

The Ch'an *Tsung* in Medieval China: School, Lineage, or What?

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A perennial problem that confronts the critical study of East Asian Buddhism is what to make of the many distinctions of *tsung* (*shū* in Japanese) that have traditionally been drawn within the religion itself. As Stanley Weinstein has aptly pointed out in an article in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* on "schools of Chinese Buddhism," the term *tsung* is generally translated as "school," but this obscures the fact that in Chinese Buddhist texts it has at least three different primary meanings, depending on the context:

- (1) it [*tsung*] may indicate a specific doctrine or thesis, or a particular interpretation of a doctrine; (2) it may refer to the underlying theme, message or teaching of a text; and (3) it may signify a religious or philosophical school.¹

Weinstein goes on to argue that

the term *tsung* should be translated as "school" only when it refers to a tradition that traces its origin back to a founder, usually designated "first patriarch," who is believed to have provided the basic spiritual insights that were then transmitted through an unbroken line of successors or "*dharm*a heirs." This definition is derived from the original meaning of *tsung*, which signified a clan that was descended from a common ancestor.²

He then observes that

It is only in the eighth century that we encounter full-fledged schools with founders, lineages, supposedly orthodox transmissions of doctrine, and large numbers of followers. Three such schools made their appearance

during the second half of the T'ang dynasty: Ch'an, T'ien-t'ai, and Hua-yen.³

Weinstein's analysis of the term *tsung* is helpful as far as it goes, but as he himself notes in discussing these three schools, the modern critical study of the traditional accounts of their founders and lineages of Dharma transmission has revealed in each case a considerable "discrepancy between legend and fact." The problem, in a nutshell, is that the term *tsung* as it is found in Buddhist texts refers to entities that, from a critical historical point of view, belong partly or wholly to the realms of religious ideology and mythology. The study of some ostensibly historical lineage records reveals that they were fabricated retrospectively as a means of gaining religious authority, political power, and/or patronage. This was clearly the case with the various competing versions of a lineage purported to stem from Bodhidharma (later called the Ch'an *tsung*) that survive in inscriptions and Tun-huang manuscripts dating from the late seventh and eighth centuries. Other lineage formulations layed scant claim to literal historicity, but signalled by their structure that they were using the language of consanguinity in a metaphorical and symbolic way. The Chen-yen (Shingon in Japanese) lineage formulated in the T'ang, for example, posited the eternally present cosmic Buddha Mahāvairocana as its "founding ancestor." Various religious motifs that appear in Buddhist lineage records, such as accounts of Dharma transmission taking place in secret, by proxy, and even in dreams, also alert us to the fact that *tsung* were never conceived as a set of merely historical relationships between masters and disciples, but that they were always understood to have a mysterious, spiritual dimension that lay beyond the ken of the world. *Tsung* were conceived, after all, as

sodalities that comprised a set of ancestral spirits as well as living persons.

Given the ideological, symbolic, and mythological dimensions of most accounts of *tsung* in Chinese Buddhist texts, I think it best to translate the term as "lineage" whenever it refers to a spiritual clan conceived as a group of individuals related by virtue of their inheritance of some sort of Dharma from a common ancestor. This translation has the virtue of being a nearly literal rendering which neither assumes nor implies anything about the historicity or ontological status of the lineage in question, the latter being matters for subsequent historical judgement on a case by case basis. I want to reserve the English word "school" for movements or groups within Chinese Buddhism that were made up of real persons united in a self-conscious manner by a common set of beliefs, practices, and/or social structures. I take it as axiomatic that the sort of entity we would want to call a school of Buddhism, unlike the entities that the Buddhist tradition calls lineages (*tsung*), was constituted at any point in its history exclusively by living persons. In other words, ancestral spirits played a role in the formation of schools only insofar as they occupied the minds of currently living members.

Before turning to the specific topic of this paper, which is the relationship between the mythology of the Ch'an lineage and the historical entity that was the Ch'an school in medieval China, I would like to point out some of the implications of the general distinction that I draw between lineages and schools. In the first place, I would not want to restrict the designation "school" to only those sodalities that identified or sought to legitimize themselves by formulating a lineage of patriarchs. Most schools of Chinese Buddhism from the T'ang dynasty on did in fact embrace some sort of lineage myth, but I would be prepared in principle to recognize the existence of schools that did not. What I want to call a school, to repeat, can be delineated by any

shared set of ideas, practices, and/or social arrangements for which there is sufficient historical evidence, and the ideas in question need not have included any belief in a lineage of Dharma transmission.

Conversely, the survival of a lineage record in an ancient Buddhist text certainly raises the possibility that the genealogy in question was produced by a school seeking to delineate its membership, write its history, or stake a claim to orthodoxy, but it is also possible that the lineage was formulated by one person who lacked sufficient fellow believers or followers for us to speak of a school. Hypothetically, we might also expect to find cases in the history of Chinese Buddhism where lineage records survived as literary artifacts even after the schools that formulated them had died out; cases where other, perhaps opposing, schools subsequently appropriated the lineages contained in written records; and even cases where schools were actually founded through the process of appropriating a lineage myth.

Moreover, even if it could be shown that a particular lineage record was preserved in the school that produced it, and even if the school in question was distinguished chiefly by a shared belief in that lineage, it would be a mistake to think of the membership of the school and that of the lineage as somehow coextensive. For one thing, lineages always included dead people, and schools (as I have defined them) did not. Moreover, schools generally included far more members than those few living persons who were recognized within the membership as Dharma heirs in the founder's lineage.

The distinction that I want to draw between lineage and school, needless to say, is not one that was ever drawn in the Buddhist tradition itself. I am *not* arguing that the term *tsung* in medieval China had (when it referred to groups of people) two different meanings, one of which we should translate as "lineage" and the other as "school." On the contrary, I want to render *tsung*

as "lineage" in every case, with the understanding that "lineage" is a complex, ambivalent concept belonging to the normative tradition. My designation "school," on the other hand, is strictly a modern, analytical category with a definition that I have stipulated on the basis of currently accepted principles of critical historiography.

