

History, Ideology, and General Ideological History: A Case Study of Chan Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty

Zhaoguang Ge

Introduction

An increasing number of studies on the history of Chan Buddhism have been published by Chinese scholars in recent years. Not counting the early work by scholars such as Hu Shi and Yin Shun or other scattered research and translations that appeared before the 1980s, a dozen or more studies were published on the mainland during the 1980s and 1990s. After my own *Chanzong yu Zhongguo wenhua* 禪宗與中國文化 (Chan Buddhism and Chinese Culture) (1986), other titles included *Chanzong sixiang de xingcheng yu fazhan* 禪宗思想的形成與發展 (The Formation and Development of Chan Ideology) (1991) by Hong Xiuping, *Zhongguo Chanzong sixiang licheng* 中國禪宗思想歷程 (The Ideological Course of Chan Buddhism) (1992) by Pan Guiming, *Zhongguo Chanzong tongshi* 中國禪宗通史 (A Comprehensive History of Chan Buddhism) (1993) by Du Jiwen and Wei Daoru, my *Zhongguo Chan sixiangshi* 中國禪思想史 (A History of Chinese Chan Buddhism) (1995), *Zhongguo Chanzong sixiang fazhanshi* 中國禪宗思想發展史 (The History of the Development of Chinese Chan Buddhism) (1997) by Ma Tianxiang, and *Tangwudai Chanzongshi* 唐五代禪宗史 (Chan Buddhism during the Tang and Five Dynasties) (1999) by Yang Zengwen. In Taiwan, Cai Rixin's *Zhongguo Chanzong de xingcheng* 中國禪宗的形成 (The Formation of Chinese Chan Buddhism) was published in 2000 and Liu Guozong's *Chanzong sixiangshi gaishuo* 禪宗思想史概說 (Historical Overview of Chinese Chan Buddhism) in 2001. In addition to these works of scholarly research, major progress has been made in the archiving of material and the publication of primary materials such as the Chinese manuscripts on Chan Buddhism from Dunhuang, *Chanzong quanshu* 禪宗全書 (The Complete Works of Chan Buddhism), new editions of the *Tanjing* 壇經 (The Platform Sutra) and *Shenhui yulu* 神會語錄 (Discourses of Shenhui), and

Z. Ge (✉)

National Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies, Fudan University, Hong Kong, China
e-mail: gezhaoguang2006@yahoo.com.cn

dictionaries on Chan Buddhism, all of which have greatly facilitated further research. However, in my opinion, despite all of these, the quality of the research published has made little progress. Many of these works echo what others have written before, leaving questions unanswered; old problems have not been solved, while new questions have emerged.

The above is more self-reflection than criticism of others. After I finished writing my *Zhongguo Chan sixiangshi* in 1993 which was published in 1995, I suspended my research into the subject for a long time. One reason was that my time and energy were put into another project. But another reason was that my research on Chan Buddhism had stumbled upon obstacles, such as the following: How do we interpret Chan Buddhism? How do we explain “Chan”? When writing about Chan ideology, there is the problem of how to break out of the mainstream of historical thought. If we wish not only to go beyond the records in *Denglu* 燈錄 (The Transmission of the Lamp) but also to move beyond the modern works on Chan history, how can we weed through the old ideas and bring forth the new? I have not yet found the answers to these questions, but in this article I will set out some of my thoughts.

Rewriting the History of Chan Buddhism

The Chinese historian Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) wrote in his “Gushi bianpai” 古史辨派 (Debates on Ancient History) that ancient history is a “faulty chronology of layers” and that “false history” needs to be weeded out. In order to eliminate false history, it is necessary to comb through historical documents to find genuine historical facts.¹ However, the downside of this method is that it attaches too much attention to “falsehoods.” Historian Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969) pointed out that hidden in the false history were facts. Chen suggested that if historians could determine the date and authorship of documents that had been intentionally falsified, then suspicious material would become of historical value.² As the French scholar Michel Foucault (1926–1984) wrote, we cannot simply erase false history from the “faulty chronology of layers” because it has already affected the work of historians and the ideas of later generations.³

¹ Gu Jiegang, preface to *Gushibian* 古史辨·自序 (Debates on Ancient History), 2nd ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 1:52, 138, 187.

² Chen Yinke, “Liang yi dacheng qixin lun weizhikai xuzhong zhi zhenshiliao” 《梁譯大乘起信論偽智愷序中之真史料》 (True Historical Information of the Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana translated in the Liang dynasty), in *Jinmingguan Conggao erbian* 金明館叢稿二編 (Collected works of Chen Yinke volume 2) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 132–136.

³ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002).

