

Chapter 10

Development of Zen Buddhism in China

For the Chinese version of the same subject, see “Zhongguo chanxue de fazhan” in Hu Shih Yanjiangji (Taipei: Hu Shih jinianguan, 1970), 3 vols., Vol. 1, pp. 87–149.

There are two ways of telling a story. According to the traditional version, the origin and development of Zen Buddhism in China can be very easily and simply told. We are told that this school was founded by Bodhidharma who arrived at Canton in 520 or 526, and, having failed to persuade the Emperor Wu-ti of Liang to accept the esoteric way of thinking, went to North China where he founded the school of Ch'an or Zen (禪). Before his death, he appointed his pupil Hui-k'o (慧可) as his successor and gave him a robe and a bowl as insignia of apostolic succession. According to this tradition, Bodhidharma was the 28th Patriarch of the Buddhist Church in India and became the first Patriarch in China. Hui-k'o, the second Patriarch, was succeeded by Seng-ts'an (僧璨). After two more generations, two great disciples of the fifth Patriarch Hung-jen (弘忍), Shen-hsiu (神秀) and Hui-neng (慧能), differed in their interpretation of the doctrines of the school and a split issued. Shen-hsiu became the founder of the Northern or Orthodox School, while Hui-neng, an illiterate monk in Canton, claimed himself the successor to the Patriarchate of the school of Bodhidharma. This Southern School soon became very popular and Hui-neng has been recognized in history as the Sixth Patriarch from whose disciples have descended all the later schools of Zen Buddhism.

Such is the traditional story of Zen School. I have tried during the last few years to trace the sources of this story and to verify the authenticity of this tradition. From the very beginning, I had grave doubts. In the first place, I found that practically all the documents on which this tradition was based were of a late origin: none of them date back earlier than the year 1000, that is, about 500 years after Bodhidharma and

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300 years after Hui-neng, who died in 713. These documents do not square with the earlier historical materials produced before the seventh century. In the second place, there are numerous discrepancies in the list of the 28 Patriarchs which has different versions. The list of names of the patriarchs which was transmitted to Japan in the Tang dynasty and is preserved among the Japanese Zennists to-day, differs in many places from that which was officially recognized by imperial decree in 1062, and which has formed the accepted version in China to this day. And lastly, I was troubled by the fact that this simple story of the origin and development of Chinese Zennism failed to give us a satisfactory and connected account of the evolution of Buddhism in China as a whole and of the particular historical position of Zennism in this general evolution. If Zennism were merely an isolated school first introduced by Bodhidharma in the early years of the sixth century, how then could we explain the fact that Tao-hsuan (道宣), the great historian of Buddhism, who died in 667, had already recorded 133 monks in his *Buddhist Biographies* (续高僧传) as practitioners of Zen or dhyana? Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o were among these, and it is clear that as late as the middle of the seventh century, their school was regarded only as one of the main currents in a great movement of dhyana. Surely, if we wish to understand the true history of Zen Buddhism, we must take into account this larger and more general movement of which Bodhidharma's school formed a part.

These considerations have led me to investigate into this problem and take particular pains to guard myself against the danger of using later source-materials for the reconstruction of earlier history. I am here to present a summary of my investigations on the origin and development of Zen Buddhism in China.

I

"Indian religions," says Sir Charles Eliot, "lay stress on meditation. It is not merely commended as a useful exercise, but by common consent it takes rank with sacrifice and prayer, or above them, as one of the great activities of the religious life, or even as its only true activity. It has the full approval of philosophy as well as of theology. In early Buddhism it takes the place of prayer and worship and, though in later times ceremonies multiply, it still remains the main occupation of a monk."

Yoga which is the old generic name for the various practices of meditation or dhyana, was practised by ascetics at the time of Buddha. The two early teachers of the Buddha were yogis. In all hinayana scriptures, yoga is regarded as an integral part of Buddhism. The practitioner is called yogachara and the texts describing its methods and stages of attainment are known under the name of yogacharabhumi. When mahayana Buddhism flourished, the practices of yoga were again incorporated into it. The philosophy of Asanga, for instance, was called Yogachara and his greatest work was entitled *Yogacharabhumi* (瑜伽师地论), the same title as the numerous manuals on yoga practices by Sangharaksha (僧伽罗义), Dharmatrata and Buddhasena (达磨多罗, 佛大先) translated into Chinese during the years 150–410 A.D.

When China began to translate Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, these early yoga manuals were among the first books translated. An Shih-kao whose translations were done in the third quarter of the second century (148–170), attempted a number of such texts. A complete translation of Sangharaksha's *Yogacharabhumi* (修行道地经) was made by Fa-hu (法护) in 284. A selection from a number of such yoga texts was translated by the great translator Kumārajīva in the first decade of the fifth century. At the same time, in Southern China, the great Chinese monk Hui-yuan (慧远) requested Buddha-bhadra to translate the *Yogacharabhumi* of Dharmatrata and Buddhasena into Chinese.

Thus by the first years of the fifth century, Chinese Buddhists were in possession of a fairly large number of such small manuals of yoga or dhyana practice in addition to the detailed descriptions of dhyana and samadhi contained in the four Agamas (Nikayas) of which complete Chinese translations were made during the years 384–442.

The system of yoga practice as taught in these manuals is in general quite the same as that described by Sir Charles Eliot in his *Hinduism and Buddhism* (I, pp 311–322). In brief, it consists of various methods to regulate and control one's mind with the ultimate object of attaining the blissful state of equanimity and achieving supernatural powers of knowledge and action. It begins with such simple practices as control of breath and concentration of thought on some object of contemplation. If the practitioner is troubled by disturbing desires or thoughts, he is taught to dispel them by the aid of philosophic insight. If the disturbing element is sexual desire or worldly vanity, he must contemplate on the vivid horrors of the human body in the process of decay. This is called "insight through the idea of uncleanness" (不净观). If he is troubled by feelings of anger or hatred, he must check himself by the idea of infinite love,—love for all men and women, love for enemies as well as for friends, and love for all sentient beings. This is called "insight through infinite love" (慈悲观). If he suffers from ignorance, he must be trained to understand that all phenomena are unreal and impermanent: they are accidentally formed by a chance combination of causes and they must be destroyed by an equally accidental working of causes. This is called "insight through correct thinking" (思惟观).

