

The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism

JOHN R. MCRAE

7. *Fa-ju*

The first of Hung-jen's disciples to make his mark in the Chinese capitals was Fa-ju (638-89), originally of Lu-chou (Ch'ang-chih hsien, Shansi) and, at the very end of his life, a resident of the famous Shao-lin ssu on Mount Sung. Fa-ju's biography is known from the *CFPC* and from an anonymous epitaph that contains the earliest statement in any Ch'an text of the "transmission of the lamp" doctrine. Professor Yanagida has studied these two works closely and has concluded that Fa-ju was a figure of considerable importance during his own lifetime, but was intentionally slighted and eventually forgotten within just a few decades of his death.⁸⁹

Fa-ju's first known Buddhist teacher was Hui-ming, a meditator with Mādhyamika affiliations also known as Ch'ing-pu Ming, or "Blue-robed Ming." Hui-ming was noted for his vigorous ascetic practices and had just finished his own studies under Fa-min (579-645) and Chih-yen (577-654) when Fa-ju most probably joined him, during the years 655-59. Fa-min emphasized "nonattainment" (*wu-te*), and Chih-yen taught the contemplations of impurity, compassion, and birthlessness. This combination of teachings no doubt filtered down through Hui-ming to Fa-ju, even though the two men were together only briefly.⁹⁰

Soon after Fa-ju left home to become a monk, at age nineteen (= 658), he went to study under Hung-jen. Thus the epitaph accurately points out that, when Hung-jen died in 674, Fa-ju had been with him for sixteen years. Fa-ju's whereabouts for the next eight or nine years, i.e., from 674 to 683, are unknown, but he must have spent at least the latter part of this period in Ch'ang-an and/or Lo-yang. This inference is based on the *CFPC*'s information that his name was advanced for a position in the official *samgha* administration after Emperor Kao-tsung's death at the very end of 683. Fa-ju avoided official appointment by moving to Shao-lin ssu on Mount Sung, where he stayed for several years without being recognized.

Fa-ju began to teach the Dharma in 686 after a concerted request from *Dhyāna* Master Hui-tuan of Lo-yang and the entire community of Shao-lin ssu. From this beginning until his death three years later, Fa-ju taught constantly, always responding quickly to the doubts of his many students. Just before his death he is supposed to have said (according to the *CFPC*): "After this [students of Ch'an] should study under *Dhyāna* Master [Shen]-hsiu of Yü-ch'üan ssu in Ching-chou." The reader should remember this instruction, as well as Hui-tuan's request, when we discuss the biographies of Shen-hsiu's disciples I-fu and P'u-chi.⁹¹

Fa-ju's prominence was short-lived, however. He is treated as a major figure in the *CFPC* but listed as a teacher of only local prominence in the *LCJFC*. Yanagida suspects that the description of Fa-ju in the latter text as a resident of far-off Lu-chou rather than of the famous Shao-lin ssu was intended as a deliberate slight. Certainly Shen-hui's attacks on P'u-chi and the Northern School betray a complete ignorance of Fa-ju's significance.⁹² Although Fa-ju had no known disciples of any prominence,⁹³ he was important as an early exponent of the new religious message of Ch'an in the area of the Chinese capitals. Since he was almost certainly the originator of—or, at least, the first to disseminate—the transmission theory that occurs in his epitaph (and that will be discussed in Chapter IV, Section 9), Fa-ju should be remembered as a significant figure in the history of Ch'an.

8. Shen-hsiu: Biographical Sources

Shen-hsiu (606?-706) was the preeminent figure of the Northern School. Without him the Northern School would not have existed, and no record of the East Mountain Teaching would have survived. Without him the development of the Ch'an School itself would have been long delayed—for decades, at the very least. For Shen-hsiu's spiritual training earned him the strong personal support of an empress, the enthusiastic adulation of the populace, and the religious dedication of a large number of disciples. Of aristocratic and perhaps even royal heritage himself, Shen-