Let us take as an example the genealogy of Chan Buddhism in *Denglu*. The traditional *Denglu* contains a chronological record of the different schools of Chan Buddhism. The advantage of this is that the sequence is clear and it was possible to continue adding new data after confirmation of the genealogy, not only recording all the monks but also leaving behind a complete overview for history. However, the drawback is that if we reconstruct history based on records of monks organized according to celebrity status, position, and school, there is the danger that the information has been manipulated and of “the teacher gaining fame because of his disciple.” In the traditional *Denglu*, Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (720–814), a Chan master during the Tang dynasty, was listed under Mazu 馬祖 (709–788), another Chan master. Baizhang Huaihai and Xitang Zhizang 西堂智藏 (735–817) were identified as the two most important masters. But as I mentioned in my *A History of Chinese Chan Buddhism*, Baizhang Huaihai became increasingly prominent after the compilation of the *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (Jingde Records of the Transmission of the Lamp), in which his story is given color and emphasis.⁴ The story of “Ye yazi” 野鴨子 or “Wild Ducks,” for example, according to the early record in *Wuxie heshang* 五泄和尚 (*Wuxie Monk*), in volume 15 of *Zutang ji* 祖堂集 (*Collection of Ancestors’ Hall*), originally was attributed to Baizhang Weizheng 百丈惟政, but in later records, such as *juan* 3 (volume 3) of *Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元 (*Collection of the Five Lamps*), *juan* 1 (volume 1) of *Guzun su yulu* 古尊宿語錄 (*Analects of the Ancient Eminent Masters*), and *juan* 6 (volume 6) no. 53 of *Biyuan lu* 碧岩錄 (*Record of Green Rock*), its attribution was changed, and it became the most important enlightenment dialogue written by Baizhang Huaihai. Historians of Chan interpret this short anecdote differently. In fact, it seems that Baizhang Huaihai was not the most important disciple of the Mazu school. In the *Tanggu Hangzhou Kaiyuansi Shimendao*, *Chanshi daming* 唐故洪州開元寺石門道一禪師塔銘 (An Inscription at the Master of Kaiyuan Temple in Hong Province) written by Master Quan Deyu 權德輿 (759–818), Baizhang Huaihai was not even on the list of 11 most important Chan disciples of the Mazu school at that time. Even Chen Yu 陳翽, who later wrote the tombstone inscription for Baizhang Huaihai and was confronted with the historical facts, could only explain that Baizhang “was very humble and not seeking fame, therefore his grave inscription only listed his name.”⁵ However, Baizhang later became an important figure in Mazu legend—an obvious case of revisionism by later generations. Studies of Chan history up to the present, in the interest of emphasizing *Nong Chan* 農禪—the integration of farming into Chan—give Baizhang and his phrase “One day without work is one day without food” a key role in the history of Chan while ignoring Huaihai’s relatively reserved attitude of entering into the Hangzhou School of Chan. He went from being unknown among mid-Tang believers to a prominent place in *Denglu*, from the individual style

⁴ Ge Zhaoguang, *Zhongguo chan sixiangshi* 中國禪思想史 (A History of Chinese Chan Buddhism) (1995), 303.

⁵ *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Complete Works of the Tang) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), *juan* 446.

and behavior of Huaihai at the time of *Nong Chan*, and still later became a key figure of Chan Buddhism. Could archeological excavations from this period bring new information to light? Until now I do not believe Chan studies have looked into this possibility and instead have followed in the footsteps of tradition.⁶

It is not only the position of individual masters but the entire traditional Chan genealogy that is suspect. Many times, history was rewritten in order to emphasize the importance of one master's family while diminishing the importance of another and to glorify their own school's history. Some masters went so far as to "adopt" Chan followers from other schools in order to increase their importance or to add branches to give their school roots in another family that included famous names. This kind of fabrication of family and clan genealogies continues in the present, for example, the Shitou schema. In *Zhongguo Chanzong tongshi* (1993), Du Jiwen and Wei Daoru indicate that Qingyuan Xingsi 青原行思 (740–?) was not listed, and it was not until the *Zutang ji* that doubts were raised about whether it was revisionism of later generations.⁷ In *Chanzong sixiang de xingcheng yu fazhan* (1991), Hong Xiuping notes, "Nanyue Huairang and Qingyuan Xingsi gained fame only because of Mazu and Xiqian." He also indicates that Qingyuan Xingsi and Shitou Xiqian 石頭希遷 (fl. eighth century) at that time did not belong to the same school, "their merging took place later," which is correct.⁸ However, although they did express suspicion about the identities of figures such as Tianhuang Daowu 天皇道悟 and Yaoshan Weiyuan 藥山惟儼 (751–834), they followed in the tradition of scholars such as Du and Wei and probed into clause 4 *Guanyu shitou zongxi ji qi chanfeng de kaocha* (An Examination of Shitou Schema and their Chan Style). A closer look shows that not only Shitou is listed late, but even the identities and lineages of key figures such as Danxia Tianran 丹霞天然, Yaoshan Weiyuan, and Tianhuang Daowu are suspects. Putting those biased records of *Denglu* aside and focusing on other records from the same period, such as inscriptions on stone tablets, and data that are not listed according to schools, such as the *Sengzhuan* 僧傳 (Biography of Monks), it may be possible to establish their true identities and origins. In this context, it is possible that Danxia Tianran, Tianhuang Daowu, and Yaoshan Weiyuan all belonged to the most victorious Mazu school at that time. However, because of the Shitou records, their entries were later revised, resulting in a change in the genealogy.⁹ If this is the case, I am afraid that the origins of later families including Weiyang 滄仰, Yunmen 雲門, Fayan 法眼, Linji 臨濟, and Caodong 曹洞 are all unclear, which is exactly what Hu Shi wrote in a letter to Yanagida Seizan. Many forged letters and fabricated historical records appeared during the mid- and late Tang periods, which then became raw material for the *Jingde Chuandeng lu*. Because there were

