

The Transformation of the Formless Precepts in the *Platform Sūtra* (*Liuzu tanjing* 六祖壇經)

Morten Schlütter

Introduction

The *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (*Liuzu tanjing* 六祖壇經) is perhaps the single best known text produced by Chinese Chan Buddhism.¹ It has had a history in China of more than a thousand years; today is it available in many Chinese editions with a range of scholarly and popular commentaries, and it has also been translated into a number of European and Asian languages. The *Platform Sūtra* purports to contain the teachings of Huineng 慧[惠]能 (traditional dates 638–713), Sixth Patriarch of Chan 禪 Buddhism. It begins with Huineng’s dramatic telling of how he came to literally inherit the mantle of the Fifth Patriarch, Hongren 弘忍 (ca. 600–674), and continues with Huineng’s recorded sermon and his conferral of “formless precepts” (*wuxiang jie* 無相戒) on his audience, followed by accounts of his encounters with disciples as well as his protracted deathbed instructions. It is the only Buddhist text produced in China that is honored with the title of *sūtra* (*jing* 經),² otherwise reserved for the teachings of the Buddha.³

There is a considerable body of scholarship on the *Platform Sūtra* produced both in East Asia and the Western world, most of which has focused on the earliest version of the text (probably from about 780CE) that was found in the early twentieth century in a hidden cave library at Dunhuang

¹ Parts of this introduction are adapted from Schlütter 2014.

² Recently, Christoph Anderl has argued for the possibility that *jing* in the title of the Dunhuang version may refer not to Huineng’s words but to the *Diamond Sūtra*. See Anderl 2013.

³ Other texts actually produced in China were also called *jing*, but then claimed to be translations of the words of the Buddha from the Sanskrit (often referred to as “apocryphal sutras”).

敦煌 in western China.⁴ However, what makes the *Platform Sūtra* especially interesting as an object of study is the fact that it is known in a number of editions, spanning from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries, that are distinctly different from each other. Thus the Dunhuang version of the text is only half as long as the Yuan-dynasty (元, 1279–1368) edition from 1291 that eventually became the orthodox version. Clearly, notions about the persona of Huineng and his teachings evolved in important ways over time, and the *Platform Sūtra* changed accordingly. In this way, the *Platform Sūtra* is not a just a text that tells us about the early formation of Chan, but one that can serve as a kind of laboratory where a number of crucial changes and developments in Chan can be observed diachronically over a period of at least 500 years.⁵

This paper will focus on Huineng's "formless precepts" that had a prominent role in the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra*, and will trace the development of these precepts through several crucial stages of the text.

The *Platform Sūtra(s)*

The fact that a number of different versions of the *Platform Sūtra* are extant makes it unique among Chinese Buddhist texts.⁶ In addition to the well-known Dunhuang version and the orthodox Yuan-dynasty version that is contained in the Taishō canon, several other editions discovered in Japan in the 1930s make at least seven distinct versions of the *Platform Sūtra* available to us.⁷ Furthermore, we no longer have to be content with the Stein manuscript held in the British Library as the sole representative of the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra*; we now have available two other Dunhuang manuscripts that in recent decades have been discovered in Chinese museum libraries.⁸

⁴ For an overview of recent scholarship on the Dunhuang *Platform Sūtra* see the essays in Schlütter and Teiser eds. 2012. See also Jorgensen 2002.

⁵ I am currently engaged in a study that seeks to elucidate the historical development of Chinese Chan through an examination of the different versions of the *Platform Sūtra*. My working title is *The Evolution of the Platform Sūtra and the Changing Notions of What Chan Should Be*.

⁶ We can speculate that other Buddhist texts may have undergone similar transformations, although we have little evidence of this.

⁷ Many of these texts can be found reproduced in Yanagida ed. 1976. See also Ishii 1979.

⁸ Besides Stein no. 5474, there is a manuscript known as the Dunhuang Museum edition (*Dunbo ben* 敦博本), first published in Yang 1993. The Stein manuscript and the Dunhuang

Modern scholarship has shown quite conclusively that the *Platform Sūtra* cannot be accepted as an actual record of the life and teachings of Huineng, but rather is a text likely produced well after the death of Huineng, who probably had no real connection with it. Virtually nothing is known for certain about Huineng, and his prominence as the Sixth Patriarch seems to be entirely due to the tireless efforts of the monk Shenhui 神會 (684–758),⁹ who claimed to be Huineng's disciple (although the two very likely never met) and who clearly hoped to be recognized as the Seventh Patriarch.¹⁰ Shenhui himself was quickly forgotten by history, but Huineng came to be universally accepted as the Sixth Patriarch and the ancestor to the entire subsequent Chan tradition. Thus, ever since the mid-ninth century, all members of the Chinese Chan school, and later those of the Korean Sŏn and Japanese Zen schools, trace their lineages directly back to Huineng.

In all versions, in the first part of the *Platform Sūtra* Huineng himself tells in dramatic fashion how he, an illiterate seller of firewood, is initially awakened upon hearing the *Diamond Sutra* recited.¹¹ This inspires him to travel to the monastery of the Fifth Patriarch of Chan, Hongren, where, in spite of the fact that Hongren immediately recognizes his superior understanding, Huineng is employed as a lowly worker. Later Huineng proves himself by composing a poem illustrating an understanding of inherent Buddha-nature that is vastly superior to that of the main disciple of Hongren, Shenxiu 神秀 (606?–706). Then, in the secrecy of night, Hongren gives Dharma transmission to Huineng as the Sixth Patriarch and also transmits the robe of the First Patriarch Bodhidharma (Putidamo 菩提達摩, fifth century) to him. Fearing that people will harm Huineng, Hongren sends him away and tells him to stay hidden for several years. Eluding those who want to kill him and steal Bodhidharma's robe, Huineng escapes. He eventually becomes publicly recognized as the Sixth Patriarch (although this is not detailed until the Yuan-dynasty version). The subsequent parts of the *Platform Sūtra* contain Huineng's sermon and his bestowal of the formless precepts,

museum edition are compared and photographically reproduced in Huang 2006. Very recently yet another manuscript was found in the Lüshun Museum in Liaoning Province in China (known as the *Lüshun ben* 旅順本), see the beautiful color reproductions in Guo and Wang eds. 2011.

⁹ This is a revised set of dates. Earlier Shenhui's dates were thought to be 670–762. See McRae 1987.

¹⁰ See Jorgensen 2005: 153–154. See also Jorgensen 2012.

¹¹ This section is adapted from Schlütter 2007.

and record his later encounters with disciples and others, as well as his protracted parting instructions to his disciples before his death.

Much of the great appeal of the *Platform Sūtra* to both monastics and laypeople must lie in its dramatic and exciting narrative and in the fact that Huineng is depicted as an illiterate lay person when he receives Hongren's Dharma (he is, however, understood to later become a monk, even if this is only made explicit in the Yuan-dynasty version of the *Platform Sūtra*). Huineng's exchange of poems with Shenxiu illustrates in a lucid fashion the doctrine of inherent Buddha-nature, and once and for all establishes the superiority of the "sudden" teaching that affords complete and direct insight into a person's originally enlightened self-nature. The core of the sermon that follows elaborates on these points in various ways.

Scholarship on early Chan was transformed after the discovery in the beginning of the twentieth century of a number of texts relating to the early Chan movement in the cave library at Dunhuang, which also contained an early version of the *Platform Sūtra*. Using this and other materials, scholars long ago showed that the story of Huineng should be understood in the context of competition among different factions of Chan in the years after Hongren's demise, and that virtually nothing in the *Platform Sūtra* can be taken as historical fact.¹² Much of the material included in the *Platform Sūtra* seems to be a reflection of the struggle by Shenhui to have Huineng recognized as the Sixth Patriarch, and himself acknowledged as the main heir of Huineng. Nevertheless, there are a number of different voices in the early *Platform Sūtra*; that of Shenhui and his faction is not the only one. What is more, Shenhui's role in promoting Huineng as the Sixth Patriarch was virtually forgotten in the later Chan movement, and Shenhui's voice was gradually obliterated in the successive versions of the *Platform Sūtra*. Having initially appeared as Huineng's main heir Shenhui is in later versions depicted as a minor figure.

I have written several essays aimed at determining how the different extant editions of the *Platform Sūtra* are related to each other, employing the methodology of textual criticism.¹³ There is no doubt that the methodology of textual criticism is a crucial tool for determining the relationship between

¹² See the ground-breaking work by Hu Shih in Hu 1930, and Hu 1932. See also Yanagida 1967; Yampolsky 1967; McRae 1986; and Jorgensen 1987.

¹³ Schlütter 2014. Textual criticism has been used extensively especially in the study of Greek and Roman classical texts to determine the most authentic readings when manuscripts vary.

the different editions of the *Platform Sūtra*, and it is unfortunate that much of the more recent scholarship on this and other Buddhist texts has ignored textual criticism altogether.¹⁴ It must be kept in mind that critical editions of texts that exist in multiple versions cannot be created by choosing the readings from each of the versions that seem to make the most sense. This procedure creates an entirely new text, different from all the previous versions of the text, and so actually obscures rather than illuminates the text's history.

To briefly summarize the points I have made in earlier papers that are relevant for the present essay, we know that a monk named Huixin 惠昕 (d.u.)¹⁵ in 967 took an "old version" (or perhaps several versions) of the *Platform Sūtra* similar, but not identical, to the ones currently known from Dunhuang, and revised the text in certain ways as well as divided it into eleven chapters and two fascicles. Huixin's original edition is lost, but several editions of the *Platform Sūtra* in eleven chapters and two fascicles that must be ultimately based on Huixin's text are extant. Huixin's version eventually became the ancestor of a new and considerably longer edition of the *Platform Sūtra* in ten chapters and one fascicle, first prepared sometime before 1290, that quickly became the orthodox version. Two variants of this edition, both with the title *Liuzu dashi fabao tanjing* 六祖大師法寶壇經 (the Dharma jewel Platform Sūtra of the great master, the Sixth Patriarch), became dominant. Most important is the 1291 edition associated with the Yuan-dynasty monk Zongbao 宗寶 (d.u.) which is included in the Japanese modern Buddhist canon, the *Taishō Daizōkyō*.¹⁶ Another edition, from 1290 and associated with Mengshan Deyi 蒙山德異 (1231–?),¹⁷ became especially popular in Korea.¹⁸

I have shown in my earlier work that the direct basis for the orthodox version was the text of the so-called Kōshōji edition. Based on Huixin's text, it was probably first edited by Chao Jiong 晁迥 (951–1034)¹⁹ in 1031 or by

¹⁴ See a summary of more recent scholarship on the *Platform Sūtra* in Jorgensen 2002.