It is sometimes objected that historians, especially intellectual or religious historians, should not impose their own categories on the foreign cultures they study. There is some truth in this, for it is extremely important to bracket one's own linguistically and culturally determined "common sense" and learn to follow the thought processes of the other sympathetically in the other's language. However, when it comes time to explain and interpret what one has learned using one's own language and operating within the constraints of one's own academic discipline, it is manifestly impossible to use only concepts borrowed from the foreign tradition that is the object of study. In plain English, it is absurd to argue that because medieval Chinese Buddhists never drew a distinction between lineages as semi-mythological entities and schools as historical ones we should refrain from imposing that distinction on them.

Indeed, I would argue that a failure to impose the distinction in a clear-cut way has led modern historians of Ch'an to read their own understanding of Buddhist schools or "sects" back into the ancient Chinese term *tsung*. My remarks here are directed chiefly to the very influential and otherwise high quality Japanese scholarship in the field known as *zenshūshi* or "history of the Ch'an *tsung*." In Japan today the term *zenshū* refers, in the first place, to a school of Buddhism (comprising three main denominations: the Sōtō, Rinzai, and Ōbaku) that has an independent institutional structure, as well as a distinctive set of beliefs, sacred texts, and religious practices. Within the contemporary Zen school, the religious belief in a lineage of Dharma transmission stemming from the first patriarch Bodhidharma is still very much

alive, and this too is called the *zenshū*. Japanese Buddhists today, in short, understand and use the term *zenshū* in a multivalent way that clearly justifies an English translation as "Zen school" in some cases and "Zen lineage" in others. However, this distinction is only implicit in the modern Japanese usage; no one feels a need draw it out explicitly because the intended meaning is generally understood from the context. Moreover, the very ambiguity of the term *zenshū* has certain benefits: it lends an air of sanctity to the existing Zen institution by suggesting that it is the vehicle for the preservation of a mysterious Dharma (namely *satori*) inherited from the Buddha and Bodhidharma, and it imparts a sense of historicity to the lineage myth by suggesting that the ancient patriarchs were real people just like the Zen school masters of today. It is only in the Japanese scholarship on the history of Zen (Ch'an) in China that the failure to draw an explicit distinction between school and lineage creates problems, for it leads to the unwarranted assumption that whenever ancient Chinese texts speak of the "Ch'an *tsung*" (*zenshū* in Japanese), the reference necessarily implies, in addition to the existence of a lineage scheme, the existence of some sort of institutional entity or social grouping similar to the Japanese Zen school. For example, Ui Hakuju, a prominent historian of Zen, assumed that because the monk Tao-hsin (580-651) was identified in eighth century records as the "fourth patriarch" in a Dharma lineage extending from Bodhidharma, the monastic community he headed on East Mountain in Huang-mei must have been a Ch'an school monastery.⁴ As I have shown elsewhere, however, even the concept of a sectarian "Ch'an monastery" does not appear in any historical records until the late tenth century.⁵

Having explained my approach to the study of *tsung*, or lineages in the history of Chinese Buddhism in general terms, let me turn now to the specific case of Ch'an. What I shall do in the limited space available here is sketch out what I

take to be the history of the so-called Ch'an lineage—that is, the development from the T'ang through the Sung of the various quasi-genealogical records that purport to trace the transmission of Dharma from a first patriarch Bodhidharma—and correlate that development with what I take to be the history of the Ch'an school, an entity which in my view first took shape in the mid-tenth century.

The story of Bodhidharma's lineage begins in (or, at least, cannot be traced any further back than) the late seventh century, when the followers of a monk named Fa-ju (638-689), who had resided at the Shao-lin Monastery near the eastern capital Lo-yang, wrote an epitaph claiming that he was the recipient of secret oral teachings (*tsung*) transmitted from the Buddha through a line of Indian teachers to the *Tripitaka* master Bodhidharma. The epitaph states that Bodhidharma brought the teachings to China and transmitted them to Hui-k'o, after which they were passed down to Seng-tsan, Tao-hsin (580-651), Hung-jen (600-674), and finally Fa-ju.⁶ It is likely that Fa-ju's followers simply invented this lineage, selecting the figures of the Indian monk Bodhidharma and his disciple Hui-k'o out of the *Hsü kao-seng chuan*,⁷ a collection of biographies of eminent monks that had been compiled a few decades earlier (in 644), and using them as a convenient link to India. Fa-ju may have been a disciple of Hung-jen, who is mentioned in the *Hsü kao-seng chuan* as Tao-hsin's disciple,⁸ but the connections between Hui-k'o, Seng-ts'an and Tao-hsin were almost certainly fabricated as a means of linking Fa-ju back to Bodhidharma. Fa-ju's followers put together a set of six biographies commemorating their teacher and his five predecessors in the putative lineage.⁹ In it they placed Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o in the Shao-lin Monastery, the place where Fa-ju resided, although the *Hsü kao-seng chuan* account of Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o that they relied on for most of their information made no mention of that monastery.¹⁰ Unfortunately, we know almost nothing about Fa-ju and his followers

at the Shao-lin Monastery, apart from the fact that they invented a lineage of secret oral teachings going back to India. Given the paucity of concrete evidence, I would hesitate to describe them as constituting a distinct school. If they had a special name for themselves or some particular approach to Buddhist thought or practice that served to identify them, those things have been lost from the historical record.

The next phase in the formulation of the myth of Bodhidharma's lineage occurred when the followers of a monk named Shen-hsiu (606?-706), who had flourished in the province of Ching-chou before he moved to the capitals Loyang and Ch'ang-an in the last six years of his life and gained the support of Empress Wu, succeeded in claiming that he too, like Fa-ju, had been a Dharma heir in the sixth generation in the lineage of Bodhidharma. One follower of Shen-hsiu in particular, a monk named P'u-chi (651-739), is said to have gone to the Shao-lin Monastery and set up a "hall of the seven patriarchs" (*ch'i-tsu-t'ang*) honoring the six patriarchs of Fa-ju's lineage and one more—his own teacher Shen-hsiu.¹¹ P'u-chi also arranged for the collection of six biographies originally compiled by Fa-ju's followers to be edited to include the biography of his teacher Shen-hsiu in the sixth generation alongside Fa-ju. The resulting text, entitled the *Ch'uan fa-pao chi*, survives, having been discovered at Tun-huang in the early part of this century. Whereas the older core of the text—the first six biographies (Bodhidharma through Fa-ju)—was evidently composed to validate the lineage outlined in Fa-ju's epitaph and to establish the Shao-lin Monastery as the ancient and legitimate home of that lineage,¹² the edited version that we have today is at pains to put Shen-hsiu on an equal footing with Fa-ju and to make a case that Shen-hsiu took over Hung-jen's lineage after Fa-ju died.¹³ A subsequent formulation of Shen-hsiu's lineage, found in another Tung-huang text, the *Leng-chia shih-tzu chi*, highlighted Shen-hsiu as Hung-jen's leading disciple and relegated Fa-ju to

