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FORUM

Matthew Wilhite

Do Not Say That You Have Forgotten King and Father: Yunqi Zhuhong's Chan Realism

Abstract This essay examines the late Ming-dynasty Chan master Yunqi Zhuhong's commentary on the *Brahma Net Sutra* (*Fanwangjing*), which it takes up in order to explore his discourse concerning both Chan realism and his ensuing rejection of mainstream Chan *gongan* rhetoric. The *Brahma Net Sutra* contains a list of major and minor precepts governing proper morality for monastic and lay Buddhists. Zhuhong's interpretation of the Twenty-First Minor Precept, which prohibits revenge, offers insight into his sense of political realism regarding the relationship between gradual teachings, provisional truths, and ultimate truth. His interpretation of the Tenth Minor Precept, which prohibits storing weapons, demonstrates his moral realism in contrast to Chan's traditional use of pedagogical violence. Zhuhong's realist discourse, influenced by the teachings of the Buddhist Vinaya as well as by engagement with Confucian ethics, presents an overlooked counter-narrative shift that contrasts with the emphasis on sudden enlightenment and antinomianism in Chan *gongan* discourse typical of the Tang and Song dynasties.

Keywords Yunqi Zhuhong, Ming, *Brahma Net Sutra*, Chan realism, *gongan*

The Condition of Chan Buddhism in the Ming Dynasty

The Ming dynasty was once seen as a period of decline and stagnation for Buddhist institutions, doctrine, and morality.¹ Therefore, studies of Chan *gongan* discourse generally focused on the charismatic masters of the Tang dynasty and the lineage-creation and routinization that took place during the Song dynasty. This absence of attention to the Ming was justified in that the literary genres that

¹ The best example of this view is still Kenneth Ch'en; *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*. Ch'en spends a mere twenty-one pages on both the Ming and Qing dynasties, characterizing the periods with the chapter title, "Recession and Decline."

Matthew Wilhite (✉)
Religious Studies Department, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242, USA
E-mail: matthew-wilhite@uiowa.edu

came to define Chan, such as the histories of lamp-transmission (*dengshi*), collected sayings (*yulu*), and encounter dialogues (*jiyuan wenda*), all of which influenced the formation of *gongan* discourse, seemed to have died out during the Ming and reappeared only in the Qing dynasty.² Put simply, the Ming has been at times overlooked by Chan scholars because the rhetorical devices and styles that came into existence during the Tang and were formalized during the Song were mostly absent during the Ming. However, a decline of mainstream rhetoric may sometimes reveal the vibrancy of counter-narratives, rather than general intellectual stagnation. It is just such a counter-narrative that this essay examines.

In 1587, the Buddhist monk Yunqi Zhuhong wrote the *Fanwangjing xindipin pusajie yishu fayin*, a treatise examining both the *Brahma Net Sutra* (*Fanwangjing*) and Zhiyi's earlier Tiantai-school commentary on this scripture. The *Brahma Net Sutra* contains ten major and forty-eight minor "bodhisattva precepts" that continue to be upheld both by lay and monastic Buddhists in East Asia. In his commentary, Zhuhong rejected the emphasis on sudden enlightenment and ultimate truth that justified antinomian violence often found in *gongan* rhetoric, and instead he favored what I term "Chan realism,"—which is a novel emulsion of moral and political realism. By moral realism, I refer to the view that there are objective moral truths independent of human thought, culture, and perceptions.³ Political realism refers to the tradition that stretches from Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* through Hobbes' *Leviathan*, and is most clearly expressed by Hans Morgenthau as an interest in power as a tool to ensure the continued existence of a state or other institution and, thereby, to protect people from the horrors of anarchy.⁴ In Zhuhong's work, we see a commitment both to absolute moral truth and to the continued existence of the Ming state as a protecting entity that could ensure the continued existence of the Buddhist community.

The Buddhist community's understanding of Zhuhong and his relationship to Chan has long been ambivalent. The eldest son of a prominent family in Hangzhou, Zhuhong pursued a career in government bureaucracy until continued failures to move ahead in the state examination process combined with the deaths of his first wife, son, and both parents led to his taking ordination as a Buddhist monk at the age of 32 in 1566. During his life and after his death, Zhuhong was celebrated as a moral reformer and a leader of the late-Ming revival of Buddhism, brought about in part due to his championing of benevolent societies engaged in

² Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China*, 5–6, 33–42.

³ David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, 14.