¹⁵ Otherwise unknown.

¹⁶ T48, no. 2008: 345–465. A English translation of the whole text with all its attached materials is found in McRae 2000.

¹⁷ For biographical information see Ui 1942–43: vol. 2, 12–13, and Komazawa Daigaku Nai Zengaku Daijiten Hensanso eds. 1978: 947b.

¹⁸ A 1316 edition was reproduced and described in Ōya 1935.

¹⁹ See Chang 1975: vol. 3, 1946. Hu 1975.

his descendant Chao Zijian 晁子健 (d.u.)²⁰ who wrote a preface for it in 1153. It is now known from a Japanese printed edition found at the temple Kōshōji 興聖寺 in Kyoto.²¹ However, the material from the Kōshōji text has been completely rearranged in the orthodox edition, and much material on Huineng’s encounters with various disciples was added from the 1004 *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (Record of the transmission of the lamp from the Jingde era [1004–1008]) and other sources. It can be shown conclusively that it was the orthodox edition of the *Platform Sūtra* that borrowed from the *Chuandeng lu* and the Kōshōji text and not the other way around, although there is no space here to present the evidence.²²

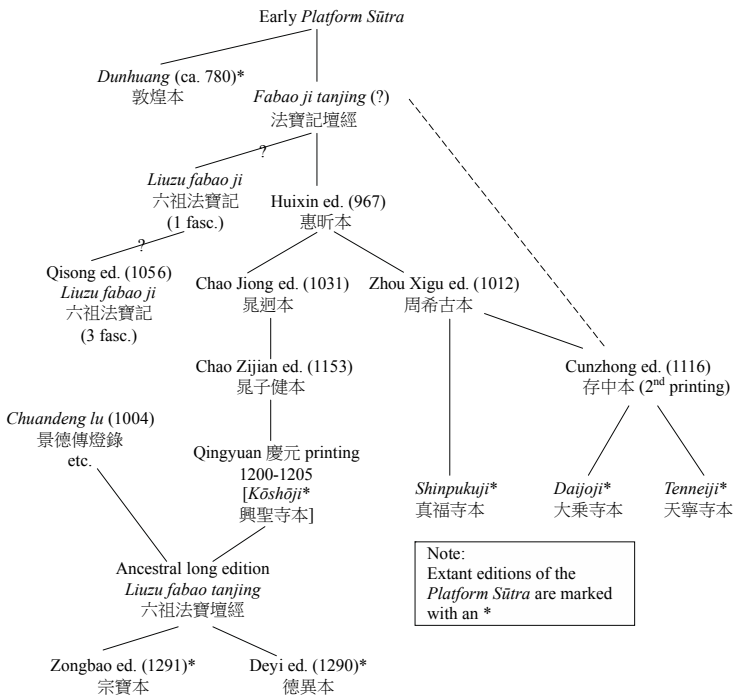


Table 1: Editions of the Platform Sūtra

²⁰ See Chang 1975: vol. 3, 1947, for a list of references to him.
²¹ The Kōshōji version is almost certainly not the edition of the *Platform Sūtra* prepared by the scholar-monk Qisong 契嵩 (1007–1072), although it is usually (incorrectly) assumed that his edition was the ancestor of the orthodox edition.
²² See Schlütter 1989 and Schlütter 2014.

In the following, I will discuss the formless precepts as they appear in the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra*, then the Huixin version, and finally the Zongbao edition as representative of what became the orthodox version of the *Platform Sūtra*.

Formless Precepts in the Dunhuang *Platform Sūtra*

The formless precepts must have been understood as an essential feature of the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra*, which showcases the precepts in an addendum to its title. The full title reads:

The Sūtra of the Perfection of Wisdom (prajñāpāramitā) of the Supreme Vehicle of the Sudden Teaching of the Southern Tradition: The Platform Sūtra Preached by the Great Master Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch, at the Dafan Monastery in Shaozhou, in one scroll, also including the bestowal of the formless precepts; recorded and compiled by the Disciple Fahai, Spreader of the Dharma” (*Nanzong dunjiao zuishang dasheng moheboleluomi jing, Liuzu Huineng dashi yu Shaozhou Dafansi shi fa tanjing yi juan, jian shou wuxiang jie, hongfa dizi Fahai jiji* 南宗頓教最上乘摩訶般若波羅蜜經六祖惠能大師於韶州大梵寺施法壇經一卷 兼受無相戒弘法弟子法海集記).²³

The very word “platform” in the title almost certainly refers to a kind of ordination platform on which Huineng is understood to have administered the formless precepts to his audience.

The structure of the Dunhuang *Platform Sūtra* highlights the centrality of the formless precept ceremony. As has often been observed, the Dunhuang *Platform Sūtra* can be divided into two distinct parts which may originally have been separate: the first part of the text which contains Huineng’s first-person spoken sermon at the Dafan 大梵 monastery in Shaozhou, and the rest of the text that shifts to a third-person narrative and which purports to deal with Huineng’s life and interactions with disciples after his sermon at Dafan. It is quite possible that the sermon part of the *Platform Sūtra* originally circulated as the whole work and it is worth noting that the full title of the Dunhuang text only seems to refer to this part.²⁴

The *Platform Sūtra* states in its very first sentence that Huineng ascended the teacher’s seat at the Dafan monastery to “preach the prajñāpāramitā and

²³ I read *shou* 受, “receive,” in the title as a loan for *shou* 授, “bestow,” a common substitution. See Anderl 2013 for a very different interpretation of the title.

²⁴ See Yanagida 1964.

transmit the formless precepts” (sec. 1). This forefronts the role of the formless precepts and ties them in with the declared ideological basis of the whole text, the *prajñāpāramitā* teaching of emptiness. The audience is then described in hyperbolic terms as consisting of ten thousand monks, nuns, and lay people. The prefect of Shaozhou, Wei Ju 韋據 (d.u.), together with more than thirty officials and thirty Confucian scholars, now asks Huineng to preach and Wei Ju orders the disciple Fahai 法海 (d.u.) to record the master’s words.²⁵

Later versions further accentuated the role of Wei Ju and the officials as the foremost representatives of the laity, and I believe it is apparent that the *Platform Sūtra* especially seeks to appeal to members of the educated elite. Nevertheless, it is made very clear in the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra* that monastics are also present at Huineng’s sermon, and are included as recipients in his transmission of the formless precepts. This is an important point that I shall return to later.

Although neither the title nor the short introduction in the *Platform Sūtra* mention this, Huineng begins his sermon with a dramatic autobiography that describes how he came to be the Sixth Patriarch (secs. 2–11). Only when this is concluded does he go on to his doctrinal instructions to the audience. Thus the sermon itself falls into two distinct parts, and again it is easy to imagine that the sermon may first have circulated without the autobiography. The sermon proper, as I will call it (secs. 12–37), can be understood to be structured around the formless precepts ceremony.

Huineng begins the sermon proper by noting that special karmic conditions resulted in his coming to preach to the assembled officials, monastics, and lay people, and that his teachings were handed down to him by the patriarchs. A note in the Dunhuang text here reads: “What follows below is the Dharma,” emphasizing the centrality of this part.²⁶ Huineng now sermonizes on a series of topics (secs. 13–19), before he turns to the formless precepts. This part of the sermon proper leads up the formless precepts and

²⁵ In the following I will refer to the sections of the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra* as established in Suzuki ed. 1942, and followed by Yampolsky 1967. For direct quotations I will refer to the text in the back of Yampolsky 1967, since the edition in T48, no. 2007 is not very reliable. I have occasionally amended the text based on the two other Dunhuang manuscripts found in Guo and Wang eds. 2011.

²⁶ Yampolsky 1967: 134; Chinese text, p. 5, line 11.

can be understood to prepare Huineng's audience for his precept instructions. Space does not allow for a full recounting of this section,²⁷ but although the *Platform Sūtra* identifies itself as centered on the *prajñāpāramitā* teachings, the most fundamental message of this section (and the entire work) is that all sentient beings are endowed with the Buddha nature. To gain the insight that Buddha nature is in fact identical to our own original nature we need to overcome the dualistic and ignorant thinking that is at the root of all delusion, in a moment of direct unmediated perception. Furthermore, Huineng's teaching is "sudden" (*dun* 頓) since he does not employ any expedient means but points directly to our own true nature.²⁸

The precept ceremony in the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra* consists of four main parts (secs. 20–23):

1. Refuge in the threefold body of the Buddha of oneself
2. The four Bodhisattva vows
3. The formless repentances
4. The three refuges

After conferring the precepts on his audience, Huineng declares that he will now expound the doctrine of the great *prajñāpāramitā* (a concept he has not directly referred to in his sermon earlier); this follows the pattern of other early Chan precepts texts, as I will discuss below. Huineng's sermon on the *prajñāpāramitā* can be seen as a direct extension of the formless precepts and Huineng here invokes "formlessness" several times; some scholars see this a fifth part of the formless precepts.²⁹ In essence, the section on the *prajñāpāramitā* comprises the rest of Huineng's sermon at the Dafan monastery, concluding with Wei Ju's questions about Bodhidharma and the emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 (464–549) (sec. 34), and the nature of the Pure Land (sec. 35), together with Huineng's assurance that it is possible for lay people to practice his teachings (sec. 36). The sermon ends with Huineng's long "formless verse" which he specifies is for both monastics and laypeople (sec. 36). After this, Huineng declares that he will now return to Mt. Caoxi 曹溪 (or Caoqi) and he then disperses the audience; however, he invites everyone to come and see him at Caoxi if they have any doubts (sec. 37). The audience all exclaims: "This we have never heard before. How fortunate is Lingnan to have given rise to a Buddha in that place, who would

²⁷ See the discussion in Gregory 2012.