Through these processes the practitioner of yoga expects to attain the four stages of dhyana, the four "formless states" (四无色定) and the five magic powers (五神通 *iddhi*). These I shall not describe in detail. (See Eliot, I, pp. 313–317, and Hu Shih, *Study of Indian Yoga Practice through the Older Translations*. Hu Shih Wencun, 3 vols., pp. 423–448).

The most important thing for the historian of Chinese Buddhism to note is the fact that when these early yoga manuals were translated into Chinese, they were eagerly welcomed and highly esteemed by the Chinese Buddhists. Tao-an (道安 d. 385), the greatest scholar-monk of the fourth century, took great pains to edit the fragmentary translations on this subject and wrote commentaries to each of them. He tried to interpret the doctrines of dhyana in terms of the Taoistic philosophy then prevalent among the intellectual class of the country. In a preface to one of these texts, he said: "The various stages in the control of the breath all aim at the gradual diminution of activity in order to attain the state of non-activity. And the four

states of dhyana are merely stages of gradual forgetfulness for the final blissful achievement of no desire." Any one familiar with the philosophy of Lao-tse can see that Tao-an was attempting to interpret the yoga practices of Indian Buddhism as if they were intended to be the working methods for the attainment of the Taoistic ideals of non-activity and freedom from desire. We must remember that the age was one of tremendous revival of the philosophy of Lao-tse and Chuang-tse, and that it was just this kind of ingenious interpretation which made Buddhist philosophy acceptable and attractive to the Chinese intelligentsia.

The year of Tao-an's death (385) was the year of Kumarajiva's arrival in China. Kumarajiva was undoubtedly the greatest translator of Buddhist texts. During his 9 years (401-409) in Chang-an, he organized a great translation bureau with 800 monks working under him. Ninety-four works were translated under his direction and a large number of these have since become classics in Chinese literature. In addition to his translation of several yoga texts, he translated the *Prajnaparamita Sutras*, the *Saddharma Pundarika*, the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, and the Madhyamika treatises of the school of Nagarjuna. These texts which represent Mahayana Buddhism at the height of its philosophical speculation, were now made attractively accessible to the Chinese Buddhists and paved the way for the rise of the dhyana schools in the following centuries.

While Kumarajiva was making his masterly translations in Ch'ang-an, another great master, Hui-yuan (d. 416 慧远), a disciple of Tao-an, was busy in starting his Buddhist centre at Lu-shan, near Kuling in Kiangsi Province. Hui-yuan was a profound Chinese scholar well versed in the writings of Confucianism and Taoism. Like his teacher Tao-an, he was seeking the essence of Buddhism and found it in the doctrines of dhyana or yoga. In his preface to Buddhahadra's translation of Dharmatrata's *Yogacharabhumī*, Hui-yuan said: "Of the three phases of Buddhistic life (i.e., moral discipline, meditation and insight 戒定慧), dhyana and insight are of fundamental importance. Without insight, meditation cannot attain the highest state of quietitude. Without meditation, wisdom cannot achieve its profundity of insight... I regret very much that since the introduction of the Great Religion into the East so little is known of the practices of dhyana that the whole structure is in danger of collapse because of the lack of the solid foundation of meditation."

This quotation is significant in showing the high esteem with which dhyana was regarded by the Chinese Buddhists of the intellectual class. As is well known, Hui-yuan was the founder of the Pure Land or Amitabha Sect in China. In the older yoga manuals translated into Chinese, concentration of one's thought on the Buddha was commended as an aid to meditation. The method was to picture to one's self the image of the Buddha and to contemplate in imagination all the 32 major forms and 80 minor forms of splendor and grandeur which the Buddha was said to have attained at the time of his birth, and so on. The Amita texts taught a much simplified doctrine which promised rebirth in the Pure Land of infinite longevity and infinite light on the only condition of absolute faith in the reality of this paradise and of the Amitabuddha who presides over it. Viewed in the light of historical evolution, the idea of the Land of the Amitabha is a part of the dhyana methodology; and the very title as well as the content of such a text as the

Amitayur-dhyana-sutra is suggestive of this interpretation. A doctrine of such simplicity had little attraction to the peculiarly metaphysical mind of the Indian people but its very naive simplicity appealed to the Chinese mind which had never known any complicated system of religion or metaphysics until it came into contact with Buddhism.

It is a most significant fact that the first Chinese sect of Buddhism was one of such extreme simplicity and that this sect was founded, not by the common folk, but by a monk-scholar of great reputation and no mean learning. And we must remember that among the first 123 members of the Lotus Society founded by Hui-yuan, there were at least half a dozen men who were well known as Confucianist scholars. All this points to a fundamental difference in the mentality of the Chinese and the Indian peoples, a difference the understanding of which is absolutely essential to the history of Buddhism in China.

The Chinese mentality is practical and abhors metaphysical speculation. All the religions and philosophies of ancient China were free from the fantastic imaginativeness and hairsplitting analysis and gigantic architectonic structure which characterize all religious and philosophical literature of India. When China was brought face to face with India, China was overwhelmed, dazzled and dumbfounded by the vast output of the religious zeal and genius of the Indian nation. China acknowledged its defeat and was completely conquered.

But after a few centuries of bewilderment and enthusiasm, the Chinese mentality gradually re-asserted itself and began to search for those things which it could really understand and accept. It now undertook to sift from this vast literature of Buddhism those elements which might be regarded as essentials in distinction from the impressive images and grandiose rituals and unintelligible metaphysics and superstitious charms and spells. Tao-an and Hui-yuan declared that they had found those essentials in dhyana and insight.

But the whole system of dhyana practice, even in its concise form as presented in the translated manuals, was not fully understood by the Chinese Buddhists. The four dhyanas, the four stages of formless sublimity, and the five states of transcendental powers were vaguely interpreted in terms of the native cult of Shen-hsien or Immortals which had had quite a vogue ever since the days of the Empire of Ch'in. The best proof of this is the following quotation from Hui-chiao (), the scholarly historian of Buddhism and author of the first series of *Buddhist Biographies* which was finished in 519. In his general summary of the biographies of "practitioners of dhyana," Hui-chiao said: "But the apparent utility of dhyana lies in the attainment of magic powers (*iddhi*) which made it possible to accommodate the whole world or even worlds in a tiny pore in the skin, or to solidify the four seas into a piece of cheese, or to go through a stone wall without obstruction, or to transport a vast multitude of people at a wave of the hand."