obscurity.¹⁴

The followers of Shen-hsiu, represented after his death by P'u-chi and other leading disciples, did constitute what I would call a school of Buddhism with a distinctive set of doctrines. P'u-chi claimed that those doctrines had been inherited from Hung-jen and called them the "East Mountain teaching" (*tung-shan fa-men*), a name that made reference to the mountain in Huang-mei where Hung-jen's monastery was located.¹⁵ P'u-chi, it seems, also used the name "Southern lineage" (*nan-tsung*) for Shen-hsiu's line of Dharma transmission.¹⁶ The school of Shen-hsiu and P'u-chi, however, was fated to go down in history as the "northern lineage" (*pei-tsung*), a derogatory label that was first attached to it by a vociferous contemporary critic, Ho-tse Shen-hui (684-758), who appropriated the name "southern lineage of Bodhidharma" for his teacher Hui-neng and himself. Scholars today commonly refer to Shen-hsiu's school as the Northern School of Ch'an—a designation that I am content to follow. The distinctive doctrines and religious metaphors employed by the school have been well elucidated in John McRae's book, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*, and need no further discussion here. I would simply stress, as McRae himself notes, that there is no evidence other than that found in the texts of the Northern School itself to support the attribution of the school's doctrines to the fourth and fifth patriarchs in Shen-hsiu's putative lineage, Tao-hsin and Hung-jen.¹⁷ In other words, we must be careful to distinguish Shen-hsiu's mythological lineage (later called the "northern lineage"), which posits a transmission of teachings from Bodhidharma through Tao-hsin and Hung-jen to Shen-hsiu, and the historical entity we call the Northern School. That school is identifiable by its distinctive doctrines and by its lineage myth, the last of which, as I explained above, it simply stole from the monk Fa-ju and his followers at the Shao-lin Monastery. Needless to say, the fact that the Northern School appropriated Fa-ju's genealogical credentials does

not mean that it necessarily derived any other aspects of its teachings or practices from Fa-ju.

The next phase in the formulation of the myth of Bodhidharma's lineage is one that is familiar to all western students of Chinese Buddhism, thanks to Philip Yampolsky's translation of the *Platform Sūtra* and summary of Hu Shih's pioneering research on the aforementioned critic of the Northern School, Shen-hui.¹⁸ Shen-hui, as is well known, argued that it was not Shen-hsiu of the Northern School who was the true sixth patriarch in the "southern lineage of Bodhidharma," but his own teacher Hui-neng. What is not generally understood is that Shen-hui must have been aware of the Northern School's appropriation of Fa-ju's lineage and modeled his own grab for genealogical legitimacy after it. Shen-hui criticized P'u-chi for editing the *Ch'uan fa-pao chi* in such a way that there were two patriarchs in the sixth generation (Fa-ju and Shen-hsiu) and for setting up the "hall of the seven patriarchs" at Shao-lin Monastery,¹⁹ so he evidently realized that the reworking of the text and the establishment of the portrait hall had been ploys to wrest the prestige of Bodhidharma's lineage from Fa-ju. However, it did not serve his interests to refute the claims of Shen-hsiu's followers by reasserting Fa-ju's status as sole patriarch in the generation after Hung-jen. Instead, Shen-hui drew attention to the self-contradictory nature of the lineage claims made in the *Ch'uan fa-pao chi* and seized the opportunity to argue that the true sixth patriarch was neither Shen-hsiu nor Fa-ju but Hui-neng.

As John Jorgensen has pointed out, Shen-hui's criticism of the *Ch'uan fa-pao chi* was based in part on the principle that the lineage of Bodhidharma could have only one legitimate Dharma heir per generation,²⁰ just as the system of succession in the imperial clan could allow only one reigning emperor at a time. "Shen-hui," he writes,

used the literati ideal of the orthodox lineage, or rather the idea of the legitimate imperial

clan lineage, to try to convince his audience that his was the legitimate line of succession, and that the leading lights of Northern Ch'an were pretenders to the "throne" of Ch'an.²¹

Shen-hui refused to countenance more than one patriarch per generation because

he was creating an "imperial lineage" for "Southern Ch'an," that is, himself. He wanted one visible centre of authority just as an imperial lineage has in the person of the emperor.²²

In short, Jorgensen argues, Shen-hui worked to enhance the prestige of Bodhidharma's lineage by portraying it as a spiritual genealogy analogous to the line of emperors and tried to appropriate that prestige by presenting Hui-neng and himself as the sole rightful heirs to the lineage in the sixth and seventh generations, respectively. Jorgensen asserts that the idea of a strict patriarchal succession was the invention of Shen-hui,²³ but this is not necessarily true: it could have been invented by the disciples of Fa-ju and merely reasserted by Shen-hui as a polemical device to neutralize the machinations of Shen-hsiu's followers.

Shen-hui, much as P'u-chi before him had done, backed up his claim to Bodhidharma's lineage by erecting a mortuary portrait hall (*chen-t'ang*) memorializing six generations of patriarchs in China.²⁴ Unlike P'u-chi, however, Shen-hui built the portrait hall at his own monastery, the Ho-tse Monastery in Lo-yang, and allowed only one patriarch per generation. The figure enshrined in the sixth generation, of course, was Hui-neng. The text of the stele marking the portrait hall was written by Sung Ting, a high official in the Bureau of Military Appointments, with a preface by Shen-hui himself which detailed the "bloodlines" of the lineage (*tsung-me*) from the Buddha down through the various Indian patriarchs and the six generations of patriarchs in China. Images (*ying*) were drawn for each of the six patriarchs and placed in

the hall,²⁵ and the Defender-in-Chief Fang Kuan (697-763) produced a "preface to the portraits of the six generations" to accompany them. It is significant that the myth of Bodhidharma's lineage first took on a concrete, institutional form through the building of mortuary halls along the lines of Confucian clan shrines and the performance of death anniversary rites for the ancestral teachers (*tsu-shih*) whose portraits were enshrined therein. Such halls and rites clearly had a political as well as a devotional side to them, for they held up a lineage for public display and affirmation. The mortuary portrait halls built by P'u-chi and Shen-hui were high-profile facilities that were aimed not only at establishing quasi-genealogical credentials within the Buddhist order, but at gaining recognition and support for their schools from high ranking government officials.