²⁸ This important point is made in Gregory 2012.

²⁹ Yanagida 1964. See also Groner 1989 and Groner 2012.

have thought it possible!”³⁰ The narrative now shifts into the second part of the text, which will not be addressed in detail here.

Before going on to a discussion of the formless precepts in the Dunhuang *Platform Sūtra*, and how the precepts change in later versions of the *Platform Sūtra*, a brief discussion of the history of precepts in China in general, and in the emerging Chan school in particular, is necessary.

Bodhisattva ordinations in China

The formless precepts in the *Platform Sūtra* came out of a Chinese tradition of Mahāyāna Bodhisattva precepts for both monastics and lay people that began in the fifth century. Bodhisattva precepts in China have been the subject of much research, although some aspects of the precepts, like exactly how and to whom they were administered, are still not fully understood.

It seems Dharmakṣema (Ch.: Tanwuchen 曇無讖, 385–433) was the first to confer Bodhisattva precepts on others in China, in a ceremony based on the *Pusa dichi jing* 菩薩地持經 (Skt.: *Bodhisattvabhūmi Sūtra*, T. 1581) that he had translated from the Sanskrit.³¹ But by the second half of the fifth century two new texts with Bodhisattva precepts appeared in China, the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (Brahmā’s Net Sūtra, T. 1484) and the *Pusa yingluo benye jing* 菩薩瓔珞本業經 (Bodhisattvas’ Precious Necklace of Primary Acts Sūtra, T.1485), both almost certainly Chinese compositions although claimed to be translations from the Sanskrit. The *Fanwang jing* in particular quickly became very popular.³²

The *Fanwang jing* accommodates traditional Chinese concerns, such as filial piety, and promises heavenly or high human birth for anyone who takes the precepts. The precepts are also specifically said to be open to all, from kings and gods to slaves and prostitutes, and including all monastics. The text thus served to make the Bodhisattva precepts appeal to a wide spectrum of Chinese society, presenting them in such a way that lay people and monastics could take the precepts together.³³ It also incorporated all the major Bodhisattva precepts of earlier translated works, making it especially

³⁰ Yampolsky 1967: 162; Chinese text, p. 19, line 4–5.

³¹ Funayama 2004.

³² Funayama 2004.

³³ Groner 1989, and Adamek 2007: 78–81.

appealing.³⁴ A number of commentaries, manuals, and ritual texts for Bodhisattva precept ceremonies appeared over the next centuries, broadly based on the *Fanwang jing* and other texts. The *Platform Sūtra* itself, in what clearly seems to be an attempt of establishing its own orthodoxy, quotes from the *Fanwang jing* right before it begins its section on the formless precepts: “Your own original nature is pure and undefiled” (本源自性清淨).³⁵

A number of ritual manuals of various kinds drawing on the *Fanwang jing* and other sources were compiled in China after the fifth century. Although there is a great amount of diversity in the details of these texts, rituals for Bodhisattva precepts and related events like repentance rituals tended to follow a general liturgical framework that by the 7th and 8th centuries had become a very stable ritual structure. Thus Dan Stevenson notes that in Chinese Buddhist ritual in general a “basic syntax, or structural logic, of the rite [...] tend[ed] to restrain any radically divergent intrusion or relocation of elements within the overall sequence.”³⁶

A Bodhisattva-precept manual composed by the Tiantai monk Zhanran 湛然 (711–782), using the ten main vows from the *Fanwang jing*, seems to have become especially influential.³⁷ Zhanran’s ordination manual is prefaced by a note, presumably by Zhanran himself, which states that he based his manual on a number of different sources, i.e., the *Fanwang jing*, the *Pusa yingluo benye jing*, and the *Pusa dichi jing*, as well as various manuals and commentaries, but that even though his text does not rely on one single authority it still is in accord with the sacred teaching.³⁸ Zhanran’s manual contains the following twelve sections that give a good overview of the steps involved in his precept ceremony:³⁹

1. Introduction 開導
2. Taking the three refuges, in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha 三歸
3. Invitation to Śākyamuni as preceptor, Mañjuśrī as master of ceremonies, Maitreya as teacher, the Buddhas of the ten directions as witnesses, and various bodhisattvas as fellow students 請師

³⁴ Funayama 2004.

³⁵ Yampolsky 1967: 141; Chinese text, p. 8, line 5. See the *Fanwang jing*: 是一切眾生戒本源自性清淨 (CBETA, T24, no. 1484: 1003, c28), which is somewhat different from the *Platform Sūtra*’s quotation of it.

³⁶ Stevenson 2014.

³⁷ *Shou pusajie yi* 授菩薩戒儀, CBETA, X59, no. 1086. See Groner 1989, and Groner 2012.

³⁸ *Shou pusajie yi*, CBETA, X59, no. 1086: 354, b9–10.

³⁹ Translation based on Groner 1989.

4. Repentance 懺悔
5. Aspiration to supreme enlightenment (including the four bodhisattva vows) 發心
6. Questions about hindrances to receiving the precepts 問遮
7. Conferral of the precepts through the three collections of pure precepts (三聚淨戒)⁴⁰ 授戒
8. Ascertaining those who have witnessed the ceremony 證明
9. Sign from the Buddha confirming the validity of the ceremony 現相
10. Explanation of the precepts 說相
11. Dedication of the merit from the ceremony to all sentient beings 廣願
12. Exhortation to observe the precepts 勸持

Dan Stevenson describes a general syntax that he has observed in a large number of ritual texts as typically including the following elements in order, although several other elements are usually inserted as well:⁴¹

1. Opening invocations and offerings of incense and flowers to the eternally abiding Three Treasures
2. Ritual veneration of the assembled deities
3. Confession and repentance
4. Profession of vows
5. Refuge in the Three Treasures (along with affirmation of the bodhisattva vow)

With these models in mind, let us examine rituals of bestowing Bodhisattva precepts in early Chan.

Bodhisattva-Precept Ceremonies in Chan before the Platform Sūtra

The early Chan movement seems to have enthusiastically embraced bodhisattva-precepts rituals, while at the same time simplifying them and keying them in with an emphasis on the doctrines of emptiness and inherent Buddha nature. Early on there was a close connection between Chan and the Bodhisattva precept movement, just as many early Chan masters were also known as strict upholders of the Vinaya, the Buddhist monastic code.⁴²

⁴⁰ The three collections are: precepts that prevent evil, precepts that encourage good, and precepts that benefit sentient beings. See Groner 1989.

⁴¹ Stevenson 2014.

⁴² See Faure 1997: 107–118.

It seems likely that the beginnings of the Chan movement should be traced to the Chinese monk Daoxin 道信 (580–651) and his disciple Hongren, who were both active at the monastery at Huangmei on East Mountain in present-day Hubei (and who came to be known as the Fourth and Fifth Patriarchs in retrospect).⁴³ Although we only know about the teachings of Daoxin and Hongren from later sources, it seems they both placed great emphasis on meditation and the notion of inherent Buddha-nature.⁴⁴

But Daoxin is also associated with a concern for Buddhist precepts. Most significantly, in the early 8th century Chan history, the *Lengqie shizi ji* 楞伽師資記 (Record of the masters and disciples of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra), Daoxin is said to be the author of a text on administering the Bodhisattva precepts, the *Pusajie fa* 菩薩戒法 (Protocol (for transmitting) the Bodhisattva Precepts).⁴⁵ The text is now lost, but the sermon attributed to Daoxin in the *Lengqie shizi ji* includes a remark about repentance:

The Puxian guan jing 普賢觀經 (Sūtra of Meditating on Samantabhadra) says:
 ‘The vast ocean of obstructive karma is entirely caused by deluded thought.
 Those who wish to repent should sit erect and contemplate ultimate reality.’
 This is the supreme repentance.⁴⁶

As we shall see, the *Platform Sūtra* later seems to echo this sentiment.

The earliest mention of Daoxin is in the 645 *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Continued chronicle of eminent monks), written when he was still alive. Here it is said that when wild beasts were bothering the area of his monastery at night Daoxin conferred the precepts on them (授歸戒), which caused them to leave.⁴⁷ Although the reference here may be to the Three Refuges, it indicates that Daoxin in his own life-time was associated with the practice of giving precepts to non-monastics, and it seems likely that the *Pusajie fa* attributed to him was centered on a ritual that was directed at both monastics and laypeople. The *Xu gaoseng zhuan* also relates that when Daoxin first became a novice at the age of eight he remonstrated with his master for not being pure in his keeping of the monastic precepts, further suggesting that Daoxin was known for a general concern with precepts.⁴⁸

⁴³ See McRae 2004: 1–44.

⁴⁴ McRae 1986: 132–136.

⁴⁵ *Lengqie shizi ji*, CBETA, T85, no. 2837: 1286, c20.

⁴⁶ *Lengqie shizi ji*, CBETA, T85, no. 2837: 1287, a7–9. Cited in Ishii 1997.

⁴⁷ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, CBETA, T50, no. 2060: 606, b17–18.

⁴⁸ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, CBETA, T50, no. 2060: 606, b2–3.

