a quasi-passive marker or in the sense of “covered with.” But while it is true that 披 (*pi*) is sometimes used for 被 (read *pi*) in the sense of “put on a piece of clothing around the back,” 披 is generally not used for 被 when read as *bei*. I have instead taken 披 in the sense of “to sift through,” as it occurs in compounds like 披究 (“investigate deeply”). Thus 披洗 may be being used in a meaning similar to the phrase 披沙揀金 “to sift through the sand and pick out the gold,” meaning that one clears away what is unnecessary to reach the essence (I thank Robert Ashmore for this suggestion).

⁸¹) Chen Jinhua translates as: “Therefore, [Bodhidharma's followers] only attained his traces, as [superficially] as just being showered [by the water of his teachings]. As for those who are blocked by the functions of their mind and who are engaged in empty talk, they are certainly unable to carry on [Bodhidharma's] teaching” (Chen 2002a: 362; 2002b: 172). Here he is probably following Jan (1990: 31), who believed that the entire passage was directed against Bodhidharma's later followers. Chen explains in a footnote why he

After this introduction Daoxuan presents the errors of these later followers in great detail, and I will examine this section below. The question before us now is whether or not this introductory passage provides any clues to the identities of Daoxuan's targets. By my reading, in this initial passage Daoxuan affirms the abilities of both Sengchou and Bodhidharma and then notes that later students, regardless of who they followed, could not match these illustrious predecessors. The first sentence, "things found their fish-weirs," is a reference to the famous parable from the *Zhuangzi* about the need to abandon words (*yan* 言) once the meaning (*yi* 意) has been understood, just as one abandons the trap (fish-weir) once the fish has been caught.⁸² Thus for "things to find their fish-weirs" indicates that meanings find the proper words to express them, which is probably praise for both Sengchou and Bodhidharma. This is contrasted with the "fellows who only talk too much" 惟繁云之儔. These people use words indiscriminately and are reduced to empty talk.⁸³ So while Daoxuan does seem to imply that these practitioners are in some sense the later followers of either Sengchou or Bodhidharma, he does not specifically identify them by lineage. Rather, this is a general statement about the inability of later generations to match the precedents of these two outstanding masters.

With this we have reached the end of Daoxuan's discussion of Bodhidharma. Daoxuan goes on to criticize at length certain recent trends in *chan* practice (7b).⁸⁴ He then changes tone again and praises various other *chan* masters such as the famous Tiantai adepts Zhiyi and Huisi (8 and 9).⁸⁵ The tone then changes once again and Daoxuan launches into a final jeremiad (10a and 11).⁸⁶ He never identifies who he is criticizing. Chen links the later attacks to Bodhidharma's followers because some of what is said is analogous to the passage that follows

thinks this refers specifically to Bodhidharma: "We know that this criticism was targeted at Bodhidharma-Huikē's meditation group because it follows the sentence in which Daoxuan criticizes Bodhidharma for the impracticability of his teaching" (Chen 2002a: 362; 2002b: 172).

⁸² *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (*Wai wu* 外物): 944.

⁸³ On the meaning of *fanyun* 繁云 see above, note 79.

⁸⁴ Chen's translation and discussion of this passage can be found at Chen 2002a: 362–365.

⁸⁵ T.2060: 50.596c27–597a21. Chen 2002a: 351–360.

⁸⁶ T.2060: 50.596c27–597b18. Chen 2002a: 340–345.

the discussion of Sengchou and Bodhidharma.⁸⁷ For his part, Jan thinks that they include Bodhidharma's followers but are not necessarily limited to them.⁸⁸ But if we accept, as I believe I have shown we should, that the earlier attacks were not directed towards Bodhidharma or his followers, then there is no direct way to link them to these later attacks either.

In the final passage (12), Daoxuan sums up his argument and praises four figures mentioned earlier: Huisi, Huiyuan,⁸⁹ Sengchou, and Sengshi. For Chen Jinhua, it is significant that Daoxuan should fail to mention Bodhidharma, and I quote him at length because this is in fact the crux of his argument:

What is worth particular notice in this passage is not only what Daoxuan says—concerning the four Buddhist monks (Huiyuan, Huisi, Sengchou and Sengshi) whom he extols as meditation masters par excellence—but also what he does not say—his complete omission of Bodhidharma or any member of his group. The deliberateness with which Daoxuan refrains from “anointing” Bodhidharma and Huike as meditative exemplars presents a stark contrast to their paramount status as Chan patriarchs in later ideological constructs of the Chan lineage.

Given Daoxuan's close relationship with Sengchou's tradition, such comments cannot be read simply as historical criticism; rather, they should also be taken as a reflection of the bitter rivalry between the two meditation groups placed under the names of Bodhidharma and Sengchou.⁹⁰

It is instructive, I believe, to contrast Chen's interpretation with that of Yanagida, to which I already alluded in the introduction:

Daoxuan, in his evaluation of the *chan* practitioners [section] of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, recognized that Bodhidharma's “wall-contemplation” was a unique Mahāyāna *chan* [practice], different from Sengchou's “four stations of mindfulness” or the *Zhiguan* [methods] of Tiantai [Zhiyi]. That he praised Mahāyāna wall-contemplation as being of the highest merit is clearly a reflection of the new trend [represented by] the *chan* of the Bodhidharma lineage at that time.⁹¹

⁸⁷ See Chen 2002b:177 for some examples.

⁸⁸ Jan 1990a: 32.

⁸⁹ Chen thinks this is Huiyuan 慧遠 of Mount Lu (334–416), as opposed to Huiyuan of Jingying temple (523–592). This makes sense in as much as Huiyuan of Mount Lu is mentioned earlier in the *Xichan lun*, during Daoxuan's discussion of the early history of meditation practice in China (T.2060: 50.596a15).

⁹⁰ Chen 2002a: 365.

⁹¹ Yanagida 1967: 14–15.

Despite their different interpretations of Daoxuan's attitude towards Bodhidharma, Chen and Yanagida make the same fundamental assumption: that when Daoxuan was writing his text Bodhidharma's followers represented an important group of practitioners with a novel orientation towards *chan* practice.

Yet, a reading of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* as a whole gives no reason to think that Bodhidharma was either particularly significant or that his followers formed a group. The only possible exception to Bodhidharma's general obscurity might have been his status as a transmitter of the *Laṅkāvatāra* sutra. In the current text of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, this is mentioned once in the biography of Bodhidharma's only famous student, Huike 慧可,⁹² and once in the biography of Fachong 法沖 (589–666?). However, neither passage is relevant: the first is a later interpolation,⁹³ and the second appears only in the later expanded version of the text.⁹⁴ Thus, when composing the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* Daoxuan in all likelihood had no idea that Bodhidharma or Huike were known as masters of *Laṅkāvatāra*.⁹⁵ And even if we were to accept that Bodhidharma was known as such to some of Daoxuan's contemporaries, this would probably not be relevant to Daoxuan's evaluation of his status as a *chan* master.⁹⁶

⁹²) T.2060: 50.552b20.

⁹³) The first author to propose this was Hu Shi in his pioneering study of the *Laṅkāvatāra* school (Hu 1930b: 211–212). Hu Shi believed that the three lines making reference to the *Laṅkāvatāra* sutra, which occur in different places in the received text, were originally noted on the side as one paragraph and later incorporated into the text in a haphazard fashion. He shows quite convincingly that the current text is incoherent as it stands, and that when put together the three lines in question form a perfectly readable small paragraph.

⁹⁴) On the status of Fachong's biography, see McRae 1916: 24–29 and Faure 1997: 147–152.

⁹⁵) We must be careful, however, because some sections of the original draft of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* were revised later. For example the biography of the famous translator Xuanzang 玄奘 contains a description of his funeral, an event that did not occur until after the completion of the initial draft of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* in 645 (Fujiyoshi 2002: 179–245). But, as Jorgensen points out (2005: 113), the current version of the *Xichan lun* gives us no reason to think that its original form has been modified.

⁹⁶) Note that the earliest text to link the East Mountain community of Daoxin explicitly to Bodhidharma, the stele inscription of the *Tang zhongyue shamen shi faru chanshi xingzhuang* 唐中岳沙門釋法如禪師行狀 (Yanagida 1967: 35–41), refers to Bodhidharma not as a *chan* master but as a Dharma master (*fashi* 法師) (ibid.: 488).

There is thus no reason to think that Bodhidharma or his followers were famous or formed any kind of coherent group when Daoxuan was writing the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners*. Accordingly, his failure to mention them in the final summary cannot be understood as a deliberate exclusion. Nor, pace Yanagida, can what Daoxuan does say about Bodhidharma reflect the influence of a “Bodhidharma lineage,” whose existence at this time remains entirely hypothetical. Both approaches are anachronistic: they take the later status of Bodhidharma as their point of reference and thus obscure our understanding of Daoxuan’s intentions.

The Chanding Temples

By itself, the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* provides us with little reason to think that Bodhidharma or his followers were among the intended targets of Daoxuan’s criticisms. But we must also address the question of the monks of the Chanding temples. As mentioned earlier, Chen Jinhua has noted that Bodhidharma’s followers were *not* invited to stay at these temples, whose mission was to recruit eminent *chan* masters from all over the country; and he believes we should understand this as evidence of their systematic exclusion. However their absence, I would argue, could only be significant if they were themselves significant, which does not seem to have been the case.⁹⁷

Scholars of early Chan have long been bedeviled by the fact that the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* contains almost no precise information on Bodhidharma.⁹⁸ His biography is comprised largely of a quotation from the

⁹⁷ The possibility that Bodhidharma’s followers were simply too few or too obscure to be invited to the Chanding temples is considered briefly by Chen, who feels, however, that “according to Daoxuan, Bodhidharma’s group was actually very influential at the time” (Chen 2002b: 206). As justification for this, Chen refers us back to Daoxuan’s description of Bodhidharma in the *Xichan lun*, where it is stated that (following my translation above) “students of that era flocked to him in great numbers. However, it was difficult to reach the bottom of the words he spoke, so those who made genuine effort were few.” Rather than indicating that the Bodhidharma “group” was popular, this passage seems to imply that despite Bodhidharma’s initial popularity his serious disciples were few. In other words, the reader is assured that Daoxuan’s near total ignorance of Bodhidharma’s later followers should not be construed to mean that he was an inferior monk.

