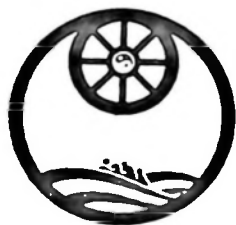


Early Ch'an in China and Tibet

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New Japanese Studies in Early Ch'an History

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The study of the early history of Ch'an Buddhism has, over the years, fascinated a small body of scholars who have dedicated themselves to the detailed research that such study entails. Investigation of the Tun-huang documents, as gradually they become available for research, has revealed a corpus of literature that relates to early Ch'an. The appraisal of this literature has given us a not inconsiderable knowledge of the historical background of early Ch'an.

The first studies were made in the late 1920s and early 1930s when such scholars as Hu Shih, Yabuki Keiki, Suzuki Daisetsu, Ui Hakuju, Kuno Hōryū, and others began publishing texts, editing them, collating various editions, and writing detailed studies of these materials. Hu Shih described in dramatic detail Shen-hui's attack on Northern Ch'an and his claims for Hui-neng as the Sixth Patriarch. Writings of priests of Northern Ch'an, histories purporting to prove the legitimacy of various schools, and a vast number of other works were brought to light. Studies were continued in postwar years by a handful of scholars, but it was not until the late 1950s and early 1960s that scholars turned again to detailed studies of the Tun-huang documents. Hu Shih resumed his interest; Paul Demiéville continued his studies. In Japan major contributions were made by several men, but by far the most significant were those made by Yanagida Seizan. In addition to producing a constant succession of learned articles, more popular works and translations, and the monumental *Shoki Zenshū shissō no kenkyū*, Professor Yanagida has made translations of several early works with detailed annotations, published in the *Zen no goroku* series. Indeed, without the studies of Professor Yanagida and other Japanese scholars, our knowledge of early Chinese Ch'an would be negligible.

I intend here to summarize the results of some of these recent studies without going into great detail and without providing specific references to the large number of works these scholars have examined. I do not pretend to be able to offer any new or substantive contributions to our

knowledge. It is obvious, however, that many new elements have been added to our conceptions of the early history of Ch'an.

One of the most peculiar features of this early Ch'an history is that for the most part it has nothing whatsoever to do with the Ch'an of the five schools and seven teachings that derive from Ma-tsu (709-788), Lin-ch'i (d.866) and other famous T'ang masters. In fact, we know considerably more about the origins and development of the schools that no longer exist, that were virtually forgotten for over a thousand years, than we do about the origins of the kind of Ch'an that developed in China, was transmitted to Japan and that is preserved there today. We have, of course, names and lineages, concocted at an early time to establish its legitimacy, but we have no contemporary documents that lend clues to its early history. The Tun-huang documents contain no materials relating to this school of Ch'an, whereas they are rich in documents concerning Shen-hui, several branches of the so-called Northern School, Ox-head Ch'an, and Ch'an materials translated into Tibetan. There are several possible reasons one could advance for this lack: materials relating to this school did not exist; if they did exist they never reached Tun-huang; or the Tibetans were simply not sufficiently interested to translate such materials.

Let us examine some of this new material to see what inferences can be drawn from it. The story of Shen-hui's attack in 734 on the so-called Northern Ch'an of Shen-hsiu and his claims that this school represented a gradual approach to enlightenment as opposed to the sudden teaching that he advocated, is of course derived from the Tun-huang documents, but it is too well known to merit repetition. One should note, however, that Shen-hui's Ch'an, although it champions Hui-neng, is not the predecessor in any way of the surviving Ch'an schools. Shen-hui's school, together with Northern Ch'an, lost out in the turmoil that overwhelmed the T'ang from the mid-eighth century onward, virtually destroying the Buddhism that centered in the capital cities. The final blow was the Hui-ch'ang persecution of the 840s from which these schools of Ch'an failed to recover.

To begin with, I should like to summarize what is known of the development of Ch'an in China, leading up to the so-called Tung-shan fa-men, the school of the East Mountain, associated with Tao-hsin and Hung-jen, the Fourth and Fifth Patriarchs. I base myself largely on an article by Yanagida that appeared in *Zen Bunka Kenkyūjo Kiyō*, v. 6.