⁶ Another case against Baizhang Huaihai is Zhangjing Huaihui (756–815). See Ge, *Zhongguo chan sixiangshi*, chapter 5, 305.

⁷ Du Jiwen and Wei Daoru, *Zhongguo Chanzongshi* 中國禪宗通史 (A Comprehensive History of Chan Religion) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Guji Publishing House, 1993) 274–275.

⁸ Hong Xiuping, *Chanzong sixiang de xingcheng yu fazhan* 禪宗思想的形成與發展 (The Formation and Development of Chan Ideology) (Kaohsiung: Foguang chubanshe, 1991).

⁹ *Zhongguo Chan sixiangshi*, 295–302.

many movements competing for power and influence, the period from Dali (766–779) to Yuanhe (806–820) was the most important for the Southern School of Chan.¹⁰ As a result, the history of Chan became tainted with false information. If we want to get to the truth, we must do intellectual archeology research. We will discover a seemingly clear and orderly history, but is it sketched and patched up? Sometimes, history is shaped by later generations who omit facts they deem unimportant. But whether they are important or not is for yet later people to decide. Although more recent history is well organized, it does not necessarily reflect the truth, as Chen Yinke wrote in his review of *Zhongguo Zhexueshi* (A History of Chinese Philosophy) by Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895–1990), "The harder you try to systematically arrange sayings of ancient sages, the more you deviate from their original intention."¹¹ When we apply Foucault's archeological method of dusting layer by layer, we examine the color of each layer and try to deduce why each was painted the way it was. I wonder, can we move beyond the traditional investigation of *Denglu* in order to examine the real history of Chan Buddhism? There are a large number of extant historical documents from the Tang dynasty, including newly discovered inscriptions on stone tablets and new finds from Dunhuang, all of which can help reconstruct the history of Chan. However, at present, studies of Chan Buddhism are still built almost exclusively on the foundation of *The Transmission of the Lamp*, which is unfortunate.¹²

It is worth noting that even the term "*Chanzong*," or Chan Buddhism, is suspect. The moment that a school within Chanzong is sorting out the names of its masters, it has already started to edit history. But in fact, there were quite a few schools of Chan Buddhism coexisting in early times, not as that later historical record narrowed down to only the South Chan Buddhism. If we look at Tang-dynasty sources, it is clear that in the second half of the eighth century, the Chan masters shared popularity with other Buddhist masters such as the dharma masters and the discipline masters, and Chan was a branch of the learning of Precept and Wisdom—a meditative method within Buddhism based on the classic Lankavatara Sutra from the Dongshan Chan School, which at that time was a branch of Chan masters that drew a little more attention than other Buddhist masters. It was when the interest in Buddhist metaphysics and complex theories once held by Buddhist followers among the secular people started to wane and through the decades' effort of Chan advocates such as Shen Xiu 神秀 (?–706), Pu Ji 普寂 (651–739), and Yi Fu 義福 (658–736) of the

¹⁰ Yanagida Seizan, *Hu Shi Chanxue An* 胡適禪學案 (Hu Shi on Chan Studies) (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1975), 617, 630.

¹¹ Feng Youlan, appendix to *Zhongguo Zhexueshi* 中國哲學史 (A History of Chinese Philosophy) (Reprint, Zhonghua shuju, 1984).