According to the Ch'an historian Tsung-mi (780-841), a self-avowed heir in Ho-tse Shen-hui's lineage,²⁶ five years after Shen-hui died in 758 the emperor had a monastery (the Pao-ying Monastery) built at the master's *stūpa* site at Lung-men in the eastern capital (Loyang). In 770 the patriarchs hall (*tsu-t'ang*) at the monastery was granted a doorway plaque by the emperor Tait-sung which read, "Hall of the True Lineage which Transmits the Dharma of *Prajñā* (Wisdom)." In 772 the *stūpa* itself was granted an imperial plaque which read, "*Stūpa* of the Great Teacher *Prajñā* (Shen-hui's posthumous title)." In 796, furthermore, various Ch'an masters were summoned by the crown prince at imperial behest to determine the orthodox Ch'an teachings, and this commission formally ratified Shen-hui's status as seventh patriarch in Bodhidharma's lineage. The event was recorded on a stele set up by imperial order inside the Shen-lung Monastery (Tsung-mi remarked that it was "still there"), and the emperor wrote a eulogy for the seventh patriarch.²⁷ A memorial stele written in 806 for Hui-chien (719-792), a disciple of Shen-hui, also called Shen-hui the seventh patriarch and stated that Hui-chien used money donated from the imperial treasury to build

a Kuan-yin hall that featured portraits of the seven patriarchs.²⁸ It is evident from all of this that Shen-hui and his followers enjoyed considerable success in their bid for official sanction and patronage in the eighth and early ninth centuries.

Luis Gómez has pointed out that Shen-hui's doctrinal stance, which stressed the principle of sudden enlightenment (*tun-wu*), was riddled with inconsistencies which resulted from the fact that "his position was critical rather than constructive: it was formed by a set of objections to his opponents, not by a structured system."²⁹ Nevertheless, Shen-hui's "sudden enlightenment" rhetoric was distinctive in its polemical tone and stridency, and was evidently very effective in attracting mass audiences and gaining converts and patronage. John McRae describes Shen-hui as a proselytizer whose "chosen role of inspiring conversion to the Buddhist spiritual quest was combined with an overriding concern with the initial moment of religious inspiration."³⁰ In other words, Shen-hui was a sort of Buddhist evangelist who used the rhetoric of sudden enlightenment to deny the necessity of a long and difficult regimen of meditation and other forms of monastic discipline, and to excite a quick and fervent acceptance by his audiences of the notion that enlightenment was at hand—that they were already, as it were, saved. Shen-hui and his followers may have defined their approach to Buddhist teachings and practice largely in contradistinction to the Northern School, but their success in appropriating that school's genealogy and wresting away a good deal of its prestige and patronage over the course of the half century following Shen-hui's death is sufficient evidence that they constituted a distinct school within the Buddhist order.

Shen-hui's school had plenty of competition from other claimants to Bodhidharma's lineage in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, however. Some of them, like Shen-hui himself and P'u-chi before him, chose to stake their claim to the lineage on the basis of putative connections between their ancestral teachers and the fifth patri-

arch Hung-jen. Tsung-mi, who compiled a list of lineages deriving from Bodhidharma in his *Chan-yüan chu-ch'üan-chi tu-hsü*, noted three that fell into this category: (1) the lineage of Chih-hsien (609-702), represented in succeeding generations by his immediate disciple Chu-chi (669-732) and Chu-chi's disciple Kim Ho-shang (also known as Wu-hsiang) of the Ching-chung Monastery in Cheng-t'u; (2) the lineage of Wu-chu (714-775) of the Pao-t'ang Monastery in Szechuan, a disciple of Kim Ho-shang who taught much the same doctrines as his master but took a radically different approach to practice; and (3) the lineage of Kuo-lang Hsüan-shih, which was also centered in Szechuan.³¹ Other lineage formulations, evidently produced after Shen-hui's attack on the Northern School, accepted Hui-neng as the sixth patriarch and sought to provide themselves with genealogical credentials by linking their leaders to him as his spiritual descendants, brushing aside Shen-hui's claim to the position of seventh patriarch in the process. Followers of what Tsung-mi called the Hung-chou lineage promulgated a genealogy which extended from the sixth patriarch Hui-neng through an obscure monk named Nan-yüeh Huai-jang (677-744) to their own teacher Ma-tsu Tao-i (709-788), who was closely associated with the Kai-yüan Monastery in Hung-chou. Various followers of Shih-t'ou Hsi-ch'ien (700-790), meanwhile, traced their lineages back to Hui-neng through Shih-t'ou's teacher Ch'ing-yüan Hsing-ssu (d. 740). The latter two lineages came to be celebrated in the Sung dynasty as the main bloodlines through which all living Ch'an masters inherited the Dharma from Bodhidharma and Hui-neng, and vast collections of hagiographical lore grew up around them. However, apart from Tsung-mi's sketchy accounts of the characteristic doctrines and practices associated with each of the various lineages he lists, there is very little in the way of contemporaneous evidence that would allow us to determine the true scope and character of the schools that produced those competing genealogical records.

