
Zen and Zen Buddhism: An Overview

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Zen and Zen Buddhism have a long history. A consensus among Zen Buddhism practitioners and scholars is that Zen Buddhism began with Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism (Dumoulin 2005), who incorporated *dhyana* (i.e., a form of Zen meditation with Indian origins) into his training. As Zen meditation can be traced back to India prior to the time of Gautama Buddha, the history of Zen Buddhism actually began before Buddhism itself. For a moment, imagine the tropical climate of India: It must have been quite natural for the students of diverse spiritual traditions to meditate tranquilly under a tree or on a stone as they explored the meaning of the way.

The term Zen (禪) itself sits upon a rich history. It can be used to describe similar but varying concepts or practices depending on the context and culture with which it is used. The term Zen is derived from the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese word Chan (禪), which came from the Sanskrit word *dhyana* or the Pali word *jhana*. In Japanese Zen Buddhism, the term is often considered synonymous with yoga (瑜伽) or samadhi (三昧, an ultimate state of concentration achieved through meditation). In practice, Zen is often understood as the act of adjusting one's mind by seeing and reflecting the true nature of the universe. As such, Zen is also called *Zenjo* (禪定) because the Sanskrit *dhyana* also emphasizes the *adjustment, settlement, and concentration* of the mind, which is roughly translated as *jo* (定) in Japanese.

Prior to his awakening or enlightenment, Gautama Buddha was said to seek teachings from two sages, Ajara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta. According to *Keitoku Dentō-roku* (景德傳燈錄 in Japanese; The Record of the Transmission of the Lamp), one of the most widely read ancient Chan texts, Gautama Buddha sought the samadhi of nothingness (i.e., nondiscrimination) and the samadhi of neither-perception-nor-nonperceptions from these teachers (see Daoyuan and Whitfield

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2015, p. 76). As noted below, these forms of samadhi were considered the two highest stages of Zen meditation. However, once the Buddha awakened to these states, he questioned the practice of Zen meditation for the purpose of achieving these states. Gautama Buddha then left those teachers and moved to Bodh Gaya of India and attained the enlightenment of the Middle Way (中道; Chudo in Japanese) under the famous Bodhi Tree (Japan Buddhist Federation 1978). The Middle Way describes the profoundly influential Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right samadhi. Although transitioning away from zazen for the purpose of attaining the ultimate state of mind, Gautama Buddha continued to practice zazen for the rest of his life.

Earlier Buddhist texts categorize the world into three realms: the world of desire (i.e., physical and material world), the world of form (i.e., energy world), and the world of formlessness (see Shankman 2008). A detailed account of this ancient Buddhist perspective is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, worth noting briefly are the four levels of *dhyana* (zen) as well as the four levels of samadhi in the formless realm described in these texts. It is said that upon mastery of the four *dhayas* in the realms of form, one can move toward the four formless samadhi in the realm of formlessness. The four levels of *dhyana* are said to correspond to the four levels of attainment in the realm of formlessness. According to Shankman, these four levels of *dhyana* are “distinctive meditative states of high concentrations in which the mind becomes unified” (p. 32). The four levels of samadhi in the formless realm are the samadhi of boundless space, of boundless consciousness, of nothingness, and of neither-perception-nor-nonperception.

According to an ancient Buddhist story, when Gautama Buddha attained the highest stage of samadhi in the realm of formlessness (i.e., that of neither-perception-nor-nonperception), he brought himself back to the fourth level of *dhayna*. He did so because the fourth level of *dhayna* represents the optimal balance between meditation practice and samadhi while also

capturing the Middle Way of not affirming self-centered desires as well as that of not falling into a pattern of excessive pursuit of samadhi through meditation practice.

Even after the death of Gautama Buddha, zazen training continued in Buddhism and has subsequently been transmitted through generations of Buddhist monks. It is also worth noting that zazen was integrated into various forms of spiritual training in India, including Buddhism, because it was believed to have a mystical power.

Generally speaking, it is said that Zen Buddhism was transmitted to China from India in the sixth century by Bodhidharma (菩提達磨; Bodai Daruma in Japanese) of India. In Zen Buddhism, Bodhidharma is regarded as the founder (i.e., the first patriarch) of Zen Buddhism as well as the 28th patriarch of Buddhism overall. From this perspective, China became the birthplace of Zen Buddhism as a religious organization when the teaching of Bodhidharma was transmitted to his Chinese disciple, Huike (慧可; Eka in Japanese; 487–593), who became the second patriarch of Zen Buddhism.