¹² See recent publications in Chinese, such as *Chanzong zongpai yuanliu* 禪宗宗派源流 (Origins of Chan schools) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998) edited by Wu Limin, *Tang wudai chanzongshi* 唐五代禪宗史 (Chan Buddhism during the Tang and Five Dynasties) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1999) by Yang Zengwen, *Zhongguo chanzong de xingcheng* 中國禪宗的形成 (The Formation of Chinese Chan Buddhism) (Taipei: Yun long chubanshe, 2000) by Cai Rixin, and *Chanzong sixiangshi gaishuo* 禪宗思想史概說 (Historical Overview of Chinese Chan Buddhism) (Taipei: Wenjiu chubanshe, 2001) by Liu Guozong.

Northern Chan School and Hui Neng 慧能 (638–713), Shen Hui 神會 (684–758), Ben Jing 本淨 (667–761), and Hui Zhong 慧忠 (?–775) of the Southern Chan School that by the mid-eighth century the position of the Chan master became more important than that of the dharma master and discipline master. Not until then did Chan gradually become the central interest of Buddhist believers and developed into the huge body of theory and practice, and what the modern people know as Chan Buddhism became the mainstream of the Chan school. Later Chan researchers often regard the history of Chan Buddhism as recorded by Chan masters who defined Chan in a narrow version as the entire history of the Chan school, thus missed the large picture. As Ran Yunhua 冉雲華 pointed out, “For several years now, the history of Chan Buddhism has been based on extant documents of *Chuandeng lu* which were compiled after the tenth century. The sources of this early Chan history are insufficient and full of biases based on different schools.”¹³ He discovered that the history described in the chapter on the practitioners of Chan in *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (Biographies of Eminent Monks) and *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Sequel to Biographies of Eminent Monks) was part of Chan history yet was not given enough attention as a result of the exclusiveness of Chan history records edited after the tenth century such as *Denglu*. However, we can see from the *Daofan quguai xinjue* 導凡趣聖心訣 (Essentials of Guiding Common People to Become Sages) and *Chuanfabao ji* 傳法寶紀 (Records of the Transmission of the Fa) found in Dunhuang that the reason for the omission of Master Faru of the Northern Chan School lies in the ranking of the seven Chan patriarchs.¹⁴ If we take another look at Chan through the eyes of Tang-era people, we will discover that in later *Denglu*, the history of Buddhism was described as the history of Chan Buddhism, while the history of Chan Buddhism in turn was described as the *Chuandeng* of the Nanzong, the Southern Chan School, that is, in recent books on the history of Buddhism too much focus has been placed on Chan masters. However, such narrowing down is problematic, if we look at the Chan religion as described in the “Stele Inscription of the Chan Master of Great Righteousness, the Service Master of Great Virtue in the palace chapel of Xingfu Temple,” written by Wei Chuhou 韋處厚 (773–823) in the early ninth century,¹⁵ if we look at the approximately contemporaneous Bai Juyi’s *白居易集* (772–846)¹⁶ *Chuanfa tangbei* 傳法堂碑 (Stele Inscription of the Dharma Transmission Hall) which cites Xingshan Weikuan’s 興善惟寬 (755–817) description of the history of the entire Chan schools, as well as the “Epitaph of the Great Master Zuoxi,” which Li Hua¹⁷ of the eighth century wrote for [Master

¹³ Ran Yunhua, ed., *Zhongguo Chanxue yanjiu lunji* 中國禪學研究論集 (Studies on Chinese Chan) (Taipei: Dongchu chubanshe, 1990).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 164–165.

¹⁵ *Quan Tang wen*, *juan* 715, 3258.

¹⁶ *Chuanfa tang bei*, *juan* 41 傳法堂碑 of Bai Juyi *ji* 白居易集 (Collected Works of Bai Juyi) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979).

¹⁷ Li Hua, *Guzuo xida shi bei*, *juan* 861 故左溪大師碑 of *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 (An Anthology of Literature); Pei Xiu, *Chan yuanshu quanji xu* 禪源諸詮集序 (General preface to the collection of explanations of the Chan source), *juan* 48 of *Da zheng cang* 大正藏, 398.