Zen as a sect is not found in India; that a well-known priest should devote himself solely to meditation practice is a Chinese phenomenon. The term *hsi-ch'an*, in the sense of practicing Ch'an *samādhi* or meditation sitting, appears first in the *Kao seng ch'uan* and the appellation Ch'an or Ch'an-tsung was applied by those outside the group to priests who concentrated on meditation. Indeed, the term Ch'an-tsung, meaning Ch'an Sect, does not appear until the latter half of the eighth century. The sources of Ch'an lie in the Buddhism of the non-Chinese Kingdom of Northern Wei. This Buddhism differed to no great extent from that practiced elsewhere in China, but at the time intercourse with the nations of Central Asia was quite active and Yogācāra, Vijñaptimātra and other forms of Mahayana Buddhism were introduced. At Lo-yang, the capital, the number of meditation masters coming from the West increased, for this city at the end of the silk road was the goal, the haven for priests coming from Central Asia. It was in this atmosphere that Ch'an was born; it was here that Bodhidharma, only one of many Central Asian meditation masters, arrived in China.

Our only source for the history of this early Ch'an is the *Erh ju ssu hsing lun*, the "Discourse on the Two Entrances and Four Practices," the only one of many works attributed to Bodhidharma that can be considered authentic. Professor Yanagida has published an edited text and Japanese translation, *Daruma no Goroku* in the *Zen no Goroku* series. The preface to the edition found at Tun-huang is by Bodhidharma's disciple T'an-lin who makes the claim that Bodhidharma was the third son of an Indian king, a legend that still persists in Ch'an literature. The *Lo yang chia lan chi*, the "Record of Lo-yang Temples," identifies him merely as a native of Central Asia.

At this time there was a sharp division between priests who lectured and studied scriptures and those who practiced meditation. Textual records to the conflict are numerous; but it is evident that both practices are vital to Buddhism. The famous T'ien-t'ai priest Nan-yüeh Hui-ssu, for example, is said to have spent his days in lecturing and his nights in sitting. Indeed, no textual evidence remains to tell us how the early Ch'an people practiced meditation or what particular works they used. The legend of Bodhidharma sitting silently facing the wall is no more than a later myth. There is no support either, in this Tun-huang text, for the claim that Bodhidharma used the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and wrote a commentary on it. Professor Yanagida believes that the work that influ-

enced this text the most was the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*; but the *Vimalakīrti* can not be limited merely to Ch'an, for it has long been one of the most popular of works throughout all of Chinese Buddhism.

The "Discourse on the Two Entrances and Four Practices" talks of the essential gates for entering the way: entering into principle and entering into practice. Entering into principle is to awaken to the religion through teaching. This is scarcely the "separate teaching outside the scriptures" so much spoken of in later Ch'an, yet one cannot say that it represents a total dependence on textual writing. It is to awaken to the teaching of the historical Buddha; in other words it is to believe with deep faith that all sentient beings are possessed of the Buddha-nature.

We know little of the men who came to be regarded as the Second and Third Patriarchs of Ch'an, but by the middle of the Seventh Century a substantial establishment existed on the East Mountain. Among certain elements of this group was a growing consciousness of themselves as a separate school, and a need was felt to establish a tradition that would provide them with a viable history of their origins. We do not know when the monks of the school of the East Mountain first referred to Bodhidharma as the founder of the school. The first sources to mention it, the *Ch'uan fa pao chi*, the "Records of the Transmission of the Law" and the *Leng chia shih tzu chi* "Records of the Transmission of the Laṅka" are of a later date. Around this time the monk Fa-ch'ung was claiming Bodhidharma as founder of the Leng-chia or Laṅkāvatāra School. A disciple of the Fifth Patriarch by the name of Hsuan-yi attempted to take over this Laṅkāvatāra tradition. It was his disciple Chiung-chiao who wrote the "Records of the Transmission of the Laṅka." One cannot attribute the introduction of Laṅkāvatāra thought to Tao-hsin, the Fourth Patriarch; there is evidence instead of close contact with the T'ien-t'ai school. In fact, Ch'an and T'ien-t'ai meditation practices were probably established at roughly the same time in the early sixth century.

In the establishment of the East Mountain School one must note the appearance of the *Chin kang san mei ching*, the "Diamond Samādhi Sūtra." This is a spurious sutra, composed in China in the late seventh century. One purpose of the work was to tie together Bodhidharma's discourse of the "Two Entrances and Four Practices" with the then-current East Mountain thought and at the same time attribute to them the authority of words spoken by the Buddha. This work is strongly

influenced by *Laṅkāvatāra* thought and established Tathāgata-garbha concepts in this early Ch'an. It reflects the status of this East Mountain school in the late seventh century. Because it had attracted a large following it could claim affinity with the Buddha; it was not necessarily the case of a weak cause attempting to strengthen itself, but rather that of a strong cause adding further strength to itself. By the end of the seventh century the East Mountain under Hung-jen was a major religious establishment.

