A SOURCE BOOK IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

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PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

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THE ZEN (CH'AN) SCHOOL OF SUDDEN ENLIGHTENMENT

THE CH'AN MOVEMENT, better known as Zen, has been described by Hu Shih (1891-1962) as a "reformation or revolution in Buddhism,"[1] and by Suzuki as a movement in which "the Chinese mind completely asserted itself, in a sense, in opposition to the Indian mind. Zen could not rise and flourish in any other land or among any other people."[2] The two outstanding scholars sharply differ in their approaches to Zen: the one, historical; the other, religious and mystical. But they reinforce each other in characterizing Zen's development in Chinese history, for it was through a revolution that Ch'an came completely into its own.

Literally, the name of the school should be Meditation, for the Sanskrit *dhyāna*, pronounced in Chinese "ch'an" and in Japanese "zen," means that. But meditation changed its character in China almost from the very inception of Buddhism, although the typically Indian form of sitting in meditation and concentrating one's mind to the point of ignoring the external world has continued in Chinese Buddhist schools. When Buddhism first came to China, it was mixed up with the Yellow Emperor–Lao Tzu cult. As a result, meditation was not understood in the Indian sense of concentration but in the Taoist sense of conserving vital energy, breathing, reducing desire, preserving nature, and so forth. This was the meditation taught by early Buddhist Masters like An Shih-kao (C.A.D. 150), Kumārajīva (344-413), Tao-an (312-385), and Hui-yüan (334-416). In the end, meditation meant neither sitting in meditation nor mental concentration, but simply the direct enlightenment of the mind.

Tradition traces the beginning of the school to Bodhidharma (fl. 460-534), whose historicity has been questioned in the West. Most Chinese and Japanese scholars, however, are satisfied that he did come to China.[3] But a clear picture of the school did not emerge until Hung-

[1] Hu Shih, "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China: Its History and Method," *Philosophy East and West*, 3 (1953), p. 12.

[2] Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih," *ibid.*, p. 40.

[3] See Hu Shih, *Hu Shih lun-hsüeh chin-chu* (Recent Essays on Learned Subjects by Hu Shih), 1931, pp. 486-487, T'ang Yung-t'ung, *Han Wei Liang-Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao Fo-chiao shih* (History of Chinese Buddhism from 206 B.C. to A.D. 589), Shang-hai, 1938, pp. 779-780, and Lo Hsiang-lin, *T'ang-tai wen-hua shih* (History of the Civilization of the T'ang Dynasty, 618-907), Taiwan, 1955, pp. 110-123. Tradition said that Bodhidharma came to Canton in 520 or 527. Hu rejects these dates and said he came during 470-475. Lo believes he arrived between 465 and 524. T'ang thinks he died in China before 534. For his biography see *Hsü kao-seng chuan*

jen (601-674).[4] With him the history of Zen in China took a radical turn. According to tradition, Bodhidharma handed down the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra* (Scripture about [The Buddha] Entering into Laṅka)[5] whereas Hung-jen taught the *Diamond Scripture*.[6] The central emphasis of the former is Ultimate Reality or the true nature of dharmas (elements of existence), whereas the emphasis of the latter is on the mind, and it is the mind rather than Ultimate Reality that has become the central focus of Chinese Zen. Hung-jen's two outstanding disciples, Shen-hsiu (605?–706) in the north[7] and Hui-neng (638-713)[8] in the south, developed divergent tendencies. Shen-hsiu stressed gradual enlightenment of the mind whereas Hui-neng stressed sudden enlightenment.

For decades Shen-hsiu had been a celebrated Zen Master in the north. In 700, at the age of ninety, he was invited to the capital by Empress Wu (r. 684–705), who did him the extraordinary honor of curtseying to him.

(Supplement to the *Biographies of Eminent Monks*), ch. 19, TSD, 50:551 and *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu* (Records of the Transmission of the Lamp Compiled during the Ching-te Period, 1004-1107), SPTK, 3:1b-9b. It is not certain whether he was a Persian or the son of an Indian prince. He first came and settled in a monastery in Canton. Unproved traditional accounts have added that he was invited by the emperor to go to the capital at Nanking. When the emperor asked if there was any merit in building temples or copying scriptures, he said no. Realizing that the emperor did not understand, he left and went to Lo-yang. For forty or fifty years he propagated the Laṅka doctrine in North China and attracted many followers.

[4] For his biography, see *Sung kao-seng chuan* (Biographies of Eminent Monks Compiled in the Sung Period [988]), ch. 8, TSD, 50:54, and *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*, 3:14b-16a. Accounts of his life are mostly legends. It is agreed that he was a bright boy and that after he joined the Buddhist order he spent most of his time in spiritual cultivation and teaching. In 659 he was favored with an imperial audience.