⁴ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 294–98; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 223–24; and Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 3–13.

activities such as liberating animals. However, in regards to the Chan community, his legacy has been less certain. Later Chan figures, such as Feiyin Tongrong in his *Wudeng yantong* (The strict transmission of the five Chan schools), relegated Zhuhong to the "lineage unknown" (*sifa weixiang*) portion of Chan history.⁵

Zhuhong was, thus, kept within the sphere of Chan Buddhism while also being quarantined at its fringes. I posit that one reason for Zhuhong's troubled relationship with the Chan establishment is his notion of Chan realism and his resulting rejection of *gongan* rhetoric along with the antinomianism, violence, and absurdist standpoint of mainstream Chan discourse. To demonstrate how Zhuhong's realism contributed to the sometimes overlooked intellectual vibrancy of Ming Buddhism, I first outline the essential elements of mainstream Chan in relation to Zhuhong's view of *gongans* and go on to explore his realism by examining his explanation of the Twenty-First Minor Precept from the *Brahma Net Sutra* and his political argument in favor of provisional truths and a gradualist approach to cultivating enlightenment. Then, I turn to Zhuhong's explanation of the Tenth Minor Precept and his moral realist argument against Chan masters' use of pedagogical violence.

For the sake of clarity, allow me to take a moment to clarify two important terms used above: provisional truth and gradualist approach. Provisional truth refers to the limited, context-dependent truth of the unenlightened rather than the ultimate truth perceived by those who are enlightened. Zhuhong often uses a related term, provisional teachings, to refer to moral systems, such as Confucianism, as well as simpler aspects of Buddhism that fall short of expressing ultimate truth. Though provisional truths are less than perfect, they are seen by some as necessary expedients to lead individuals towards ultimate truth. This approach of using provisional teachings/truths to lead an individual to ultimate truth is the gradualist approach, sometimes referred to as gradualist teachings, spoken of above. The gradualist approach contrasts with the belief, prevalent in mainstream Chan, that a sudden, complete experience of enlightenment is the proper path to enlightenment.

Gongans, Mainstream Chan, and Zhuhong

Mainstream Chan rhetoric is best known for its use of *gongans*, the strange and absurd anecdotes that stress themes of sudden enlightenment and antinomian

⁵ Chün-fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis*, 5–19; Joanna F. Handlin Smith, "Liberating Animals in Ming-Qing China: Buddhist Inspiration and Elite Imagination," 57–62; Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 4–8. For more on Zhuhong's biography, see his funerary stele, "Guhang Yunqi Lianchi dashi taming" (Hangzhou's master Yunqi Lianchi's funerary stele), in Yunqi Zhuhong, *Lianchi dashi quanji*, 5117–34.

morality. An example of antinomianism is a famous *gongan* known as "Nanquan's Cat." The Chan master Nanquan Puyuan encounters two sets of monks fighting over possession of a cat. Seeing this, Nanquan holds up the animal and declares that if the disciples can demonstrate their enlightenment the cat will live, but if not the cat will be killed. Reduced to silence by the challenge, the monks watch as Nanquan cleaves the cat in two, killing it. Later, Nanquan's disciple Zhaozhou Congshen hears the story from Nanquan. Putting himself in the place of the challenged monks, Zhaozhou removes one of his sandals, places it upon his head, and leaves. Nanquan calls after him, "If you had been there, the cat would have been saved."⁶

There are two important hallmarks of Chan *gongan* rhetoric in the story of "Nanquan's Cat." First, in Zhaozhou's seemingly absurd response to the challenge, we see the trope that enlightenment transcends conventional logic and, quite often, goes beyond words altogether. Second, in Nanquan's killing of a sentient creature, we see the trope that enlightened wisdom transcends even Buddhist conventional morality, leaving us with the antinomian notion that immorality in pursuit or demonstration of enlightenment is, in fact, moral. This extreme rhetoric was typical of mainstream Chan.

I use the term mainstream Chan in order to draw attention to a collection of tropes that became commonplace in Chan discourse, especially since the influence of one particular dharma-descendent of Huineng, namely, Mazu Daoyi. Mazu, in turn, gave rise to a number of influential students, including Baizhang Huaihai, whose dharma-heir Huangbo Xiyun was the master of Linji Yixuan, whose lineage became dominant in the Song dynasty.⁷ As a central figure in the development of mainstream Chan rhetoric, Mazu and his disciples stressed the importance of the "ordinary mind" as possessing enlightenment. Ultimate enlightened truth is the true nature of all reality, they posited, including the everyday human mind. It is the human tendency to cling to deluded thought and attachment that separates us from true reality.

Therefore, for Mazu and the Hongzhou school, Chan was not a process of cultivation through meditation, but rather a striving to eliminate delusions and attachments so that one can finally express their original enlightenment. Additionally, the Hongzhou school came to be associated with sudden enlightenment, although it seems Mazu himself did not discuss the matter much. Perhaps most importantly, Mazu and his disciples were crucial to the

⁶ One of many English translations can be found in John Daido Looi, ed., *Sitting with Koans: Essential Writings on the Practice of Zen Koan Interpretation*, 253. For original see Taisho Canon, T 51.258a3-7.