Zuoxi] Xuanlang describing the Northern School, Southern School, Oxhead School, and Tiantai School as Chan-related lineages, the verse saying “Master Heze [Shenhui] points directly to *insight*, [Mazu of] Jiangxi’s view of *all things are real*, Tiantai’s adherence to *Three Truths*, and Oxhead’s notion of *no single method*” stated in the “General Preface to the Collection of Explanations of the Chan source” that Pei Xiu wrote for Zongmi (780–841) when the former summarized the thoughts of these schools.¹⁸ If we consult all these materials, then we can understand that starting from the latter half of the eighth century, in many people’s minds, the so-called Chan masters in general include not only the big five but also the Buddhist disciples who were specializing in Chan. Therefore, to study Chan lineage and system, instead of using the notion about Chan as limited by later Chan school, which even ruled out Tiantai School from Chan, shouldn’t we examine the Tang people’s own concepts of dharma masters, disciplinary masters, and Chan masters to interpret Chan as one branch of Buddhism in that era? If we want to rewrite the history of Chan Buddhism, why not follow the example of Ran Yunhua and use *Song Gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song), written by non-Chan authors, as a source? Then perhaps there will be no misunderstanding over the identity of the person in dialogue with Shen Hui in Huatai (present-day Henan province).¹⁹

This does not mean we have to use postmodernist theory in order to understand Chan genealogy but rather that we should review Chan history using traditional historical methods. It also does not mean we have to throw out the original Chan history but perhaps find a new way to retell that history. On the one hand, this retelling aims to better understand the actual situation and common ideas of that time by using early historical documents and outside historical records. On the other hand, it can also provide a historical narrative “that all before the Chan historical accounts [narrows down the entire history of Chan to only that of the southern Chan].” An example of the so-called postmodernist theory is the recent work by American scholar John McRae, *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*, in which he comes up with “McRae’s Rules of Zen Studies.”²⁰ The four rules are the following: “It’s not true, and therefore it’s more important,” “Lineage assertions are as wrong as they are strong,” “Precision implies inaccuracy,” indicating that if more details about time and people are given, the information becomes more suspect, and “Romanticism breeds cynicism,” referring

¹⁸ Ge, *Zhongguo Chan sixiangshi*, 308–314.

¹⁹ Often people think it is a Northern Chan master who is in dialogue with Shen Hui, and they regard his victory as a victory of the South over the North. In fact, the person speaking with Shen Hui must have been a dharma master and not a Chan master. According to Tang custom, a dharma master was mostly good at interpreting/translating or preaching the sutras, and not a Chan Buddhist. In other words, they belong to the first two categories listed in *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (Biographies of Eminent Monks). Therefore, it seems reasonable that many scholars think that this debate with Shen Hui was prearranged.

²⁰ John R. McRae, *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), xix–xx.

to those who tell stories are bound to create good and bad people, and this is equally unavoidable in the case of Chan history. Perhaps this theory is too “postmodernist”. The originally special historic phenomena are being popularized by McRae. But we have to admit that if we go back and look at the earliest original documents, there is indeed in Tang-dynasty Chan a competition for power and influence. We all know Tang Chan history was basically written using *Denglu*—written by Chan followers—as the main source. However, *Denglu* is only one telling of that history. If we look at non-Chan sources, such as prose collections, stone tablets, and other Buddhist records, perhaps we can determine what was changed in *Denglu*, and how the beliefs and emotions of many generations influenced that history.

Ideology: How to Reinterpret Chan Buddhist Thought

Contemporary analysts of Chan Buddhist ideology mostly take a philosophical approach. This often results in Chan ideology becoming like a fish out of water—eternal but without life. There is no doubt that scholars such as Daisetz T. Suzuki 唐五代禪宗史 and Kitaro Nishida have an Eastern awareness of Chan Buddhism that aids their understanding and interpretation, but they are only using Chan material to develop their modernist philosophical thinking. The debate between Hu Shi and Suzuki over the interpretation of Chan is not a question of right or wrong. They simply approach Chan ideology, history, and philosophy from different angles. I tend to follow the historical tradition of Hu Shi—using historical documents to investigate Chan religion and ideology.

From the perspective of ideological history, Chan was not some super philosophy dangling in historical midair. We must place Chan in its proper contemporary social and ideological context in order to explain its meaning in Chinese ideological history. In recent years, there has been a tendency to connect the history of ideology to social history, since ideologies only come to life when they become the source for human reasoning and actions. For an ideology to become of use in daily life, it must respond to the problems of daily life. As Benjamin I. Schwartz points out, problems in ideological history mainly concern people’s conscious responses to their environment, and these responses change in different time periods.²¹ In the Chinese language, there is an expression, “It is impossible to clap with one hand.” Chan ideology is just one side of ideological history. We must also look at what circumstances it is responding to.