Hui-chiao's *Biographies* which covered the whole period of early Buddhism in China from the first century to the year 519, contained only 21 names of "practitioners of dhyana" out of a total of about 450. And practically all of the 21 dhyana monks were recorded because of their remarkable asceticism and miraculous powers. This shows that in spite of the numerous yoga manuals in translation, and in

spite of the high respect paid by intellectual Buddhists to the doctrine and practice of dhyana, there were, as late as 500, practically no Chinese Buddhists who really understood or seriously practised dhyana or Zen.

II

The great Hui-yuan died in 416. By this time, the Chinese had embarked on their search for a way of simplifying and purifying Buddhism in order to make it more acceptable to the Chinese mind. Some great minds had turned their eyes on dhyana, but dhyana as it was then presented to them was still too Indian to be easily accepted by the Chinese. A further simplification and a more radical purification were needed before there could be a truly Chinese movement of Zen Buddhism. This was to be the work of the next three centuries after Hui-yuan's death.

Chinese Zennism arose not out of Indian yoga or dhyana but as a revolt against it. Failure to understand this accounts for all failures on the part of European and Japanese scholars to understand Chinese Zennism.

Chinese Zennism as it has been understood since the end of the seventh century, called itself "the School of Sudden Awakening or Enlightenment" (tun-tsung, 顿宗). The founder of this school was neither Bodhidharma, nor Hui-neng, but the philosophical monk Tao-sheng (道生) who was a disciple of Hui-yuan and of Kumarajiva. Tao-sheng was a very learned scholar of great brilliancy and eloquence. Visitors to the Tiger Hill near Soochow will be shown the large flat rock which is still called the Lecture Platform of Sheng-kung (生公说法台) (i.e., Tao-sheng) where he was supposed to have lectured with so powerful eloquence that even the stones nodded their heads in assent.

Tao-sheng was a revolutionary thinker, and is recorded by the historian Hui-chiao as having made this reflection on the general trend of Buddhist study: "The symbol is to express an idea and is to be discarded when the idea is understood. Words are to explain thoughts and ought to be silenced when the thoughts are already absorbed. Ever since the introduction of Buddhist scriptures to the East, the translators have met with great impediments, and the people have clung to the dead letter and few have grasped the all-comprehensive meaning. It is only those who can grasp the fish and discard the fishing net that are qualified to seek the truth."

The last figure of speech refers to a saying of the philosopher Chuang-tse who said: "The fishing net is to get fish. Take the fish and forget the net. The snare is to get the rabbit. So take the rabbit and forget the snare." The nihilistic influence of Lao-tse and Chuang-tse has always had an emancipating effect on the Chinese mind, and Tao-sheng was only the natural product of an age which, as has been pointed out, was one of Taoist revival.

So Tao-sheng came forward with his destructive criticism. He propounded two famous theories, one of which was on the thesis that good action requires no return (善不受报) which strikes a hard blow on the Indian conception of merit. But the most far-reaching theory of his was the idea of Sudden Enlightenment (顿悟) which

means that Buddhahood can be achieved through immediate awakening without having to undergo the long and arduous processes of merit-accumulation and dhyana practice. In his public lectures, he declared that the logical conclusion of the *Parinirvana Sutra* would be that even the *icchantika* (i.e., one who did not accept Buddhism) was capable of attaining Buddhahood. All these radical ideas so alarmed the conservative monks that they all attacked him and publicly banished him from Nanking. But many years later, the complete text of the *Parinirvana Sutra* arrived in Nanking and there it was found that the *icchantika* was held to be capable of attaining Buddhahood. So our rebel philosopher was vindicated and died in glory in the year 434.

The biographer Hui-chiao said: "Because his interpretation of the *icchantika* had been established by scriptural evidence, his theories of Sudden Enlightenment and of Goodness Requiring No Reward were also highly honored by the Buddhists of the time." The same historian reported that the Emperor Wen-ti of Sung (424–453) took great liking to the theory of Sudden Enlightenment and held public debates on it. He made inquiries to secure monks who could expound this theory after the death of Tao-sheng; and when he found Tao-sheng's disciple Tao-you he immediately invited him to his Court and held another debate on this doctrine. He enthusiastically applauded when Tao-you scored a victory over his orthodox opponents. A doctrine which received such favorable patronage from the Imperial Court could not but find its way to general acceptance.

Thus was fought the first battle in the Chinese Revolt against the Buddhist conquest. The war-cry was Sudden Enlightenment versus Gradual Attainment. This war-cry was the very instrument of simplification which Tao-sheng's predecessors had been seeking. It was destined in the course of a few centuries to sweep away all worship and prayer, all constant incantation of sutras and dharanis, all alms-giving and merit gathering, and even all practices of dhyana or Zen. When it had finally succeeded in overthrowing the Indian dhyana itself, then there was the real Chinese Zennism.

III

But Indian dhyana also went through a process of simplification and systematization during the sixth century, and in its simplified and systematized forms it furnished the basis for several interesting movements. Of these, the most important are the school of Bodhidharma and the T'ien-t'ai School (天台宗), both of which had something to do with the development of Chinese Zennism.

The earliest mention of Bodhidharma was in Yang Hsuan-chih's *Buddhist Monasteries in Lo-yang* (杨之—洛阳伽蓝记) written in 547, in which Bodhidharma is said to have visited and admired the Yung-ning Monastery. As this monastery was built in 516 and became a military camp after 528, Bodhidharma's visit must have taken place during the early years of its glory, that is, about 520 or earlier. This destroys all traditional myth about his arrival in Canton in 520 or 526. The second

earliest record of his life was in Tao-hsuan's Buddhist Biographies which was compiled near the middle of the seventh century. Tao-hsuan's biographies are full of reports of superstitions and miraculous events; but his account of Bodhidharma is totally free from any mention of such mythological incidents and seems to have been based upon earlier records of fairly high authenticity. Here Bodhidharma is said to have first arrived at Canton on the border of the Sung Empire and later gone northward to live under the Wei Empire. The Sung dynasty fell in 479; so his arrival could not have been later than that date. In another biography of the same series, one of Bodhidharma's Chinese pupils in the north is recorded to have moved to the southern Empire during the years 494–497, which is additional evidence for my view of his early arrival. So I conclude that Bodhidharma arrived in Canton about the year 470 and travelled to the northern Empire where he remained until about 520. This view makes his stay in China cover a period of 50 years and is far more satisfactory than the traditional story of his staying in China only 9 years.