One thing that is amply clear from Tsung-

mi's writings and all the other documents at our disposal, however, is that in the T'ang dynasty there was never any sort of unified movement with a commonly held set of teachings or practices or social structures that we could justifiably label the "Ch'an school" of Buddhism. On the contrary, there were numerous and diverse schools, some centered on the capitals and some located in distant regions such as Szechuan, some in direct competition for imperial recognition and patronage and some so widely separated as to be ignorant of each other's existence, which held only one thing in common: a concern with spiritual genealogy as a strategy of legitimation and an investment in the mythology of the lineage of a conveniently vague Indian *dhyāna* master by the name of Bodhidharma. Until the early ninth century, when Tsung-mi attempted to pull together and compare the doctrines of all the schools that linked themselves in some way with Bodhidharma's lineage, the concept of a single broadly extended, multi-branched "Ch'an lineage" did not exist. Tsung-mi struggled to harmonize the teachings of what he conceived as the various branches of the Ch'an lineage, portraying them as opposite but ultimately complementary aspects of one profound, ineffable truth transmitted by Bodhidharma. His ecumenical vision and sense of community was shared by few if any other claimants to Bodhidharma's lineage in the T'ang, however, so this was a case of a lineage produced by an individual rather than a school. In plain words, there was a Ch'an lineage mentioned in a few texts (all Tsung-mi's) prior to the mid-tenth century, but there was no real Ch'an school that corresponded to it or adopted it as a genealogy. Nor was there any historically verifiable transmission of concrete doctrines or practices along any of the lines of Dharma transmission that ostensibly linked Bodhidharma with his various putative spiritual heirs in the sixth generation and beyond.

The Ch'an school, in my view, emerged as a real entity with an identifiable social structure, ideology, and body of sacred texts sometime

around the middle of the tenth century. The process through which it arose was gradual and complex, but may be viewed as having three basic phases: (1) the formation and widespread acceptance among Buddhists of a mythical genealogy very similar to (and clearly influenced by) Tsung-mi's ecumenical conception of a multi-branched lineage stemming from Bodhidharma; (2) the ritual reenactment of that mythical genealogy in a way that gave rise to an elite class of Ch'an masters (*ch'an-shih*) within the Buddhist order; and (3) the ratification by the state of both the lineage myth and the social hierarchy it fostered, resulting in the creation of Ch'an school monasteries.

In order to understand how this process—the institutionalization of the Ch'an lineage myth—unfolded, it is necessary to review the circumstances that had befallen Chinese Buddhism over the course of the previous two centuries, from the time of the An Lu-shan rebellion (755-763) in the middle of the T'ang down through the period of the Five Dynasties (907-959). Prior to the An Lu-shan rebellion, imperial patronage had played a decisive role in supporting the Buddhist order and in determining which schools within it would flourish. Although the court was probably motivated as much by a desire to control Buddhism as to promote it, Buddhism was nevertheless afforded the status of a national religion. Various schools within it, including those which claimed to represent Bodhidharma's lineage, vied vigorously for official recognition as legitimate representatives of the religion. Following the An Lu-shan rebellion, however, there was a gradual decentralization of political and economic power that led a growing number of Buddhist clergy to seek patronage among provincial bureaucrats and military governors.

The systematic suppression of Buddhist institutions that was instigated by imperial decree in the Hui-ch'ang era (841-846) greatly increased the role that provincial patrons played in the survival and subsequent development of Chinese Buddhism. The suppression resulted in the whole-

sale defrocking of Buddhist clergy, the closing or destruction of Buddhist monasteries, and the seizure of their wealth. These measures were carried out wherever the power of the central T'ang government still extended, and the schools of Buddhism that had enjoyed imperial patronage in the vicinity of the capitals, including the Northern School of Shen-hsiu and the school of Shen-hui, were greatly effected. There is evidence, however, that in some regions such as Kiangsi in the south (where the Hung-chou school of Ma-tsu was flourishing) and Hopei in the north (where the school of Lin-chi was supported by a local warlord), the imperial edicts proscribing Buddhism were carried out half-heartedly, or even ignored.³² The fact that certain schools claiming to represent Bodhidharma's lineage came through the Hui-ch'ang suppression unscathed was probably due in large part to their distance—both in terms of geography and of patronage—from the T'ang court.

With the end of the Hui-ch'ang era and the ascension of a new emperor more favorably disposed towards Buddhism, the official policy of suppression was rescinded and some imperial patronage was restored, but that patronage became less and less significant as the empire finally disintegrated completely into local regimes in the final decades of the T'ang. The late T'ang and Five Dynasties, a period of political fragmentation, saw the development of what were later called the "five houses (*wu-chia*) of Ch'an" under the protection of various local officials in areas that were relatively free from strife. Among these, the Wei-yang school was the first to flourish.³³ The Emperor Wu-tsung, who had presided over the suppression, died in 846 and was succeeded by Hsüan-tsung, who was sympathetic to Buddhism. P'ei-hsiu (797-870), a powerful advisor in Hsüan-tsung's court, restored the T'ung-ch'ing Monastery on Mt. Wei in Hunan province where Wei-shan Ling-yu (771-853) had resided before the suppression, and many disciples gathered there under that master once

again. Another monastic center revived with P'ei-hsiu's patronage soon after the suppression was Mt. Huang-po in Kiangsi province, where Huang-po Hsi-yün (d. ca. 856) flourished.³⁴ Meanwhile, the Lin-chi school began to thrive in far off Hopei with the support of non-Chinese warlords. The Yün-men school flourished in the area of Lingnan, patronized by the rulers of the state of Nan Han. The Fa-yen school was centered in the Nan T'ang, a state made up of parts of the older kingdoms of Wu in Kiangsi and Min in Fukien. Each of these schools developed its own distinctive approach to Buddhist thought and practice in relative isolation from the others. Together with the Tung-shan school, they have been regarded since the Sung as the major streams of the Ch'an lineage in the late T'ang and Five Dynasties. It was only retrospectively, however, in the mid-tenth century, that the genealogies handed down in these schools were collated and referred to collectively as the "Ch'an lineage." As Yanagida Seizan suggests, moreover, there must have been numerous other similarly localized new developments in the Buddhism of this period.³⁵ The so-called "five houses" just happened to be schools for which records survived.