The philosophy of Zen Buddhism was said to fully develop during the time of the sixth patriarch, Huineng (慧能; Eno in Japanese; 638–713). Subsequently, Baizhang Huaihai (百丈懷海; Hyakujo Ekai in Japanese; 720–814) established the Pure Rules of Baizhang (百丈清規; *Hyakujo Shingi* in Japanese), an early set of rules for Zen monastic discipline, and Zen Buddhism rapidly grew to become a major religious and cultural force. Zen Buddhism faced a significant threat between the years of 845 and 846 when Chinese Emperor Wuzong persecuted and devastated Buddhist schools in an effort to cleanse China of foreign influences. However, some Zen schools survived as their practices did not rely on texts or sutras, and these became the leading sects of Chinese Zen.

Zen Buddhism was also transmitted to Korea from the seventh to ninth centuries, and subsequently to Japan in the twelfth century. In more recent years, Zen was transmitted from Asian areas to the West, and it has become a global phenomenon since. In attempting to understand

“what Zen is,” we must explore the significance of Chinese Zen in the development and proliferation of Zen worldwide.

Establishment of Zen Buddhism and Its Philosophy

As mentioned above, Zen can be traced originally to India, but Zen Buddhism as a major religious organization originated in China. Although Bodhidharma of India was said to have moved to China, disseminating his teachings through Huike, Zen was actually introduced to China gradually. Prior to the arrival of Bodhidharma, China had already been exposed to Zen meditation since 67 A.D., when Buddhism was first introduced to China. It is speculated that Chinese people were intrigued by Buddhism when it was introduced to them for the first time; this is less so because of its formal teachings and practices and more so a result of the mystic powers that the foreign monks of Buddhism were believed to possess. The Dunhuang manuscripts, a cache of important religious and secular documents discovered in China’s Mogao Caves in the early twentieth century, uncovered hidden aspects of the complicated history of Zen Buddhism.

In terms of the history of Zen Buddhism, the Dunhuang manuscripts revealed that Heze Shenhui (荷沢神会; Katakū Jinne in Japanese, 684–758) played a crucial role in the establishment of Chinese Zen as a religious organization. Hu Shih (胡適; 1891–1962), a Chinese philosopher, essayist, and diplomat, studied Shenhui extensively (see McRae 2001). As described in McRae (2001), Hu Shih (1953) gave Shenhui the highest regard as the most successful evangelist in the history of Chinese Buddhism. Hu Shih also described Shenhui as both the persecutor of Indian Zen and the founder of the new type of Chinese Zen. According to McRae (2003), Shenhui fabricated the history of Zen as “a public exponent of the ‘good news’ of Chan” (p. 107). Seizan Yanagida (柳田聖山; 1922–2006), one of the most important Japanese Buddhologists in

the twentieth century, also discussed the significance of Shenhui extensively throughout his career (see McRae 1993).

As noted above, the discovery of the Dunhuang manuscripts elicited a revision of the history of Zen Buddhism. For example, Rinzai and Soto sects of Zen Buddhism previously considered the famous encounter between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu (502–555) as a historical fact (see Ferguson 2011, pp. 14–16). This episode was included both in the Blue Cliff Record (碧巖錄; Hekiganroku in Japanese) and in the Book of Equanimity (從容錄; Shōyōroku in Japanese), the fundamental scriptures of Rinzai Zen (Linji School) and Soto Zen (Caodong School), respectively. However, this encounter is now considered a fiction created by Shenhui.

The Blue Cliff Record is a collection of koans originally compiled in China during the Song Dynasty in 1125, subsequently expanded into its present form by the Rinzai Zen master Yuanwu Keqin (1063–1135; 圓悟克勤; Engo Kokugon in Japanese). A *koan* (公案) is a story, dialogue, question, or statement, which is used in Zen practice to provoke enlightenment. The book includes Yuanwu’s annotations and commentary on 100 Verses on Old Cases (頌古百則), a compilation of 100 koans collected by Xuedou Zhongxian (980–1052; 雪竇重顯, Setcho). The Book of Equanimity was compiled by Soto Zen master Wansong Xingxiu (万松行; 1166–1246), first published in 1224. The book comprises a collection of 100 koans written by the Soto Zen master Hongzhi Zhengjue (宏智正覺; 1091–1157), together with commentaries by Wansong.

In addition to the famous encounter between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu, Shenhui appears to have created other legends about Bodhidharma, including nine years of wall gazing, Huike cutting off his arm to demonstrate his sincerity in receiving Bodhidharma’s teaching, and Huike receiving a robe as the testimonial of the transmission of the True Way.