But I shall not burden you with more details of such historical criticism which I have published elsewhere (See Hu Shih, *On Bodhidharma*, *Hu Shih Wencun*, 3 vols., pp. 449–466). Suffice to say that I am convinced that the life of Bodhidharma by Tao-hsuan is by far more authentic than all the later accounts which grew up long after the rise of the numerous myths and legends concerning him. According to Tao-hsuan, Bodhidharma was a teacher of dhyana from southern India and taught dhyana in northern China. It was an age of scholastic verbalism and his teaching was little appreciated and sometimes opposed by the Buddhists. He had only two young disciples, Tao-yü and Hui-k'o (道育, 慧可), who served him faithfully and received in turn the secrets of his teaching. He practised a much simplified form of dhyana which is called "Wall Contemplation" (壁观), that is, contemplation in sitting posture facing a wall. He taught that there were only two ways of attaining the truth, by insight and by conduct. Insight consists in a firm belief that all sentient beings possess the same pure nature; that this pure nature is often obscured by extraneous elements which can be removed by practising mental concentration in the form of wall contemplation, eliminating from thought all distinctions of the ego and the non-ego, of the common herd and the attained few, thus gradually leading to the state of nirvana by silently uniting one's self with the truth. The practical approach through conduct implies four phases: forbearance of pain and suffering, resignation to all natural course of causation, elimination of all desiring and seeking, and, lastly, acting always in accordance with the law which is the same as the recognition of the pure nature in all men. These were called "the four courses of conduct."

Tao-hsuan recorded several followers of his school. His disciple Hui-k'o left a poem which says:

When clouded, the pearl is taken to be a piece of earth ware;
 But when suddenly self-conscious, it becomes the perfect pearl.
 Ignorance and wisdom are one.
 Remember that all things are mere appearances.
 Seeing that your self differs not from the Buddha,
 Why then seek elsewhere for that which is the ideal?

This harmonizes well with the teaching of Bodhidharma and also fits in with the doctrine of Sudden Enlightenment which had become popular during the fifth century.

From all reliable sources, it seems certain that Bodhidharma's school was a school of asceticism. The early members of the school are described by Tao-hsuan as living a very severe ascetic life, each carrying only one dress, one bowl and two needles, begging one meal a day and living sometimes in ruined tombs. When one monk of the school was invited by a family to a vegetarian dinner or to stay overnight with them, he flatly declined by saying, "When there is no man left on earth, I shall then accept your invitation."

Tao-hsuan stated in more than one place that Bodhidharma regarded the *Lankavatara Sutra* (楞伽经) as the only book worth studying, and that his followers used only this sutra as their text. Lanka is modern Ceylon. This sutra is supposed to have been preached by the Buddha on his visit to Lanka, and represents the newer tendencies of southern India. The name of Nagarjuna is mentioned in the last verse. It was natural that Bodhidharma who came from southern India, was attracted by this new sutra.

In the seventh century, the school of Bodhidharma came to be known as the Lanka School (楞伽宗). In a biography of a monk of this school, Fa-ch'ung (法冲) by name, who was still alive when Tao-hsuan compiled his *Biographies*, we find a list of 28 names descending from Hui-k'o. It is interesting to note that the school of Bodhidharma had apparently departed from the original spirit of simplicity and asceticism and had, by the seventh century, produced not a few scholastic commentators on the *Lankavatara Sutra*. Out of the 28 monks mentioned, 12 were authors of separate commentaries the total of which amounted to 70 books.

This is all we know of the School of Bodhidharma. Tao-hsuan who died in 667, never talked about Bodhidharma being the 28th Patriarch of Indian Buddhism. Nor did the great pilgrim Hsuan-tsang who was in India for 16 years; nor did I-tsing who was in southern and middle India for almost 25 years. None of these learned Buddhists spoke of the existence of a Buddhist Patriarchate in India. The myth of the 28 Patriarchs was a sheer invention of the eighth century Zennists.

IV

By the time of Bodhidharma's arrival in China, there came another Indian teacher of dhyana by name of Fu-to (*Buddha*) who also propagated the yoga practice in northern China. From his school came the famous monk Seng-ch'ou (僧稠) who had been a Confucianist scholar of repute before he was converted into Buddhism. Seng-ch'ou put upon himself all the severe discipline of dhyana practice and was praised by the master Fu-to as having reached the highest attainment in dhyana east of the Himalaya Mountains. He was highly honored by the emperors of Wei and of the Northern Ts'i and had a very large following. He died in 560 at the age of 81. He wrote a book in two chapters on "The Method of *Chih and Kuan*."

The title of this book is significant in furnishing a clue to the origin of the T'ien-t'ai School which summarizes its teachings under these two words, *chih* and *kuan* (止观), which are Chinese equivalents of *Samatha* or claim and *Vipassana* or insight. *Samatha* is the result of meditation and concentration, and *Vipassana*, that of cultivation of philosophy. The T'ien-t'ai School was probably influenced by Seng-ch'ou, if it was not directly descended from him.

The so-called T'ien-t'ai School was founded by Hui-ssu of Heng-shan in Hunan and Chih-k'ai of T'ien-t'ai in Chekiang, and was often more correctly called the School of Heng-shan and T'ien-t'ai. Hui-ssu (慧思) was a northern monk who practised the Indian dhyana in all seriousness and claimed to have attained its highest stages. About the year 554, he moved into the Southern Empire and by 568 he was in the Heng-shan where he remained until his death in 577. His great disciple Chih-k'ai (智) was a native of Hupeh and after studying under Hui-ssu, settled down as a teacher of dhyana in Nanking. In 575 he went to the T'ien-t'ai Mountains where he spent the rest of his life with occasional visits to Nanking and to Lu-shan. He died in 597 after having enjoyed the highest honors of the emperors of Ch'en and Sui. He was the most influential monk of the age, having built 35 great monasteries, made 4,000 converts, and raised enough contribution for the copying of 15 complete collections of the Buddhist Tripitaka. A large number of commentaries, treatises and other works from his dictation testify to his literary genius and catholic learning.