It was during the first half of the tenth century, while much of northern China was torn by strife, that a new conception of Bodhidharma's lineage similar to the one held earlier by Tsung-mi began to gain acceptance in the kingdoms of the southeast. As Yanagida has pointed out, those kingdoms were havens of relative peace and prosperity in a troubled age, and because their rulers were generally sympathetic to Buddhism, many monks from more strife-torn regions took refuge there.³⁶ In this setting, where monks from all over China congregated and brought with them the lineage claims and hagiographical lore of numerous regional schools, a consensus arose that granted membership in a broadly conceived Ch'an lineage to anyone who could trace his spiritual heritage back to Bodhidharma through the sixth patriarch

Hui-neng. The principle of unilinear Dharma succession that Shen-hui had stressed earlier survived to the extent that the "trunk" of the Ch'an family tree was envisioned as a line of thirty-three Indian and Chinese patriarchs (one per generation) culminating in Hui-neng, but two main branches (the lineages of Ch'ing-yüan and Nan-yüeh) and multiple sub-branches were accepted as equally legitimate in the generations after Hui-neng. It was also allowed that the lineage had anciently included "collateral" branches, such as the lineages of Niu-t'ou (594-657) and Shen-hsiu, stemming from the fourth and fifth patriarchs, respectively.

The oldest extant text to embody such a multi-branched Ch'an lineage is the *Tsu-t'ang-chi* or "Patriarchs Hall Collection."³⁷ It was compiled in 952 by two monks who were followers in the third generation of the eminent Ch'an master Hsüeh-feng I-ts'un (822-908).³⁸ The compilers resided at the Chao-ch'ing Cloister in Ch'üan-chou (in present Fukien). At the time, Ch'üan-chou was under the rule of the Nan T'ang but previously it had fallen within the boundaries of the kingdom of Min. The Chao-ch'ing Cloister had been built in 906 for a disciple of Hsüeh-feng I-ts'un (822-908) by the Wang family, the rulers of Min who had patronized Hsüeh-feng and many of his followers. The port cities of Ch'üan-chou and Fu-chou, where the Wangs were based, were relatively prosperous and free from turmoil. Because patronage from the sympathetic local rulers was available there, monks flocked from all over, and the number of Hsü-feng's disciples grew to some 1,700.³⁹

Like many of the independent kingdoms in both north and south China that competed for territory and economic and political influence during the tenth century, Nan T'ang fancied itself an "empire" along the lines of the great T'ang dynasty. Because the T'ang emperors before them had patronized the Buddhist order and built monasteries dedicated to the protection of the nation, it was deemed fitting by the rulers of these states that they should follow suit. The compilers of the *Tsu-t'ang-chi*, with their implicit claim to represent not

just a single line of orthodox Buddhism, but rather a great many lines that had thrived all over China in the T'ang, created a document that played nicely to this conceit: they made the Ch'an lineage in Fukien seem like the repository of all the glories of the past, and the true guardians of the flame of T'ang Buddhism. At this point, I think, it is fair to speak of a nascent Ch'an school in southeast China, identifiable by: its newly forged genealogical records; its conception of itself as a lineage which conveyed the Buddha Śākyamuni's formless Dharma of enlightenment in a "mind-to-mind" transmission from master to disciple, apart from the scriptural tradition; and its success in gaining the patronage of kings, which was manifested concretely in the building of "Ch'an (lineage) monasteries" (*ch'an-ssu*)—something that had never existed before.

Nan T'ang, as it happened, was not the state to succeed in reunifying China and turning the rhetoric of empire into reality. That distinction (though never fully realized, due to the existence of the powerful Khitan state to the north) belonged to the Sung. Nor did the *Tsu-t'ang-chi* survive long in China: as fate would have it, the text was lost within about 150 years of its publication, being preserved in its entirety only in Korea. Nevertheless, the conception of the Ch'an lineage reflected in the *Tsu-t'ang-chi* soon found expression in other collections of Ch'an biographies known generically as records of transmission of the flame (*ch'uan-teng lu*), and those succeeded in gaining the official approval of the Northern Sung court. The oldest and most influential of the texts in question is the *Ching-te ch'uan teng lu*, which was completed 1004 and subsequently included in all imperial editions of the Buddhist canon. It seems that with the political reunification of China, the Buddhist order in general had an opportunity to regain its erstwhile status as an imperially sanctioned national religion. It was the nascent Ch'an school in particular, however, armed with its ancient yet open-ended genealogy and its claim to transmit no particular doctrine or practice but only

the "Buddha mind" (*fo-hsin*, i.e. enlightenment) itself, that was able to bring the greatest number of regional movements under its wing and present itself at the Sung court as the legitimate standard bearer of the Buddhist tradition as a whole.

The Ch'an lineage in the Sung was essentially a mythological entity, that is, a collection of stories about how the sacred (enlightenment) manifested itself in the world of human beings from ancient times down to the present. Yet, because the mythology was not only transmitted verbally and in written form, but was also reenacted in concrete rituals that were recognized by the government as well as the Buddhist community at large, the Ch'an lineage did in fact take on a certain social and institutional reality. That is to say, there was in the Sung an elite group of Buddhist monks (and a few nuns and lay persons) who were regarded as living members of the Ch'an lineage by virtue of the fact that they had formally inherited the Dharma from another recognized member of the lineage in a ritual of Dharma transmission.

In earlier accounts of Bodhidharma's lineage in China (beginning with Shen-hui) we find the patriarchs handing over robes and bowls to their disciples as proof of Dharma transmission—visible signs that the formless Dharma had indeed been vouchsafed. In the Sung, however, it was only by the possession of an "inheritance certificate" (*ssu-shu*), a kind of diploma received in the ritual of Dharma transmission, that a person was recognized as a member of the Ch'an lineage. When one recalls the image of the iconoclastic Ch'an master that is projected in the hagiographical literature, the key role played in Sung Ch'an by such regalia might seem strange. It was precisely because the Ch'an lineage was defined in terms of the transmission of something utterly signless and ineffable, however, that certification was necessary. It is easy to assume that the mark of a Ch'an master (*ch'an-shih*) in the Sung would have

been skill in meditation. The term *ch'an-shih* does in fact mean "meditation master" in texts dating from the T'ang and earlier, but many proponents of the Ch'an lineage in the Sung vigorously denied that the name Ch'an signified any particular reliance on the practice of *dhyāna* (*ch'an-na*, commonly abbreviated as *ch'an*). The Ch'an master Chueh-fan Hui-hung (1071-1128), for example, stressed that Bodhidharma himself had not been a mere practitioner of *dhyāna* (*hsi-ch'an*), but a great sage who mastered the full range of Buddhist practices.⁴⁰ What the term "Ch'an lineage" really meant in the Sung was not the lineage of meditation, but the lineage of enlightenment. Masters in the Ch'an lineage could not be readily distinguished from other Buddhist monks on the basis of their ordinations, the practices they engaged in, or the arrangement of the monasteries they lived in. The elite ranks of Ch'an masters in the Sung included not only meditation specialists but also Pure Land devotees, tantric ritualists, experts on monastic discipline, exegetes of *sūtra* and philosophical literature, poets, artists, and even monks with leanings to Neo-Confucianism. Thus, apart from a familiarity with the mythology of the Ch'an lineage and an ability to mimic its rhetorical style in certain ritual settings, the only indispensable external marks of a Ch'an master in the Sung were the regalia of Dharma transmission, chief among them his inheritance certificate.