Daoxin's reputation for concerns with the Buddhist precepts may well have set a precedent in the emerging Chan movement, and several texts associated with early Chan figures that discuss or contain some sort of Bodhi-sattva precepts are still extant.⁴⁹ Here I would like to focus on two early Chan texts that like the *Platform Sūtra* outline a precept-conferral ceremony. The first is the *Dasheng wusheng fangbian men* 大乘無生方便門 (The expedient means of attaining birthlessness in the Mahāyāna), also known as the *Wu fangbian* 五方便 (Five expedient means).⁵⁰ The text is associated with Shenxiu (the rival of Huineng in the *Platform Sūtra*) and his disciples. The other text is by Shenhui, entitled *Nanyang heshang dunjiao jietuo chanmen zhiliaoxing tanyu* 南陽和上頓教解脫禪門直了性壇語 (The venerable Nanyang's platform sermon on direct realization of the [innate] nature according to the Chan doctrine of liberation through the sudden teaching), usually abbreviated as the *Tanyu* 壇語 (Platform Sermon).⁵¹ Although it is impossible to date these texts precisely, the *Wu fangbian* seems to be the earlier of the two, although the *Tanyu* appears to be from the first part of Shenhui's career, in the years after 720.⁵² The *Tanyu* may well represent a sort of reaction to the *Wu fangbian* (or a similar text) associated with Shenxiu's school that Shenhui later relentlessly attacked. Furthermore, I believe we can see the precept ceremony in the *Platform Sūtra* as playing off and reacting to the ceremonies of both the *Wu fangbian* and the *Tanyu*.⁵³

While the precepts ceremonies in the texts of both the *Tanyu* and the *Platform Sūtra* are presented as records of actual ceremonies, the precept ceremony in the *Wu fangbian* appears to be a kind of manual for monastics on how to confer the precepts on an audience. The precept ceremony comes right at the beginning of the text and is followed by a long sermon. The description of the precept ceremony in the *Wu fangbian* can be divided into seven parts:⁵⁴

⁴⁹ See Faure 1997: 108–118.

⁵⁰ A number of different versions of the text were found at Dunhuang. For a discussion of the text and its editions see Ibuki 2012 and McRae 1986: 325–327 (note 161). See also the translation in McRae 1986: 171–196, based on several manuscripts of the *Wu fangbian*. I have used CBETA, T85, no. 2834, that is based on S. 2503 in the British Library (http://idp.bl.uk/database/search_results.a4d?uid=627894504106;random=23440) in the following references to this text. This text often seems to differ from the version of the text used by McRae.

⁵¹ Yang ed. 1996: 4–14.

⁵² See McRae 1987: 234.

⁵³ A connection between the three texts is suggested in Satō 1986: 391–398.

⁵⁴ See Senda 2007. See also Groner 1989, and Groner 2012.

(1) The four Bodhisattva vows. The ceremony begins with the audience being instructed to kneel with their palms together and asked to recite the four vows that are written out in the text (“sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them; the passions are limitless, I vow to cut them off; the Buddhist teachings are boundless, I vow to study them; I vow to achieve the unsurpassed Buddha Way”).

(2) Requests that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas be preceptors and witnesses.

(3) The three refuges, in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. The text simply says to “instruct [the audience] in receiving the three refuges” (次教受三歸).⁵⁵

(4) Questions about the five capabilities. These are spelled out in the text, and after each question the response expected from the audience, “I can,” is supplied. The five capabilities are about rejecting people of bad influence, getting close to people of good influence, maintaining the precepts, studying Mahāyāna scriptures, and saving sentient beings from suffering.

(5) Statement of names, and repentance of transgressions. Here, the precept ceremony in the *Wu fangbian* stipulates that everyone in the audience must state their own name and repent their transgressions, and say:

All the past, future, and present karma of the ten evil transgressions⁵⁶ [committed by me], in body, speech, and mind, I now fully repent with the utmost sincerity and I hope that my transgressions will be eradicated, never to occur again (次各稱已名懺悔罪言:過去未來及現在身口意業十惡罪我今至心盡懺悔。願罪除滅永不犯).⁵⁷

The text then notes that the five heinous crimes⁵⁸ and all karmically obstructing sins are to be repented “according to the above,” but no details are given.⁵⁹ The *Wu fangbian* goes on to say that this repentance can be likened to the way a pearl clarifies muddy water; the power of the Buddha nature is just like this and it purifies the muddy water of the afflictions.

⁵⁵ *Dasheng wusheng fangbian men*, CBETA, T85, no. 2834: 1273, b16. This is not included in McRae’s translation.

⁵⁶ These are: (1) killing 殺生, (2) stealing 偷盜, (3) debauchery 邪淫, (4) lying (deception) 妄語, (5) ornate speech (flattery) 綺語, (6) insult (abusiveness) 惡口, (7) treachery (slander) 兩舌, (8) coveting 貪欲, (9) becoming angry 瞋恚, and (10) holding false views 邪見 (or delusion 愚癡). Muller, ed. 1995–2016.

⁵⁷ Translation from McRae 1986: 172 (with some changes).

⁵⁸ The five heinous crimes are, most commonly, matricide, patricide, killing an Arhat, shedding the blood of a Buddha, and destroying the unity of the sangha.

⁵⁹ *Dasheng wusheng fangbian men*, CBETA, T85, no. 2834: 1273, b21–25.

(6) Declaration of the audience's ability to receive the Bodhisattva precepts. The text here states that since everyone in the audience has completed their repentances they are now pure like the finest lapis lazuli, and within and without they are ready to take the pure precepts. It further explains that the Bodhisattva precepts are the precepts of the mind, because the Buddha nature is the nature of the precepts. To allow the arising of even the slightest deluded thought is to go counter to the Buddha Nature, and to break the Bodhisattva precepts. On the other hand, when taking care that (deluded) thoughts do not arise in the mind then one is in accordance with Buddha nature and that is upholding the Bodhisattva precepts.⁶⁰ A note in the text then indicates that the above should be explained three times.

(7) Meditation. The *Wu fangbian* now states that everyone must sit in the Lotus position. The preceptor is then to ask the audience:

Disciples of the Buddha, your minds are peaceful and motionless. What is it that is called purity? Disciples of the Buddha, the Tathāgatas have a great expedient means for entrance into the Path (or into enlightenment). In one instant you can purify your mind and suddenly transcend to the stage of Buddhahood.⁶¹

The preceptor then strikes the wooden board, and everyone is now to perform the *nianfo* 念佛 together (likely this means chant homage to Amitābha, although it could also mean meditate upon the Buddha(s)).

The *Wu fangbian* now goes on to a ritualized sermon on the Prajñā-pāramitā with questions and answers, that can be understood to be part of the precept ceremony. After this it moves on to a lengthy discussion of the five expedient means that give the text its name.⁶²

Interestingly, the precept ritual here does not actually list the Bodhisattva precepts themselves nor does it contain instructions on how they should be conferred. It seems to imply that actual precepts were to be given to the audience, presumably between sections 6 and 7 above. It is possible that this consisted of the ten main precepts of the *Fanwang jing*, but it could also have been another list or formulation of precepts that was well known to the intended users of the manual (likely monastics associated with Shenxiu's school). The compilers of the *Wu fangbian* probably considered the ceremony of precept conferral so well known that it was not necessary to

⁶⁰ *Dasheng wusheng fangbian men*, CBETA, T85, no. 2834: 1273, b28–29. This passage is not included in McRae's translation.

⁶¹ CBETA, T85, no. 2834: 1273, b29. Translation from McRae 1986: 173.

⁶² For a discussion see McRae 1986: 218–233.

include. In any event, the precept ceremony outlined here seems fairly conventional. Although it does not strictly follow Zhanran's manual or the sequence observed by Dan Stevenson, it does contain many of the same elements and the same general outline.

It is not made clear in the *Wu fangbian* whether the audience receiving the precepts consisted of lay people, monastics, or both. However, the tone of the text is such that it seems most likely that the main audience was laypeople, and that the *Wu fangbian* was a manual for the monastics who conferred the precepts.

Unlike the *Wu fangbian* (and the *Platform Sūtra*), Shenhui's *Tanyu* does not contain a clearly delineated precept ceremony.⁶³ It seems to be an actual recording (more or less) of a sermon by Shenhui, which probably took place on a platform. But although the precept ceremony in the *Tanyu* seems rather amorphous it is still clearly a central part of the text, as reflected in its title and the placement of the precepts right at the beginning of the text. The ceremony, such as it is, can perhaps be divided into the following seven parts:⁶⁴

(1) Introduction. The text begins with Shenhui telling his audience what a rare opportunity it is for each of them to be able to come here, to give rise to the unsurpassed enlightened Bodhi mind, and to meet Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and truly good friends (*kalyāṇa-mitra*). Today the audience will hear what they have never heard before, and meet who they have never met before.⁶⁵ Shenhui then states that he will lead them in confession, and each of them in worshipping the Buddha.

(2) Homage to the Buddhas, Dharma, and Sangha (the Three Treasures). Shenhui now leads his audience in traditional homage to the three treasures, although he gives them a rather unusual form:

1. We pay homage to all the Buddhas of the past, to all of them.
2. We pay homage to all the Buddhas of the future, to all of them.
3. We pay homage to all the Buddhas of the present, to all of them.
4. We pay homage to the preeminent Dharma, the sūtras of the Prajñāpāramitā.
5. We pay homage to all the great Bodhisattvas and all the wise and holy monks.⁶⁶

⁶³ I am using the text of the *Tanyu* found in the edition prepared by Yang ed. 1996: 3–14.

⁶⁴ Yang ed. 1996: 4–7. See also the divisions in Senda 2007: 108–109, which I partially follow. An early translation of the text into English can be found in Liebenenthal 1953.

⁶⁵ Yang ed. 1996: 4, line 14–15, line 5.

⁶⁶ Yang ed. 1996: 5, line 6–10. My translation following Liebenenthal 1953 with several changes.

(3) Repentance of sins.⁶⁷ Shenhui next tells his audience that each must repent their sins with the utmost sincerity. Several overlapping sets of sins are to be repented, beginning with the four *pārājika* offenses⁶⁸ and all in the same formula:

All the past, future, and present karma of the four *pārājika* offenses [committed by me], in body, speech, and mind, I now fully repent with the utmost sincerity and I hope that my transgressions will be eradicated, never to occur again (過去未來及現在身口意業四重罪。我今至心盡懺悔。願罪除滅永不
起).

Interestingly, this is exactly the same formula we have seen used in *Wu fangbian* for repentance of the ten evil transgressions, a point I will return to below. In the *Tanyu*, this is followed by repentance of the five heinous crimes, the seven heinous crimes,⁶⁹ the ten evil transgressions (十惡罪), all karmically obstructing sins (障重罪), and all sins in general (一切罪), all of them using the same formula.