While Bodhidharma represented an attempt to substitute the newer and greatly simplified dhyana of southern India for the older scholasticism and yoga practice, the School of T'ien-t'ai typified the effort on the part of Chinese intellectual Buddhists to reconstruct some sort of manageable system out of the tremendous and chaotic mass of Buddhist literature. The task was gigantic and required a genius like Chih-k'ai to essay it. This task gives to the school its encyclopaedic character.

The greatest puzzle which had troubled the early Chinese Buddhists had been the tremendous number of sutras all supposed to have been preached by the Buddha himself. It might be granted that the Buddha, being in possession of supernatural powers, was capable of preaching all this in a life-time. But how could all their apparent theoretical differences and inconsistencies and contradictions be explained? As early as the fifth century, Hui-kuan (慧观), a fellow-student of Tao-sheng, suggested the idea of arranging the various sutras as the products of various periods in the life of the Buddha, attributing the Hinayana Agamas to the first period of his teaching activity, the Parinirvana Sutras to the time of his death, and arranging the other Mahayana texts in between them. It was a brilliant idea coming as a natural product of the historically-minded Chinese race. The T'ien-t'ai School seized upon this idea and worked out its details under the general theory of p'an-chiao (判教) or Dividing the Periods of the Teaching. By this theory with its encyclopaedic details, all the differences and contradictions of the sutras were reconciled to the satisfaction of the scholastics of the age.

The doctrine of Chih and Kuan was another attempt at systematization. All the earlier manuals on yoga practice, concise as they may have been to the Indian mind, were still too disorderly and stupidly confusing to the Chinese mind. Chih-k'ai

proceeded to treat the whole system under the two mutually helpful approaches of concentration and insight. He made many trials and finally in his "Elementary Chih-kuan" (小止观), written for his own brother, he produced a true masterpiece of lucidity and brilliancy, which to this day has remained one of the most widely read books in China and Japan.

The T'ien-t'ai School, however, remained a school of Indian dhyana, which, though simplified and systematized, was still alien to the Chinese race. Moreover, Chih-k'ai's ambitious attempt at encyclopaedic systematization had unfortunately included too much and discarded too little of the worst elements of the Buddhist religion. His school was highly praised by Tao-hsuan as the only sect which did not emphasize esoteric contemplation at the expense of profundity of scholarship in the scriptures. But, after all, the scholarship of T'ien-t'ai was nothing but a Chinese monkeying of Indian scholasticism. And scholasticism it remained throughout the later centuries until it was totally obliterated by the rise of Chinese Zennism.

The T'ien-t'ai School made an incidental contribution to the later development of Zennism. In its desire to become the orthodox sect of Buddhism in China, the T'ien-t'ai masters claimed their direct lineal descent from the great Mahayana teacher Nagarjuna (马鸣). To authenticate this spiritual genealogy, Chih-k'ai made much use of a pseudo-historical work, the *Fu-fa-ts'ang-chuan*, (付法藏传), supposed to have been translated from Sanskrit towards the latter part of the sixth century, which told of a line of 23 or 24 Buddhist masters, from Mahakasyapa and Ananda to Simla Bhikshu, in continuous transmission of the Law. Nagarjuna was the 13th whom Chih-k'ai called his "great-great-grandfather." This claim gave to the T'ien-t'ai the prestige of being the legitimate movement for the restoration and revival of the Mahayana system, which, according to the *Fu-fa-ts'ang-chuan*, had died out with the persecution and murder of the 23rd Apostle in Kashmir. But it also initiated a bad example of genealogical controversy which was responsible for the invention of numerous lists of Patriarchs, in the eighth century, to establish the orthodoxy of Chinese Zennism.

V

We are now ready to come directly to the real beginning of Chinese Zennism. Toward the last years of the seventh century, there arose in the vicinity of Canton a great teacher, Hui-neng, who was an uneducated and almost illiterate monk, but who, by sheer force of personality and inspiring eloquence and, above all, by the great simplicity and directness of his spiritual message, succeeded in founding a new sect which was in reality nothing short of a Chinese revolt against Buddhism. He was truly the founder of the Chinese Reformation without which all the secular art, literature, and philosophy would probably have been impossible.

Hui-neng taught that Sudden Enlightenment was possible, and he himself was an outstanding example of it. Enlightenment comes when you have clearly seen the Buddha-head in yourself. Seek not outside of yourself: all is within you.

“The Buddha is within you; the Trinity is within you.” You have been told to abide by the Buddha, the Law, and the Sangha. But I say unto you: abide by your self. The Buddha is within you, because the Buddha means the Enlightened One, and enlightenment must come from within yourself. The Law is within you, because the Law means righteousness, and righteousness is within you. And the Sangha is within you, because the Brotherhood means purity, and purity is within you.

For the first time in the history of Chinese Buddhism, Hui-neng revolted against dhyana itself. He said: In my teaching, *Ting* (*Samatha*, meditation) and Hui (*Vipassana*, insight) are one, and not two. Calm is the lamp and insight is the light. In all action, walking or resting, sitting or sleeping, always act with a straightforward heart: that is the *samadhi* of one-mindedness. And in all places and all times, always act with intelligence: that is the *prajna-paramita*. Sitting motionless is no dhyana; introspection of your own mind is no dhyana; and looking inward at your own calmness is no dhyana. In thus overthrowing the principal element in the Indian dhyana, Hui-neng was laying the foundation of Chinese Zen which was no Zen at all.

Hui-neng lived and taught in and about Canton and died a comparatively unknown monk, unrecognized by the Buddhist world outside his immediate circles. Wang Wei (王维), who wrote the Epitaph of Hui-neng at the request of his disciple Shen-hui (神会), probably about the middle of the eighth century, said that Hui-neng was a pupil of Hung-jen (弘忍) who was a Buddhist monk of the Lanka School and who taught in a monastery in Huang-mei (黄梅) in the modern province of Hupeh. This Lanka lineage is confirmed by other authentic documents of the eighth century.