⁹⁸ An attempt to determine what sources Daoxuan used in his construction of Bodhidharma’s biography can be found in Yanagida 1999: 84–88.

one text thought to be associated with him, the *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* (*Erru sixing lun* 二入四行論).⁹⁹ If we exclude this portion, the entire biography amounts to less than ten lines of Taishō text, making it one of the shortest entries in the entire *Xu gaoseng zhuan*.¹⁰⁰

Daoxuan's knowledge of Bodhidharma's later "followers," as evidenced by the 645 draft of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, was equally vague. In the biography of Huike, the only disciple of Bodhidharma discussed in detail,¹⁰¹ Daoxuan explicitly states that Huike had no well-known disciples and laments the paucity of his information on them:

時復有化公、彥公、和禪師等。各通冠玄奧，吐言清迥，托事寄懷。聞諸口實，而人世非遠，碑記罕聞。微言不傳，清德誰序，深可痛矣。¹⁰²

At this time, [following Huike] there were also Huagong, Yangong, and *chan* master He. They each penetrated and mastered the abstruse profundity. The words they uttered were pure and profound, and they sincerely undertook their affairs. I have heard this from reliable sources, but even though their time is not distant, inscriptions or records [about them] are rarely encountered. Their subtle words have not been transmitted: who then will continue their pure virtue? This is deeply lamentable.

Detailed analyses of all the information that Daoxuan knew or might have known about Bodhidharma's disciples can be found in any number of Japanese studies, as well as several works by Western scholars.¹⁰³ And of the *chan* practitioners who can be reasonably traced to Bodhidharma or Huike, it seems that only three were alive when the Changding temples were founded, namely Fakan 法範 (d. 604), Xuanjing 玄景 (d. 606), and Huiman 慧滿 (d. 642).¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Ishii Kōsei has attempted to demonstrate that Daoxuan's editing of the *Erru sixing lun* for inclusion in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* reveals a bias against Bodhidharma, but I find the analysis unconvincing (Ishii 2000). My thanks to John McRae for this reference.

¹⁰⁰ This point is emphasized by Sekiguchi 1967: 44. For a translation of the biography, see McRae 1986: 17–8.

¹⁰¹ Another monk named Sengfu 僧副 is given by Daoxuan as a student of *chan* master "Dharma" 達摩; some scholars believe this refers to Bodhidharma (McRae 1986: 19–21).

¹⁰² T.2060: 50.552b14–17. This passage is discussed by Hu Shi 1930b: 211.

¹⁰³ See for example McRae 1986: 16–29; Faure 1997: 145–151; Yanagida 1970: 20–21 and 135–145.

¹⁰⁴ See McRae 1986: 23–24 and Yanagida 1967: 24–25.

What is at stake here is not simply our understanding of Daoxuan's opinions, but the very existence of the "proto-Chan" doctrines that Japanese scholars once considered characteristic of Bodhidharma's early followers.¹⁰⁵ For example Yanagida Seizan writes:

It is certain that the followers who gathered around Bodhidharma and Huike habitually practiced austerities in the forests and fields, and that they constituted an extremely novel existence in contrast to the Northern Chinese Buddhism of the day, which took as its task the spreading of the religion among the populace; the latter had degenerated into a form of temple Buddhism involved in the performance of flourishing ceremonies throughout the year, conventionalized lectures on the sutras, and a doctrine which stressed the acquisition of merit by constructing temples and images.¹⁰⁶

According to this view, even though these ascetics eventually settled in monasteries they retained their iconoclastic attitude, and Japanese scholars often mention manual labor among this supposed group's many distinctive practices.¹⁰⁷ Such emphasis on manual labor is taken to have represented the profoundly new doctrine that "Buddhist practice need not be restricted to any special external religious forms and conventions, and could be undertaken in the midst of all ordinary human activities."¹⁰⁸

The actual existence of any such communities has been called into question by many scholars.¹⁰⁹ But Chen Jinhua has proposed that Daoxuan's attacks on the unnamed *chan* practitioners point to the existence of precisely such a group:

Combining all the theoretical and practical "defects" that Daoxuan attributes to these *dhyāna* practitioners, we get the impression that they rather closely match several salient features that both later Chan ideologues (starting from the Song and Yuan periods) and some modern Chan scholars have invoked to characterize Chan monasticism and sectarianism. They include the effort to incorporate Chan

¹⁰⁵ Here I base myself largely on Foulk 1987: 36–42 and 298–328.

¹⁰⁶ Yanagida 1974: 7, as translated by Foulk 1987: 12.

¹⁰⁷ Ui Hakuju first proposed that manual labor was a characteristic feature of the so-called "East-Mountain" (*dongshan* 東山) community founded by Daoxin 道心, roughly contemporaneous with Daoxuan (McRae 1986: 42).

¹⁰⁸ Foulk 1987: 309, who criticizes this view.

¹⁰⁹ See principally Foulk 1987.

enlightenment into daily life, advocacy of communal manual labor, and economic self-sufficiency, etc. Although some scholars have recently challenged the existence of such a “proto-Chan” ideology and movement under the Tang dynasty, Daoxuan’s descriptions and criticisms... seem to provide serious evidence that a significant number of *dhyāna* practitioners were experimenting with these ideas as early as the middle of the seventh century.¹¹⁰

Thus, correctly identifying the target of Daoxuan’s attacks could have important consequences for our understanding of the institutional development of Chinese Buddhism. If Daoxuan was attacking Bodhidharma’s followers, this would provide a source—indeed, the only source—for the existence of a group with distinctly “Chan” doctrines affiliated with Bodhidharma beginning in the early seventh century. However, if my analysis is correct, there is no reason to believe that Daoxuan was attacking Bodhidharma or his “followers,” and the early Chan movement is again relegated to the late seventh century.

But who, then, are Daoxuan’s targets? Do his comments indicate the existence of some hitherto unknown *chan* practitioners? Or, are they simply general observations, not pointing to anyone in particular?

The Three Levels Movement

To interpret Daoxuan’s comments on *chan* practice correctly we must first identify the well-known *chan* practitioners of his day. But if Daoxuan had any kind of polemical agenda—and his criticisms suggest that he did—we cannot necessarily take the “groups” mentioned in the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* as the entirety of famous contemporary monks known for their *chan* practice. We must also consider that in composing the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* Daoxuan is presenting a particular picture of what *chan* means. For example, when he criticizes those monks who neglect doctrinal study, Daoxuan writes, “In the world there is the saying that ‘ignorant old fellow’ just means *chan* master” 故世諺曰，無知之叟，義指禪師。¹¹¹ He alludes here to the fact that certain individuals are viewed by the

¹¹⁰ Chen 2002a: 343.

¹¹¹ T.2060: 50.597b15–16.

world as “*chan* masters”; but the point is that he does not agree with this assessment—they are not “real” *chan* masters.

The question then becomes whether or not there were other well-known groups who advocated a *chan* practice that might have affinities with the content of Daoxuan’s criticisms. As I will now suggest, what we know about the Three Levels movement indeed fits well with much of what Daoxuan says.

Many of the initial studies of Xinxing and his followers, no doubt still influenced by their official status as “heretics,” tended to view their practices as radically different from prevailing norms.¹¹² They were often described as rejecting monastic discipline, eradicating the distinction between lay and clergy, and denying the utility of the traditional scriptural corpus.¹¹³ More recently, however, scholars have emphasized that despite some seemingly anti-establishment rhetoric, the practices that Xinxing instituted actually fell well within the orthodoxy of the time.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, for our purposes how Xinxing was perceived is at least as important as what he actually advocated.

First, epigraphical evidence suggests that Xinxing and his disciples were generally regarded as *chan* masters (*chanshi*).¹¹⁵ Documents that detail the institutional life of Three Levels monks also indicate that Xinxing did in fact place great emphasis on seated meditation. The Dunhuang manuscript known as the *Zhi fa* 制法 even declares that “seated meditation alone should be considered the fundamental

¹¹² For example Mark Lewis states that “the Three Stages sect declared the bankruptcy of received Buddhism and called for a new form of religion to rescue men from the world of error and sin in which the Buddhist establishment itself was now caught” (Lewis 1990: 213).

¹¹³ Lewis 1990: 215–225.

¹¹⁴ Hubbard 2001: 142–148. Dan Stevenson also emphasizes the pan-sectarian nature of *Sanjie* ritual manuals (Stevenson 1987: 266–283).

¹¹⁵ Of the seven memorial steles for Xinxing’s followers noted by Hubbard, six explicitly label them as *chan* masters (Hubbard 1991: 266–268). Nishimoto has recently discovered four more extant stele inscriptions for Three Levels followers, two of whom are called *chan* masters (Nishimoto 1998: 81). Seemingly unnoticed so far by Three Levels scholars is a stele from Shanxi reported by Amy McNair, dated on the basis of iconography to the second half of the seventh century (McNair 1996). Though the stele text is effaced, part of the title is still readable, indicating that it was erected for a “*chan* master of the Three Levels” 三階禪師.