Hu Shih also emphasized that it was Shenhui who initially considered the robe as a symbol of the transmission of the Way to subsequent leaders, possibly initiating the concept and

process of Patriarchal lineage. He also wrote the original text of the Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra (see Buddhist Text Translation Society 2001). Historically, Shenhui's apparent falsifications played a role in criticisms of Northern School teachings and the proliferation of the Southern School of Zen.

Today, Zen Buddhism generally regards Huineng of the Southern School as the sixth and last patriarch of Zen Buddhism (Dumoulin 2005; McRae 2003), largely as a result of Shenhui's influence in creating a split between the Northern and Southern Schools of Zen. Shenhui, of the Southern School, claimed that Huineng (also of the Southern School) was the legitimate heir of Zen Buddhism. At that time, Shenxiu (神秀; Jinshu in Japanese; unknown-706) of the Northern School was regarded as the heir of the fifth patriarch, Hongren (弘忍; Konin in Japanese; 601–674), and he and his students experienced widespread fame and status through the strong support by China's imperial court.

When Shenhui claimed that Huineng of the Southern School was the heir of the fifth patriarch in 720, he was largely ignored. However, when the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763) devastated northern China in an attempt to weaken the Tang Dynasty, Shenxiu and the Northern School's influence was also significantly weakened. At the same time, Shenhui of the Southern School gained the power that the Northern School lost, and his assertions of Huineng as the sixth patriarch were legitimized. Shenhui subsequently proclaimed himself to be the seventh patriarch, the receiver of the robe from Huineng.

Huineng's Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra was one of the most widely read Zen Buddhist texts, particularly the version edited and published in 1291. As a result, many believed that the stories of Huineng cited in the Platform Sutra were historical facts. For example, in the text is a legendary poetry contest between Huineng (Southern School) and Shenxiu (Northern School) at the fifth patriarch's monastery at Huangmei. This episode, which was found to be fictional later in the early twentieth century,

symbolized the emergence of the Southern School and the demise of the Northern School. Shenxiu's poem (McRae 2000, p. 20) goes:

Body is the bodhi tree
Heart is like clear mirror stand
Strive to clean it constantly
Do not let the dust motes land

In response to Shenxiu's poem, Huineng wrote (McRae 2000, p. 22) the following:

Bodhi is originally without any tree;
The bright mirror is also not a stand
Originally there is not a single thing
Where could any dust be attracted?

A detailed analysis of these poems is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is worthwhile to present a brief commentary on this poetry contest. In *Zen's Chinese Heritage: The Masters and Their Teachings*, a widely read book on Chinese Zen and its heritage, Andy Ferguson (2011) explains this episode:

To better understand the doctrinal difference between Shenxiu's "Northern" and Huineng's "Southern" Zen, it would be useful to briefly introduce the Buddhist doctrine of "mind." The concept of "mind" is central to Zen, as well as other schools of Buddhist thought and philosophy. A Zen Buddhist teaching holds that there is but one universal "mind" that is constituted by the mind of all living beings. This universal mind is called "Buddha," "Buddha nature," "true self," and so on.

But different schools of Zen and Buddhism had different interpretations about the teaching of mind and how it may be understood. Shenxiu's Northern School believed and advanced the position that there are "impurities" that can cloud the mind. These impurities include an individual's thoughts or interpretations, and any of which necessarily give rise to the illusion of an individual self. Therefore, a "mirror" analogy is applied to this type of understanding. The individual's small mind is likened to a "mirror" that reflects the entire universe. Delusion is an impurity, and the "dust" on the mirror that prevents the individual from maintaining his or her pure, original (and universal) mind.

In contrast, the Southern School advanced the idea that there is no way to realize the nature of mind except through sudden realization, and this must be done quite apart from any ideas of "purity" or "impurity." Even the so-called "dust" on the

allegorical mirror must only be part of mind, so how can it be called “impure”? “Polishing” the mirror, or removing impurities through various practices, does not lead to a genuine realization of the nature of mind. This difference was at the heart of the poems attributed to Shenxiu and Huineng in the contest at Huangmei (pp. 49–50).

Ferguson (2011) also highlights the political significance of this episode in the Platform Sutra as follows:

In that competition, the lowly positioned Huineng proved to have superior spiritual insight, despite the fact that Shenxiu was Hongren’s most senior student. This famous episode, well known in the religious folklore of East Asia, is the legendary seed of the growth of Zen into Northern (followers of Shenxiu) and Southern (followers of Huineng) schools. Twentieth-century scholarship has, to a large degree, undermined the evidence that this event really occurred. However, the story of the poetry contest at Huangmei remains informative, for it symbolizes the genuine doctrinal differences that many scholars believe divided the Northern and Southern Zen schools (p. 49).