⁷ Albert Welter, *The Linjilu and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy: The Development of Chan's Records of Sayings Literature*, 1-7, 29-32, 109. See also Albert Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati: The Political Ascendancy of Chan Buddhism*, 63-113.

development of the encounter dialogue as a vital genre within Chan, thus helping to popularize their views regarding sudden enlightenment and inherent Buddha-nature.⁸ These early ideas stemming from Mazu found their most ardent and perhaps radical expression within the Linji sect.

The Linji partisan Yang Yi, who was a powerful court literati during the Northern Song dynasty, further advanced his school's agenda. Yang was made editor of Daoyuan's *Jingde chuandeng lu* (Record of the transmission of the lamp compiled in the Jingde era), which was produced in the first decade of the eleventh century and became an important transmission history because it bore the mark of official government sanction. The *Jingde chuandeng lu* of the first decade of the 1000s was heavily influenced by the *Zutangji* (Patriarchs' hall collection) of 952, as evidenced by its adoption of that text's multi-lineal format and extensive inclusion of encounter dialogues. What sets the *Jingde chuandeng lu* apart from its predecessor is Yang Yi's preface. While earlier Chan advocates believed that Chan existed as a parallel co-practice to other forms of Buddhist discipline, Yang Yi's preface argued for Chan independence as "a special practice outside the teachings" (*jiaowai biechuan*).⁹ The assertion that Chan stood apart from other forms of Buddhism, including the conventional Vinaya, would open the door for the Linji school's unconventional teachings and practices to enter the mainstream.

Perhaps the most influential Linji partisan was Dahui Zonggao, who, during the twelfth century, championed the use of *gongans* and the importance of sudden enlightenment. Dahui gained prominence in part due to his vitriolic condemnation of the Caodong lineage's use of the meditative technique of silent illumination (*mozhao*). During the eleventh and twelfth century the Caodong lineage underwent a renaissance of sorts due to its popularity among literati and governmental officials. During this time, the Caodong lineage became associated with the silent illumination practice of quieting the conscious mind in order to allow one's inherent enlightenment to manifest itself. Dahui saw silent illumination as a quietist method that did not generate a climactic moment of sudden enlightenment and was, therefore, not suitable for Chan practitioners. Instead, he emphasized the use of *gongans* in the abbreviated form of *huatou* in order to generate the necessary spontaneous breakthrough that allowed enlightenment to be realized.¹⁰

⁸ Jinhua Jia, *The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism in Eighth- through Tenth-Century China*, 47-82; John R. McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*, 93-97; and Mario Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism*, 3-4, 157-63, 168-72, 193-203.

⁹ Welter, *The Linjilu*, 38-39. See also Sokaku Ogata, trans., *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp (Jingde chuandenglu)*.

¹⁰ Morten Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen: The Dispute Over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-Dynasty China*, 1-12, 78-153, 175-82.

During the same time that Dahui was leading the Linji lineage to a rhetorical victory over the Caodong lineage, the various encounter dialogues and biographical sketches of Linji were being compiled into a stand-alone work that would help popularize Linji's idiosyncratic actions and sayings. The *Linjilu* (Record of Linji) was compiled in 1120 by a member of the Yunmen lineage of Chan, Yuanjue Zongyan. The *Record* details Linji's use of violence and shouting in his endeavor to reveal to his students their own innate Buddhahood. In no uncertain terms Linji taught that the Buddha was to be found within oneself, not outside, and that sudden and complete enlightenment was the only true form of awakening. Linji rejected scholasticism and a gradualist approach to enlightenment, believing that any gradual path employing provisional truths or methods was false. Moreover, the *Record* is filled with anecdotes about Linji's employing physical violence against his students, teachers, and peers, as well as his using deafening shouts that were meant to split open their minds and allow their inherent enlightenment to emerge.¹¹

The Chan discourse that Zhuhong encountered during the Ming was still strongly influenced by the ascendancy of the Linji lineage that had taken place during the Song. In 1600, Zhuhong completed the *Changuan cejin*,¹² which he wrote in order to compile useful quotes and anecdotes to help guide Chan practitioners towards proper study and practice. Zhuhong's preface warns that the Chan community contains both enlightened and deluded individuals and that the wise members of the community must act as "gate-keepers" to ensure that only those deserving and ready for wisdom gain access to it. With this in mind, the *Changuan cejin* was compiled as a short and readily accessible guidebook for those on the path to enlightenment to gain guidance from the enlightened masters of the past rather than fall prey to charlatans.¹³ From his preface, we can see his ambivalence with the Chan community and his concerns over proper versus improper practice.