[practice] for all the evil monks of the evil world after the Buddha's extinction" 惡世界佛滅度後，一切惡出家人唯以坐禪爲本。¹¹⁶

Xinxing spent most of his life around the Qi capital of Ye 鄴 in north-east China, but in 589 he was invited to the new Sui capital, Daxingcheng 大興城 (later renamed Chang'an 長安), built from the ground up only five years before.¹¹⁷ The Sui minister Gao Jiong 高穎, arguably the most powerful statesman of the time, reportedly established a special cloister (*yuan* 院) for Xinxing at the Zhenji 真寂 temple, which itself was Gao's former residence.¹¹⁸ According to the *Bian zheng lun*, which records several other Buddhist projects sponsored by Gao Jiong, Xinxing's cloister was in fact a "chan cloister" (禪院).¹¹⁹ Daoxuan's biography of Xinxing tells us that upon arrival in the capital he wrote approximately forty fascicles of teachings, among which were "rules for the affairs of the assembly [of monks] as instituted east of the mountain [i.e. in Ye]" 山東所制眾事諸法。¹²⁰ We also hear that a total of five temples were built for Xinxing's followers in the capital,¹²¹ and

¹¹⁶ Hubbard 2001: 20, with slight modifications. The *Zhi fa* is found as part of Pelliot 2849, which contains regulations for Three Levels monks, procedures for begging for food, and a precept ceremony. This text was first identified as pertaining to Xinxing and his community by Daniel Stevenson (1987), and then later (independently) by Nishimoto Teruma. For an edited version of the text, see Nishimoto 1998: 578–601. The view that seated meditation (*zuochan* 坐禪) was the most appropriate practice for the age of *mo fa* seems to have been widespread. The best testament to this is the expression of such views in the *Miao sheng ding jing* 妙聖定經, an apocryphal sutra recovered at Dunhuang that was instrumental in the thought of Huisi and Zhiyi. On this text, and for an edited version, see Sekiguchi 1969: 379–402.

¹¹⁷ On the dating of Xinxing's arrival in Chang'an, see Nishimoto 1998: 61. On the construction of the Sui capital, see Wright 1979: 78–81 and Xiong 2000: 31–50.

¹¹⁸ On Gao Jiong and his role in the founding of the Sui, see Wright 1979: 66–73. On Xinxing's invitation see his biography in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* (T.2060: 50.560a15–16). The Zhenji temple was founded by Gao Jiong in 583, not long after the initial construction of the city (Xiong 2002: 305).

¹¹⁹ T.2110: 52.519b13.

¹²⁰ T.2060: 50.560a16. Daoxuan even reports that other temples in the city soon began to follow these regulations.

¹²¹ According to Daoxuan, these were the Huadu 化度, Guangming 光明, Cimen 慈門, Huiji 慧日, and Hongshan 弘善 temples (T.2060: 50.560a19). In addition to these five, Nishimoto has identified eight more temples that may have had some connection with the Three Levels group (Nishimoto 1998: 128–129). The Huadu temple was the Zhenji temple established by Gao Jiong (the name was changed in 619). Although Daoxuan clearly indicates that these five temples were built for Xinxing's followers (又於京師置寺五所, T.2060: 50.560a19), secular sources suggest that the temples in question were all in existence long before Xinxing had arrived (Xiong 2000: 303–320; the Hongshan 弘善 temple mentioned by Daoxuan may be the same as the Hongshan 宏善 temple found in other

according to the *Ming bao ji* 冥報記 (written at roughly the same time as the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*), the monks who headed these temples were still known half a century later as “the five *chan* masters.”¹²²

Moreover, the fact that the circulation of Three Levels texts was officially banned in 600 does not seem to have affected either the popularity of the Three Levels movement or the continued presence of Xinxing's disciples at major temples.¹²³ The early decades of the seventh century also saw the phenomenal success of the so-called “Inexhaustible Storehouse,” founded at Xinxing's temple, which attracted unprecedented levels of donations from wide segments of society.¹²⁴ Epigraphical and archeological evidence also suggests that during the middle of the seventh century Three Levels monks were received at the court of emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 627–650) and patronized by the broader aristocracy.¹²⁵

Thus it seems certain that when Daoxuan was writing the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners*—and indeed all throughout his life—he and his contemporaries would have known of Xinxing's followers as famous *chan* masters connected with a powerful and wealthy institution. It is therefore interesting to note that in the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* Daoxuan should make no mention of anyone associated with this group, for it certainly cannot be claimed that he had insufficient knowledge of them, that they did not constitute an organized group, or that they were not famous as practitioners of *chan*.

sources: see Yabuki 1927: 120). If this is true, then it is possible that Daoxuan is referring to the creation of new cloisters, as was the case with the Zhenji/Huadu temple.

¹²² T.2082: 51.788c4–5. The *Ming bao ji* was written by Tang Lin 唐臨 (600–659), grandson of Xinxing's patron Gao Jiong. See the translation of this biography by Gjertson 1989: 157–160. A handy comparison of the various biographical accounts of Xinxing's life can be found in Nishimoto 1998: 34–40.

¹²³ Hubbard 2001: 195–230. We also have no way of knowing to what extent the proscription was enforced.

¹²⁴ According to the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (first printed in 981), during the first half of the seventh century “men and women of good society would come in repentance of their offenses and vie with one another in their donations so that order could not be maintained. They would abandon entire carts of money and silks, and after having donated their valuables and silks, they would leave without even making their names known” (cited in Hubbard 2001: 198). Though often associated with the Three Levels movement, the so-called inexhaustible storehouses had existed since at least the early fifth century and were a common institution of the time (Michibata 1967: 514–526).

¹²⁵ See below p. 101.

There is another historical point worthy of our attention. Differing from previous scholars who linked the suppressions of the Three Levels teachings to doctrinal positions offensive to the emperor, Jamie Hubbard has suggested that the initial suppression in 600 may have been connected with the demotion of Xinxing's chief patron Gao Jiong the year before.¹²⁶ Gao's ousting is generally understood as one piece in the power struggle between supporters of the then crown prince Yang Yong 楊勇 (d. 604) and Emperor Wen's second son Yang Guang 楊廣 (569–617), the future Emperor Yang 煬帝.¹²⁷ Gao Jiong's son was married to Yang Yong's daughter, and Gao had consistently supported Yang Yong at court. Meanwhile various other powerful players, notably Empress Wenxian 文獻 (553–602), were trying to convince Wendi to remove Yang Yong and name Yang Guang heir apparent. Gao Jiong was eventually charged with conspiracy, and Yang Guang became crown prince in 600, the same year the Three Levels texts were banned.

Yang Guang's status, however, was not assured, and he spent the next four years making sure that none of his other brothers would challenge him.¹²⁸ It is thus perhaps significant that the founding of the first Chanding temple in 603 was ostensibly undertaken for the post-mortem benefit of Empress Wenxian, Yang Guang's most powerful supporter, who had died in 602. The edict ordering the construction of this temple begins as follows:

自稠師滅後，禪門不開。雖戒慧乃弘，而行儀攸闕。今所立寺，既名禪定，望嗣前塵。¹²⁹

Since the death of Master [Seng]chou, the gate of *chan* has not yet been opened. Although the [teachings of] precepts and wisdom are still propagated, the rules for conduct have been lacking. Now that the monastery established is called "Chanding," it is hoped that what was previously practiced [by Sengchou] will be continued.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Although this is not indicated by Hubbard (2001: 197), Yabuki seems to have already suggested this possibility in his initial study (Yabuki 1927: 47). See also Nishimoto 1998: 130–131.

¹²⁷ Xiong 2006: 22–25.

¹²⁸ Xiong 2006: 25–28.

¹²⁹ T.2060: 50.573c17–19. This edict is preserved in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography of Tanqian 曇遷 (542–607), the first abbot of the temple.

¹³⁰ Translation by Chen 2002b: 183, with slight modifications.

When we consider that Xinxing's chief disciple and renowned *chan* master Sengyong 僧邕 (543–631) was at this very time leading a congregation of over three hundred monks in a “*chan* cloister” at the Zhenji temple, and that there were at least four other major temples in the capital associated with Xinxing's *chan* master disciples, it is impossible to take the assertion “since the death of Master [Seng]chou the gate of *chan* has not yet been opened” as an actual description of an absence of prominent *chan* masters in the capital. The edict also mentions that “rules of conduct” (*xing yi* 行儀) for monks had been lacking. And yet, if Daoxuan's biography of Xinxing is to be believed, Xinxing had compiled a set of monastic rules and regulations that were either followed or imitated in many other local temples.¹³¹

The above-mentioned edict thus does not represent the whole story. Might it be that establishing the first Changding temple was part of a broader attempt to shore up support for the Yang Guang faction, which had lost a powerful ally with the passing of Empress Wenxian?¹³² Though no longer in office, Gao Jiong was still alive (he was executed in 607 after a brief re-instatement by Emperor Yang),¹³³ and Yang Yong was still a major rival for the throne (he and his descendants would be killed shortly after the death/murder of Emperor Wen).¹³⁴ Moreover, Yang Guang himself had just returned to Chang'an in the fall of 600 from a ten-year stint in the former southern capital of Jiangdu 江都, and thus may not have had as much support in the city as his older brother. He is recorded to have sponsored a large temple in 601, which he filled with monks from Jiangdu, perhaps as a means to increase his influence in the capital.¹³⁵ The founding of the first Changding temple

¹³¹ T.2060: 50.560a20. It has been pointed out by many scholars that the specific practices attributed to Xinxing and his followers were actually shared by a wide variety of groups. This, however, in no way diminishes the fact that Daoxuan seems to suggest that, in the capitals at least, Xinxing was instrumental in establishing practices such as begging for food or the daily six-fold repentance.

¹³² Empress Wenxian was one of the most powerful and influential consorts in Chinese imperial history and had an active role in many areas of the new government (Wright 1979: 63–66).

¹³³ Wright 1979: 68.

¹³⁴ On the murder of Yang Yong's family, see Xiong 2006: 33.

¹³⁵ This was the Riyan temple 日嚴寺. On Emperor Yang's temple building activities, see Yamazaki 1952: 22–25. It is also interesting to note that the Riyan temple was where Daoxuan later entered as a novice in 610. He spent five years there before moving to the

thus may have been in part an attempt to capitalize on the prestige of Sengchou and the *chan* masters of Ye, while at the same time marginalizing Xinxing's surviving disciples, who may have been directly or indirectly associated with a rival political faction.