This episode is also known for highlighting the contrast between the Northern School and the Southern School in their respective accounts of enlightenment. Shenxiu is said to emphasize gradual enlightenment (漸悟), whereas Huineng spoke of sudden enlightenment (頓悟). As such, the story in the Platform Sutra also implies the superiority of sudden enlightenment to gradual enlightenment. According to Hu Shih, Shenhui used this rhetoric to promote the Southern School of Zen and criticized Shenxiu and his lineage as a fundamentally illegitimate practice.

The sudden enlightenment advocated by Shenhui implies an innate nature of enlightenment; that is, we already have the Buddha nature. According to Suzuki (1996, 1997), the suddenness (頓) in the sudden enlightenment (頓悟) is not about the immediacy of time. Rather, it is of a breakthrough in logic and space. The Chinese character 頓 means “sudden,” but in Chinese Zen Buddhism, the term also means “as it is” or “thusness.” As such, instead of translating it as “sudden enlightenment,” Shenhui’s position of enlightenment could very well be translated as “original enlightenment,” which is synonymous with *honkaku* (本覺; genuine enlightenment).

Worth noting is that Hu Shih, who generally disagrees with Suzuki’s account of Zen Buddhism, corroborated Shenhui’s emphasis on the thusness.

Recent studies on Chinese Zen Buddhism and its heritage suggest that Shenhui’s perspective on Zen is not actually distinct from that of the Northern School. In fact, it appears that Shenhui skillfully integrated the teachings of the Northern School into his own. Additionally, whereas Shenxiu was certainly the dominant figure within the Northern School of Zen, the broader teachings of the Northern School reflected diversity and complexity that was traditionally overlooked.

Despite the fictional aspects of Shenhui’s teachings, his influential contributions to Chinese Zen Buddhism remain significant (McRae 2001). His teaching of original enlightenment was considered a core teaching of Chinese Zen Buddhism during the Tang Dynasty (618–907), as well as the key teaching that eventually united all of Chinese Buddhists under the Sudden Enlightenment School.

In sum, the discovery of the Dunhuang manuscripts has offered a more complete history of early Chinese Zen Buddhism. In studying these writings, the focus was largely placed on the investigation of historical facts (e.g., whether episodes in old Zen texts actually occurred). As noted above, many of these episodes are found to be fictional or fabricated. However, as is the case in many religious and influential texts across many cultures, many have strongly advocated that wisdoms within these stories remain profound, despite the fact that the stories themselves are fictional; thus, we should appreciate the influential aspects of these narratives and refrain from shunning them immediately (see McRae 1993).

Chinese Zen Buddhism in Tang Dynasty (750–1000 AD)

Because of Shenhui’s influence and the shifting power dynamics following the revolution, the Southern School of Zen emerged as the

prominent Chinese Zen organization during the Tang Dynasty. However, Shenhui's line of Southern School teachings did not evolve into the dominant sect of Zen Buddhism. Instead, the lines of Qingyuan Xingsi (青原行思; Seigen Gyoshi in Japanese; 673–741) and Nanyue Huairang (南嶽懷讓; Nangaku Ejo in Japanese; 677–744), Shenhui's fellow disciples, became the major schools of Chinese Zen. Subsequently, Mazu Daoyi (馬祖道一; Baso Doitsu in Japanese; 709–788) and his disciples, such as Baizhang Huaihai (百丈懷海; Hyakujo Ekai in Japanese; 720–814), established the structure of Chinese Zen Buddhism as a major religious organization. Mazu was Nanyue Huairang's dharma heir.

The Bodhidharma line of Zen studied and followed the Lankavatara Sutra, one of the original sutras of Mahayana Buddhism, extensively. Mazu edited the Lankavatara Sutra, emphasizing sudden enlightenment in his teaching (Poceski 2015). In this text, Mazu attempts to make sense of important Zen concepts. For example, one of the most famous questions posed in Zen Buddhism is “What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming to China?” This question, canonically asked of Zen students, asks what Bodhidharma taught as well as what Zen teaches. This is how Mazu described the meaning of Zen by quoting the Lankavatara Sutra:

Each one of you, you should believe that your own mind is the Buddha, that this mind is identical with the Buddha. The great master Bodhidharma came from India to China and transmitted the One Mind teaching of the supreme vehicle in order to cause you to realize awakening. He also quoted the Lankavatara Scripture, in order to imprint the minds of living beings, fearing that they are perturbed and lack faith themselves. The truth of this One Mind is something that each and every one of you possesses. Therefore, according to the Lankavatara Scripture, the Buddha's teaching asserts that the mind is the essential principle, and that the lack of a particular point of entry is the (very essence) of the (true) teaching” (Poceski 2015, p. 83).