[5] See translation by Suzuki, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. It is from the existing Sanskrit text. The scripture that Bodhidharma is said to have transmitted is one of the four Chinese translations which were evidently made from different Sanskrit texts that are lost.

[6] The *Chin-kang ching* or *Vajracchedikā*, perhaps the most popular Buddhist scripture in China. Among English translations, see Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom Books*, pp. 21-71, with commentary, and Shao Chang Lee, *Popular Buddhism in China*, pp. 27-52.

[7] For his biography, see *Sung kao-seng chuan*, ch. 8, TSD, 50:755-756, and *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*, 4:15a-b. He was quite a student of Chinese philosophy before he joined the Buddhist order, having thoroughly studied Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and the *Book of Changes*. He became a monk probably at fifteen or older and Hung-jen's pupil in 669 when he was at least fifty years old. He was therefore Hung-jen's pupil for six years until the latter died. He was an abbot in a monastery in Hupei in central China until he was called by the empress. See Lo Hsiang-lin. *T'ang-tai wen-hua shih*, pp. 105-108, 136-143.

[8] See *Sung kao-seng ch'uan*, ch. 8, TSD, 50:754-755 and *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*. 5:3a-5b. His life story told in the following selections is probably legendary. He was a native of Kwangtung. It is fairly certain that he was an orphan at three. went to visit Hung-jen at thirty-four, and became a Buddhist priest in Canton at thirty-nine. See Lo Hsiang-lin, *ibid.*, pp. 143-156.

Shen-hsiu's prestige and influence soared to great heights. He was honored as "the Lord of the Law at the Two National Capitals of Ch'ang-an and Lo-yang, and the Teacher of Three Sovereigns." His movement, later known as the Northern School of Zen, almost completely dominated the religious and intellectual life of the time.

Some years before these triumphant events, Hui-neng, originally an illiterate fuel-wood peddler, preached radically new doctrines in Ts'ao-hsi, about 120 miles north of Canton. In 734, his pupil Shen-hui (670-762)[9] who, like Shen-hsiu before him, enjoyed strong support from the aristocrats and had a large following, openly attacked Shen-hsiu's school in the north. The freshness and the challenging spirit of their teachings became an irresistible attraction. A stampede was soon on, and their school, later known as the Southern School, eventually overshadowed the Northern School and from the ninth century onward, the story of Zen has been that of the Southern School.

The two schools are usually distinguished by the fact that while the Northern School advocates gradual enlightenment, the Southern School advocates sudden enlightenment. As a matter of emphasis, this is certainly correct. But Shen-hsiu did not rule out sudden enlightenment and neither Hui-neng nor Shen-hui rejected gradual enlightenment altogether. The contrast between the two schools is much deeper. It lies in the different concepts of the mind.

Both schools started from the major premise that Nirvāṇa is identical with the original substance of the Buddha-mind, which is the same as Buddha-nature, and that Buddha-nature is in all men so that all can become Buddhas. So far both schools remain within the Buddhist traditions of idealism and universal salvation. But while the Northern School teaches that the pure mind arises from absolute quietude and does so only after erroneous thoughts are eliminated, the Southern School insists that the mind cannot be split into parts and that all its activities are functions of Thusness (True Reality).[10] Consequently, the mind cannot be divided into the true mind without differentiation, on the one hand, and the false mind with differentiation, on the other. Furthermore, the

[9] For his biography see *Sung kao-seng chuan*, ch. 8, TSD. 50:756-757 and *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*, 5:24a-b. His dates are usually given as 668-760, but after recent research Hu Shih decided on 670-762. See *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology, Academica Sinica*, 29 (1958), p. 875; extra vol. 4 (1960), p. 6. He studied Confucianism and Taoism before be became a Buddhist priest. After he was thirty, he went south to see Hui-neng. Much affected, he returned north to preach the doctrine of sudden enlightenment. In 720 he was appointed to be a priest in Honan and in 745 he was invited to live in a temple in the eastern capital, Lo-yang. Eight years later he was banished to Kiangsi because he was suspected of "gathering large crowds with harmful motives."

[10] For this concept, see above, ch. 24, n.19.

Northern School considers the mind in its undisturbed state as calmness (*samādhi*) and the senses in their undisturbed state as wisdom (*prajñā*), but the Southern School refuses to accept the distinction, regarding both as of one substance and not two. In fact, it affirms the unity not only of the mind but of everything else. The Buddha-mind is everywhere so that anything can be an occasion for its realization at any moment and this realization can take place in any way. It was out of this major concept that the peculiar Zen methods have evolved.