Hung-jen, the Fifth Patriarch, had many disciples, some of whom figure most prominently in the history of Ch'an (see chart). A large number of them were able to establish, with varying degrees of success, schools of their own. And remarkably, many of them left records, traditions of their schools, and minor works, many of which have been preserved at Tun-huang. The teachings of four of these disciples are associated with the Northern School:

1) The school of Shen-hsiu. This school is most closely identified with what came to be known as Northern Ch'an. In the first four decades of the eighth century it was one of the most powerful schools of Buddhism in the capital cities and it held very close ties to the Imperial Court. Its priests were given the highest honors. Ui Hakuju has studied the rise and fall of this school in detail, and although somewhat outdated his work still provides much useful information. Although Shen-hui accused this school of taking a gradual approach, Tun-huang documents give evidence that Northern Ch'an also adopted many of the sudden teachings, perhaps because of the success Shen-hui had gained. Ma-ho-yen, or Mahayana, the Chinese representative in the religious debates at Lhasa, stemmed from this school.

2) The school that produced the *Leng chia shih tzu chi*, or the "Records of the Transmission of the *Laṅka*." The work is important historically and represents a conscious effort to establish the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* as an essential element in Ch'an teaching. It attempts to epitomize Bodhidharma's thought, as found in the Discourse on the Two Entrances and Four Practices, within the *Laṅkāvatāra* tradition. The author found Bodhidharma's concept of "entering into principle" a convenient place on which to focus. The book makes Gunabhadra, the translator of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, into Bodhidharma's teacher, thus assuring a connection with this sutra. The work is typically Northern Ch'an and supports the claims of Shen-hsiu as the heir of the Fifth Patriarch. This work and the following one have been translated

and annotated by Professor Yanagida in volume 2 of the *Zen no goroku* series.

3) The school descending from Fa-ju (638–689). This school flourished very briefly at Sung-shan and is distinguished for having composed the earliest Ch'an history that is still extant, the *Ch'uan fa pao chi*, dating to around 713. This work is the only text to mention Fa-ju, other than an inscription that is preserved elsewhere. The text supports Shen-hsiu but makes him an heir of Fa-ju rather than the Fifth Patriarch.

4) The school derived from Hui-an, otherwise known as Lao-an, who lived to be 128, we are told (582–709). There are problems with the lineage of this school that cannot be examined here. One of Hui-an's heirs, Hui-kuang is the compiler of a document found at Tun-huang known as the *T'un wu chen tsung lun*, "On the True Teaching of Sudden Enlightenment." While it reflects Laṅkā and typical Northern Ch'an thought, it combines them with a considerable admixture of Shen-hui's sudden enlightenment doctrines.

Let us now turn to a consideration of the work known as the *Li tai fa pao chi*, or "Historical Record of the Law," and the school that it represents. Here again we are indebted to Professor Yanagida for an annotated translation and established text. The *Fa pao chi* itself dates to around 780 and was written to champion the teachings of a school of Ch'an that was situated in Szechuan. The work to a great extent comprises a compendium of the teachings of a priest known as Wu-chu (714–774) and was composed in the Chien-nan area of Szechuan, a region that was at times the center of Sino-Tibetan struggles. The book itself is aware of the conflict between Northern and Southern Ch'an, but in an effort to establish its own independence, keeps itself aloof from the conflict, which at any rate was no longer a problem by this time. The work, however, is clearly in the sudden enlightenment tradition. One purpose of this book was to refute the Laṅkāvatāra lineage and to deny any connection between Gunabhadra and Bodhidharma. It accepted Shen-hui's version of the transmission and acknowledged Hui-neng as the Sixth Patriarch, but invented an elaborate story to prove that Bodhidharma's robe was in its possession. Where Shen-hui has the Sixth Patriarch state that the robe was no longer to be handed down, the *Fa pao chi* devised a story whereby Chih-hsien, the school's first patriarch, had been given the robe by the Empress Wu, who had previously requested the robe of the Sixth Patriarch. Chih-hsien, 609–702, handed the robe to his heir Chu-chi, (669–732), known also as T'ang

ho-shang, or the priest T'ang. Chu-chi handed down the robe and the teaching to Wu-hsiang (684–762), better known as Chin ho-shang, who was a native of Silla. Wu-hsiang handed the teaching and the robe to Wu-chu.