The *Changuan cejin* demonstrates that Zhuhong did not reject the use of *gongans* or the wisdom of past Chan masters. He seems to have embraced the Linji tradition of *kanhua* or *gongan*-investigation Chan, as evidenced by his quoting of Dahui Zonggao. Dahui's quotation in the *Changuan cejin* criticizes those "who just teach people to stop and rest like dead jackals" and instead stresses the importance of meditating on *gongans*.¹⁴ The fact that Zhuhong embraced *gongans* as efficacious meditative tools is evidenced through stories

¹¹ Burton Watson, *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi: A Translation of the Lin-chi Lu*, 9, 15–16, 24, 26, 34, 40, 47, 52, 89–91, 100, 104–7.

¹² The *Changuan cejin* can be found in Yunqi Zhuhong, *Lianchi dashi quanji*, 1999–2092. Translated in J. C. Cleary, *Meditating with Koans*.

¹³ Yunqi Zhuhong, *Lianchi dashi quanji*, 1999–2000.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2016–17. Translation from Cleary, *Meditating with Koans*, 37–38.

from multiple masters who achieved progress toward ultimate enlightenment by focusing on the famous *gongan*, "Zhaozhou's Dog," in which Zhaozhou is asked whether or not a dog possesses Buddha-nature and responds, "No."¹⁵

However, Zhuhong does not wholly align with the Linji school's view of Chan rhetoric. He deviates from mainstream Chan in one major fashion in the *Changuan cejin* by stressing the recitation of the name of Amitabha Buddha as the single most efficacious *gongan*, thereby subordinating *gongans* derived from encounter dialogues and lamp transmissions to a *gongan* derived largely from Pure Land practice. In his commentary on Chan masters employing the term "No" from "Zhaozhou's Dog," Zhuhong stresses that *nianfo*, or the recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name, is an equally valid object of meditation in the form of the question, "Who is the one reciting the Buddha-name?"¹⁶ Zhuhong seems to be ambivalent towards mainstream Chan by accepting the *gongan*-investigation method of Dahui, yet focusing on *nianfo* in a way that avoids an emphasis on the sudden enlightenment and violence emphasized by the Linji tradition.

While one possible (and very worthwhile) explanation for Zhuhong's emphasis on *nianfo* as a *gongan* and his subsequent omission of antinomian Chan rhetoric is that he was a passionate advocate for the joint practice of Chan and Pure Land Buddhism,¹⁷ I wish to follow a different path of thought in this essay. I look not to Zhuhong's Pure Land faith but to his fundamental view of Buddhism as incompatible with mainstream Chan. In the following section, I discuss Zhuhong's interpretation of *The Brahma Net Sutra's* prohibition against revenge. Zhuhong's interpretation puts him at odds with the Linji emphasis on sudden enlightenment and ultimate truth, as he extols the virtues of gradual cultivation. Zhuhong criticizes the Chan tradition's use of pedagogical violence by prioritizing the Vinaya over the antinomian morality of enlightened masters. This demonstrates that Zhuhong's de-emphasis of sudden enlightenment stems from the discourse of realism that puts him at odds with prominent Chan masters of the Tang and Song dynasties.

Revenge and Political Realism

The Twenty-First Minor Precept of the *Brahma Net Sutra* prohibits revenge using the following language:

A disciple of the Buddha must not, because of anger, answer with anger; nor

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2010–11, 2018–22, 2025, 2030, 2033. For the corresponding translation see Cleary, *Meditating with Koans*, 30, 38–43, 46, 51, 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2011, 2041–42, 2055–60. For corresponding translation see Cleary, *Meditating with Koans*, 31, 62–63, 77–82.

¹⁷ Yü, *Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 29–63.

because of being struck, answer with a strike. If his/her parents, elder brothers, younger brothers, or six relations are killed s/he must not seek revenge. If there is one whose ruler is, because of others, killed, s/he must not seek revenge. Taking life is not in accordance with the filial way.¹⁸

The bulk of Zhuhong's commentary supports the prohibition against revenge as formulated in the *Brahma Net Sutra* and reiterated in Zhiyi's commentary. Both Zhiyi and Zhuhong indicate that while the precept states that one may not "answer with a strike," "because of being struck," neither can one take revenge for the sake of virtue. Zhuhong goes further by referencing the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* in stating that a disciple of the Buddha should not even give rise to ill-will, no matter what harm they must endure.¹⁹ However, Zhuhong problematizes the prohibition against revenge by employing a realist argument that Buddhists should be willing to support those state institutions and morality that allow for Buddhism's continued existence.