For example, why did the Chan masters of the Southern School of the Huineng system after the High Tang period suddenly become popular, replacing the dharma master, and become illustrious Buddhist guides? Since Hu Shi, a historical fact that

²¹ Benjamin I. Schwartz, preface to *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 4.

drew much attention was that Shen Hui 神会 (684–760) used “xiangshui qian,” literally “perfume money,” to bribe officials and gain economic advantages for the Southern School. But Shen Hui is not the only one who used perfume money to obtain soldier’s pay and provisions for Buddhist monks from the government, and after Shen Hui’s time, it was not only the Southern Chan or Heze Schools that did so. This also does not account for the gradual decline of the traditional school of the dharma master. There is another historical factor: before the High Tang, to maintain some Buddhist tradition such as large-scale translations of Buddhist scriptures, interpretation and annotation of Buddhist classics and discussion about Buddhist theories, to the great extent, relied on the financial and intellectual support from large monasteries and influential collective effort, thus taking on some noble flavor, which means that not only basic knowledge and ideas of Buddhism were required in these practices but a rather profound capacity for reasoning was also essential. However, this kind of Buddhist practice suffered a setback in the aftermath of the An Shi Rebellion (755–763), also known as the An Lushan Rebellion. Many large monasteries were destroyed, and those that were not damaged could no longer support large-scale recitals and intellectual discussions. Consequently, those relying on generous financial support from the large monasteries and the facilities to build up Buddhist knowledge collapsed. Dharma masters who specialized in translation, commentary, and debate lost their means of support; this led to a great watershed in the practice of Buddhist teachings. In my article “Lilun xingqu de sangshi” 理論興趣的喪失 (The Loss of Interest in Theory), I have discussed these phenomena²² and this change during the mid-Tang era, when the discipline masters and Chan masters gradually gained more influence, in particular in the early ninth century when figures such as Zhangjing Huaihui 章敬懷暉 (748–835) entered court, leading to empowering Chan discourse with political influence. The Chan school, especially in Hangzhou, abruptly gained prominence and as a result left behind many records in a growing number of locations, leading to the misunderstanding by later generations that Chanzong was already the mainstream of Buddhism.

To give another example, why did Chan Buddhism become increasingly popular in the period from the mid-Tang era until the late Tang? Many works on the ideological history of Chan focus on the Great Anti-Buddhist Persecution, which reached its height in 845 during the reign of Tang Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (814–846, r. 840–846). Chan masters who did not rely on support from monasteries were better able to survive than other Buddhist schools; hence, the importance of philosophies of self-reliance such as Nong Chan, attributed to Baizhang Huaihai, grew. This explanation for Chan’s increased popularity is not very reliable—as I noted earlier, the importance of the position of Baizhang is suspect. Indeed, many monks did perish during

²² Published in *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究 (Research into World Religions), 2001:1, pp. 35–47. Also included in Ge Zhaoguang, vol. 2 of *Zhongguo sixiangshi*.

the Anti-Buddhist Persecution, and many illustrious monks were forced to return to secular life or flee into hiding.²³ But this does not mean that Buddhism became more populist or that Buddhism became estranged from the urban areas and more “rural.” In fact, among the monks who were left behind, many relied on the rich, for example, Huang Zhong 寰中 (780–862) of Daci Mountain, Hangzhou, who hid in the Dai family villa; Cong Jian 從諫 (?–866) of the Guang’ai Temple, Luoyang, who hid in the hot springs of the Huangpu family; and Jingshan Hongyan 徑山洪湏 (?–901) who went into hiding in Huichang, at the home of Changsha believer Luo Yan 羅晏. As it says in the *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, “[He] who wears lay clothes according to the rules; relaxes his strong feelings for the [Buddhist] way; crouches and holes up like dragons and snakes to wait for the right time; salvages none when jades and stones are burnt in fire.” This was probably a common method of survival by monks.²⁴ After the short-lived persecution of Buddhism of 20 months by Wuzong ended, Buddhism very rapidly recovered and became completely reliant on those monks once supported by the powerful elites. Because of this, by the Late Tang/Five Dynasties period, Chan Buddhism, instead of becoming more common and secular, actually became more noble and elitist. Only in this historical context are we able to understand the development of Chan Buddhism. In my opinion, from the High to Late Tang and Five Dynasties, the shift from the early Chan to five Chan schools, Chan gradually turned from a pure, wordless experience into a philosophy highly reliant on documents and was gradually diverted from the common people to the educated. It is easy to understand, for only the elite class and people who were culturally literate would develop interest in the exquisite and concealed language while able to read between the lines.

We must try to understand the development of Chan ideology against this historical background. If we investigate more deeply, it is possible to find a historical explanation for the union of the Pure Land school and Chan during the Qing-Ming period and for the failure of the Chan revival in the late Qing period. It is not necessary to put the focus of Chan Buddhist ideological history only on the Tang-Song period because the study of ideological history should probe into the environment from which the ideology rose, the responses of that ideology to the environment, and how the ideology intervenes and influences social life. It does not only trace the rise and fall of the study of such ideology, nor does it complement its own writing in this ideological theory.