Before discussing this school in more detail it would be wise to turn briefly to Tibet to see what was happening in this area fairly close to Szechuan. Here I use the findings of Obata Hironobu, a colleague of Professor Yanagida. Obata relates a story contained in an ancient historical record, the *Sba bzed* (see also R.A. Stein. 'Sba bzed, une chronique ancien de bSam-yas', Paris, 1961) in which two famous priests, Sañ-śi and Gsal-snañ, narrate stories on the occasion of the founding of a new temple in Lhasa.

The story goes like this:

Sañ-śi was the son of a former envoy to China and was the friend of the Prince who was later to become King Khri-sroñ lde-brtsan (742–797). The Prince asked Sañ-śi various questions about some Buddhist texts he was reading and Sañ-śi provided him with instruction. The King, seeing that his son was interested in Buddhism, decided to send Sañ-śi, together with four others, to China to learn of the Buddhism there. Since there had been a prediction in China that a bodhisattva would be coming from the West, Sañ-śi and his group were honored greatly. They met the Chinese Emperor who wanted Sañ-śi to remain as a close minister because he was the son of the former envoy. Sañ-śi, however, declined and the group was given one thousand rolls of the scriptures to take back with them. On their return they encountered the Priest Chin (Chin ho-shang) of I-chou who was strolling along with a tiger tethered to a rope. He told the group that the King of Tibet had died and that the country was dominated by two ministers who were followers of the Bon religion and who were intent upon destroying Buddhism. Chin stated, however, that should the present Tibetan Prince, upon reaching adulthood, speak heresy then he should be preached to, at which time he would turn to the Buddhist faith. He then presented them with three rolls of sacred texts and predicted that Buddhism would be spread in Tibet by a bhikṣu, Sāntarakṣita, the son of the King of Bengal. The group stayed for two months, then paid a visit to Wu-t'ai-shan and after further adventures returned home to find that all that the Priest Chin had said was true. Therefore, they hid the sacred scriptures to keep them safe. One day the Prince spoke of Lao Tzu and other Chinese teachings. Sañ-śi hurried to recover the

hidden Buddhist texts, had the Prince read them, thus converting him to Buddhism.

Admittedly there are parts of this story that are obviously of a later hand, but if we examine the history of this time there is much that holds up. In 742 the Prince, later to become King, was born. Since the reigning King died in 754 and the Prince ascended the throne at twelve years of age, it may be assumed that Sañ-śi's visit to China was around 751. It was in this year that the Kingdom of Nan-chao (in present-day Yunnan), that bordered on southern Szechuan, disassociated itself with the T'ang court and allied itself with Tibet in an association that was to last until 794. With this Tibet gained a direct route to Szechuan running through Nan-chao. Since Chin ho-shang, the Priest Chin, lived in I-chou in Chien-nan, a part of Szechuan, it is logical that Sañ-śi should pass through this area on his return home. In 754, on the death of the King, ministers affiliated with the Bon religion gained control and began an anti-Buddhist movement that continued until about 761, when the King became an adult. Meanwhile in China the An Lu-shan rebellion occurred in 755, lasting until 763, and in the seventh month of the following year Emperor Hsüan-tsung took refuge in the Chien-nan area of Szechuan and Su-tsung ascended the throne. In 759, according to the *Fa pao chi*, Wu-chu appeared at services that were being conducted at Chin ho-shang's temple. Perhaps around this time Sañ-śi was on his way home and hid the sacred texts. At any rate, in 761 the King attained adulthood and the two anti-Buddhist ministers met an unnatural end. Buddhism now was officially adopted and the priest Gsal-snañ was sent to India by the King to invite Śāntarakṣita. In 762 Chin ho-shang died, an epidemic swept Tibet and supporters of the Bon religion once again gained power. Buddhist activities were stopped and Śāntarakṣita returned to India. In 763 the Tibetans swept over North China and occupied Ch'ang-an. The conquering general, a member of the Buddhist faction, was appointed minister on his return home, and Buddhism became firmly established in Tibet. At this time Tibetans were greatly attracted to Buddhism and it would seem only natural that Buddhism should have entered that country both from China and India.