Until more detailed research can be conducted the above scenario remains speculative. But even if the first Changding temple was not constructed with this explicit aim, we can easily imagine that it would have had this effect. Both groups were after all known largely as *chan* masters. Note also that Sengchou's followers, who made up the majority of the monks at the Changding temples,¹³⁶ came from Ye, the same region as Xinxing and Sengyong.¹³⁷ Moreover, Sengyong, who led the congregation at the Zhenji temple after Xinxing's death, was believed to have once been a disciple of Sengchou.¹³⁸ In fact, according to Sengyong's memorial stele, Sengchou had explicitly praised his advanced abilities in *chan*.¹³⁹ If this is true, or even if it was merely believed to be so at the time, it is hard to imagine that Sengyong and his followers could have taken the imperial proclamation cited above as anything but an affront, as it would have directly implied that Sengyong was not a true *chan* master.

As Chen Jinhua has shown, Daoxuan underwent the larger part of his training at the Changding temples during the early seventh century.¹⁴⁰

Changding temple with his teacher Zhishou 智首 (Yamazaki 1967: 160). It thus seems clear that there was a close relationship between the two institutions, though the Riyan temple was shut down in 625, seven years after the founding of the Tang.

¹³⁶ Based on Chen's study, half of the identifiable monks were associated with Sengchou (Chen 2002b: 206).

¹³⁷ They were, in fact, probably based in exactly the same area. Tokiwa Daijō was the first to suggest that Baoshan 寶山, located in the mountains west of Ye, was the "womb" of the Three Levels movement. This conclusion is based largely on numerous burial inscriptions from the surrounding area (Tokiwa 1927; Tsukamoto 1937; Ōuchi 1997). The exact location of Sengchou's temple is not certain, but Longshan, mentioned as the site of the temple in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, is just 10 km to the northeast of Baoshan, and the Xiaonanhai caves (one of which contains a labeled painting of Sengchou—see Yan 1995: 569) are an even closer distance to the south (see Yan 1993: 39 for a map of the sites in the region). There is even a slight possibility that Xinxing's original temple was in fact the Yunmen temple of Sengchou (Ōuchi 1997: 299–300), though this cannot be confirmed. Recent evaluations of the influence of the Three Levels group in the Ye area as seen from archeological evidence can be found in Li 1997: 468–472 and Ding 1988: 19–20. For a survey of the temples in the Ye area based on written sources, see Suwa 1988: 294–322.

¹³⁸ See Sengyong's biography, T.2060: 50.583a5–15.

¹³⁹ For Sengyong's stele, see Yabuki 1927: 40–42. I will discuss this text below.

¹⁴⁰ Chen 2002a: 375–384.

Sengyong lived until 631, and would have been a presence in the capital all through this time.¹⁴¹ Thus, if there was a rivalry between Xinxing's followers and the monks of the Changding temples, Daoxuan probably was influenced by it, if only by dint of where he lived.

In short, not only is there a conspicuous absence of the well-known *chan* master Xinxing and his followers in the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners*, it is also conceivable that there was some kind of institutional rivalry between Daoxuan's home temple and the remaining Three Levels adherents in Chang'an. The next step, then, is to see if the content of Daoxuan's criticism matches either the doctrines advocated by Xinxing or the descriptions of Three Levels practices in other sources.

This is a difficult question to answer, if only because our knowledge of the Three Levels teachings remains limited. And even if Daoxuan was criticizing them directly, he may not have accurately represented their practices. Yet, despite these limitations it is still possible to discern in what Daoxuan says a number of doctrines and practices that appear to be characteristic of the Three Levels movement.

Let us begin by looking at the first, and I believe the most important, misunderstanding of *chan* that Daoxuan addresses, contained in section four:

若乃心水鼓浪，則世業難成。想寂離緣，則理自清顯。涅槃敘定，豈不然哉。故使，聚落宴坐，神仙致譏，空林睡臥，群聖同美。誠以，託靜求心，則散心易攝，由攝心故，得解脫也。成論明誥，斯可師之。

If waves are stirred on the waters of the mind, then worldly affairs will be difficult to accomplish. If thoughts are quelled and one departs from objects, then the truth will shine purely of its own. How could it not be [also] thus with nirvana and the other absorptions? Thus even if you sit in quietude in towns and villages, gods and immortals will heap censure upon you. But if you [so much as] lie down and sleep in empty forests, the multitude of sages will all praise you.¹⁴² Indeed if one avails of quietude to seek the mind, then it is easy to concentrate one's distracted thoughts. Owing to a concentrated mind, one attains liberation. The

¹⁴¹) Moreover Sengyong's memorial stele was penned by the famous calligrapher Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢, suggesting that Xinxing's disciples were still supported by powerful patrons (Hubbard 1991: 266).

¹⁴²) The point seems to be that even if you meditate while living in the city, this is still not enough. In contrast, if living in the proper environment, even a seemingly ordinary behavior like sleeping in praise.

Satyasiddhi treatise¹⁴³ clearly states this, and one can accordingly take it as authoritative.

The key point seems to be that separation from the distractions of the city is a necessary condition for true *chan* practice. This fits well with the general pattern of the biographies of the *chan* practitioners, in which the usual mode of training is long stints of solitary practice in remote regions.¹⁴⁴

In the next section, Daoxuan criticizes those who fail to understand this point:

世有定學，妄傳風教。同纏俗染，混輕儀迹。即色明空，既談之於心口。體亂爲靜，固形之於有累。神用沒於詞令，定相腐於脣吻。排小捨大，獨建一家。攝濟住持，居然乖僻。

In the world there are practitioners of meditation who falsely transmit a certain style of teaching. They unite with the stains of the secular world, mixing up and taking lightly the [proper] deportments [for a monk]. Having explained emptiness as “nothing but form,” they discuss it with their minds and mouths. They embody agitation and take that for quiescence, and thus [try to] give form to it [i.e. quiescence] through attachments. The activity of their spirit drowns in words and orders, and the marks of concentration rot upon their lips [as they speak]. Rejecting both the lesser and the greater [vehicles], they set up a house of their own. Their embracing and rescuing [of sentient beings] and their dwelling in and maintaining of [the teachings] are thus naturally deviant.¹⁴⁵

Part of the difficulty in identifying a real target for these attacks is that we cannot know how literally to take them. When Daoxuan says that these people “reject both the lesser and the greater vehicles,” is this simply his way of making a general criticism? Or is he referring to an actual group with an actual doctrine that advocated something other than either the greater or lesser vehicle? For now let us focus on the overall thrust of Daoxuan’s argument—that *chan* cannot be practiced amid the agitation of towns and villages, and that his opponents falsely

¹⁴³ *Cheng lun* 成論 refers to the *Chengshi lun* 成實論 (T.1646), generally reconstructed as either the *Tattva-siddhi-śāstra* or the *Satya-siddhi-śāstra*, though I have not identified the passage(s) from this text to which Daoxuan refers.

¹⁴⁴ It is also interesting to note that the biography of Xinxing is unusual in this regard, and gives no indication that Xinxing ever spent time as a solitary hermit.

¹⁴⁵ Chen’s translation of this section is found in Chen 2002a: 339.

imagine their immersion in such conditions to be a kind of quietude.

As it turns out, one of Xinxing's more interesting teachings was that because of the inferior capacities of human beings (those of the "third level"), cultivation of practice must take place in towns and cities and not in remote regions. In the *Duigen qixing fa* 對根起行法, one of our most important sources on Three Levels teachings, we find the following statements about the appropriate places of practice:

第二段：明三階出世處不同所由義者，於內有三段。一者第一階一乘根機凡夫菩薩入道處，莫問聚落山林靜亂俱得道 (...)

第二階三乘根機眾生入道處者，唯在靜處，不得在聚落 (...)

第三階空見有見眾生出世處者，唯得在聚落，不合在山林閑靜。¹⁴⁶

The second section: [this] clarifies the reason that the places of liberation are not the same for the three levels. This has three parts: the first concerns the place at which the ordinary people and bodhisattvas of the first level, who have the capacity for the one vehicle [the *ekayāna*], enter the path. Without question of city or town, mountain or forest, in both quiet and agitation they gain the path...

Sentient beings of the second level, who are of the capacity for the three vehicles [that of the *śrāvaka*, the *pratyekabuddha*, and the *bodhisattva*], enter the path only in quiet places, and not in cities and towns...

As for the place of liberation of sentient beings of the third level, who have views of emptiness and existence,¹⁴⁷ they attain [liberation] only in cities and towns, and it is not suitable [for them] to reside in the calm and quiet of mountains and forests.

Though Xinxing often mentions practices for the first and second levels, he is actually advocating the practice for people of the third level, for in his understanding this corresponded to almost everyone. Thus Xinxing effectively taught that it was not suitable to pursue practice outside of the city among the "mountains and forests." Applying this doctrine to *chan* practice, it seems very close to what Daoxuan condemns. It is also interesting to note that the rejection of the first and second levels could easily be interpreted as a rejection of both the

¹⁴⁶ The text is that of Nishimoto 1998: 490. See also Yabuki 1927, *betsu hen*: 125. The translation is by Hubbard 2001: 80–85 with minor modifications. Nishimoto 1998: 172–181 discusses the various recensions of this key Three Levels text.