²³ For details on the Anti-Buddhist Persecution, see *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (Biographies of Eminent Monks Compiled during the Song Dynasty), *juan* 12 and 17, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 273–274, 278, 284, 428, 430; *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (*History of the Tang*), 18: part 2, 605–606; Yuan Ren, *Rutang qiufa xunli hangji* 入唐求法巡禮行記, 4: 479. For modern research and narration of the persecution in Huichang, refer to Tang Yongtong, *Suitang fojiao shigao* 隋唐佛教史稿 (History of Buddhism during the Sui and Tang Dynasties) in *Huichang fanan* 會昌法難 (Anti-Buddhism Movement in Huichang Era), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 41–52. See also (Ryōshi Michihata) *Tangdai fojiaoshi de yanjiu* 唐代佛教史の研究 (Studies on Tang Dynasty Buddhist History) (Kyoto: Fazang guan, 1957), 161–177; Suzuki Tetsuo, 唐五代禪宗史 (History of Chan Buddhism during the Tang and Five Dynasties) (Tokyo: Shanxifang foshulin, 1985), 390–393.

²⁴ *Song gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 12, 273–274, 278, 284; *juan* 17, 428, 430.

General Ideological History: Seeking Questions from a New Angle

After the publication of my *Zhongguo Chan sixiangshi*, I gained much insight from some of the many reviews. Among the reviewers who most inspired me was Luo Houli, who wrote, “What if you look at it from a different angle? What if you look at it from the point of view of the one who asks questions? Would that lead to a different conclusion?”²⁵ In other words, it is usually the answers of the Chan masters that we use as material. If someone asks “What is the meaning of the dharma of law?” we don’t usually pay attention to the question itself, even if it is asked repeatedly. Instead, we focus on the Chan masters’ answers, intriguing phrases, such as “He sold charcoal for 10 years but did not use a steelyard” and “Look up to view Persia and face the south to view Phecda,” because these mysterious expressions give researchers the chance to come up with new theories and interpretations.

The fact that these questions are raised over and over again is worth investigation. In recent years, I have stressed that we should pay attention to common knowledge, ideology, and religion rather than the extraordinary ideas and theories that traditionally receive the most attention and are at the core of ideological history but do not always have great influence on daily life. If we look at sources such as the *Chuangdeng lu*, we can see from the questions asked that most Chan believers were not concerned with the mystery of logic or language nor were they particularly interested in the return to a simpler life. The special concepts and values discovered by later Chan researchers may have concerned only a small number of followers and masters or could even have been projected on them by the later researchers. Ordinary people usually asked questions such as “Why did Buddhism come from India?” and “What problem does it want to solve for believers?” The question most often raised was “Why did the ancestral master come from the West?” In the *Jingde Chuandeng Lu*, this question appears about 120 times. The response from Longya Judun 龍牙居遁 was “This is the most difficult question.” Another master said, “Good question.” We can see that common believers were not concerned with the special Chan truth but wanted to know the reasoning behind Chan, since the question of why the ancestral master is coming from the West gets at the basis of Chan belief. At the same time, the quest for the meaning of the coming of Buddhism that was frequently mentioned by later Southern Chan Buddhists was actually first put forward by Helin Xuansu 鶴林玄素 (668–752) from the Oxhead School and Master Huian who was regarded as from the Northern Chan School 慧安國師.²⁶ If this is the case, how can we understand the Southern Chan School’s affinity with and change from the Northern Chan and Oxhead Chan Schools? Other questions often raised were “What is the intention of Buddhism?” and “What is Dao?” These questions appear in the *Jingde Chuandeng lu* more than 100 times. From the popularity

²⁵ Luo Houli, “Wen wu dingfa yu wen cheng falì” 文无定法与文成法立 (No fixed method for essay writing and method established when writing is completed), *Dushu*, 1997:4, pp. 66–72.

²⁶ *Jingde Chuandeng lu*, *juan* 17 and *juan* 4.

of these questions, we can deduce the believers' quest for concrete knowledge, which was far greater than the enlightenment of the mysterious truth. In fact, for those proficient in Chan thought, Buddhism and Dao are opposites. Legend has it that Liuzu Huineng once had a conversation as follows: "Somebody asked, 'What does Huanghui believe?' The master said, 'He attained the dharma of law.' The monk asked, 'Can monks attain the same?' The master replied, 'No.' The monk asked, 'Why?' The master said, 'I do not know the dharma of law.'"²⁷ It is possible that this conversation was reconstructed by later generations who created contrasts between the dharma of law and Dao, classic theory, and inner enlightenment. *Juan 16 Nanquan Puyuan* 南泉普願 of the *Zutang ji* says, "Under the *Wuzu Dashi* [masters of five schools] there were 599 people who all knew the dharma of law, except for Lu Xingzhe, who only knew the Dao. Up until all Buddhas were born, one was only taught the Dao."²⁸ In *Juan 14 Shitou Xiqian* of the *Jingde Chuandeng lu*, there is a record, "Disciple Daowu asked, 'Who would receive the intention of Caoxi?' The master said, 'He was the one who knew the dharma of law.' He asked, 'Do you know it?' The master said, 'No, I don't.'"²⁹ In replying to a common believer, the Chan master does not emphasize this difference. So can we deduce the average level of understanding of Chan Buddhism as well as how it spread?