Hui-neng called his own school the “Southern School of Bodhidharma.” In his early years he was connected with the Lanka School of Bodhidharma. The Lanka School had long remained a school of obscure ascetics and teachers of the Lankavatara. Tao-hsuan in a biography of Fa-ch’ung written in 664–665, spoke of the difficulty of finding the line of descent in the Lanka School. But by the end of the seventh century, a disciple of Hung-jen, by the name of Shen-hsiu (神秀), suddenly burst into national prominence through the patronage and high honors bestowed on him by the great Empress Wu. She invited him to Ch’ang-an in 700 and for 7 years he was honored as “the Master of the Law in the two Capitals and Teacher to three Emperors.” Shen-hsiu died in 706 and his pupil P’u-chi (普寂) continued to be in imperial favor for a number of years. In the Epitaph on Shen-hsiu’s Tomb, Chang Yueh (张说) wrote what may be called the *first* connected genealogy of the Lanka School after Bodhidharma which follows:

1. Bodhidharma
2. Hui-k’o
3. Seng-ts’an
4. Tao-hsin
5. Hung-jen
6. Shen-hsiu

This list contains two names (Tao-hsin and Hung-jen) not mentioned in Tao-hsuan’s list of the Lanka teachers, and probably represents merely one branch of the Lanka School of Bodhidharma. But the high prestige of Shen-hsiu and

P'u-chi lent so much authority to this genealogy that it soon came to be accepted as authentic. Any other school which wished to contest the high position enjoyed by them, must of necessity either question this tradition of succession, or produce its own genealogy.

So, at the height of P'u-chi's popularity and prestige, there came to Loyang a monk, who publicly challenged the historicity of the School of Shen-hsiu in the line of patriarchal descent. This monk was Shen-hui, a disciple of Hui-neng. He accepted the first five names, but declared that the 5th patriarch Hung-jen did not transmit the secrets of the Order to Shen-hsiu who was not capable of understanding the true teaching of the Master. The real successor to Hung-jen was Hui-neng, the illiterate monk who taught the doctrine of Sudden Enlightenment as against the tradition of Gradual Attainment of the other Buddhists. By this time both Shen-hsiu and Hui-neng had long been dead, and there was no effective way of contradicting such a claim. Shen-hui was an eloquent speaker and attracted huge crowds to hear him; and his courage in offering such an audacious challenge to a Teacher of the Emperor must have appealed greatly to the people of the time.

Good luck has led me to discover two documents in the Pelliot Collection of old Chinese manuscripts found in a grotto library of Tun-huang, and by means of internal evidences I have identified them to be records of the sayings and debates of the great Shen-hui whose works had long been lost in China and Japan. From these, I learn that Shen-hui was the first to raise the question of Bodhidharma's predecessors in India. In one of these documents, Shen-hui answered the question in a most ridiculously unhistorical manner. He said that Bodhidharma was the 8th Patriarch after the Buddha, and he quoted the preface of the translated *Yogacharabhumi* of Dharmatrata as his authority, most naively identifying Bodhidharma with Dharmatrata and forgetting that that work was translated at least 60 years before Bodhidharma's arrival in China!

To put a long story short. Shen-hui was making the imperial teachers very uncomfortable by his eloquence and by his pseudo-historical evidences. In 753, the Imperial Censor accused him of "gathering large crowds around him," and he was exiled from the Capital to live in I-yang, and later in other places of exile. But 2 years later the great rebellion of An Lu-shan broke out and Loyang and Ch'ang-an fell one after the other. The Emperor fled to Szechuen and the Empire was tottering. The imperial armies under the great general were in difficulty to get money. It was suggested that money could be obtained by issuing a large number of licenses for admission into Buddhist monkhood.

The eloquence of Shen-hui was commandeered into government service and he made converts by large numbers. It was said that his services in this direction was a great help to the imperial government in re-capturing the lost Capitals and restoring the Dynasty. When the new Emperor returned to the Capital, Shen-hui was invited to the Palace and an urgent decree was issued to build a monastery for him within a prescribed time. The banished heretic now became the honored teacher of the Empire. He died in 758 (or 760). And in 777 an imperial commission with the Heir-apparent at the head decided to make Hui-neng the Sixth Patriarch and Shen-hui the Seventh. The Southern School of Sudden Enlightenment thus finally achieved its

great triumph over the Orthodox School of Gradual Attainment. From this time on, this School has been the Orthodox Sect of Buddhism in China.

In the meantime and in later periods, the absurd list of eight Indian Patriarchs went through many revisions. It was soon seen that it was impossible to have only eight generations in a 1,000 years. So there were numerous suggestions made to lengthen this list, some making it as many as 50, being based on a list of monks of the Hinayana school of Sarvastivadins recorded by Seng-you (僧佑) in the sixth century; others making it 24, 26, 28, 29, or 30, all based on the *Fu-fa-ts'ang-chuan* used by the T'ien-t'ai School. Everybody was inventing a genealogy to suit his own calculation. By the first half of the ninth century, the number 28 was more or less agreed on by general assent. But the personnel still varied in the different lists. The present genealogy of the Patriarchs was the work of the monk Ch'i-sung (契嵩) of the eleventh century and was officially recognized in 1062.

VI

It may seem strange that in all works on the history of Zen written since the tenth century, the Seventh Patriarch Shen-hui is given only a bare mentioning, and that all the later schools of Chinese Zen have claimed their descent, not from Shen-hui, but from two other disciples of Hui-neng, Huei-jang and Hsing-ssu (怀让, 行思), both of whom were unknown figures during their life-time. The explanation is simple. Zennism could not flourish as an officially patronized religion, but only as an attitude of mind, a method of thinking and a mode of living. An officially patronized teacher of Buddhism must of necessity perform all the traditional rituals and ceremonies which the true Zennist despises. Shen-hui succeeded in establishing Zennism as a State Religion, but by so doing he almost killed it. All further development of Chinese Zen had to come from those great teachers who valued simple life and intellectual freedom and independence more than worldly recognition.