The teaching of One Mind in this passage is analogous to the teaching of original enlightenment. Similarly, Mazu also taught that our

ordinary, everyday behavior can manifest the Buddha Way. He stated:

The Way needs no [special methods of spiritual] cultivation—all you need to do is put an end to [engendering all sorts of] defilements. What are defilements? If you have a mind [mired in the circle] of birth and death, and are engaged in deliberate acts and have [self-centered] ambitions, then everything [you do] is defilement. If you want to directly know the Way, then ordinary mind is the Way. Ordinary mind denotes [a state of mind in which there is] no [deliberate] action, no [ideas about] right and wrong, no grasping and discarding, no [notion of] annihilation and permanence, no ordinary and sacred. The scripture says, “Unlike the practice of ordinary people, and like the practice of sages—that is the practice of bodhisattvas.” At this very moment, as you engage in walking, standing, sitting, or reclining, and as you respond to [various] situations and deal with [other] people—everything [you do and encounter] is the Way (Poceski 2015, p. 301).

In summarizing Mazu's teachings, it is important to note that what he meant by mind is not what we usually understand as mind. What he means is the act of a whole person interacting fully with his or her surroundings and other individuals in a given moment. For Mazu, the enlightenment or the Way is not somewhere “else,” but in the very moment of one's life. It is this mind that blends everyday living and the Way into the original oneness. The following is an episode that summarizes the teaching of Mazu.

One day Mazu addressed the congregation, saying, “All of you here! Believe that your own mind is Buddha. This very mind is buddha mind. When Bodhidharma came from India to China he transmitted the supreme vehicle teaching of One Mind, allowing people like you to attain awakening. Moreover, he brought with him the text of the Lankavatara Sutra, using it as the seal of the mind-ground of sentient beings. He feared that your views would be inverted, and you wouldn't believe in the teaching of this mind that each and every one of you possesses. Therefore [Bodhidharma brought] the Lankavatara Sutra, which offers the Buddha's words that mind is the essence—and that there is no gate by which to enter Dharma. You who seek Dharma should seek nothing. Apart from mind there is no other Buddha. Apart from Buddha there is no other mind. Do not grasp what is good nor reject what is bad. Don't lean toward either purity or pollution. Arrive

at the empty nature of transgressions; that nothing is attained through continuous thoughts; and that because there is no self-nature the three worlds are only mind. The myriad forms of the entire universe are the seal of the single Dharma. Whatever forms are seen are but the perception of mind. But mind is not independently existent. It is codependent with form. You should speak appropriately about the affairs of your own life, for each matter you encounter constitutes the meaning of your existence, and your actions are without hindrance. The fruit of the bodhisattva way is just thus, born of mind, taking names to be forms. Because of the knowledge of the emptiness of forms, birth is nonbirth. Comprehending this, one acts in the fashion of one's time, just wearing clothes, eating food, constantly upholding the practices of a bodhisattva, and passing time according to circumstances. If one practices in this manner is there anything more to be done? (Ferguson 2011, p. 75)

When Zen Buddhism was first transmitted from India to China, Chinese people were intrigued by the mystical powers associated with it, rather than its actual teachings. However, as Zen Buddhism became rooted into the Chinese soil, such an image was naturally faded. What made Chinese people attracted to Zen was its teaching of ordinary, and yet wholehearted way of living. A quote by Layman Pang (龐居士; Hokoji in Japanese; 740–808), a nonmonastic student of Mazu, is known to highlight this point. It goes:

How miraculous and wondrous,
Hauling water and carrying firewood (Ferguson 2011, p. 109)

According to Layman Pang, there is no act that reflects the Buddha Way more than activities crucial for everyday living, such as hauling water and carrying firewood at his time. Linji Yixuan (臨濟義玄; Rinzai Gigen in Japanese; died 866 CE), the founder of the Linji School of Zen Buddhism, further refined the importance of everyday and ordinary living as the core teaching of “人” (*nin* in Japanese; being a person). The teaching of *nin* reflects the continuous practice (the true self) that is not entangled with anything. It is to pee and poo, wear clothes, and eat without being caught up by delusions. Linji used the term “無事人; one who has nothing to do” to describe the fully enlightened person, then stated:

[He who has] nothing to do is the noble one. Simply don't strive—just be ordinary (see Sasaki and Kirchner 2008, pp. 178–179).