¹⁴⁷ The term *kongjian youjian zhongsheng* 空見有見眾生, "sentient beings with views of emptiness and existence," is the standard term in Xinxing's writings to refer to human beings of the third level.

lesser vehicle (the second level) and the great vehicle (the first level), another of Daoxuan's accusations.¹⁴⁸

Similarly, in several places Daoxuan suggests that his opponents were either unversed in or openly hostile towards accepted scriptures. In section 10a he states that "In recent times many practitioners of meditation have neglected the study of doctrine" 頃世定士多削義門.¹⁴⁹ A bit later he says they also "do not think and choose, and they turn away from the scriptures of perfect meaning" 未曾思擇扈背了經.¹⁵⁰ In a similar vein (section 11), we hear that they "rarely read the true scriptures" 正經罕讀,¹⁵¹ and that their lack of knowledge is so bad that "it has caused sutra-lecturers to ridicule these folks. And thus in the world there is the saying that 'ignorant old fellow' just means *chan* master" 致使講徒例輕此類。故世諺曰，無知之叟，義指禪師。¹⁵²

Although Xinxing clearly had a deep knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures, he does seem to have advocated a rejection of major portions of the canon. The basic theory was that because of the inferior capacities of human beings it was no longer possible to discriminate the true from the false; thus, selecting one scripture as higher than another might accidentally result in slandering the authentic teaching, a sin to be avoided at all costs.¹⁵³ Accordingly, in outlining the appropriate scriptures for each of the three levels, Xinxing classifies "sudden teachings of the great vehicle, such as the *Huayan* and other Mahāyāna sutras" 頓教大乘法華嚴經諸大乘經, as appropriate only for people of the first level. Similarly, "the sutras, *vinaya*, and commentaries of

¹⁴⁸) Though one might object on technical grounds that the distinction between the three vehicles and the one vehicle is not the same as the distinction between Hinayāna and Mahāyāna, it does not seem unreasonable that someone might classify this distinction as such in a non-technical context. The teaching of three vehicles does, after all, include the path of the *śrāvaka*. Moreover, in the passage examined just below Xinxing distinguishes the texts appropriate to the first and second levels as a contrast between "Great Vehicle" scriptures on the one hand, and "sutras, *vinaya*, and commentaries" (i.e. the three baskets) on the other, a term routinely used in the context of textual classification for the corpus of the lesser vehicle (such as in the passage by Zhiyi cited earlier).

¹⁴⁹) T.2060: 50.597a21.

¹⁵⁰) T.2060: 50.597a22.

¹⁵¹) T.2060: 50.597b8.

¹⁵²) T.2060: 50.597b15.

¹⁵³) Hubbard 2001: 123–131.

the three vehicles” 三乘經律論 are appropriate only for the second level, while for the third level we find a list of what appear to be specific Three Levels teachings, such as “the teachings given by all buddhas and bodhisattvas [for those who have] views of existence or emptiness [i.e., beings of the third level]” 一切佛菩薩應說空見有見法。¹⁵⁴

It is easy to see how someone like Daoxuan could have viewed this as a rejection of the canonical scriptures and the setting up of a new “house” that was neither the greater nor the lesser vehicle. Perhaps even more important than what Xinxing advocated, however, or what his students actually did, is how they were generally perceived. We hear, for example, of the *chan* master Xiaoci 孝慈, a disciple of Xinxing who reportedly rejected the *Lotus Sutra*:

慈門寺僧孝慈，年可五十。幼少已來，依投信行禪師說三階佛法。以修苦行，常乞食爲業，六時禮懺，著糞掃衣。隨所至處，說三階佛法，勸誘朦俗。每說三階佛法時，嘗言不合讀誦大乘經典。若讀誦者，入十方阿鼻地獄。¹⁵⁵

The monk Xiaoci of the Cimen temple was about fifty years old.¹⁵⁶ From his youth he relied on *chan* master Xinxing. He preached the doctrine of the Three Levels. His main activity was ascetic practice and always begging for food. Six times daily he practiced veneration and repentance, and donned a refuse-rag robe. Wherever he went he preached the doctrine of the Three Levels and misled the people. Whenever he preached the doctrine of the Three Levels he would always say that it was not fitting to read the scriptures of the Mahāyāna, and that if one were to read them one would fall into hell.

Later in the story an old woman embarrasses Xiaoci by making him vow to be silenced for life should the *Lotus Sutra* actually be the Buddha's true word: Xiaoci and his five *chan* master companions are all struck dumb. The perception revealed by this story seems to have been widespread; other polemical tracts attacking the Three Levels teachings

¹⁵⁴ *Duigen qixing fa* (Nishimoto: 482–483). These passages are discussed by Hubbard 2001: 124–127, and Lewis 1990: 222.

¹⁵⁵ This story is found in the *Shimen zijing lu* 釋門自鏡錄 T.2083: 51.806b3–7, and is discussed by Yabuki 1927: 101–102, who notes several other similar anti-Three Levels stories contained in the text.

¹⁵⁶ The Cimen temple was one of the five temples where Xinxing's disciples resided. See Daoxuan's biography of Xinxing, T.2060: 50.560a20.

also specifically cite the doctrine that one would fall into hell if one read or recited the sutras.¹⁵⁷

The description of the monk Xiaoci also brings to our attention a few other well-attested aspects of Three Levels practice. First, Xiaoci is said to have taken begging for food as his “main activity.” This accords with other descriptions of Three Levels practice, including Daoxuan’s biography of Xinxing, where he states that this was the common practice of Xinxing’s adherents.¹⁵⁸ A document recovered from Dunhuang gives explicit instructions concerning the procedure for begging in Xinxing’s community, leaving little doubt that Three Levels followers viewed it as a central practice.¹⁵⁹

We also see reference in the above story to a veneration and repentance ceremony performed six times throughout the day. As it turns out, seventh century authors almost invariably characterized the activities of Three Levels adherents by referring to begging and frequent veneration and repentance rites. One of Xinxing’s earliest biographies, contained in the *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀 written only a few years after his death, summarizes his practice by saying that “his followers all practiced the *fang deng* [repentance ceremony] to bind their purity, and practiced the *dhūta* [austerity] of begging for food” 門徒悉行方等結淨，頭陀乞食。¹⁶⁰ Daoxuan’s biography of Xinxing also states that “they all

¹⁵⁷ A comment recorded in the *Shi jingtu qunyi lun* 釋淨土群疑論 (composed by the monk Huaigan 懷感 in the mid-seventh century) illustrates a very similar view of Three Levels doctrine: “The *chan* masters of the Three Levels all take *chan* master Xinxing as an advanced bodhisattva. From within the Mahāyāna sutras he selected [excerpts] and assembled the *Three Levels Register*, which says that [in this age] in order to be reborn in the Buddha-lands of the ten directions it is only suitable to practice the universally true and universally correct Buddha-dharma [i.e. the Three Levels teachings]. If one practices the partially-true or partially-correct Buddha-dharma, or reads and chants the Mahāyāna sutras, then this is a teaching that does not correspond to the capacities [of living beings], and one will fall into the hells of the ten directions” 三階禪師等，咸以信行禪師是四依菩薩。於諸大乘經中，撰集三階集錄，言今千年已後第三階眾生，唯合行普真普正佛法得生十方佛國。若行別真別正佛法，及讀誦大乘經等，即是不當根法，墮於十方地獄 (T.1960: 47.48a16–20). For details on this text and its criticism of Three Levels doctrines, see Yabuki 1927: 105, and Nishimoto 1990.

¹⁵⁸ T.2060: 50.560a20. See also Hubbard 2001: 24–27.

¹⁵⁹ Nishimoto 1998: 578–601.

¹⁶⁰ T.2034: 49.105b22. *Dhūta* (頭陀) and begging for food (乞食) could also be construed as two activities, but since begging for food is one of the *dhūtas*, and since Xinxing condemned other *dhūta* practices like forest-dwelling, I have translated as above.

performed the circumambulating veneration ritual six times throughout the day and made begging for food their main activity” 莫不六時禮旋，乞食爲業。¹⁶¹

It is thus of more than passing interest that in his criticism of the unnamed *chan* practitioners in section 10a, Daoxuan should explicitly mention these two activities in the same breath:

納衣乞食，綜計以爲道心。又有倚託堂殿邊旋竭誠，邪仰安形苟存曲計，執以爲是餘學並非。

[There are some who] wearing patched robes and begging for food, [nonetheless] take calculation [of material gain] as the mind of the way. There are further some who take refuge in chapels [in which] they circumambulate with exhaustive sincerity, [and yet,] calming their bodies with heterodox beliefs, they still preserve their twisted calculations, taking this [practice] to be correct and all other practices to be wrong.¹⁶²

Given how Daoxuan and other seventh century authors seem to have portrayed Xinxing and his followers, the conjunction of these two practices here is quite striking.

Of course, Daoxuan mentions many monks in his biographies, both *chan* practitioners and others, who practiced begging for food. Why then does he seem to criticize such a practice here? One answer may be that he is not criticizing the practice *per se*, but is just noting that these individuals do it in the wrong way, and my translation reflects this reading. For example, almost all of the *chan* practitioners noted by Daoxuan who begged for food did so while living in remote areas, among the “mountains and forests.” Xinxing and his followers, in contrast, begged for food in the capital, and Daoxuan himself would probably have witnessed this. For Daoxuan to find this unseemly fits well with the main thrust of his initial criticism—that some *chan* practitioners live amid the confusion of cities while claiming to be dwelling in quietude.

Daoxuan seems to imply that these practitioners relied on circumambulation practices at the expense of other activities, “taking

¹⁶¹ T.2060: 50.560a21.

¹⁶² For Chen's translation, which I have followed in substance, see Chen 2002a: 341.

this [practice] to be correct and all other practices to be wrong.”¹⁶³ This is exactly how he describes Xinxing’s attitude in his biography:

凡有景塔，皆周行禮拜，遶旋翹仰，因為來世敬佛之習。用斯一行通例餘業。¹⁶⁴

Wherever there were stupas, [Xinxing] would walk around them and make prostrations, circumambulating and gazing up in reverence, and he took this practice to be a cause [allowing one] to venerate the Buddha in future lives. He used this single practice (*xing* 行) to encompass all other practices (*ye* 業).

While the point here is more that Xinxing believed that all other practices were included within his veneration practice, the implication is that he viewed it as the single most effective activity, a position very close to the one criticized in the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners*.

Finally, Daoxuan makes a few more isolated comments which can also be linked to Xinxing. As Chen Jinhua notes, Daoxuan seems to imply that his opponents formed their own “communities,” failed to observe the precepts, and practiced manual labor:

復有相迷同好，聚結山門，持犯蒙然，動掛形網，運斤運刃，無避種生。

Further there are some who mislead each other and become friends, gathering together in temples. They are confused as to what constitutes upholding versus breaking [the precepts], and in their actions they are caught in the net of form. They wield axes and knives, and they do not avoid hurting living creatures.¹⁶⁵

These comments could be general criticism. But, as it turns out, Daoxuan does record that Xinxing both renounced the precepts and practiced manual labor.¹⁶⁶ Again, Hubbard points out that Xinxing’s

¹⁶³ Again note that the actual activities in question, the *fangdeng* 方等 and other repentance ceremonies, were widespread practices at the time. Dan Stevenson suggested long ago that rituals of this kind were widely shared by Chinese Buddhists during the North-South Dynasties period and early Tang (Stevenson 1987). More recently Bruce Williams has also linked many of the ritual texts once felt to be characteristic of Three Levels ritual practice to broader trends in North-East China during the late sixth century (Williams 2002: 106–199, 159–186).