The greatest teacher of Zen in the eighth century was Tao-i (道一), better known by his secular family name Ma and called Ma-tsu or the Patriarch Ma (马祖). He came from a Lanka school in Szechuen and later studied under Hui-neng's disciple Huei-jang. The Lanka sutra had taught that words were not necessary to express the truth and that any gesture or motion or even silence might be used to communicate a truth. Ma-tsu developed this idea into a pedagogical method for the new Zen. There is no need to seek any special faculty in the mind for the enlightenment. Every behavior is the mind, the manifestation of the Buddha-nature. Snapping a finger, frowning or stretching the brow, coughing, smiling, anger, sorrow, or desire,...is the functioning of the Buddhahead: it is the *Tao*, the Way. There is no need to perform any special act, be it dhyana or worship, in order to achieve the *Tao*. To be natural is the Way. Walk naturally, sit naturally, sleep naturally, live naturally,—that is the Way. Let the mind be free: do not purposely do evil; nor purposely do good. There is no Law to abide, no Buddhahood to attain. Maintain a free mind and cling to nothing: that is *Tao*.

He was the first teacher to resort to all kinds of strange methods of communicating the truth. The essence of the method is to make the novice to think out the problem for himself. When a monk asked what the message of Buddhism was, he gave him a sound beating, saying, "If I don't beat you, the world will laugh at me." Another disciple asked a similarly abstract question, the Master told him to come near and gave him a box on the ear.

One of his disciples was asked by an official what the whole Buddhist Canon was trying to expound, this disciple showed him a closed fist and said, "Do you understand?" "No," said the official. The monk said, "Fool! You do not recognize a fist?"

An old monk was staying with one of his disciples when the sun shone on the window. The monk asked, "Is it the sunlight that touches the window, or is it the window that touches the light?" Ma-tsu's pupil looked at him and said, "My brother, there is a visitor in your room. You had better return there."

Another disciple was asked what the Buddhist Trinity actually meant. He replied, "Corn, wheat and beans." "I don't understand." "Then, let us all be happy and glorify the Trinity."

Chinese Zennists in the early years had no separate meeting place or monastery of their own. It was Ma-tsu's disciple Huei-hai (怀海) who first founded the Zen monastery and formulated its rules of government. At the head of the monastery is the Master Monk who occupies a separate room; the other student monks live in the common hall, arranged according to priority. There is no hall of worship, but only a lecture hall, the hall of the Law. This is significant in indicating an almost conscious breaking away from the Indian religion.

The monks are not required to study regular lessons. All are free to move about. At regular times, the Master holds assembly at the Hall of the Law, and the novices all gather around him. There will be questions and answers and discussions.

The food is simple, but the whole community must share the labor in the monastery. Huei-hai himself participated in the manual labor of his monastery. He was the author of the saying, "No labor, no food." Here again may be seen the radical departure from the parasitic institution of mendicancy practised in Indian Buddhism.

The most interesting thing is that the Zennist monastery as designed by Huei-hai was organized more like a school than a place of religious worship. In fact, the Zen monasteries were the great centres of philosophical speculation and discussion throughout the ninth and tenth centuries. It was not until Zennism had superseded practically all the other sects that the Zennist monasteries came to take up the older rituals and worships which they, as publicly supported institutions, were now expected to perform.

Chinese Zen was an iconoclast movement. After it had discarded the Indian dhyana practice, it went further and revolted against all prayer and worship. Wu-chu (无住), a fellow-student of Ma-tsu in Szechuen and founder of the Zen school at Pao-t'ang Ssu (保唐寺) in Chengtu, who died in 766 and whose teachings have been preserved in the Tun-huang Collection of Manuscripts both in Paris and in London,—was famous for his conscious abolition of all rituals and worship of the

Buddhist religion. In his school, the monks were not allowed to pray, to recite or copy scriptures or to worship painted or carved images of the Buddha.

There is a well-known story told of the Zennist T'ien-jan (天然), better known by the name of his monastery Tan-hsia (丹霞), who died in 824. One night he was stopping at a monastery with a few travelling monks. The night was bitterly cold and there was no firewood. He went to the Hall of Worship, took down the wooden image of the Buddha, and, chopping it to bits, made himself a comfortable fire. When his comrades reproached him for this act of sacrilege, he calmly replied: "Oh, I was only burning the image to extract the sarira (舍利 the sacred bone-relic)." The other monks said: "How can you expect to find the sarira in a piece of wood?" "Well," said Tien-jan, "then, I am only burning a piece of wood."

The ninth century saw the rise of two great masters of iconoclasm, Hsuan-chien and I-hsuan (宣鉴, 义玄). Hsuan-chien died in 865, and I-hsuan, founder of the Lin-chi (临济) School, died in 866. Both of them taught immediately after the great persecution of Buddhism of 845 which had destroyed 4600 monasteries, confiscated millions of acres of land, and forced 260,000 monks and nuns to return to lay life. The persecution which lasted only 2 years, had apparently the effect of purifying the Buddhist religion and elevating the prestige of Zen monks who did not rely upon such externalities as rituals and monasteries, and who could maintain their conviction in huts or caves. It strengthened the belief that a real religion was something apart from the architectural splendor and ritualistic extravagances of the temples and monasteries. It was no accident, therefore, that the great iconoclastic masters arose and taught in the decades immediately following the persecution.

Hsuan-chien taught the doctrine of non-activity which harks back to the teachings of Ma-tsu and reminds one of the philosophy of Lao-tse and Chuang-tse. "My advice to you is: Take a rest; have nothing to do. Even if that little blue-eyed barbarian monk Bodhidharma should come here, he can only teach you to do nothing. Put on your clothes, eat your food, and move your bowels. That's all. No death to fear. No transmigration to dread. No Nirvana to achieve and no bodhi (wisdom) to attain. Try to be just an ordinary man having nothing to do."

Hsuan-chien was fond of using the most profane language in attacking the sacred tradition of Buddhism. "Here, there is no Buddha, nor Patriarch. Bodhidharma was only an old bearded barbarian. The bodhisattvas are only dung-heap coolies. Nirvana and bodhi are dead stumps to tie your donkeys on. The 12 divisions of the Tripataka are only lists of ghosts, sheets of paper fit only for wiping the pus from your skin. And all your four merits and 10 stages are mere ghosts lingering in their decayed graves. Have these anything to do with your own salvation?"