(4) Exhortation to give rise to the Bodhi mind, and definition of Śīla, Prajñā, and Samādhi (known as “the three disciplines,” *sanxue* 三學).⁷⁰ I see this as the central part of the precepts, Shenhui’s version of actual vows. He here recounts how everyone today has come to his place of teaching, and tells his audience that each of them must now give rise to the unsurpassed Bodhi mind, and seek the unsurpassed Bodhi Dharma. To do so they must have faith in the Buddha’s words and rely on the Buddha’s teachings. This is encompassed in the well-known saying from the sūtras: “Do not commit the various sins, practice all the good things, purify your mind, this is the teaching of all the Buddhas.” Shenhui then explains that not to commit the various sins is the precepts (Śīla 戒), to practice all the good things is wisdom (Prajñā 慧), and to purify your own mind is meditation (Samādhi 定). Shenhui also tells his audience that only when these three disciplines are studied can we call it Buddhism. To this traditional explanation Shenhui adds: “That the deluded mind does not rise is called precepts; that there is

⁶⁷ Yang ed. 1996: 5, line 11–p. 6, line 1.

⁶⁸ The four *pārājika* offenses that will cause a monastic to be expelled from the Buddhist order are: sexual intercourse, stealing, murder, and falsely claiming spiritual attainments.

⁶⁹ These are the same as the five heinous crimes, with the addition of killing a monastic, and killing one’s teacher.

⁷⁰ Yang ed. 1996: 6, line 2–7.

no deluded mind is called meditation; knowing that there is no deluded mind is called wisdom.”⁷¹

(5) Exhortation to observe the precepts.⁷² Shenhui now tells his audience that everyone must maintain the pure precepts (齋戒) for without them all the good Dharmas cannot come into being. To achieve the unsurpassed Bodhi one must also uphold the precepts. One cannot obtain a rebirth as even a mangy jackal without upholding the precepts, much less the body of a Buddha.

(6) The effects of karma and lack of correct understanding of the Dharma.⁷³ This long passage is mainly about how important it is to meet the right teachers, and it criticizes the teachings of the two vehicles (the “Hīnayāna”). Shenhui then states:

Since you have already mounted this platform in order to learn and practice the prajñāpāramitā, I want each of you to give rise to the unsurpassed bodhi mind with heart and mouth and not to leave your seats until you understand the meaning of the Middle Path which is the highest truth.⁷⁴

(7) Getting rid of all is meditation.⁷⁵ In a passage that is perhaps a kind of response to the last part of the precept ceremony in the *Wu fangbian*, Shenhui now states that those who strive for liberation should rid themselves of all kinds of Buddhist concepts. Furthermore:

They must get rid of both realization of the inner and outer worlds, and in the Three Worlds neither their body nor their co-ordinating organ (*manas*)⁷⁶ appear. That is meditation. This kind of meditation is authorized by the Buddha. The Sixth Patriarch has transmitted (his message) from mind to mind because it cannot be expressed in words. In this form it is handed down.”⁷⁷

This concludes the section of the *Tanyu* that can reasonably be considered part of a precept ritual. However, there is no break in the text, and Shenhui continues directly with remarks about how everyone in the audience possesses the nature of a Buddha. The rest of his long sermon revolves around the concept of Buddha-nature and the prajñāpāramitā teachings.

⁷¹ Yang ed. 1996: 6, line 8. My interpretation follows that of Adamek 2007: 207.

⁷² Yang ed. 1996: 6, line 7–9.

⁷³ Yang ed. 1996: 6, line 10–p. 7, line 9.

⁷⁴ Yang ed. 1996: 7, line 8–9.

⁷⁵ Yang ed. 1996: 7, line 10–11.

⁷⁶ The seventh of the eight consciousnesses taught in Yogācāra, the self-aware, defiled consciousness.

⁷⁷ Translation from Liebenthal 1953.

Comparing the *Wu fangbian* with the *Tanyu* we do not see many direct parallels. The one striking similarity is in the section of repentances where the two texts have the exact same wording. I have not found this exact wording anywhere else and it shows that the two texts in some ways have a common heritage. It seems very likely that Shenhui was aware of the precept ritual as presented in the *Wu fangbian* and simply used its formula for his repentances. However, he broadens the scope of the repentances by adding several items to the list, perhaps most significantly the four *pārājika* offenses that were originally meant for monastics only, but, of course, (except for sexual intercourse) would be serious offenses for anyone. It is not clear whether the audience was laypeople, monastics, or both, but as with the *Wu fangbian* the whole tenor of the sermon makes it likely that it was mainly directed to laypeople, although monastics may well have been included in the audience.

In any case, I believe we in general can see a theme of expansion of the scope of the precepts in Shenhui's *Tanyu* compared to the *Wu fangbian*. Thus, instead of the four Bodhisattva vows that open the ceremony in the *Wu fangbian*, the *Tanyu* tells its audience that they are here to give rise to the unsurpassed Bodhi mind. This can be seen as parallel to the Bodhisattva vows (that are never mentioned in the *Tanyu*), but vastly broader in scope and perhaps implying a rejection of those vows as too limited. Likewise, in the traditional homage to the three treasures the *Tanyu* uses a unique formula that broadens the scope of each treasure, and strongly emphasizes the *prajñāpāramitā* as the true Buddhist Dharma, and the Bodhisattvas and enlightened masters as the real *saṅgha* to which to pay homage.

Unlike the *Wu fangbian*, which seems to be a kind of manual, there is no sense in the narrative of the *Tanyu* that an unstated list of actual precepts is understood to have been administered to the audience. Shenhui's exhortation telling his audience to give rise to the unsurpassed Bodhi mind and to seek the unsurpassed Bodhi Dharma seems to be the closest we get to an actual conferral of precepts. By ultimately equating the unsurpassed Bodhi Dharma with the three disciplines of precepts, wisdom, and meditation this vision of the precepts encompasses the entire Buddhist tradition. Nothing less than full Buddhahood is to be the goal for everyone in the audience.

Although the attacks of the "Northern school" of Chan and the more radical teachings that Shenhui later came to embrace are not prominent in the *Tanyu* (perhaps confirming it is a relatively early text), in the section on the effects of karma and lack of correct understanding of the Dharma we

can probably see a veiled attack on Shenxiu and his disciples in Shenhui's emphasis on meeting the right teachers and avoiding the failings of the two inferior vehicles. And Shenhui's statement that real meditation entails getting rid of any clinging to rigid categories of Buddhist teaching, and his emphasis that the Sixth Patriarch transmitted his teaching from mind to mind because it cannot be expressed in word seems to foreshadow his later campaign.⁷⁸

On the other hand, much of the teaching found in the *Tanyu*'s precept ceremony seems rather conventional, and in spite of the fact that Shenhui refuses to be confined by a traditional precepts ritual several elements echo a fairly standard one. Thus, Shenhui invokes the usual homage to the Three Treasures in the beginning of his precept ceremony (although in an unusual form), and his repentance ritual is a standard and very orthodox one. The exhortation to follow the precepts that emphasizes good rebirth also follows a fairly common formula. Furthermore, Shenhui's discussion about how people are limited by their past karma, being adrift in the ocean of saṃsāra, and his definition of the three disciplines that defines not committing the various sins as the precepts, practicing all the good things as wisdom, and purifying one's own mind is meditation (in the Dunhuang *Platform Sūtra* attributed to Shenxiu!) seems rather unsophisticated, even if he adds a more radical interpretation afterwards. And although right after presenting his precepts Shenhui declares "Learned friends, each of you are fully endowed with the Buddha nature within your own bodies (知識——身具有佛性)"⁷⁹ and further expands on this in his sermon, in the precepts the teaching of Buddha nature is not mentioned, unlike the *Wu fangbian* where the concept is invoked several times.

The Formless Precepts in the Dunhuang Version of the *Platform Sūtra*

The section on the formless precepts in the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra* begins by Huineng declaring to his audience that all must now

⁷⁸ Faure 1997: 113, suggests that Shenhui was still a disciple of Shenxiu when the *Tanyu* was recorded, so that the reference to the Sixth Patriarch here is pointing to Shenxiu. However, Shenxiu died in 706 and the *Tanyu* is likely from the early 720s.

⁷⁹ Yang ed. 1996: 7, line 12.

receive the formless precepts with their own bodies (Sec. 20). Its program is as follows:

(1) Refuge in the three-fold body of the Buddha. Huineng first tells everyone to repeat what follows after him, as he is now going to make all see the three-fold body of the Buddha within themselves: “I take refuge in the pure Dharmakāya Buddha in my own corporal body; I take refuge in the ten thousand hundred billion Nirmāṇakāya Buddhas in my own corporal body; I take refuge in the future perfect Sambhogakāya Buddha in my own corporal body. (Recite the above three times [original note in the text]).”⁸⁰ Huineng goes on to explain that, in fact, the corporal body is just an abode that cannot be said to be a refuge; the threefold body of the Buddha is within everyone’s own Dharma nature (法性). As for taking refuge in the Dharmakāya Buddha, the nature of everyone is by itself originally pure, and everything in the universe is encompassed by one’s own nature. A person who thinks about all evil things will practice evil, while a person who thinks about all good things will practice good. Taking refuge in the Dharmakāya Buddha of oneself is to cast aside all that is not good. Likewise, as soon as a person thinks of good, Prajñā wisdom is born and this is called the Nirmāṇakāya Buddha of one’s own nature. Finally, when future thoughts are good one may be called the Sambhogakāya Buddha.

(2) Next come the four Bodhisattva vows (sec. 21). Again Huineng tells his audience to repeat out loud what he says, and again the text notes that the vows should be recited three times: “Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them; the passions are limitless, I vow to cut them off; the Buddhist teachings are boundless, I vow to study them; I vow to achieve the unsurpassed Buddha Way. (Recite three times).”⁸¹ Huineng goes on to state that everyone must save themselves in their own bodies with their own natures. This means, he continues, that within their own corporal bodies with their false views and defilements, ignorance and delusions, everyone naturally has the originally enlightened nature. Simply, this nature of original enlightenment that everyone possesses will save them with right views. When delusions are eliminated people will awaken by themselves and achieve the Buddha way, this is practicing the power of the vows. Interestingly, Huineng does not refer to the Bodhisattva vows as “formless;” it is

⁸⁰ Yampolsky 1967: 141; Chinese text, p. 8, line 8–9.