¹⁶⁴ T.2060: 50.560a6–8.

¹⁶⁵ T.2060: 50.597b6. Chen links this passage to the idea that early Chan monasticism was characterized by reliance on manual labor (Chen 2002a: 341–342), a view refuted by Foulk 1987: 313–323.

¹⁶⁶ T.2060: 50.560a10.

supposed abandonment of the precepts is belied by his community's strong emphasis on monastic discipline.¹⁶⁷ This, however, in no way diminishes the possibility that someone like Daoxuan would have objected to even a nominal rejection of the canonical rules.

As for Daoxuan's comment about "gathering together in temples," Three Levels followers are known to have lived in isolated cloisters within other monasteries, a fact supported by both prescriptive and descriptive sources. Three Levels texts like the *Zhi fa* specifically indicate that Three Levels monks should live separated from the rest of clergy.¹⁶⁸ And emperor Xuanzong's edict of 725 banning the Three Levels teachings stated that "the barriers [separating them from the rest of the community] shall be removed. They will now live together with the community of monks in the main temple; separate dwellings are not permitted."¹⁶⁹ Other sources also indicate the presence of "Three Levels cloisters" (*Sanjie yuan* 三階院) within certain monasteries in Chang'an.¹⁷⁰ Obviously it cannot be said for sure that any of these activities were exclusive to Three Levels monks. Nonetheless, they do seem to have been among their most important and noteworthy practices.

To sum up, we have seen that (1) Xinxing and his followers were known as *chan* masters and had a strong presence in Chang'an from before the founding of the Chanding temples through the end of the seventh century and beyond, (2) the circumstances surrounding the founding of the Chanding temples and the initial (and unsuccessful) proscription of the Three Levels teachings suggest the possibility of an institutional rivalry between Xinxing's followers and the newly imported *chan* masters of the Chanding temples, (3) Daoxuan fails to mention Xinxing or his followers as eminent *chan* practitioners in the *Evaluation*

¹⁶⁷ Hubbard 2001: 10.

¹⁶⁸ Nishimoto 1998: 578. See also the comments in the *Nianfo jing* 念佛鏡, which suggest that Three Levels monks refused to sit in the communal hall with the rest of the assembly (T.1966: 47.127a2–12, discussed in Yabuki 1927: 563); but it should be noted that this is a Song-dynasty text which attributes views to Three Levels followers that are not always consonant with Tang sources.

¹⁶⁹ 勅諸寺三階院，並令除去隔障，使與大院相通，眾僧錯居，不得別住 (T.2154: 55.679a16–17). This edict is preserved in the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄. Translation of this passage is by Hubbard (2001: 214), with slight modifications.

¹⁷⁰ See for example the description of the Three Levels cloister at the Jingyu 淨域 temple in the *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎, cited by Yabuki 1927: 122.

of the *Chan Practitioners*, and finally (4) many of Daoxuan's objections can be linked to actual Three Levels teachings or widely held perceptions about their beliefs. Taken all together, this suggests that Xinxing and his followers were indeed among the main targets of Daoxuan's attacks.

Universal Reverence

The evidence examined so far suggests that Daoxuan opposed certain interpretations of *chan* practice closely associated with the later followers of Xinxing. Determining reasons for such bias on Daoxuan's part would considerably strengthen this hypothesis. And at least one such reason is revealed by an examination of Daoxuan's biography of Xinxing's disciple Sengyong.¹⁷¹

This biography provides a particularly good opportunity to evaluate Daoxuan's attitudes because we can compare it to the stele inscription on which it is based.¹⁷² Daoxuan discusses the composition of the stele text towards the end of Sengyong's biography:

左庶子李伯藥製文，率更令歐陽詢書。文筆新華，多增傳本，故累誦野外矣。¹⁷³

[The stele] text was composed by Li Bo, Grandee of the Tenth Order,¹⁷⁴ and cal-

¹⁷¹ One possible objection to the notion that Daoxuan disapproved of Xinxing or his followers is the simple fact that biographies of Xinxing, Sengyong and a few other Three Levels followers are included in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, which as its name indicates was intended as a record of eminent monks. I believe, however, that we do not necessarily have to understand Daoxuan as issuing a blanket endorsement of every monk he chronicled. Though prefaces to such collections usually make a point to indicate that the author has gone to great pains to weed out monks who were famous only in name, the reality of the situation may have been somewhat different. If a monk like Xinxing was well respected by society at large, it might have been politically impossible for Daoxuan to fail to mention him altogether.

¹⁷² The stele text can be found in Yabuki 1927: 40–43. The stone itself was lost in the Song, and the preserved text contains numerous lacunae, which can sometimes but not always be supplemented from the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography. For a summary of the critical scholarship on this stele, see Nakata 1952.

¹⁷³ T.2060: 50.584a22–24.

¹⁷⁴ *Zuo shu zi* 左庶子, literally “left [i.e. senior] master of the host,” is perhaps equivalent to Hucker #6997 *Zuo shu zhang* 左庶長 (Hucker: 525), which he indicates was an honorary title in use during the Han.

ligraphed by Ouyang Xun, Director of the Court of the Watches.¹⁷⁵ The text and writing have been newly embellished, greatly adding to the text of the biography, and therefore it is constantly praised in distant regions.

It is difficult to determine exactly what Daoxuan means here, but he seems to be implying that the memorial stele has additional information not contained in some other unknown source text, and that these additions have contributed, perhaps undeservedly, to Sengyong's fame throughout the empire.

There is no way to determine if this is true. Although the biography seems to derive from the inscription, this would also be the case if there was a common source. Most of the biography reads like a condensation and simplification of the memorial, and the achievements of Sengyong sometimes appear minimized as a result: thus, Daoxuan's failure to mention the claim that Sengyong's family was descended from the ancient Zhou imperial house. But Daoxuan does seem to have thought highly of Sengyong. After indicating that various wild animals came to hear him preach, he writes: "If it were not for a miraculous response to his conduct, how could this have occurred?" 自非行感所及，何以致斯, a line not found in the stele text.¹⁷⁶

There is, however, one section of the inscription noticeably absent. Towards the end, both texts say that Sengyong was "always humble, yielding, and self-effacing, embodying the way and concealing his function" 卑辭屈己，體道藏用.¹⁷⁷ But the stele goes on to say:

未若道安之遊樊污對鑿齒而自伐彌天，慧遠之在廬山折桓元[玄]之致敬人主。¹⁷⁸

He was never like Dao'an, who when traveling to Fanwu boasted of filling heaven in his reply to [Xi] Zuochi, [nor like] Huiyuan, who when dwelling on Mount Lu resisted Huan Xuan's attempt to compel [the clergy] to reverence the ruler.

The first reference concerns an event recorded in Dao'an's biography in the *Gaoseng zhuan*. When the famous literatus Xi Zuochi, having

¹⁷⁵) *Leigeng ling* is Hucker #3584 (Hucker: 302), who during the Tang was in charge of the orderly operation of heir apparent's household.

¹⁷⁶) T.2060: 50.584a4-6.

¹⁷⁷) T.2060: 50.584a20; Yabuki: 41.16.

¹⁷⁸) Yabuki's text reads 桓元, but this must be an error for 桓玄.

invited Dao'an to his house, sat down before the great monk and introduced himself as "Xi Zuochi of the four oceans" 四海習鑿齒, Dao'an responded "the monk Dao'an who fills heaven" 彌天釋道安.¹⁷⁹ The second, and more significant, reference is to Dao'an's student Huiyuan, who in the early fifth century famously defended the clergy's prerogative to abstain from bowing to the sovereign.¹⁸⁰

That Sengyong is praised for *not* being like Huiyuan strongly suggests that by the time the memorial was composed, and perhaps even earlier, a link had been made between the Three Levels doctrine of "universal reverence" (*pu jing* 普敬) and the sensitive question of the Sangha's persistent refusal to bow to secular authorities.¹⁸¹ As almost all accounts of Xinxing's life indicate, one of his principal practices was the imitation of the monk named Never Despise (*bu qing* 不輕) from the *Lotus Sutra*, who famously bowed to everyone he met. As the *Lidai sanbao ji* biography says:

門徒悉 (...) 在道路行，無問男女，率皆禮拜，欲似法華常不輕行。¹⁸²

All [Xinxing's] followers... when walking on the road bowed to everyone regardless of whether they were male or female, desiring thereby to emulate Never Despise of the *Lotus Sutra*.

Such practice was potentially at odds with accepted monastic law. Indeed, the doctrinal basis for the clergy's refusal to bow to the ruler was the understanding that the *vinaya* prohibited monks from bowing to laymen. It is thus significant that, although he copies the above section of the *Lidai sanbao ji* nearly exactly in his biography, Daoxuan changes the wording slightly to indicate that Xinxing "reverenced both

¹⁷⁹) T.2059: 50.352c6. Arthur Link points out that this story was probably derived from a line found in a letter written by Xi Zuochi (Link 1958: 24).

¹⁸⁰) Huiyuan's resistance to general Huan Xuan's attempts to make the clergy bow to secular authority has been discussed in numerous secondary studies. See for example Itano 1940, Shimada 1962 and Kobayashi 1993: 64–114. Huiyuan's principal essay on the subject, the *Shamen bu bai wang lun* 沙門不拜王論, has been translated by Hurvitz 1958. See also Zürcher 1974: 231–239.

¹⁸¹) The term "universal reverence" seems to have been coined by Xinxing, and does not appear in Buddhist texts prior to his time. It occurs throughout the surviving Three Levels texts and constituted one of their principal doctrines (Nishimoto 1998: 319–320).