"The wise seek not the Buddha. The Buddha is the great murderer who has seduced so many people into the pitfall of the prostituting Devil." "The old Barbarian rascal (the Buddha) claims that he had survived the destruction of three worlds. Where is he now? Did he not also die after 80 years of age? Was he in any way different from you? O ye wise men, disengage your body and your mind! Give up all and free yourself from all bondages."

"Here in my place, there is not a single truth for you to take home. I myself don't know what Zen is. I am no teacher, knowing nothing at all. I am only an old beggar

who begs his food and clothing and daily moves his bowels. What else have I to do? But allow me to tell you: Have nothing to do: go and take an early rest!"

While Hsuan-chien taught in the South, his contemporary I-hsuan was opening his school in the border of Chihli and Shantung. His school was known as the Lin-chi School which in the next two centuries became the most powerful school of Zen. It is said that he once studied under Hsuan-chien; and it is possible that he inherited the latter's iconoclasm and developed its more constitutive phases into a great school. He made use of all the pedagogical methods of the earlier Zen masters, but his favorite method was that of howling or shouting at his audience.

The greatness of his school lies in the emphatic recognition of the function of intellectual emancipation as the alpha and omega of the new Zennism. He said: "The mission of Bodhidharma's journey to the East is to find a man who will not be deceived by men." "Here in my place there is no truth to tell you. My duty is to lighten the heavy burden of dead weight on your back. My mission is to free men from their bondages, to cure the sick, and to beat the ghosts out of men." "My duty is to kill everything. When the Buddha is in my way, I'll kill the Buddha. When the Patriarchs are in my way, I'll kill the Patriarchs. When the Arhat is in my way, I'll kill the Arhat."

"Be independent and cling to nothing. Even though Heaven and Earth are turned upside down, I doubt not. Even though all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas appear before my eyes, I am not gladdened at heart. Even though the hell-fire of all the three underworlds are thrown at me, I fear not."

"Recognize yourself! Wherefore do you seek here and seek there for your Buddha and your Bodhisattvas? Wherefore do you seek to get out of the worlds? O ye fools, where do you want to go?"

VII

Under the leadership of these great masters, there was developed during the eighth and ninth centuries the full Zennism of China. As I have taken pains to show, it was no work of any single teacher, of Bodhidharma or even of Hui-neng, but it was the culmination of a very long process of gradual evolution. It was the unique product of the Chinese racial mentality reacting after many centuries of Buddhist domination and training. It was the child born of the marriage between Chinese rationalism and naturalism on one hand, and Indian religion and philosophy on the other. Historically, it was a revolt against Buddhism. The first impulse was probably to assimilate Buddhism, reorganizing it under the heading of dhyana. All the earlier movements of dhyana in China, from Tao-an in the fourth century to the schools of Bodhidharma and of T'ien-t'ai in the sixth and seventh centuries, represented this tendency of selective assimilation. Hui-neng, the George Fox of China, began a new epoch by discarding the Indian dhyana altogether and by his great emphasis on Sudden Enlightenment. But this new Chinese Zennism of Hui-neng and Shen-hui did not develop a working methodology. The new development in the eighth and

ninth centuries took two directions: on the one hand, the revolt was carried further by becoming frankly iconoclastic and rationalistic; on the other hand, Ma-tsu and I-hsuan worked out a set of pedagogical methods aiming in general at intellectual emancipation.

Dhyana was discarded and, with it, all the other ideas and practices of Buddhism. "No death to fear; no transmigration to dread; no Nirvana to achieve and no Bodhi to attain." All that was left, was an attitude and a method. The attitude was "to kill everything," "to beat the ghosts out of you," and "to be natural." The method was to find out the truth by your own effort, and "not to be deceived by men."

The methodology of Zen has often been misunderstood. Some regard it as mysticism; others call it sheer humbug. There is no doubt that there is a clear method behind all the apparent madness for which many Zen masters were famous. The method, as far as I can understand it, has two important phases. First, the master must not make things too easy for the novice; he must not preach to him in too plain language, or in any language at all. This is so important that one of the great masters once said: "I owe everything to my teacher because he never told anything nor explained anything to me."

When the novice comes to the master with some such abstract question as the meaning of Zen or the message of Buddhism, the teacher will say to him: "When I was in Nanking last time, I made a coat, weighing 7 pounds." Or, he will say to him, "My dear fellow, how fine are the peach blossoms on yonder tree!" Or, he will shout at him a deafening shout. Or, if he is really deserving, he will get a box on the ear.

So he retires to the kitchen, puzzled and probably burning with shame or with pain on the cheek. He stays on and, after a while, will be told to leave the place to try his luck at some other great Zen school. Here begins the second phase of the method which is technically called "travelling on foot" (行脚).

He travels from one hill to another, presenting his silly questions to the various great masters presiding over the monastic schools. If he fails to understand, he moves on. Most of the famous teachers did much travelling during their period of student-life. A monk travels always on foot, carrying only a stick, a bowl and a pair of straw sandals. He begs all the way for his food and lodging, and often has to seek shelter in decayed temples, caves and ruined houses by the roadside. He has to suffer the severities of the weather and is subject to all forms of danger and hardship.

But all hardships intensify his life. The beauty and grandeur of nature ennobles his mind. He comes into contact with all sorts of people and studies under the greatest minds of the age. He meets kindred souls troubled more or less by similar problems, and he lives with them, befriends them and discusses things with them. In this way, his experiences are widened and deepened and his understanding grows. Then, some day, he hears a chance remark of a charwoman, or a frivolous song of a dancing girl, or the chirping of a bird on yonder tree, or he smells the fragrance of a nameless flower,—and he suddenly understands! All his previous inquiries and searches and experiences become correlated somehow, and the problem seems so clear and the solution so evident! The miracle has happened and he attains his Sudden Enlightenment.

And he travels long distances back to his old master, and, with tears in the eyes and gladness at heart, he gives thanks and worships at the feet of his great teacher who never told him anything.

This is Zen in the Chinese sense.