It should be clear from this that the majority of the members of the Ch'an lineage as it was conceived in the Sung were ancestral figures whose sacred words and deeds were preserved in the "records of the transmission of the flame." Only the most recent heirs to the lineage were living, and even they were revered as ancestor-like personages who in a certain sense had already departed the world of ordinary human beings and joined their predecessors.⁴¹ The entity I want to call the Ch'an school included far more members than the few who were recognized as Dharma heirs, although the latter were clearly the leaders. The school consisted of everyone who believed in the

Ch'an lineage, gained inspiration from its lore, worshipped its patriarchs, and followed or supported the Ch'an masters who were its living representatives.

The Sung court favored the Ch'an school, mainly by granting canonical status to the hagiographical collections that elaborated its conception of an extended, multi-branched Ch'an lineage, and by designating large state-supported ("public") monasteries as places where only monks who were Dharma heirs in that lineage could serve as abbot. It is important to note that many of the monasteries so designated in the early Sung had been in existence from T'ang times or even earlier and had often enjoyed some sort of imperial recognition or patronage in the past, but without any particular association with the lineage of Bodhidharma. The sudden conversion of those establishments to "Ch'an monasteries" (*ch'an-ssu* or *ch'an-yüan*) by imperial proclamation in the Sung, in fact, was usually accomplished by simply renaming the institution, issuing an imperial plaque bearing the new name for display above the main gate, and appointing a new abbot (regarded as "founding abbot," *k'ai-shan*) who belonged to the Ch'an lineage. The one other change that was absolutely necessary was a refurbishing of the mortuary halls with the portraits of Ch'an patriarchs.

Much has been made in the scholarly literature about the characteristic features of Ch'an monasteries in the Sung, but as I have shown elsewhere, they were in fact largely indistinguishable in their organization and operation from other large, public monasteries.⁴² The Ch'an school claimed to have invented many features of the monastic institution that it came to dominate in the Sung, attributing them to the T'ang patriarch Paichang (749-814). Those claims do not stand up to historical criticism, however, and so must be interpreted as just another aspect of the Sung Ch'an mythology. It is clear, moreover, that the vast majority of the monks, nuns, novices, postu-

lants, and lay patrons who lived and trained in Ch'an monasteries in the Sung were not members of the Ch'an lineage (as the term was understood at the time) because only a select few ever received Dharma transmission. Many persons at all levels in the monastic hierarchy did, however, have various connections with members of the Ch'an lineage, who were usually senior officers, abbots, or retired abbots.

The overall picture of the Sung Ch'an school that emerges is that of individual members of an elite, highly prestigious, mythologically charged fraternity (the Ch'an lineage) holding high monastic office and having around them a wide circle of followers of varying ranks and social standings.⁴³

NOTES

1. Mircea Eliade, et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2:482.
2. Ibid., 2:484.
3. Ibid., 2:485.
4. Uchi Hakuju, *Zenshūshi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1935), 81-90.
5. T. Griffith Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch'an Buddhism," Peter N. Gregory and Patricia Ebrey, eds., *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China, 700-1300* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, forthcoming).
6. John R. McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 85-6.
7. *Taishō shinshū daizokyo* (hereafter abbreviated T) 50.551b-552c.
8. T 50.606b.
9. The text does not survive as an independent work, but is preserved as the first six biographies in the *Ch'uan fa-pao chi*. For a critical edition of the text see Yanagida Seizan, ed., *Shoki no zenshi I* (Tokyo: Chikuma, 1971).

10. Sekiguchi Shindai, *Daruma no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1967), 133.

11. This is reported in a Tun-huang text, Shen-hui's *P'u-t'i-ta-mo nan-tsung ting shih-fei lun*, edited by Hu Shih in *Shen-hui ho-shang i-chi* (Taipei: Hu Shih chi-nien kuan, 1968), 289.

12. The core of the *Ch'uan fa-pao chi*, in the section devoted to Hung-jen's biography, states explicitly that Hung-jen transmitted the Dharma to his disciple Fa-ju, but it makes no mention at all of Shen-hsiu (Yanagida, ed., *Shoki no zenshi I*, 386). In Fa-ju's biography, as well, Fa-ju's receipt of the Dharma from Hung-jen is repeated in no uncertain terms (*Ibid.*, 390). It is inconceivable that anyone wishing to establish Shen-hsiu as Hung-jen's chief disciple would have singled out and honored Fa-ju in this way or gratuitously forged a link between Bodhidharma and Fa-ju's Shao-lin Monastery.