¹⁸²) T.2034: 49.105b23–24.

lay and clergy alike” 禮通道俗.¹⁸³ This change becomes even more significant when we realize that Daoxuan himself would eventually become embroiled in a major conflict with the state over precisely this issue.

From the time of Huiyuan the Buddhist monastic establishment was unrelenting in its opposition to any suggestion that it accord with Chinese custom by bowing to the emperor.¹⁸⁴ By the early Tang, several more attempts had been made to compel the clergy to bow, none of which was more than temporarily successful.¹⁸⁵ It should also be noted that the example of Never Despise, which Xinxing and his followers tried to emulate, had been used by rulers since at least the middle of the fifth century as evidence that, clerical insistence to the contrary notwithstanding, a monk bowing to a layman did not contravene Buddhist law.¹⁸⁶

These debates erupted again in the middle of the seventh century, when during the reign of Emperor Gaozong 高宗 an edict was issued on the fifteenth day of the fourth month of the second year of Longshuo 龍朔 (662) ordering discussion of the feasibility of demanding that monks and nuns bow to their parents, to the emperor, and to the empress.¹⁸⁷ The response of the clergy was immediate, and Daoxuan

¹⁸³ T.2060: 50.560a10. More literally, “his ritual behavior was the same [towards] cleric and lay.” Daoxuan also tells us that those who became his disciples “were not regulated according to seniority based on years of ordination” 未拘之以法歲 (T.2060: 50.560a15). This point is quite important, as one of the main arguments used by Daoxuan and other defenders of the clergy’s right not to bow to the ruler was that failure to bow to secular authority did not imply that the Sangha was bereft of the virtue of respect (*jing* 敬), as claimed by their critics. That such respect existed within the clergy was demonstrated with reference to monks bowing to the Buddha and monks bowing to each other on the basis of seniority.

¹⁸⁴ Though we do find the case of the monk Faguo 法果, who under the northern Wei argued that it was acceptable for monks to bow to the ruler because the ruler was a Buddha (Tsukamoto 1974: 18–20).

¹⁸⁵ A general survey of these events can be found in Michibata 1968: 163–219.

¹⁸⁶ The first recorded instance of this strategy occurs during the reign of Emperor Xiaowu 孝武 (454–465). This event is discussed by Takao 1952: 40; Tang, vol.2: 31; and Kamata 1982, vol. 3: 114–116. Never Despise is mentioned again in the *Futian lun* 福田論, written by the monk Yanzong 彥琮 (557–610) in response to Emperor Yang’s attempts to make the clergy bow (the text is preserved in the *Guang hong ming ji* 廣弘明集. The relevant passage is at T.2103: 52.281b23). On these events, see Tonami 1986: 221.

¹⁸⁷ The events of 662 are discussed by Weinstein 1987: 32–35. Large imperially-sanctioned debates on ritual protocol were common occurrences during the Tang (McMullen 1988: 114).

was at the center of the ensuing protests, writing several letters to high officials in an attempt to sway their opinions.¹⁸⁸

Sengyong's stele thus raises the possibility that during Daoxuan's lifetime at least some followers of the Three Levels teachings were actively supporting the government's attempts to make the clergy bow. Although records of the Sangha's resistance survive only from the incident of 662, this was actually an ongoing debate. The first recorded attempt by a Tang emperor to regulate the clergy's bowing occurred in the first month of 631, when Taizong issued an edict demanding that clerics cease receiving obeisance from their parents.¹⁸⁹ There must have been significant resistance, for the edict was repealed two years later.¹⁹⁰ Sengyong's stele, it should be noted, was composed precisely during this two-year window. Moreover, Three Levels monks were received at Taizong's court,¹⁹¹ and the recent discovery of a Three Levels cave near Chang'an confirms that by the middle of the seventh century the Three Levels teachings were back in favor among the elite.¹⁹² There is also evidence that some government officials used specifically Three Levels doctrines to argue in favor of clerical bowing. A large number of memorials written by officials on both sides of the issue during the 662 debates have been preserved, where we can see that pro-bow officials sometimes used the technical Three Levels term "universal

¹⁸⁸ Daoxuan's role in these events has been studied by Reinders 1997, but the most complete accounts are found in Tonami 1986: 496–511 and especially Fujiyoshi 2002: 341–371.

¹⁸⁹ Weinstein 1987: 14.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. Though the clergy may have successfully parried this one particular effort, it appears in general that during this time the government successfully subjected the Sangha to a greater degree of control than ever before. The famous "Code for Daoists and Buddhists" (*Daoseng ge* 道僧格), probably dating to the mid-630s, stipulated that monks would be subjected to punishments handed down by secular judges for any offense that violated civil law. This was, in principle, a great change from previous regulations, which returned errant monks to monastic officials for punishment for all crimes less than murder (Moroto 1990: 108–123). The debates on bowing should thus be seen as but one small part of this larger struggle, and resistance to the bowing was probably recorded in Buddhist sources only because, unlike the more unfavorable legal matters, it was generally successful.

¹⁹¹ A stele inscription for the otherwise unknown Three Levels monk Huiliao 慧了 reports that he was selected by one of emperor Taizong's close advisors to come to court and discuss the Dharma (Hubbard 1991: 267).

¹⁹² On this recently discovered cave site, see Zhang and Wang 2003 and Nishimoto 1999.

reverence,” coupled with the example of Never Despise, to justify their position.¹⁹³

Members of Daoxuan's coterie seem, moreover, to have been disturbed by this term. In the *Forest of Pearls of the Dharma Garden* (*Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林)—a Buddhist encyclopedia compiled largely by Daoxuan's friend and colleague Daoshi 道世 around the time of the bowing debates—there is a chapter entitled “making reverence” (*zhi jing* 致敬), with a sub-section on “universal reverence.” Through sutra excerpts and a brief introduction Daoshi implies that the true meaning of “universal reverence” is that everyone should always pay reverence to the Buddha and, by extension, his earthly representatives the clergy.¹⁹⁴ “Universal” is thus redefined to mean the universal obligation to make reverence, as opposed to the universal object of reverence advocated by Xinxing. In the general introduction to this chapter Daoshi even criticizes those “clergy and laypeople who make reverence to the multitudes” (或有道俗對眾禮拜), a clear reference to Three Levels bowing practice.¹⁹⁵

More research will clearly be needed in order to draw out the full implications of these findings and determine the exact level of involvement of Three Levels followers in the seventh century bowing debates. But the evidence collected so far suggests that in all likelihood some Three Levels followers supported, or at least did not oppose, the court's position, and there is every reason to think that this would have aroused Daoxuan's ire.

Conclusions: from *chan* to Chan

In this essay I have suggested two related but distinct ideas. First, I have argued that scholars have generally approached the study of Bodhidharma with the underlying assumption that he was always considered an important figure. As I have tried to demonstrate, this

¹⁹³ These memorials are preserved in the collection of documents known as the *Ji shamen bu ying bai su deng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 (T.2108), compiled shortly after the 662 debates by Daoxuan's contemporary Yanzong 彥宗. Use of *pu jing* to support the pro-bow position can be seen at T.2108: 52.462a11, 466b17, and 470b5.

¹⁹⁴ Beginning at T.2122: 53.431b12.

¹⁹⁵ T.2122: 53.430a17–19.

has led to various problematic claims concerning Daoxuan's opinion of this monk. Second, I have proposed that, rather than pointing to Bodhidharma or his followers, Daoxuan's comments in the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* are more likely an attack on at least certain elements of the Three Levels movement, who in society at large were among the most famous *chan* masters of the seventh century. Despite (or perhaps because of) such fame, this group seems to have attracted Daoxuan's special condemnation, concerning in particular its understanding of *chan*.

This conclusion, if correct, might have important consequences for our study of both Daoxuan and the Three Levels movement. Daoxuan was one of the most prolific Buddhist writers of the early Tang, and our knowledge of Buddhism during this period depends heavily on his works; this makes it imperative that we consider any possible bias on his part. Further, a careful reading of his other writings with the Three Levels movement in mind could shed much needed light on the influence of this still poorly understood group. The issues surrounding the bowing debates, as sketched above, are one brief attempt in this direction. I also believe that directing our attention to the Three Levels followers as *chan* masters might provide some new perspectives on the emergence of the so-called early Chan during the late seventh century, and I will now conclude with some thoughts in this direction.

Traditional East Asian historiography conceived the Chan school as a gradual progression from the early followers of Bodhidharma to the so-called East Mountain community of Daoxin and Hongren, eventually flowering with the famous sixth patriarch Huineng, who championed "sudden enlightenment" (*dun wu* 頓悟) against the partisans of the so-called Northern School of Shenxiu. With the discovery of the Dunhuang documents, however, scholars have been able to reconstruct a very different picture. Based on the available evidence, it seems likely that the notion of a special lineage of transmission from Bodhidharma did not come into existence before the followers of Hongren appeared on the metropolitan scene in the late seventh century. Thus, from a certain point of view, the story of early Chan is not the story of a lineage of mountain monks gradually moving to the capitals, but that of capital monks making use of the novel device of a lineage of secret transmission to appropriate the prestige and legitimacy previously associated with mountain-dwelling *chan* practitioners.

But what other forces shaped early Chan? We may wonder, for example, what other groups of *chan* masters were operating in the capitals at this time. As discussed in the introduction, other groups of capital-based *chan* masters would not necessarily have had a direct historical relationship with what we call early Chan, but they might have had an ideological influence, since any such groups would have faced the similar question of how to justify their status as *chan* masters while living as urban monastics—a style of life at odds with at least some contemporary understandings of ideal *chan* practice (such as Daoxuan's).

As we have seen, Daoxuan seems to have viewed the ideal *chan* master as an aloof ascetic who shuns contact with worldly powers and dwells in the remote mountains cultivating tranquility. Some such *chan* masters did have contact with rulers and worldly denizens, but in these cases they were reluctant to leave their mountaintop perches, agreeing to descend into the dusty world only after multiple entreaties and returning soon after to the solace of reclusion. This, at least, is how they are portrayed, and this is the model we see exemplified in the depictions of Sengchou and Bodhidharma analyzed at the beginning of this article. In this model, authenticity is verified by the actual embodiment of stillness and reclusion and by the miracles and supernatural powers understood to go hand in hand with proper meditative cultivation.