The standard sayings of the school are: "Point directly to the human mind" and "See one's nature and become a Buddha." Everything other than the cultivation of the mind, such as reading scriptures, making offerings to the Buddha, reciting His name, joining the monastic order, are regarded as unnecessary. The total effect is to minimize, if not to wipe out, the whole Buddhist organization, creed, and literature and to reduce Buddhism to a concern with one's mind alone. The logical conclusions are that everyone can achieve enlightenment and become a Buddha, since everyone possesses the Buddha-nature,[11] that he can do so immediately, and that he can do so "in this very body." No matter how one looks at this movement, it was revolutionary in the true sense of the word.

Since the chief concern of the school is the Buddha-mind in everything, various methods were developed to realize it. Shen-hui himself taught "the absence of thought" so that the mind will return to its original state of tranquillity. Another Zen Master (though he cannot be said to belong to either the Northern or Southern tradition) emphasized "forgetting our feelings" so as to remove selfish clingings and evil desires. Still another Zen Master advocated "letting the mind take its own course" so it can be at ease and not be disturbed either by its own differentiated characters or by the phenomenal world, for both of these are, after all, manifestations of the Buddha-mind. The influence of Neo-Taoism and early Buddhism on this development is obvious.

So far these methods are still traditional. From the ninth century to the eleventh, however, novel and unconventional techniques were developed, and vigorously, if only occasionally, applied. One was travel, which was calculated to broaden one's perspective and deepen one's insight. When one's experience is enriched, one day he will suddenly intuit truth at the singing of a bird, the blooming of a flower, or a drop of rain. Another method was "never to tell too plainly,"[12] for the obvious reason that the student must discover truth himself.

The more interesting, more radical, and perhaps most misunderstood

[11] For the doctrine of universal salvation, see above, ch. 24 Introduction.
[12] *Pu-shuo-p'o.*

technique is the *koan*.[13] Literally *koan* means an official document on the desk, connoting a sense of important decision and the final determination of truth and falsehood. To this end Zen Masters made use of any story, problem, or situation, the more shocking the better. But more often than not, the method consists of a question and an enigmatic answer. It is often believed that such answers are due to the belief that truth is so mysterious, irrational, or paradoxical that only an illogical answer can reveal it. Nothing is farther from the truth. When a pupil asked, "Whenever there is any question, one's mind is confused. What is wrong?" and the answer was, "Kill! Kill!" this may sound absurd.[14] But when a pupil asked what the Buddha was, and the Master answered, "Three pounds of flax," it is not as silly as one may think.[15] Any alert mind will soon realize that conceptualization can never discover what the Buddha is and that he should return to his spontaneous mental faculty to look for the answer himself.

But the most puzzling technique is that of shouting and beating. Even these are not madness or dramatics but an unorthodox way of shocking the pupil out of his outmoded mental habits and preconceived opinions so that his mind will be pure, clear, and thoroughly awakened. In short, the whole philosophy of the various methods is to broaden a person's vision, sharpen his imagination, and sensitize his mind so that he can see and grasp truth instantly any time and anywhere. This type of mental training is utterly Chinese. Nothing like it can be found in the tradition of Indian meditation. In Indian meditation, the mind tries to avoid the external world, ignores outside influence, aims at intellectual understanding, and seeks to unite with the Infinite. Chinese meditation, on the other hand, works with the aid of external influence, operates in this world, emphasizes quick wit and insight, and aims at self-realization.

It was inevitable that such a philosophy would exercise a profound influence. Its impact on Chinese philosophy was great. The new doctrine of seriousness (*ching*)[16] in Neo-Confucianism was one of its direct products, and the whole idealistic Neo-Confucian movement of several hundred years, initiated by Lu Hsiang-shan (Lu Chiu-yüan, 1139-1193) and culminating in Wang Yang-ming (Wang Shou-jen, 1472-1529), was so much influenced by it that it has often been called Zen in Confucian

[13] *Kung-an* in Chinese and *koan* in Japanese.

[14] *Ts'ao-shan Pen-chi Ch'an-shih yü-lu* (Recorded Conversations of Zen Master Pen-chi, 840-901), TSD, 47:539.

[15] *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*, 19:14b. One of the most famous *koans*. *Pi-yen lu* (Records of the Green Cave), no. 12.

[16] See Appendix for comments on *Ching*. Also see below, ch. 34, comment on sec. 12, and lists of topics in chs. 31 and 32.

disguise. Even the Neo-Confucian tradition of compiling and publishing the recorded sayings of philosophers is an imitation of those of Zen.

The basic teachings of Zen are recorded in the *Liu-tsu t'an-ching* (Platform Scripture of the Sixth Patriarch). The following includes selections from it and also some from the *Shen-hui yü-lu* (Recorded Conversations of Shen-hui). In addition, there are selections from the *Lin-chi Hui-chao Ch'an-shih yü-lu* (Recorded Conversations of Zen Master I-hsüan, d. 867). He was the founder of the Lin-chi School, one of the seven schools that developed within the Southern School in the ninth century. Each had its peculiar method, but the Lin-chi "lightning" technique was the most radical of all.