13. In his introduction, the editor of the *Ch'an fa-pao chi*, Tu Fei, reiterates the lineage of Dharma transmission from Bodhidharma to Fa-ju just as it appears in Fa-ju's epitaph, only adding a line that reads "and Fa-ju ceded it to Ta-t'ung (Shen-hsiu)" (Yanagida, 337; translation from McRae, *The Northern School*, 257). The claim here, significantly, is not that Fa-ju "transmitted" (*ch'uan*—the verb used in every other case) the Dharma to Shen-hsiu, but that he "ceded" it. What Tu Fei means by this becomes clear in Fa-ju's biography, where the master is quoted as proclaiming to his disciples just before his death that "After [my death] you should go study under *Dhyāna* Master Shen-hsiu of Yü-ch'üan ssu in Ching-chou" (Yanagida, 390; translation from McRae, 265). It is likely that Tu Fei simply tacked this quote on to the end of Fa-ju's biography (the end of the core text) in order to provide a justification for and smooth transition to the biography of Shen-hsiu that he was appending. He still had a problem, however, for Shen-hsiu had to be portrayed as a Dharma heir in the lineage, and that meant forging a connection with Hung-jen. This Tu Fei managed, not by adding a reference to Shen-hsiu into Hung-jen's biography, but by stating circum-

spectly in Shen-hsiu's own biography that "when *Dhyāna* Master [Hung]-jen was about to die, it was said [by Hung-jen? or someone else?] that [Shen-hsiu] already had Dharma transmission" (Yanagida, 396). This clearly implies that Shen-hsiu received Dharma transmission from Hung-jen, but it uses hearsay as a device and avoids a direct statement of fact. I conclude from all of this that Tu Fei went as far as he could to turn the *Ch'uan fa-pao chi* into a text that was supportive of the claims of Shen-hsiu's followers, but that he was constrained by the preexisting account of Fa-ju's lineage and was not at liberty to reject that account out of hand or meddle too much with the core six biographies.

14. The *Leng-chia shih-tzu chi* places Shen-hsiu's biography immediately after Hung-jen's, states explicitly in Hung-jen's biography that Shen-hsiu was his Dharma heir, and mentions "Fa-ju of Lu-chou" only once in passing as one of three disciples whom Hung-jen proclaims "fit to teach people, but just in their local regions" (Yanagida, 273).

15. McRae, 8-9.

16. Suzuki Tetsuo, "Nanshū tōshi no shuchō," 77-79.

17. McRae, 10.

18. Philip B. Yampolsky, trans., *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).

19. *P'u-t'i-ta-mo nan-tsung ting shih-fei lun*, in Hu Shih, ed., *Shen-hui ho-shang i-chi*, 284, 289.

20. John Jorgensen, "The 'Imperial' Lineage of Ch'an Buddhism: The Role of Confucian Ritual and Ancestor Worship in Ch'an's Search for Legitimation in the Mid-T'ang Dynasty," *The Australian National University Department of Far Eastern History Papers on Far Eastern History* 35 (March, 1987): 114. Jorgensen draws on Yang Hung-fei, "Jinne no dentōsetsu to Juka shisō to no kōshō," *Ryūkoku shidan* 56/57, 1967.

21. Jorgensen, 96.

22. Jorgensen, 104.

23. Jorgensen, 90.

24. This portrait hall is described in the *Sung kao-seng chuan*, T 50.755b; reference given in Jorgensen, 121 (note 141).

25. It is not clear from the text of the *Sung kao-seng chuan* (T 50.755b.11-13) whether images for the various patriarchs in India were also included or whether there were only portraits for the six patriarchs in China.

26. For a discussion of Tsung-mi's affiliation with Shen-hui's line and religious training, see Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 34-52.

27. The preceding data in this paragraph all derives from the *Yüan-chüeh-ching ta-shu ch'ao*, written by Tsung-mi sometime between 833 and 841; *Dainippon sokusōkyō* (hereafter abbreviated as ZZ) 1-14-3.277c. Cited in Jorgensen, 118.

28. Jorgensen, 119-29. Jorgensen's note 136 (p. 129): "This stele is preserved in the Forest of Steles in Hsi-an. It is titled *T'ang ku Chao-sheng ssu Ta-te Hui-chien Ch'an-shih p'ei*. Can be found in Tsukuda Yasunobu, *Seian hiran no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1983), p.124."

29. Luis O. Gómez, "Purifying Gold: The Metaphor of Effort and Intuition in Buddhist Thought and Practice," Peter N. Gregory, ed. *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism, no. 5 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 86.

30. John R. McRae, "Shen-hui and the Teaching of Sudden Enlightenment in Early Ch'an Buddhism," Gregory, ed. *Sudden and Gradual*, 254.

31. ZZ 1-4-3.278b-279a.

32. Yanagida Seizan, "Tō matsu godai no kahoku chihō ni okeru zenshū no rekishiteki shakaiteki jijō ni tsuite," *Nihon bukkyō gakkai nenpō* 25 (March, 1959):171-186; Edwin O. Reischauer, *Ennin's Travels in T'ang China* (New York: Ronald Press, 1955), 270.

33. Yanagida Seizan, "Chūgoku no zenshūshi," Nishitani Keiji, ed., *Kōza zen 3, Zen*

no rekishi: Chūgoku (Tokyo: Chikuma, 1974), 68-70; Jeffrey Lyle Broughton, *Kuei-feng Tsung-mi: The Convergence of Ch'an and the Teachings* (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1975), 35.

34. Yanagida, "Chūgoku no zenshūshi," 69.

35. Ibid., 80.

36. Yanagida Seizan, ed., *Sodōshū. Zengaku sōsho 4* (Kyoto: Chūbun, 1984) 1-5.

37. Yanagida, ed., *Sodōshū*; see Yampolsky, *The Platform Sūtra*, 51, note 177, for other editions.

38. Ching (n.d.) and Yün (n.d.) by name. Both were disciples of Fu-hsien Wen-teng (n. d.), who wrote a preface for the *Tsu-t'ang chi*. Wen-teng was a disciple of Pao-fu Ts'ung-chen (867-928), who in turn was a disciple of Hsüeh-feng. See Yanagida, ed., *Sodōshū*, 1.

39. Ibid., 1. For a history of this area during the Five Dynasties see Edward H. Schafer, *The Empire of Min*; at the end of his section on Buddhism (91-96), Schafer notes that "it is clear that Fukien was an important center of the Zen sect in this period."

40. *Lin-chien-lu*, ZZ 2B-21-4.295d.

41. This status was symbolized in a number of ways, including the production and distribution of funerary portraits of eminent masters while they were still alive, and the practice of masters retiring to memorial cloisters in which their own stūpas were already enshrined.

42. Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch'an Buddhism."

43. The size and composition of this following was considered a measure of a Ch'an master's success in the Sung. The epitaphs of Ch'an masters usually told how many people they gave bodhisattva precepts to, how many novices they ordained, how many personal disciples they had, and how many Dharma heirs they recognized.