But Daoxuan does seem to have been aware that not everyone agreed with this model. As we have seen, his comments suggest the existence of an alternative contemporary understanding of *chan* practice. This understanding, at least as Daoxuan presents it, seems to have conceived of *chan* practice as something that occurred not in the remote mountains but while immersed in city life, and it is this point in particular that helps to suggest that some of Daoxuan's opponents were in fact the *chan* master followers of Xinxing.

We should remember, of course, that debates over the “true” nature of *chan* are as old as Buddhism itself.¹⁹⁶ So too are arguments about city versus mountain (or, in India, forest) practice. We must not forget

¹⁹⁶ See for example the famous episode in the *Vimalakīrti* sutra in which Vimalakīrti rebukes Śāriputra for thinking that true “quiet sitting” (*yan zuo* 宴坐) can be accomplished merely by sitting quietly (T.475: 14.539c15–27; Watson 1997: 37).

that there is not any necessary correlation between either side of these arguments and the “facts on the ground” of daily monastic practice. I am thus largely in agreement with Bernard Faure’s approach, mentioned at the beginning, which tries to uncover the paradigmatic structures at work in the biographies of monks like Bodhidharma rather than the “true” historical persons behind them. But we must also keep in mind that this approach presumes knowledge of who sits (or is seen to sit) on each side of the debate at any given time. Daoxuan, as I have argued, viewed Bodhidharma as typical of his class, no more no less, and certainly not as paradigmatic of a new kind of *chan* practice. I believe, rather, that the true structural counterpart to the image of the ideal *chan* practitioner in the *Evaluation of the Chan Practitioners* and the *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* as a whole may have been, or at least included, the followers of Xinxing and those who took inspiration from them.

If this is so, does viewing the Three Levels movement as an important part of the seventh-century debates about *chan* practice teach us anything new about early Chan?¹⁹⁷ First, let us note that both the Three Levels movement and early Chan faced certain structurally similar questions about how to justify their teachings. One of the defining features of Chan in this regard is the identification of the Chan master with the Buddha. This move to “bring the Buddha down to earth,” in Judith Berling’s words, is thought to be seen most concretely in the valorization of the words of the Chan master as equal in authority to those of the Buddha himself.¹⁹⁸ It is often noted, for example, that the *Platform Sutra*, supposedly the record of a sermon delivered by the Sixth Patriarch Huineng, was the first openly Chinese Buddhist composition to be considered—or at least promoted as—a “scripture” (*jing* 經).¹⁹⁹ This text even describes Huineng as a Buddha, born in China to liberate beings.²⁰⁰ This understanding of the Chan master as a living Buddha was to have a profound influence on everything from

¹⁹⁷ It might, of course, teach us about more than just Chan.

¹⁹⁸ Berling 1988.

¹⁹⁹ Yampolsky 1967: 126n1. The so-called “apocryphal” scriptures, of course, did not present themselves as native Chinese compositions.

²⁰⁰ Yampolsky 1967: 162.

the creation of a distinctly Chan literature to the ritual treatment of Chan abbots in life and in death.²⁰¹

The identification of the Chan master with the Buddha allowed proponents of Chan to reject—at least in theory—the traditional scriptural texts, as ultimate authority could now be grounded in the Chan master himself. As we have seen, Xinxing's adherents faced a similar problem, for their teacher too rejected—again, at least in theory—the traditional scriptures as unsuitable for the beings of this age and replaced them with his own compositions.²⁰² How was this justified? That it was necessary in the first place was justified by the notion of the inferior capacity of human beings. But how was it justified that Xinxing was capable of making the right choices?

We can catch a glimpse of how this question may have been addressed in the following passage from the mid-seventh century *Treatise on the Explanation of Various Doubts Concerning the Pure-land* (*Shi jingtu qunyi lun* 釋淨土群疑論), one of the texts noted by Yabuki for its anti-Three Levels polemics.²⁰³ The context of this passage is an extended discussion concerning which scriptures are capable of ensuring rebirth in the Pure-land. The author, Huaigan 懷感, defends the efficacy of the Pure-land sutras, and he places the following words in the mouth of his Three Levels interlocutor, whom he clearly intends to mock:

是以，禪師智慧廣弘，慈悲厚愍。此第三階沈淪，穢土受生，故開普真普正法門，接引純邪純惡之輩，使學當根佛法，皆令生彼西方。此乃法藏之所不論，釋迦之所不說，禪師獨開此教，拔彼第三階人。故曰：說諸佛不說之經，度諸佛不度之者。我等欣聞集錄，頂戴受持，更不讀誦眾經，披尋改年歷日。哀哉汝等，因執前非，還復讀彼別經，造其地獄之罪。²⁰⁴

Thus the *chan* master [Xinxing] has broad wisdom and deep compassion. We [beings] of the third level are mired [in rebirth], and have been born in this filthy land. Therefore [he] opened up the universally true and universally correct teaching²⁰⁵ in order to guide these completely heterodox and completely evil people [of the third level], causing them to study the Buddha's teaching which is appropriate for their capacities, and to all be reborn in the western [pure] land. This is some-

²⁰¹ On the ritual equality between Chan master and Buddha, see Sharf 1992, 2005.

²⁰² These texts were, however, composed of extracts from canonical texts.

²⁰³ This passage is discussed by Yabuki 1927: 547–556. See also Nishimoto 1998: 119–121.

²⁰⁴ T.1960: 47.45a22–27.

²⁰⁵ “Universally correct and universally true” (*puzhen puzheng* 普真普正) is a standard description of the Three Levels teachings.

thing that the collection of scriptures does not explain, that Śākyamuni [Buddha] did not preach—only the *chan* master [Xinxing] revealed this teaching in order to save the beings of the third level. Thus it is said: *He preached the sutras that the Buddha did not preach, saved those whom the Buddha did not save.* We reverently listen to his collected records, receiving them [humbly] upon the head and preserving them, never again reading or reciting the various [other] sutras, unfurling and investigating them for ever and ever. How lamentable you are, who owing to attachment to your former errors still read those “partial” sutras, creating sins [that will lead] to hell!

The term “collected records” (*jilu* 集錄) clearly refers to the corpus of Xinxing’s teachings, as this is the name it receives in almost all contemporaneous sources.²⁰⁶ Moreover, these “collected records” were understood to be not Xinxing’s writings but orally delivered discourses transcribed by his disciple Benji 本濟.²⁰⁷ It is also worth noting, perhaps, that Huaigan seems to think that Three Levels followers referred to Xinxing simply as the “*chan* master,” a small detail which further confirms my suspicion that Xinxing was among the most famous *chan* masters of seventh century China.

While there may of course be some element of exaggeration in this account, Yabuki notes that Huaigan tends to be quite faithful in representing his opponents’ views, adhering to the mode of logical analysis known as *yinming* 因明 in which one must argue on the basis of one’s interlocutor’s premises.²⁰⁸ At the very least we can say that by the middle of the seventh century, if not earlier, Three Levels followers were thought to hold the view that *chan* master Xinxing’s own preaching was superior to the traditional sutras.²⁰⁹ It is possible then that the

²⁰⁶ See for example *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T.2060: 50.560a17, 578a26–28.

²⁰⁷ See the comment in Benji’s biography, T.2060: 50.578a25–29.

²⁰⁸ Yabuki 1927: 552. Recall also the passages from Three Levels doctrinal texts examined above, which seem to support the idea that Xinxing’s followers rejected the sutras in favor of Xinxing’s own teachings.

²⁰⁹ The Three Levels followers probably did not think of Xinxing as an actual Buddha, however, as Huaigan refutes their view that he preached sutras by noting that this was impossible since he was not a Buddha (T.1960: 47.48b11-13). Had the Three Levels followers held Xinxing to be a Buddha, Huaigan probably would have used a different argument. But the text does suggest that Xinxing was imagined to be a particular kind of advanced bodhisattva, and this view is attributed to “all the Three Levels *chan* masters” (T.1960: 47.48a16–17). The late-seventh century Three Levels text known as the *Sanjie fofa miji* 三階佛法密記 claims that Xinxing was a “one-vehicle bodhisattva” 一乘菩薩 who had voluntarily taken rebirth on earth in order to save beings (Yabuki 1927: 5).

Three Levels movement was partly responsible for the idea that the personal teachings of a living *chan* master could in some cases equal or surpass the words of the Buddha.

This final observation is still quite speculative, but I hope it is enough to draw greater attention to the possible points of contact between the Three Levels movement and the ideology of early Chan. My intention, again, is not to show or even speculate about a direct historical connection between these two groups;²¹⁰ it is, rather, to try to reflect on how both groups were participating in an ongoing debate about what it meant to be a master of *chan*.

Bibliography

Note: References to works in the East Asian canon are from the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次朗 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932), and are indicated by text number (T) followed by volume, page, register, and line number(s). References to the *Zhuangzi* are to *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Peking: Zhonghua shuju, 1982).

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²¹⁰ Although there are a few interesting points that might, in fact, indicate some such connection. For example, Xinxing seems to have used the four-fascicle *Lañkāvatāra* sutra, and a citation from it, explicitly labeled as such, can be found in the Dunhuang manuscript of the *Sanjie fofo* 三階佛法 (Nishimoto 1998: 317). Scholars of early Chan have generally agreed that use of the four-fascicle *Lañkāvatāra* was one of the defining features of the early followers of Bodhidharma. It is even sometimes suggested that the choice of the four-fascicle version should be seen as an attempt by such monks to differentiate themselves from the followers of the Indian monk Bodhiruci, translator of the ten-fascicle version of the same text, with whom some kind of rivalry is often posited (Yanagida 1970: 114). That Xinxing used this text, however, suggests we may need to reconsider some of these theories. It might even be possible to imagine that interest in the four-fascicle version among capital residents began with Xinxing.

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