The first step in Zhuhong's problematizing of the Twenty-First Minor Precept is in challenging himself with a hypothetical objection to the precept:

The *Brahma Net Sutra* tells us not to take revenge on an enemy. By that logic one should, unwilling to harm others, sit and look up at the sky with a reckless patience. If that is so, then by following the dharma the human way is abandoned and as the Vinaya prospers the virtues of loyalty and filial piety die.²⁰

Zhuhong's fictional opponent raises the issue that if one does not avenge wrongs done to one's family or one's ruler then one cannot possibly be loyal or filial, and therefore the precept goes against two of the foundational virtues of Chinese culture. Against this hypothetical charge, Zhuhong presents three defenses for Buddhism and the Twenty-First Minor precept.

First, Zhuhong argues that the precept against revenge is more filial than Confucian ritual propriety, which allows for revenge. He begins by noting that revenge spawns further revenge. Moreover, focusing on avenging one's kin, Zhuhong remarks that the ensuing cycle of vengeance only causes loss for both families. He asks his reader how harming the family, the source of life and virtue, could possibly be considered filial.²¹

Second, Zhuhong argues that once one realizes the ultimate truth of Buddhism,

¹⁸ *Brahma Net Sutra*, T1484.24.1006b.

¹⁹ Yunqi Zhuhong, "Fanwangjing xindipin pusajie yishu fayin," in Yunqi Zhuhong, *Lianchi dashi quanji*, 425–26.

²⁰ Yunqi Zhuhong, "Fanwangjing xindipin," in Yunqi Zhuhong, *Lianchi dashi quanji*, 427.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 427–28.

gradual moral restrictions, such as revenge, will no longer have any relevance. Specifically, he informs us that in the realm of pure reality, "one cannot discern between what is within or without one's self."²² In other words, in the realm of ultimate truth there is no subject-object dichotomy. There is no individual who kills and there is no individual who is killed. There is only unity and equanimity. While revenge may make sense from a gradualist and provisional perspective, from the standpoint of Buddhism's ultimate truth, revenge itself is a meaningless construct, and its prohibition does not endanger virtue.

However, in his third defense, Zhuhong abandons ultimate truth, embraces the necessity of provisional truth and gradual cultivation, and breaks with Zhiyi's earlier commentary. While Zhiyi had interpreted the Twenty-First Minor Precept as applying to all Buddhists, lay and monastic, Zhuhong instead states, "the original sutra only regulates monastic bodhisattvas, and does not prohibit the ministers and people [from taking revenge]."²³ After declaring that Zhiyi's commentary is incorrect on the issue of to whom the precept applies, Zhuhong goes on to say:

It is true that fear spreads like a fire fueled by wind and enmity produces enmity without end.... [Yet] reason accords with reliance and outwardly [we] are protected by Confucianism and therefore wrongs need not be revenged. When you become a monk, do not say to your family that you have forgotten king and father. If Confucius had accepted the bodhisattva precepts, how could it be that as soon as he had spread his teachings he broke the precepts? If Zhao Dun had taken up the *Brahma Net Sutra*, how could he have extolled observing the precepts while not fighting his enemies?²⁴

Zhuhong's commentary makes clear that while monastic Buddhists are held to the standard of abstaining from killing and even from giving rise to ill-will, lay Buddhists in some circumstances kill, as outlined by Confucian morality. However, in order to understand exactly what forms of violence are allowed we must look at the two specific examples raised by Zhuhong: Confucius, and Zhao Dun.

Although the Confucian *Analects* (*Lunyu*) seem generally sympathetic to non-violence, the sayings of Confucius do support the idea of an armed nation willing and able to support itself. Confucius advocates lengthy training programs to ensure that the commoners of a state would be able to survive an armed conflict. In instances when a traitor killed his ruler, Confucius advocated for the

²² *Ibid.*, 428.

²³ *Ibid.*, 428–29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 429.

raising of an army in order to avenge that killing. Moreover, Confucius sided with those historical figures who had killed for the survival of the state.²⁵ It is that viewpoint that links Confucius and Zhao Dun as the two men Zhuhong references as potential lay precept holders.

Zhao Dun was a minister of the state of Jin whose acts are recorded in the *Zuozhuan*. As a minister, he was respected for fixing old regulations, searching out runaways, and reforming civil and criminal law to ensure that punishments were in line with the severity of the crime. At the time of the death of Duke Wen of Jin, his primary heir, Ling, was too young to become Duke. Therefore, the ministers argued over who should succeed Duke Wen. Zhao Dun recommended Yong, who had been serving as a minister in the state of Qin, due to his virtuous qualities. However, another minister, Gu Ji believed that Le would be a better successor. Zhao Dun disparaged Le's poor morality and the two ministers gathered entourages to bring their respective choices back to the state of Jin. Zhao Dun, in order to guarantee good governance for Jin and, thereby, preserve the state, had Le killed before he could reach the borders of Jin.²⁶