Let us turn briefly back to the *Fa pao chi*. This work, as mentioned before, dates to around 780. Essentially it represents the recorded sayings of the Priest Wu-chu, as compiled by an unknown disciple, with a history of the school, deliberately written to enhance Wu-chu's prestige and teachings. The work lays great emphasis on Wu-hsiang, or Chin

ho-shang whom we met in the Sañ-śi story. The principle sources for his biography are the *Fa pao chi*, the *Pei shan lu* written by his disciple, Tsung-mi's commentary on the *Yüan chüeh ching* and the *Sung kao seng ch'uan*. With the exception of this latter work, all the information provided is fairly similar. Chin was a Korean priest, characteristically identified as the third son of the King of Silla. In 728 he arrived in China and met Emperor Hsüan-tsung. Later he went to Szechuan where he became heir to Chu-chi, received Bodhidharma's robe and the name Wu-hsiang. He is said to have met the Emperor a second time when the latter came to Szechuan. His school is referred to as the Chiung-chung Tsung 淨衆 after the name of his temple, and he appears to have had the support of many high officials. Undoubtedly at this time he was a man of great renown. At the same time in Szechuan there was a sect known as the Pao-t'ang 保唐 school. This was the name of the temple occupied by Wu-chu, who later was to become Chin ho-shang's heir. Wu-chu was for a long time a layman and received his sanction from another layman Ch'en Ch'u-chang, a disciple of Hui-an. But so famous was Chin ho-shang that Wu-chu found himself obliged to become associated with him. It is a very strange story indeed: to have Wu-chu become the heir of a man he never met. At any rate, after Chin ho-shang's death the Pao-t'ang school spread throughout Szechuan. There is considerable evidence to show that both the Chiung-chung and Pao-t'ang schools were known in Tibet. Although the *Fa pao chi* is not found in Tibetan translation, mention of both Chin ho-shang and Wu-chu is found in Tibetan texts. There is at present no positive proof but it is fairly certain that both these schools, representing the teachings of the sudden enlightenment doctrine, reached Tibet in the latter half of the eighth century. Tun-huang was under Tibetan control from the late eighth century to the mid-ninth century. Tibetan confidence and consciousness of its own culture was high. Great temples were constructed in Lhasa. There is a tendency to view the documents discovered at Tun-huang as representative of some kind of local phenomenon, developed under the Tibetan occupation, but one perhaps may better see Tun-huang as the focal point for the interaction of Chinese and Tibetan cultures.

Tibet was vitally interested in all the various schools of Ch'an of which it was aware, and by the end of the eighth century all schools of Ch'an, no matter what their origins, advocated some form of sudden enlightenment.

Indian Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism differed, at least in terms of

the Ch'an Buddhism with which the Tibetans had become acquainted. In Buddhism, whatever the school, the aim is always enlightenment, but the method for achieving it differs radically. In India it was still a step-by-step process, a series of rebirths over a long period of time until one was suddenly confronted with the opportunity for enlightenment. In China, of course, it was achievement in this life. Interest in these conflicting views was high and the King of Tibet called for a debate, inviting to Lhasa high priests from India and China. The date of this conference, or debate is uncertain; Japanese scholars are inclined to favor the year 781. Unfortunately, the man called to represent the cause of sudden enlightenment was a priest from Tun-huang named Ma-ho-yen. By training and origin he was from the Northern Ch'an school. Tsung-mi has identified him as a member of Shen-hui's school, but this is in error. In his own preface to the *Tun wu ta ch'eng cheng lu chüeh*, 頓悟大乘正理決, "The True Principle of Sudden Enlightenment Mahayana," a document found at Tun-huang, he identifies his teachers as Chiang-mo-tsang and I-fu, both prominent priests of Northern Ch'an. In this work he sets out his own position. But Ma-ho-yen's arguments were weak: he had to prove the validity of sudden awakening; he was obliged to justify areas of which he himself was not sure; he quoted from works that had been forged in China. It was not unnatural that he lost the debate. Tibet lost interest in this Chinese Ch'an; the Chinese themselves turned to other forms of the teaching. Virtually all knowledge of these Chinese teachings of Ch'an lay buried until the Tun-huang documents were brought to light. Now, thanks to our Japanese colleagues, we are beginning to learn more and more of what these documents contain.