Zen is not based on analysis, differentiation, or logic. In *Genjokoan* (現成公案; sometimes translated as Actualization of Reality), Dogen Zenji (道元禪師; 1200–1253), the founder of the Soto School of Zen in Japan, quoted an episode of Baoche of Mt. Mayu (麻谷宝徹), a student of Mazu, to highlight this point. The episode goes:

Zen master Baoche of Mt. Mayu was fanning himself. A monk approached and said, “Master, the nature of wind is permanent and there is no place it does not reach. Why, then, do you fan yourself?”

“Although you understand that the nature of the wind is permanent,” Baoche replied, “you do not understand the meaning of its reaching everywhere.”

“What is the meaning of its reaching everywhere?” asked the monk again. The master just kept fanning himself. The monk bowed deeply.

The actualization of the buddha-dharma, the vital path of its correct transmission, is like this (Dogen and Tanahashi 1985, pp. 72–73).

Then, Dogen continued with his commentary:

If you say that you do not need to fan yourself because the nature of wind is permanent and you can have wind without fanning, you will understand neither permanence nor the nature of wind. The nature of wind is permanent; because of that, the wind of the buddha's house brings for the gold of the earth and makes fragrant the cream of the long river (Dogen and Tanahashi 1985, p. 73).

Worth nothing is the contribution of Baizhang Huaihai, the dharma heir of Mazu. As noted above, he was said to establish a set of rules for Chan (Chinese Zen) monastic discipline, known as the Pure Rules of Baizhang (百丈清規; *Hya-kujo Shingi* in Japanese), and reinforced the independence of Zen Buddhism as a major religious and cultural force. Within the Pure Rules of Baizhang, the most notable is the establishment of group work (普請; *fushin* in Japanese). *Fushin* meant “to assemble people” for labor. The establishment of this rule was significant because productive labor was strictly prohibited in early Indian Buddhism. The rule of *fushin* with the emphasis on self-sufficiency and daily labor

(e.g., farming) became a regular aspect of the monastic life. “Day of no working—a day of no eating” by Baizhang is the most famous quote derived from this outlook (see Sasaki and Kirchner 2008, pp. 320–321).

Furthermore, contemporary to Mazu, there was Shitou Xiqian (石頭希遷; Sekito Kisen in Japanese; 700–790). Shitou was a disciple of Huineng’s successor, Qingyuan Xingsi. Later in the line of Shitou, Dongshan Liangjie (洞山良价; Tozan Ryokai in Japanese; 807–869) founded the Caodong School (曹洞宗). The Caodong School of Zen was transmitted to Japan in the thirteenth century by Dogen and developed into the Soto School of Zen.

In his writings, Dogen quoted Dongshan more than anyone else. Dongshan’s Zen emphasized the continuous practice without the desire of gaining something, even the experience of enlightenment. This continuous practice is often contrasted with the practice of sudden enlightenment taught in the Linji School of Zen. Consistent with Linji, Dongshan and Dogen stated that every one of us has the Buddha nature, nevertheless. Dongshan and Dogen then said that the students of Zen must not become settled with one-time experience of enlightenment: Instead, they must continue to strive for the Buddha Way.

Zen Buddhism in Song Dynasty (960–1279)

Generally speaking, the development and expansion of Zen Buddhism during the Tang Dynasty is summarized and called “Five Houses of Chan (Zen).” *Bendowa* (辨道話; Discourse on the Practice of the Way), which was completed by Dogen in 1231 AD immediate after his return from China, described the Five Houses of Zen in the context of Zen history. He stated:

There were two great disciples under the Sixth Ancestor: Ejo of Nangaku and Gyoshi of Seigen. Both of them transmitted and maintained Buddha mandra and were guiding teachings for all beings. As these two streams of the dharma flowed and permeated widely, the five gates opened: the Hogen, Igyo, Soto, Unmon, and Rinzai schools.

These days in Song China, only the Rinzai school is present everywhere (see Dogen et al. 1997, p. 21).