In light of Zhao Dun's story it seems that Zhuhong is telling us that lay Buddhists may kill if it serves the survival of the state. Zhuhong's statement that Buddhism is "outwardly protected" by this shows his understanding that the Ming state, which protected Buddhism and allowed it to thrive, could itself only survive through using violence to quell both external threats and internal disorder. This puts Zhuhong in line with Morgenthau's understanding of political realism. Zhuhong's decision to exempt lay Buddhists from the prohibition against revenge reflects his acknowledgement of the state's power and his own selfish desire to employ that power to protect the Chinese Buddhist community. A strict moral realist would have held the *Brahma Net Sutra's* rejection of violence above any concern for the protection of the community. Zhuhong instead prioritizes the survival of the community above moral realism. In doing so he also emphasizes the importance of gradual teachings (Confucianism) over the ultimate truth of Buddhism that he had outlined. As such, his political realism is incompatible with mainstream Chan rhetoric based on sudden enlightenment.

Pedagogical Violence and Moral Realism

The Tenth Minor Precept in the *Brahma Net Sutra* prohibits the storage of weapons. It states the following:

²⁵ Confucius, *The Analects*, 123, 126–27.

²⁶ James Legge, ed. and trans., *The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*, 243–45.

A disciple of the Buddha must not store any swords, staves, bows, arrows, spears, axes or other implements of battle. They must also not store even one net or other implement for taking life. Even if the bodhisattva's parents are killed, s/he will not seek revenge, how much more will they not take the life of a sentient creature. If s/he does store a weapon, s/he has committed a light offense.²⁷

Zhuhong interprets this precept as applying equally to both monastic and lay Buddhists, but also makes clear that rulers may store weapons, as armed soldiers are required for the defense of the nation. However, Zhuhong does argue that civilians, even non-Buddhists, should not store weapons. As for the prohibition of hunting implements, Zhuhong argues that no one, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, common or noble, should injure or kill an animal.²⁸

The issue of owning weapons would seem to be resolved if it were not for the reappearance of Zhuhong's imaginary opponent who problematizes the precept by provoking the following exchange:

Question: Deshan's staff and Shigong's bow, do these not go against the precept and give rise to evil? Answer: Those are a blessed staff that preserves life and a divine bow that prevents death. How could they be weapons? [However,] if among those within [the Buddhist community] who are without accomplishment and those outside [the Buddhist community] who study with empty heads, one who is blind violently strikes with a staff or one who is deluded confusedly raises a bow and falsely discusses wisdom then, doubting the enlightenment of those who have come before and fixed the Vinaya and clarified the texts, they obtain sin without limit.²⁹

In this exchange Zhuhong upholds the correctness of the Tang dynasty Chan masters Deshan Xuanjian and Shigong Huizang, while simultaneously deriding those within and without the Buddhist community who imitate their practices and, thereby, violate the Vinaya.

Deshan and Shigong are early sources for the "blows" component of the "blows and shouts" that are identified with Linji Chan. Deshan was a disciple of Longtan Chongxin, who had initially been a student of the Vinaya and *Diamond Sutra* and set out to argue against practitioners of Chan. However, Deshan was converted by Longtan and became famous for striking his students with a staff.³⁰ Shigong made his living as a hunter, pursuing deer with a bow and arrow. One

²⁷ *Brahma Net Sutra*, T1484.24.1005c.

²⁸ Zhuhong, "Fanwangjing xindipin," in Yunqi Zhuhong, *Lianchi dashi quanji*, 377–78.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 378–79.

³⁰ Andrew Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage: The Masters and Their Teachings*, 196–200.

day, while out hunting, Shigong came upon Mazu Daoyi and was quickly converted to Chan. As a teacher, Shigong would lead his students around by their noses and again took up his bow and arrow, using it to test the mettle of his students.³¹

Both Deshan and Shigong ended up connected to Linji Chan discourse due to the content of the *Record of Linji*. Linji asserts that Shigong is one of the primary sources of his dharma, while Deshan is presented in an ambivalent position as one of Linji's peers. Linji expresses skepticism regarding Deshan and his methods, and both employ violence against each other when they meet. However, it is telling that Linji sends students to test Deshan and he himself attends one of Deshan's teaching sessions. Regardless of Linji's possible suspicion of Deshan, the phrase "Linji's shout and Deshan's stick" would go on to become common in the Chan community.³²

While Zhuhong defends Deshan and Shigong by saying that they did not transgress the precept, he offers a moral realist argument against anyone imitating the two Chan masters. In Zhuhong's words, one who imitates the two Tang masters by wielding weapons against others transgresses the Vinaya and, therefore, clearly must doubt the enlightenment of those who have written and clarified the Vinaya. While Zhuhong placed the protection of the Buddhist community above the Vinaya in his commentary on the Twenty-First Minor Precept, here he places the Vinaya above the power of pedagogical violence. In order to understand Zhuhong's view of the Vinaya's power, it is worth digressing to the issue of animal sacrifices.