From the questions asked of the masters, sometimes superficial and sometimes resourceful, we can detect a gradual change in the ideology and language of Chan Buddhism. Those asking questions in the early years were often in search of an explanation of Chan beliefs and therefore asked basic, straightforward questions such as, "I want to learn Buddhism; what should I do?" "How can formlessness be proved?" "Are meditation and wisdom one thing or two?" What is called precept? Of all dharmas, what is called reality?³⁰ Chan Buddhism at that time did not yet have its own terminology. Like other schools, the Chan school sought to reach a deeper understanding of the basic teachings of Buddhism. Therefore, in the replies to these early questions, the language is fairly direct and precise. A special method of questioning was developed later as Chan Buddhism started to seek its own language within the language. Moreover, Chan Buddhism started using concrete and unsophisticated questions to elevate reasoning and break from the restraints of traditional logic and argumentation—for example, "How old is Master Shoushan [Shijie]?" "What is your place of origin?" "Why you mean to ask but don't ask?" "Whose family's tune does the master sing?" or "This student possesses the wit approved by [Master Fengxue's] iron ox, master, please do not seal his fate." This type of symbolic speech developed into the language of the profound truth of Chan Buddhism. The questions and answers could be ever changing, depending on the

²⁷ *Zutang ji*, *juan 2*, 96–97. I consulted the copy in the collection of the Research Centre for Zen Culture, Hanazono University, Kyoto.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, *juan 16*, 587.

²⁹ *Jingde Chuandeng lu*, *juan 14*, *Da zheng cang*; *juan 51*, 310.

³⁰ *Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元, *juan 3* of *Nanyue Huairang chanshi* 南岳懷讓禪師 (Master Nanyue Huairang), 127, 135, 148–150, 153, 155, 164, 166.

environment, whether the questions came from nature and whether the answers came from the heart and followed the heart's desire. Still later, when Chan had fully developed its own language and the special terms became classics, such as when Master Changqing Huiling said in his *gatha*, "In a myriad things he alone reveals his body,"³¹ an allusion to Buddha's words that "[Heaven above and Earth below] I am the only one, alone and exalted," revealing his feeling of transcending the mortal world after achieving an inner awareness of truth. Soon there were more phrases, such as "What is [he alone] reveals his body in a myriad things?" and "How can one make this 'revealing of only one's body in a myriad things' possible?"³² One Chan Buddhist school during the Song dynasty built forth on these following phrases: "[After] 10 years of traveling in red dust, this morning [I] alone revealed my body." This inspired masters from the rather obvious hint of "raise a finger" give answers that seemed irrelevant to the question asked, such as "Adding frost onto the snow," "Cats sleeping under peonies," or "No land beyond the river, many mountains across the shore."³³ Those unfamiliar with allusions to Buddhist classics would have been unable to ask questions or understand the answers, a clear indication of the cultural level of those asking and answering the questions. There was an irreversible turn to the elitist—even what were originally serious religious questions became word games in this literary style of question and answer.

Conclusion: A Retelling and Reinterpretation of the History of Chan Buddhism

At present, scholars around the world—in Europe, America, Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan—are researching the history of Chan Buddhism. The research, which is being done from various perspectives, using diverse research methods and different theoretical backgrounds, is presenting us with a more complicated face of Chan Buddhism. In addition to general studies of Chan tradition and ideology, new books and articles are coming out on topics that include the relationship between Chan Buddhist thought and language, the complex relations between Chan Buddhist anecdotes and Buddhist classics, the relation between Buddhist monks and politics, the profound influence of Chinese classical literature on the expression of Buddhist truth, and the history of the Buddhist life and institution. All of these topics have room for further investigation. The question now is how can we find a new direction that will improve upon the road that was paved by Hu Shi and Suzuki and leads all the way to Yin Shun, in order to find new ways to tell the history of Chan Buddhism?

³¹ *Jingde Chuandeng lu*, *juan 18*.

³² *Jingde Chuandeng lu*, *juan 22* and *juan 24*.

³³ *Wudeng huiyuan*, *juan 12*, 757 and *juan 20*, 1320, 1343 and 1383.