A. THE PLATFORM SCRIPTURE[17]

3. Priest Hung-jen asked me (Hui-neng), "Whence have you come to this mountain to pay reverence to me? What do you wish from me?"

I answered, "Your disciple is a native of Ling-nan,[18] a citizen of Hsin-chou. I have purposely come a great distance to pay you reverence. I seek nothing other than to practice the Law of the Buddha."

The Great Master reproved me, saying, "You are from Ling-nan, and, furthermore, you are a barbarian. How can you become a Buddha?"

I answered, "Although people are distinguished as northerners and southerners, there is neither north nor south in the Buddha-nature. The

[17] These selections are made from the oldest version of the *Liu-tsu t'an-ching* discovered in a Tun-huang cave in 1900. In 1907 Sir Aurel Stein brought it to the British Museum. It contains about 11,000 Chinese characters and is included in TSD, no. 2007, 48:337-345. There are many mistakes in the Tun-huang copy. In these selections, the most obvious mistakes have been corrected. Minor corrections, however, have not been noted in footnotes. Sectioning follows the collated edition by Suzuki Teitarō and Kuda Rentarō, published in Tokyo in 1934, entitled *Tonkō shutsudo Rokuso dankyō* (The Platform Scripture of the Sixth Patriarch Uncovered at Tun-huang). For a complete translation and a lengthy discussion of this Tun-huang manuscript, see Wing-tsit Chan, trans., *The Platform Scripture, The Basic Classic of Zen Buddhism*, St. John's University Press, 1963.

There are five later versions of the *Liu-tsu t'an-ching*. The latest version (TSD no. 12008, 48:345-365) is dated 1291. It is included in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) editions of the Buddhist Canon of 1420-1440 and is therefore generally called the Ming Canon version. It has been in general use for centuries. For two English translations and a partial German version, see Bibliography under "Hui-neng." The Tun-huang version bears a very long title, of which *Liu-tsu . . . . t'an-ching* is only a part, and ascribes it to Hui-neng. Dr. Hu Shih thinks that it was probably by an eighth-century monk, most likely a follower of Shen-hui's school (*Philosophy East and West*, 3 [1953], p. 11). In any case, the later the version was, the more additions and interpolation, so that the Ming Canon version is twice as long as the oldest text. However, elaboration does not alter the general story or the fundamental teachings.

[18] Literally "South of the mountain ranges," in the region of present Canton in South China.

physical body of the barbarian and [that of][19] the monk are different. But what difference is there in their Buddha-nature?"

The Great Master intended to argue with me further, but, seeing people around, said nothing more. He ordered me to attend to duties among the rest. Then a lay attendant ordered me to the rice-pounding area[20] to pound rice. This I did for more than eight months.

4. One day the Fifth Patriarch (Hung-jen) suddenly called all his pupils to come to him. When we had already[21] assembled, he said, "Let me say this to you: Life and death are serious matters. You disciples are engaged all day in making offerings, going after fields of blessings[22] only, and you make no effort to achieve freedom from the bitter sea of life and death. If you are deluded in your own nature, how can blessings save you? Go to your rooms, all of you, and think for yourselves. Those who possess wisdom use the wisdom (*prajñā*) inherent in their own nature. Each of you must write a verse and present it to me. After I see the verses, I will give the robe and the Law to the one who understands the basic idea [of the Law preached by the Buddha] and will appoint him to be the Sixth Patriarch. Hurry, hurry!"

6. . . . . At midnight Head Monk Shen-hsiu, holding a candle, wrote a verse on the wall of the south corridor, without anyone knowing about it, which said:

> The body is the tree of perfect wisdom (*bodhi*)
> The mind is the stand of a bright mirror.
> At all times diligently wipe it.
> Do not allow it to become dusty.

7. . . . . The Fifth Patriarch said, "The verse you wrote shows some but not complete understanding. You have arrived at the front door but you have not yet entered it. Ordinary people, by practicing in accordance with your verse, will not fail. But it is futile to seek the supreme perfect wisdom while holding to such a view. One must enter the door and see his own nature. Go away and come back after thinking a day or two. Write another verse and present it to me. If then you have entered the door and have seen your own nature, I will give you the robe and the Law." Head Monk Shen-hsiu went away and for several days could not produce another verse.

8. . . . . I (Hui-neng) also composed a verse. . . . My verse says:

[19] Insertion according to Ui Hakuju, *Zenshūshi kenkyū* (Studies in the History of Zen), vol. 2, Tokyo, 1941, p. 119.

[20] A *fang*, which could be a sizable area or simply a room.

[21] Read *chi* (record) as *ch'i* (already), according to Ui, *ibid.*, p. 120.

[22] Where the blessings will keep on growing.