Hogen, Igyo, Soto, Unmon, and Rinzai are Japanese names for the five schools of Zen. Following a Chinese pronunciation, these schools are often called the Fayan (法眼), Guiyang (滙仰), Caodong (曹洞), Yunmen (雲門), and Linji (臨濟) schools in English, respectively. As noted above, Linji (Rinzai) became the most dominant house of Zen Buddhism during the Song Dynasty, and it blanchd out to the Huanglong line (黃龍派) and Yangqi line (楊岐派). Given these two branches, Chinese Zen during that time of Song Dynasty is also called The Five Houses and Seven Schools of Zen (五家七宗). Toward the end of Song Dynasty, only Linji (Rinzai) and Caodong (Soto) schools remained in Asia, including China and Japan (Ishii 1987).

Linji and Caodong schools in the Song Dynasty are characterized by Kanna-Zen (看話禪 in Japanese; koan-introspecting Zen) and Mokusho-Zen (默照禪 in Japanese; Silent Illumination Zen), respectively. Kanna-Zen, which was formalized by Dahui Zonggao (大慧宗果; Daie Soko in Japanese; 1089–1163), is a koan-based method of Zen Buddhism, and Mokusho-Zen, which was matured by Hongzhi Zhengjue (宏智正覺; Wanshi Shogaku in Japanese; 1091–1157), is known as the practice of just sitting with silence. Of the two, Mokuso-Zen was matured first.

Hongzhi stated that silent illumination was the most authentic expression of Buddha Way. According to the teaching of Silent Illumination Zen, the Buddha nature naturally unfolds through continuous practice, as if a light naturally begins to illuminate in darkness. As such, zazen itself considered the state of enlightenment, the Buddha Way, and the true self. Dumoulin (2005) summarized Hongzhi’s Silent Illumination Zen as follows:

In his view: silent illumination was the most authentic expression of the tradition that had come down from the Buddhas and the patriarchs: To one who forgets the words in silence reality is clearly revealed... Silence is the stillness that grounds the

enlightened mind, whose natural ability to “shine” is revealed in silence. Reality reveals itself to those sitting in silence meditation without leading them to look on things as objects of intellection. Enlightenment is like the mirror-quality of the enlightened and resplendent Buddha mind (p. 256).

Conversely, Dahui of Kanna-Zen was less enthusiastic about the Silent Illumination Zen. In fact, Dahui is sometimes the best known for calling the Silent Illumination Zen as “silent illumination false Zen (默照邪禪).” Kanna-Zen that he established was his efforts to correct misunderstandings associated with the Silent Illumination Zen. Concerned about the potential pitfalls of Silent Illumination Zen practice (i.e., just-sitting Zen), Dahui criticized the Silent Illumination Zen as follows:

Recently a type of heterodox Zen... has been grown up in the forest of Zen. By confusing the sickness with the remedy, they have denied the experience of enlightenment. These people think that the experience of enlightenment is but an artificial superstructure meant to attract, so they give it a secondary position, like branches or leaves on the tree. Because they have not experienced enlightenment, they think others have not either. Stubbornly they continued that an empty silence and a musty state of unconsciousness is the original realm of the absolute. To eat their rice twice a day and sit without thoughts in meditation is what they call complete peace (see Dumoulin 2005, p. 257).

Historically speaking, Kanna-Zen of Dahui is said to have established in 1134 when Dahui explicitly criticized the Silent Illumination Zen, particularly the teachings of Zhenxie Qingliao (真歇清了; Shinketsu Seiryō in Japanese; 1088–1151), a senior fellow of Hongzhi (see Ishii 1987, 2016; Schlutter 2010). The core of the controversy was at the *actualization of enlightenment* within the teaching of original enlightenment (Ishii 2016; Schlutter 2010).

Consistent with the Silent Illumination Zen, Dahui acknowledged the original enlightenment (e.g., Buddha nature) in every one of us. However, he argued that having the original enlightenment does not mean that one naturally actualizes it. In Dahui’s eyes, the followers of silent illumination confused the actualization of enlightenment with original enlightenment (Ishii

2016). Dahui argued that, to actualize enlightenment, it is crucial for one to wholeheartedly face a great doubt and break through it. To legitimize this point, Dahui pointed out the fact that even the Original Buddha had to undergo the experience of great doubt before he *recognized* his own true nature (Ishii 2016; Schlutter 2010). For Dahui, the Silent Illumination Zen minimized the significance of great doubt as well as importance of practice (i.e., breaking through the doubt) as they confused the original enlightenment with the actualization of enlightenment into one (e.g., “you’re already enlightened, so don’t worry, and just sit”). Dahui stated that “it is meaningless to talk about an original state of enlightenment before delusion has been overcome and enlightenment realized” (Schlutter 2010, p. 120).