⁸¹ Yampolsky 1967: 143; Chinese text, p. 9, line 9–10.

as if the text recognizes that these are commonly used standard vows—as we have seen in the *Wu fangbian*.

(3) Now comes the formless repentances (sec. 22). The format is a series of seven-character phrases that possibly should be read as a poem.⁸² In any case, the passage seems mostly like an explanation of a particular understanding of the meaning of repentance, and has no actual formula for the expression of repentance. After Huineng has laid out the formless repentance a note in the text again says to “recite the above three times.” The section reads in part:

Good and learned friends, if in past, future, and present thoughts each successive thought is not stained by delusion, and if you at once eliminate your past bad actions with your own natures, then this is repentance (懺悔). Good and learned friends, if in past, future, and present thoughts, each successive thought is not stained by ignorance, and if you eliminate your past arrogant mind and cut it off forever then this can called to repent with your own nature (自性懺). Good and learned friends, if in past, future, and present thoughts, each successive thought is not stained by jealousy, and if you eliminate your past jealous mind and with your own nature eliminate it, then this is repentance (懺) (recite the above three times).⁸³

Huineng ends the section by stating that in his teaching, forever to cut off [evil] deeds and not perform them, that is called repentance (懺悔).

(4) The formless precepts of the three refuges (sec. 23). We here get a version of the refuge in the Three Treasures:

The Master said: “Good and learned friends, take refuge in enlightenment, the most noble of two-legged beings; take refuge in the truth, the most noble that leaves behind the desires; take refuge in purity, the most noble among people.”⁸⁴

He goes on to say that from now on, the audience must call “Buddha” (enlightenment) their master and not rely on other, outside teachings that are deluded and heretical. They must take refuge in the three treasures of their own bodies. Huineng then explains his earlier statement, bringing it in line

⁸² As done in Red Pine 2006: 161; however, I am not convinced that the translation works.

⁸³ Yampolsky 1967: 144; Chinese text, p. 10, line 2–5.

⁸⁴ Yampolsky 1967: 145; Chinese text, p. 10, line 7–9. This formula is not unique to the *Platform Sūtra*, see, e.g., the Bodhisattva ritual attributed to Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), CBETA, T45, no. 1862: 396, a12–13.

with a more common formulation of the three refuges: “The Buddha is enlightenment, the Dharma is truth, and the Saṅgha is purity.” Huineng ends the section by saying:

Good and learned friends, each of you must investigate for yourselves, do not be mistaken. The sūtras say to take refuge in the Buddha of yourselves, they do not say to take refuge in another Buddha. If you do not take refuge in your own natures there is no other place [you can rely on].⁸⁵

After this, the formless precepts are completed, and Huineng goes on to his sermon on the *prajñāpāramitā*.

The precepts in the Dunhuang *Platform Sūtra* are obviously in the tradition of the *Wu fangbian* and the *Tanyu*, and almost certainly postdate them. Three of the four parts of the precept ceremony in the *Platform Sūtra* have parallels in either one of the two other texts or both. But the *Platform Sūtra* implicitly rejects the precept rituals in both the *Wu fangbian* and the *Tanyu*, and differentiates itself by advertising its precepts as “formless,” implying that the other precepts are bound by form and therefore limited. The precepts of the *Platform Sūtra* are formless because they are not about an outer dualistic reality, but about the self-nature of each of the participants. The ritual of the formless precepts is therefore a sudden teaching that embodies the highest truth, implicitly vastly superior to any other precept ritual.

The very first set of precepts, about the three bodies of the Buddha, makes it very clear that everyone must save themselves, that the bodies of the Buddha represent an inner reality. The notion of taking refuge in the three bodies of the Buddha within oneself is unique to the *Platform Sūtra*, not found anywhere else, and it seems to be placed first as a declaration of the independence of the formless precepts. Yanagida has suggested that this section corresponds to both the invitation of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas found in more traditional precept manuals (no. 2 in the *Wu fangbian*), and to the actual conferral of the precepts themselves.⁸⁶ This would mean that the refuge in the three bodies of the Buddha within oneself is the central part of the precepts in the *Platform Sūtra*, a view that seems affirmed by the fact that in later versions of the *Platform Sūtra* this section has been moved to the end of the precepts, as a culmination of the ritual (see below). Interestingly, it is possible that this section is directly inspired by Shenhui’s

⁸⁵ Yampolsky 1967: 145; Chinese text, p. 10, line 13.

⁸⁶ Yanagida 1964 cited in Groner 1989: 247.

Tanyu, where the unusual form of the three treasures, homage to the Buddhas, Dharma, and Saṅgha, also seems to serve as an invitation to the holy witnesses.

The *Platform Sūtra* seems inspired by the *Tanyu* in other ways. In this work, Shenhui starts by declaring that the audience will experience something unique, i.e., precepts and the following sermon, and meet someone unique, i.e., Shenhui. The *Platform Sūtra* presents its teachings and precepts in exactly the same way, and successfully depicts Huineng as a Buddha who administers all of this to his audience. At the same time, the *Platform Sūtra* distances itself from Shenhui's *Tanyu* by not using any of this work's precept formulations and, of course, by emphasizing that the real source of the precepts is within each person's own nature. The difference is especially clear in the *Platform Sūtra*'s formless repentances, which is also the section in which the *Platform Sūtra* deviates the most from established liturgical models. Here the text refuses to actually refer to any of the traditional sets of sins, much unlike the *Tanyu*, and instead tells the audience that they can overcome delusion, ignorance, and jealousy with their own natures and thereby eliminate all sins and transgressions. This seems to echo the short statement referred to above attributed to Daoxin in the *Lengqie shizi ji* that gaining insight into ultimate reality, i.e., seeing one's own Buddha-nature, is supreme repentance. Finally, the authors of the *Platform Sūtra*, in what seems like a calculated snub, later in the text specifically reject Shenhui's traditional definition of the three disciplines that not to commit the various sins is the precepts, to practice all the good things is wisdom, and to purify one's own mind is meditation, by using it as a signature example of the inferior teachings of Shenxiu.⁸⁷

In the *Wu fangbian* and the *Tanyu* the precepts ceremonies are placed in the beginning of the text, and followed by lengthy sermons. The Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra* is structured quite differently, as we have already seen, with the precepts being placed towards the end of the sermon. We may surmise that all three texts were created at a time when such precept ceremonies were very popular. It seems likely that the precept ceremonies in the beginning of the *Wu fangbian* and the *Tanyu* were features designed to draw people to actual sermon events. The ceremonies were brief and undemanding, unlike precept ceremonies such as the one described by

⁸⁷ Yampolsky 1967: 164; Chinese text, p. 12, line 6–13.

Zhanran, and people could probably participate in them as often as they wished.

Although it seems clear that both monastics and lay people participated in ceremonies like the one described by Zhanran, we may speculate that the precepts of the *Fanwang jing* could have seemed overwhelming to many lay people, who may well have been uncertain about whether they really would be able to keep all ten major and 48 minor precepts. The ten major precepts, the violation of which is said to have severe karmic consequences, include refraining from bragging about oneself and disparaging others (no. 7), avoid stinginess with offering one's possessions (no. 8), and not getting angry (no. 9)—all things that many people find difficult to control.⁸⁸ On the other hand, enormous merit was thought to accrue to those who took Bodhisattva precepts and so such precepts continued to be very attractive to lay people and monastics alike.⁸⁹ It seems possible that a certain ambivalent feeling towards the precepts in the *Fanwang jing* may have left the door open for simplifications and modifications to the Bodhisattva precepts and rituals, and that the emerging Chan movement in the seventh and eighth centuries may have tapped into this.

Unlike the two other texts, the *Dunhuang Platform Sūtra* almost certainly does not reflect events or sermons that actually took place. Rather it is a literary work that must have had several purposes. The text is clearly meant to be attractive to a broad readership, and the inclusion and prominent position of the formless precepts must have been understood to further this goal. The *Dunhuang Platform Sūtra* itself indicates that copies of it were used as transmission documents, the possession of which served as proof that the holder was part of Huineng's school. As indicated by the notes in the text to "recite three times," it is very possible that the precepts in the text were meant to be performed on audiences by Chan masters who could claim descent in Huineng's lineage. Thus, the description of the formless

⁸⁸ The ten major precepts of the *Fanwang jing* are: 1) killing any living creature, 2) stealing, 3) illicit sex, 4) lying, 5) selling alcohol, 6) discussing faults of the assembly, 7) bragging about oneself and disparaging others, 8) stinginess with offering one's own possessions or Buddhist instruction, 9) getting angry, 10) slandering the Three Jewels (CBETA, T24, no. 1484: 1004, b16–p. 1005, a15).

⁸⁹ I believe it is important to recognize that for most people in the Buddhist world, Buddhism was and is primarily a font of powerful blessings that can help people in this lifetime as well as in future ones. As John McRae has put it: "the Buddha was for medieval Chinese Buddhists not the humanistic image created by modern scholarship, but a magnificent golden deity capable of almost unimaginable feats of wisdom and magic." See McRae 2005.

precepts in the Dunhuang *Platform Sūtra* may have functioned as a manual in a way that was similar to how the *Wu fangbian* probably was used.

The Formless Precepts in the Huixin Version of the *Platform Sūtra*

The Huixin version is not extant, but it can be reconstructed through the surviving versions of the *Platform Sūtra* that are based on it. Such a reconstruction has been facilitated by Ishii Shūdō in an edition of the *Platform Sūtra* in which he lists all differences between the extant eleven-chapter, two-fascicle editions that were based on Huixin's work (see table 1).⁹⁰ The Ishii edition gets us very close to what the Huixin version must have been like. First, all that is common to the eleven-chapter, two-fascicle texts must have been present in Huixin's edition. Second, where they all differ, the readings that are the closest to the Dunhuang version are likely to have been in the Huixin edition.