In his discussion of the First Major Precept, which prohibits killing, Zhuhong's hypothetical opponent reminds him of the long tradition of rulers who sacrificed animals and used the meat to nourish ministers and worthies. He then goes on to ask Zhuhong how a ruler could adequately govern while suppressing the killing of animals. Zhuhong answers as follows:

It is only considered a transgression when a person is killed and, therefore, the above-mentioned execution of animals is obeyed. However, what crime have animals committed that they are taken to the execution grounds? Moreover, if we can be honest about what the gods enjoy, there was no harm in the Spring sacrifice, which used green and sweet vegetables and water. Must we then use bulls and other animals in our sacrifices? Because the Buddha-dharma has not yet entered into China's provisional teachings, how can [one who] carries out provisional teachings follow the eternal dharma?

³¹ Mario Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*, 54. See also Ogata, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 306–9.

³² Watson, *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, 59–60, 92, 92n.1, 109. See also Irene Bloom, *Knowledge Painfully Acquired: The K'un-chih chi by Lo Ch'in-shun*, 158n.237.

[We] know that Emperor Wu of Liang substituted flour for sacrificial animals. After that, the proper rituals for the ancestral sacrifices were completed and again the precept against killing was not broken.³³

Zhuhong argues against the use of animal sacrifices in state rituals and ancestral worship. He supports this argument by referring to the Spring sacrifice of the Xia and Shang dynasties, which used vegetables and water rather than animal offerings. He goes on to reference the Buddhist-convert Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty in order to show that proper ritual propriety (*li*) can be harmonized with the Buddhist dharma. Emperor Wu had banned meat and wine from the imperial household in 511, and in 517 outlawed the use of living creatures for medicinal or sacrificial reasons by instead advocating for the use of flour, fruits, and vegetables.³⁴

Zhuhong's argument is that the Vinaya has the power to rectify the Chinese state. While upholding the rituals and sacrifices that had legitimized the state for millennia, he argues that only by allowing the Buddhist Vinaya to dictate the specifics of those rituals can the provisional truths of ritual propriety be brought in line with the ultimate and eternal truth of the Buddhist dharma. Likewise, Zhuhong does not critique Chan lineage, with its claims to a mind-to-mind transmission of a unique non-textual dharma. However, he does feel that Chan must, like state rituals, be guided by the Vinaya. He does not question the enlightenment of Deshan and Shigong but does strongly condemn any who would imitate them.

For Zhuhong, the Vinaya contains moral truth that can either be rejected in favor of the provisional morality of Confucian ritual propriety or embraced so that all activities are brought in line with the one true, eternal dharma. His moral realism led him to become a reformer who criticized both non-Buddhist and Buddhist deviations from the Vinaya. While his criticism of animal sacrifices may have ruffled feathers among court literati, his condemnation of blows and shouts was thoroughly incompatible with mainstream Chan.

Conclusion

Zhuhong's interpretation of the *Brahma Net Sutra* rejects the antinomian and pedagogical violence that is the mainstay of mainstream Chan rhetoric and practice, as seen in the *gongan* of "Nanquan's Cat" as well as the *Record of Linji*, in favor of a new realist approach to Chan. Zhuhong's Chan realism is comprised of the uneasy emulsion of moral and political realism. On the one hand, Zhuhong

³³ Yunqi Zhuhong, "Fanwangjing xindipin," 252.

³⁴ Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, 121, 124–28.

is an ardent defender of the Vinaya, as a moral reformer who sees in Buddhism the ability to rectify all of Chinese society. He calls for non-Buddhists and Buddhists alike to conform to the moral dictates of the Vinaya. At the same time, Zhuhong allows for lay Buddhists to engage in violence guided by Confucian morality. He does not justify this allowance in moral terms, but in political terms. Confucian violence allows the state to protect the Buddhist community from external invaders and internal turmoil. Therefore, the existence of the Buddhist community overrides moral purity. These two seemingly incompatible viewpoints are expressed in the same document written during the Wanli era (1572–1620) of the Ming dynasty.

Both his moral and political realism put Zhuhong at odds with the mainstream Chan tropes that define *gongan* rhetoric. In his defense of Confucian morality as the defender of Buddhism, he characterizes Confucianism as gradual teachings. His emphasis on gradualism over the ultimate (or sudden) teachings that would prohibit the killing necessary to defend the state is the exact opposite of mainstream Chan's denigration of the gradualist approach. In his criticism of blows and shouts both within and without the Buddhist community, Zhuhong attacks centuries of established pedagogical violence in the Chan establishment. Here, the anything-goes approach to cultivating sudden enlightenment so often celebrated in *gongan* discourse is shown to be morally inappropriate. If we understand mainstream Chan to be characterized by an emphasis on sudden enlightenment and ultimate truth over gradual teachings as well as an embrace of violence used on a rhetorical level, then Zhuhong cannot be understood as anything other than a critic of mainstream Chan.