For Dahui, *koan* practice is a crucial way for recognizing enlightenment through overcoming greater doubts. According to Dumoulin (2005), no other Chinese Zen master understood so completely or promoted so vigorously the use of *koan* as Dahui. Many of us today are often gravitated toward *koans* for their literal provocation or deep intellectual paradox. However, the core of a *koan*, according to Dahui, is to make its central point through doubt: Enlightenment draws meaning and value from a great feeling of doubt. Dahui stated:

Just steadily go on with your *koan* every moment of your life. If a thought rises, do not attempt to suppress it by conscious effort, only renew the attempt to keep the *koan* before the mind. Whether walking or sitting, let your attention be fixed upon it without interruption! When you begin to find it entirely devoid of flavor, the final moment is approaching, do not let it slip out of your grasp. When all of a sudden something flashes out in your mind, its light will illuminate the entire universe and you will see the spiritual land of the Enlightened One fully revealed at the point of a single hair, and the great wheel of the Dharma revolving in a single grain of dust (Dumoulin 2005, p. 257).

He also stated the process of *koan* practice as follows:

The thousand and ten thousand doubts that well up in your breast are really only one doubt, all of them burst open when doubt is resolved in the *koan*. As

long as the *koan* is not resolved, you must occupy yourself with it to the utmost. If you give up on your *koan* and stir up another doubt about a word of scripture or about a sutra teaching or about a *koan* of the ancients, or if you allow a doubt about worldly matters to come up—all this means to be joined to the evil spirit. You should not too easily agree with a *koan* solution that you have discovered, nor should you think about it further and make distinctions. Fasten your attention to where discursive thinking cannot reach. Make sure that you do not allow your mind to run off, like an old mouse that ran into the horn of an ox (Dumoulin 2005, pp. 257–258).

The *koan* that Dahui used the most was Zhaozhou's Wu (Ferguson 2011, p. 153). It goes:

A monk asked Zhaozhou, "Does a dog have Buddha nature?"

Zhaozhou answered, "Wu! [in Japanese, 'Mu']"

Although Zhaozhou was a Zen master of the Tang Dynasty, Dahui was that of the Song Dynasty, this *mondo* (e.g., Zen dialogue) of Zhaozhou was used as a well-known *koan* during the Song Dynasty. Dahui stated that one must focus on this *koan*, while letting go of all logical and analytic ways of thinking and continue to leap into it. Dahui explained this *koan* further:

This one character is the rod by which many false images and ideas are destroyed in their very foundations. To it you should add no judgments about being or non-being, no arguments, no bodily gestures like raising your eyebrows or blinking your eyes. Words has no place here. Neither should you throw this character away into the nothingness of emptiness, or seek it in the comings and goings of the mind, or try to trace its origins in the scriptures. You must only earnestly and continually stir it [this *koan*] around the clock. Sitting or lying, walking or standing, you must give yourself over to it constantly. "Does a dog have the Buddha-nature? The answer: "Mu." Without withdrawing from everyday life, keep trying, keeping looking at this *koan*! (Dumoulin 2005, p. 258)

Finally, Dahui left the following comment to the students of Zen Buddhism.

Many students today do not doubt themselves, but they doubt others. And so it is said: "Within great doubt there necessarily exists great enlightenment." (see Dumoulin 2005, p. 258)

Conclusions

Many schools of Zen established across the world today have their origins traced back to Chinese Zen developed during the Song Dynasty. For example, Rinzai Zen of Japan is nothing but the Kanna-Zen. Soto Zen of Japan (i.e., Dogen Zen) adheres to the teachings of Mokusho-Zen (Silent Illumination Zen). Core teachings of different Zen schools can be understood in terms of the significance of enlightenment, practice, and its relations (Ishii 2016). As such, the core teachings of Zen discussed in this chapter as well as this entire volume can be summarized as follows:

- (A) Zen during the Tang Dynasty: We are inherently Buddhas. As such, all of our activities are the manifestation of enlightenment.
- (B) Dogen Zen: One must practice *zazen* because we are inherently Buddhas. The Buddha nature naturally unfolds when we do *zazen*.
- (C) Kanna-Zen: We are inherently Buddhas, but we must realize it by breaking through the great doubt.

Finally, as the summary above suggests, Zen is often understood as the practice of enlightenment. That being said, I think that Dogen Zen is distinct from other Zen schools in that sense (Ishii 1991). If you are interested in my account of Dogen Zen, please read my paper, titled "Characteristics of Bodhidharma Zen in Japan" (Ishii 2002). Please note that that book is written in Japanese and not yet translated into English.

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