The Huixin edition in general follows the Dunhuang version in content and order, and the main difference between the two is the greater clarity (and wordiness) of the Huixin text, and its division into eleven titled sections. However, there are a number of significant reformulations in Huixin's text, and his edition also contains passages not found in the Dunhuang version at all; as we shall see this is the case with the formless precepts. In these instances, the Huixin edition to some degree both radicalizes and sanitizes the *Platform Sūtra*. The message that Buddhahood is within our own natures is overall enhanced in the Huixin edition, and where the Dunhuang *Platform Sūtra* occasionally "slips" and reverts to more traditional doctrine asserting that practice and effort is needed the Huixin version often cuts or reformulates.

In the Huixin version the section with the precepts follows the discussion of the meaning of meditation, as in the Dunhuang version (sec. 19). However, in the Huixin version the order of the precepts is completely different, and the precepts begin with a entirely new section on the "five Dharmakāya incenses of the self nature" (自性五分法身香). It appears in a single chapter in the Huixin edition together with three of the other four sets of precepts. The first set of precepts in Dunhuang version, on the three bodies of the Buddha, has been moved to the last position in the Huixin edition, where it

⁹⁰ Ishii 1981.

has been given its own chapter. So the precept ceremony in the Huixin version consists of the following five elements:

Chapter 5:

Transmitting the incenses and repentances, and making vows

(五傳香懺悔發願門).⁹¹

1. The five Dharmakāya incenses (not in the Dunhuang version)
2. The formless repentances (no. 3 in the Dunhuang version)
3. The four Bodhisattva vows (no. 2 in the Dunhuang version)
4. The three refuges (no. 4 in the Dunhuang version)

Chapter 6

Explaining the characteristics of the unified three bodies of the Buddha

(六說一體三身佛相門).⁹²

5. Refuge in the threefold body of the Buddha of oneself (no. 1 in the Dunhuang version)

The five Dharmakāya incenses of the self nature are: 1) the incense of the precepts, 2) the incense of meditation, 3) the incense of wisdom, 4) the incense of liberation, and 5) the incense of emancipated perceptual understanding.⁹³ The five Dharmakāya incenses as described in the Huixin edition are traditional qualities of a fully enlightened Buddha, but here the text emphasizes that they are to be found within each person. Interestingly, the five Dharmakāya incenses are briefly discussed in a text attributed to Shenxiu, the *Guanxin lun* 觀心論, although they are here referred to as “the incenses of the true Dharma that has five kinds of bodies” (正法香有五種體).⁹⁴ The *Guanxin lun* also discusses precepts, although it does not outline a ceremony as such. The text is in another version known as the *Poxiang lun* 破相論 and is attributed to Bodhidharma.⁹⁵ The *Shaoshi liumen* 少室六門, also attributed to Bodhidharma, is essentially identical to it.⁹⁶ Thus there seems to have been a strong tradition linking the five Dharmakāya incenses to Bodhidharma and it would not have been surprising if they had been included in the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra*. It seems somewhat odd, however, that Huixin should have added them in 967. It seems more likely that they were already in the version of the *Platform Sūtra* that Huixin

⁹¹ Ishii 1980: 128.

⁹² Ishii 1980: 134.

⁹³ Ishii 1980: 128.

⁹⁴ CBETA, T85, no. 2833: 1272: a2–8. The text here is based on S. 2595.

⁹⁵ CBETA, X63: no. 1220.

⁹⁶ CBETA, T48, no. 2009.

used, which we know was probably a text later than the text of the Dunhuang edition, but only by a couple of generations.⁹⁷ I have not found the five Dharmakāya incenses in any other precept text prior to 967 (the date of Huixin's preface), but they do appear to have become standard in Chan precept ceremonies from the Song dynasty onward as evidenced in both the *Chanyan qinggui* 禪苑清規 and the *Chixiu Baizhang qinggui* 敕修百丈清規⁹⁸ —perhaps inspired by their inclusion in the *Platform Sūtra*.

The formless repentances in the Huixin version closely resemble those in the Dunhuang version, although the notion that they are about one's own self nature is further enhanced. Also, the last part of the section where Huineng states that in his teaching "forever to cut off evil deeds and not perform them is called repentance," is not included. It seems Huixin may have considered this statement not quite in the right spirit since it does not invoke the self-nature.⁹⁹

In the four Bodhisattva vows, the Huixin version has added to each of them the words "own mind," or "self nature," so the vows come to be about the "sentient beings of my own mind," "the passions of my own mind," "the Buddhist teachings of my own self nature," "and the unsurpassed Buddha Way of my own self nature." Likewise, the explanation that follows accentuates the message already found in the Dunhuang version that these vows are not about an external reality, but about everyone's own nature. The text seems self-conscious about the change to the four Bodhisattva vows, and at some point asks: "why don't we just say: 'sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them'?"¹⁰⁰ At the same time, the change seems to integrate the Bodhisattva vows better into the other formless precepts; since in the Dunhuang version they are the only precepts formulated in a traditional manner (and not directly referred to as "formless precepts").

The three refuges in the Huixin version do not differ in any substantial way from their presentation in the Dunhuang version.¹⁰¹

The section on refuge in the threefold body of the Buddha of oneself, that in the Huixin edition is the last of the formless precepts (but first in the Dunhuang version), is accentuated here, having been given its own chapter. The precepts in the previous chapter now seem like they are leading up to

⁹⁷ See Schlütter 2014.

⁹⁸ CBETA, X63: no. 1245, 546, c1–10.

⁹⁹ Ishii 1980: 130.

¹⁰⁰ Ishii 1980: 131.

¹⁰¹ Ishii 1980: 133.

the precepts in this chapter. As noted earlier, this gives credence to the idea that these precepts were understood to be the central ones, at the very least by Huixin. A statement that underlines the importance of these precepts seems to have been added by Huixin: “I will explain for you unified three bodies of the Buddha of self nature. I will make you see the three bodies so that you yourself will completely awaken to your own self nature (某甲與說一體三身自性佛、令善知識見三身、了然自悟自性).”¹⁰²

By rearranging the formless precepts, and placing the repentances before any actual vows, Huixin’s edition brings them into greater harmony with the dominant models for precepts rituals discussed earlier. But although the Huixin edition gives the precepts an important position, they are not specifically identified as “formless precepts.” While this section in the Dunhuang version is introduced by having Huineng declare that he will now confer the formless precepts on his audience, there is no such statement in the Huixin version, not even in front of the section on the five Dharmakāya incenses. In fact, in the Huixin version the term “formless precepts” is only used once, in the very beginning of the text, when it is said that Huineng was invited to the Dafan to “administer the formless precepts and explain the Dharma of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā.”¹⁰³

So, although the refuge in the threefold body of the Buddha was given extra prominence in the Huixin version, overall the importance of the formless precepts actually seems muted in Huixin’s text. The simple title of this edition that makes no reference to the precepts suggests the same thing: *Shaozhou Caoxishan Liuzu tanjing* 韶州曹溪山六祖壇經 (the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch of Mt. Caoxi in Shaozhou).¹⁰⁴ In his preface, Huixin does not mention the formless precepts, and merely refers to how the *Platform Sūtra* can help readers see their own Buddha nature. And although Huixin retains most of the notes found in the Dunhuang version instructing the audience to “recite three times,” the instruction to do so after the three refuges does not appear. This is obviously a mistake, but one that further indicates less concern with the precepts in the text. At the beginning of the ceremony in the Huixin version Huineng tells his audience to kneel, clearly demarcating what follows as a special ritual event; while the Dunhuang version does not have any instructions for kneeling. But the inclusion of this detail only serves to make the text appear more realistic. It

¹⁰² Ishii 1980: 134.

¹⁰³ Ishii 1980: 102.

¹⁰⁴ Ishii 1980: 100.

seems very unlikely that Huixin imagined anyone actually using a copy of his version of the *Platform Sūtra* to perform a precept ceremony. This weakening of the formless precepts' significance in the *Platform Sūtra* as an actual ceremony that could be emulated continued in the subsequent versions of the text, culminating with the orthodox version.

The Formless Precepts in the Orthodox Version of the *Platform Sūtra*

As we have seen, the Huixin edition of the *Platform Sūtra* mostly preserves the order of the text as it is found in the Dunhuang version, and although the formless precepts are rearranged their general position in the text was not changed. In the Huixin version, Huineng's autobiography and his sermon that includes the formless precepts are all presented as parts of a talk given by Huineng at one occasion at the Dafan monastery, just as they appear in the Dunhuang version. However, the orthodox version of the *Platform Sūtra* (here represented by the Zongbao edition from 1291) abolishes this scheme entirely. Although the orthodox version was directly based on the Kōshōji version of Huixin's edition it thoroughly rearranges the text and adds much new material. Most important for our purposes, the orthodox version presents the formless precepts in a context that is completely different from that of the Dunhuang and Huixin versions of the text, significantly changing the meaning and impact of the formless precepts.

Furthermore, as we shall see, the formless repentances have been completely reformulated. The change to the repentances is actually found already in the Kōshōji version of the *Platform Sūtra*, which was probably first prepared by Chao Jiong in 1031, but not published until 1153 by his descendant Chao Zijian.¹⁰⁵ The Kōshōji version only differs significantly from Huixin's edition in a few places, and the change to the formless repentances represents the most dramatic difference.¹⁰⁶

The orthodox version as represented by the Zongbao edition is divided into ten chapters.¹⁰⁷ The first chapter creates a setting not much different from what is found in the Dunhuang and Huixin versions, with Prefect Wei

¹⁰⁵ See the discussion of different editions of the *Platform Sūtra* at the beginning of this essay.

¹⁰⁶ See Ishii 1981: 130.