Given this state of affairs, we might expect Zhuhong to be seen as an outsider, perhaps even a heretic, by the Chan community. Instead, Zhuhong is included in Chan transmission histories, even though he cannot be fit into an established lineage. Moreover, we may expect the wider Buddhist community to condemn Zhuhong for his concessions regarding violence, yet he was famous in his lifetime and afterwards for being a moral reformer. Why is this the case?

I cannot explain why Zhuhong was able to combine moral and political realism while still being embraced by both the Chan and larger Buddhist communities. However, I can offer some explanation as to why we do not yet have an answer to this intriguing riddle. Although Zhuhong was a prolific author, very little of his works have been translated.³⁵ I argue that the very reason that Zhuhong is worth examining at length is the same reason why scholars have

³⁵ These works include Karl Friedrich Neumann's *The Catechism of the Shamans* (1831) as well as J. C. Cleary's *Meditating with Koans* (1992) and Cleary's *Pure Land, Pure Mind* (1994), which represent the bulk of English translations of Zhuhong's works. More telling is the fact that Chün-fang Yü's *The Renewal of Buddhism in China* (1981) remains the only book-length treatment of Zhuhong in the English language.

generally overlooked him. The study of Ming-dynasty Buddhism and of Chan, in particular, is still recovering from an old stigma that saw it as a non-event defined by the perceived stagnation of traditional Buddhist institutions, literary genres, and practices. However, the works of Timothy Brook,³⁶ Joanna F. Handlin Smith,³⁷ Chün-fang Yü, and others has shown that the Ming gave rise to a new prominence for lay Buddhist societies as well as an evolving relationship between government and non-government literati and Buddhist figures. Both of these factors have shaped Buddhism into its transition to modernity and still exert tremendous influence today. Yet, some scholars of Chan *gongan* discourse still ignore Ming Buddhism because its novelty is mistaken for decline.

We must remember that decline is relative. Decline in mainstream rhetoric makes counter-narratives more apparent. Institutional degeneration can give rise to ingenuity and invention. Zhuhong's Chan realism is one small example of Ming Buddhist innovation. However, in order to recognize these innovations we must allow ourselves to stop using mainstream rhetoric as definitive. Once we acknowledge Chan realism as a legitimate counter-narrative rather than a symptom of decline, we can begin asking questions that will unmask the innovations of Ming Buddhism and their implications for modern Buddhism. In order to fully understand the use and importance of *gongans*, we need to remain open to the arguments of Chan thinkers such as Zhuhong, who were critical of their contents.

Glossary

Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海

Baolin zhuan 寶林傳

Chuanfa baoji 傳法寶紀

Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲

Daoxuan 道宣

Daixin 道信

Daoyuan 道原

Denglu 燈錄

Dengshi 燈史

Deshan Xuanjian 德山宣鑒

Du Fei 杜朮

dunwu 頓悟

Fanwangjing 梵網經

Fanwangjing xindipin pusajie yishu

fayin 梵網經心地品菩薩戒義疏

發陰

Faru 法如

Feiyin Tongrong 費隱通容

gongan 公案

Gu Ji 賈季

Hongren 弘忍

Huangbo Xiyun 黃蘗希運

³⁶ Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China*.

³⁷ Joanna F. Handlin Smith, "Benevolent Societies: The Reshaping of Charity During the Late Ming and Early Ch'ing," 309–37.

Huike 慧可
 Huineng 慧能
 jianjiao 漸教
 jiaowai biechuan 教外別傳
 Jingde chuandenglu 景德傳燈錄
 Jingjue 淨覺
 Jiyuan wenda 機緣問答
 Lengqie shizi ji 楞伽師資記
 li 禮
 Liang 梁
 Linjilu 臨濟錄
 Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄
 Longtan Chongxin 龍潭崇信
 Lunyu 論語
 Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一
 mozhao 默照
 Nanquan Puyuan 南泉普願
 nianfo 念佛
 Sengcan 僧璨
 Shang 商

Shenhui 神會
 Shenxiu 神秀
 Shigong Huizang 石鞏慧藏
 sifa weixiang 嗣法未詳
 Wanli 萬曆
 Wudeng yantong 五燈嚴統
 Xia 夏
 Xu Baolinzhuan 續寶林傳
 Xu Gaosengzhuan 續高僧傳
 Xuanze 玄曠
 Yang Yi 揚億
 Yuanjue Zongyan 圓覺宗演
 Yulu 語錄
 Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲祿宏
 Zhao Dun 趙盾
 Zhaozhou Congshen 趙州從諗
 Zhiyi 智顓
 Zuozhuan 左傳
 Zutangji 祖堂集

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