¹⁰⁷ The titles of the chapters are: 行由第一, 般若第二, 疑問第三, 定慧第四, 坐禪第五, 懺悔第六, 機緣第七, 頓漸第八, 宣詔第九, 付囑第十 (CBETA, T48, no. 2008: 345, b24).

asking Huineng to preach at the Dafan temple. Huineng then goes on to his autobiography, which has been significantly expanded in various ways. However, at the end of the chapter with the autobiography the audience disperses and the next chapter is said to be a lecture Huineng gave the following day. Huineng's teachings at the Dafan temple are thus presented as having taken place on a number of occasions, rather than all at once as in the Dunhuang and Huixin versions. The lecture Huineng gives right after his autobiography concerns the *prajñāpāramitā*, and it corresponds to his lecture given after the formless precepts in the Dunhuang and Huixin versions, that is often seen as a continuation of the precepts. But in the Zongbao edition, the precepts come much later in the text; in fact, they are presented as having been given not at the Dafan temple, but at some unspecified time after Huineng has completed his preaching there and returned to Caoxi. Thus the precept ceremony has been lifted out of its earlier context and is no longer a central part of Huineng's core sermon, and no longer keyed in with the *prajñāpāramitā* teachings.

In fact, the precept ceremony in the Zongbao edition is found in a stand-alone chapter where it is presented as a spontaneous event, something that Huineng was all of a sudden inspired to do. The chapter, entitled simply "Chapter Six: Repentance" (懺悔第六), begins:

At one time, the master saw that literati and commoners from the Guangzhou and Shaozhou areas, and from all over the country, had gathered at his mountain to hear the Dharma. So he ascended the teacher's seat and said to the assembly: Come, all of you good and learned friends. This matter must arise out of your own natures.¹⁰⁸ At all times you must in each moment of thought yourself purify your minds. You yourselves must cultivate practice to see your own Dharmakāya, see the Buddha within your own minds. You must save yourselves and take the precepts of yourselves, only then will you not have come here in vain. You have all come from afar to meet here; we share a karmic connection. Now all of you kneel and I will first transmit to you the five dharmakāya incenses of the self-nature, and then I will confer the formless repentances.¹⁰⁹

So, in the Zongbao edition, the formless precepts are completely divorced from the context of a sermon. Although Huineng's sermon on meditation is contained in the chapter before this one, as was the case in the Dunhuang

¹⁰⁸ I am here following the Deyi edition (宮), reading *xing* 性 for *shi* 事 in the second part of the sentence: 《六祖大師法寶壇經》卷 1: 「此[16]事須從自[17]事中起,」 (CBETA, T48, no. 2008: 353, c01) [16]事=性【甲】。[17]事=性【宮】【甲】。

¹⁰⁹ CBETA, T48, no. 2008: 353, b29–c16.

and Huixin versions, in the Zongbao edition the precepts are conferred on an entirely different occasion. Moreover, the Zongbao text notes very carefully that the precept ceremony came about when Huineng responded to the specific needs of lay people. Monastics are here excluded, or rather, the text seems to imply that it is not proper for them to be included. It appears that Huineng is simply presenting a heuristic device to lay people that is irrelevant for monastics. In the Zongbao edition, none of the notes saying “recite three times” have been retained and there is no sense that the ritual of the formless precepts here could serve as a model for other such ceremonies. Instead, the chapter simply reports the event as a specific episode in Huineng’s teaching career.

The outline of the formless precepts (if we can keep calling them that) in the Zongbao edition in general follows the Huixin edition fairly closely, or rather follows the Kōshōji version of Huixin’s edition. The order and the core of the precepts are pretty much the same, except for the formless repentances. Here the Zongbao edition follows the reformulated repentances from the Kōshōji closely:

[Huineng said:] Now I will bequeath to you the formless repentances, so that you may extinguish your transgressions in the three periods of time and render pure your three types of karmic activity (i.e., those of body, speech, and mind). Good friends, you should say the following in unison after me: “From our past thoughts to our present thoughts to our future thoughts, [so that] in every moment of thought we are not subject to the defilement of stupidity, we disciples repent all our transgressions of stupidity and evil actions from the past. We beseech that [our transgressions] all be instantly eliminated, never to arise again. From our past thoughts to our present thoughts to our future thoughts, [so that] in every moment of thought we are not subject to the defilement of deceitfulness, we disciples repent all our transgressions of deceitfulness and evil actions from the past. We beseech that [our transgressions] all be instantly eliminated, never to arise again. From our past thoughts to our present thoughts to our future thoughts, [so that] in every moment of thought we are not subject to the defilement of jealousy, we disciples repent all our transgressions of jealousy and evil actions from the past. We beseech that [our transgressions] all be instantly eliminated, never to arise again.”¹¹⁰

This version of the formless repentances seems much more like a “real” repentance ritual with an actual formula for seeking forgiveness; this is no longer simply an abstract description of how repentance should be understood as found in the Dunhuang and Huixin versions of the *Platform Sūtra*.

¹¹⁰ CBETA, T48, no. 2008: 353, c16–p. 354, a1. Translation from McRae 2000: 47–48.

In fact, repentance, rather than precepts, is the declared focus of the whole section as we have seen in the title of the chapter, and Huineng in his introduction tells his audience that he will confer the formless *repentances* on them, not the formless *precepts*. It may even be misleading to talk about “formless precepts” in the context of the Zongbao edition of the *Platform Sūtra*. The Zongbao version never employs the term “formless precepts”, not even in the introduction to the text, although it does in one instance refer to the three refuges as the “formless three-refuges precepts” (無相三歸依戒).¹¹¹

In the Zongbao edition, Huineng’s “formless verse,” that in the Dunhuang and Huixin versions comes at the end of the sermon on the prajñā-pāramitā, concludes the chapter on formless repentance. Huineng here says that if his audience can see their own natures through this verse then even when far away it will be as if they are always near him. Those who do not understand, in contrast, will have come a thousand *li* in vain.¹¹² By putting this verse at the end of the chapter on the formless repentances, the text indicates that it is specifically for laypeople. However, earlier versions of the *Platform Sūtra* explicitly state that the verse is for both monastics and laypeople, just as the formless precepts are directed at both groups.¹¹³

Thus, in this version of the *Platform Sūtra* any pretense of real ceremony of formless precepts that could replicated in other settings was completely abolished, and the formless precepts (or repentances) have simply become yet another way for Huineng to help lay people in particular see their own natures.

The abstract version of the repentances in the Dunhuang and Huixin versions probably did not seem appropriate in the Song when Chao Jiong’s edition, and later the orthodox version, were compiled. It appears that especially repentance rituals had become popular in Chinese Buddhism at this time, and the earlier repentance ritual of the *Platform Sūtra* must have come to be seen as inadequate and ineffective. Surely, the editors must have felt, this could not have been the real intent of the Sixth Patriarch, and they

¹¹¹ CBETA, T48, no. 2008: 354, a27. The term “formless precepts” is, however, used a number of times in Qisong’s praise of the *Platform Sūtra* that is usually included in Zongbao’s text. See CBETA, T48, no. 2008: 346, a13–p. 347, c17. This is yet another indication that Qisong is unlikely to have been the original author of the orthodox *Platform Sūtra*.

¹¹² CBETA, T48, no. 2008: 355, a07.

¹¹³ Yampolsky 1967: 159; Chinese text, p. 17, line 13–14; Ishii 1980: 90–91.

amended it accordingly. Furthermore, at some point in the Song, Bodhisattva precepts based on the *Fanwang jing* emerged as an integral part of the monastic ordination ritual.¹¹⁴ The compiler of the orthodox edition in the Song must have viewed the suggestion that monastics were being given the formless precepts by Huineng as confusing and inappropriate. The text was thus amended again to make it clear that these precepts were for lay-people only.

Conclusion

It appears that the early Chan tradition engaged in much experimentation with different ceremonies and settings for dispensing Bodhisattva precepts to monastics and lay people, perhaps both as a way of differentiating itself from older established groups within Buddhism and as an effective means of gathering large audiences from a broad range of backgrounds. The editors of the Dunhuang *Platform Sūtra*, as well as those of the *Wu fangbian* and the *Tanyu*, drew directly on established liturgical models, while at the same time they sought to promote Chan's message of inherent Buddha nature as a reality everyone should strive to see for themselves.

There appears to be a clear trajectory from the *Wu fangbian* through the *Tanyu* to the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra*. While the *Wu fangbian* presents a fairly traditional precept ritual with, likely, the ten precepts from the *Fanwang jing*, the *Tanyu* refuses to formulate any specific precepts and instead urges its audience members to realize their own enlightened minds. The Dunhuang *Platform Sūtra* follows the *Tanyu* in not using a traditional list of precepts. It goes a step further by also omitting a list of formal repentances and by insisting on its precepts being formless, wholly about the inner reality of inherent Buddha nature. In the Dunhuang *Platform Sūtra* the formless precepts constitute a central part of the text, directed to monastics and lay people alike. The ritual of the formless precepts is here almost certainly meant to be used as a model or manual for performance of it in other settings.

However, later editors of the *Platform Sūtra* did not see the formless precepts as central to the text. It seems clear that already at the time when

¹¹⁴ Both the *Chanyan qinggui* 禪苑清規 from 1103 and the *Chixiu Baizhang qinggui* 敕修百丈清規 from 1336–1343 mention the Bodhisattva precepts as part of the monastic ordination ceremony.

Huixin prepared his edition in 967 other models of the Bodhisattva precept ritual had become dominant and the quirky formless precepts ceremony of the *Platform Sūtra* no longer appeared as attractive to the Chan community and lay people interested in Buddhism.¹¹⁵ Huixin very loyally, it seems, adheres to the text he was working from, but nevertheless reduces the significance of the formless precepts considerably and reorders them to make them seem more in line with traditional precept ceremonies. The edition by Chao Jiong went further, and rewrote the section on the formless repentances. The process of transforming the formless precepts culminated with the orthodox edition, likely created in the mid-thirteenth century. We may speculate that the original editor of the orthodox edition was a monk who did not consider the formless precepts appropriate for monastics. So in the orthodox version, the formless precepts are directed to lay people only, not connected directly with Huineng's sermons, and no longer presented as precepts at all, but rather repentances. This rendering of the material completed the 500-year long transformation of the formless precepts in the *Platform Sūtra*.

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¹¹⁵ For an investigation of later Tiantai ordination manuals and how they were used to appeal to lay believers, see Getz 2005.

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