4. *Romanticism breeds cynicism.*
Storytellers inevitably create heroes and villains, and the depiction of Zen's early patriarchs and icons cripples our understanding of both the Tang "golden age" and the supposedly stagnant formalism of the Song dynasty. If one side is romanticized, the other must be vilified, and both subjects pass incognito. The collusion between Zen romanticists and the apologists for Confucian triumphalism—which has Song Neo-Confucianism climbing to glory on the back of a defeated Buddhism—is an obstacle to the understanding of both Chan and the Chinese civil tradition. The corollary is this: Cold realism eliminates dismissive misapprehension.

CHAPTER 1

Looking at Lineage

A Fresh Perspective on Chan Buddhism

How should we begin this discussion of Chan Buddhism? One device would be to begin with a story, some striking anecdote to arouse the reader's curiosity. There are certainly many good possibilities within the annals of Chan. One is the account of an earnest Chinese supplicant—the eventual second patriarch, Huike—cutting off his arm in order to hear the teachings from the enigmatic Indian sage, Bodhidharma. How many times this story must have been told in meditation halls in China and throughout the world, in order to inspire trainees to greater effort! Or we could find something a bit less gruesome—perhaps the tale about Layman Pang sinking all his possessions to the bottom of a river because he had learned the futility of chasing after worldly riches. Surely this example of unencumbered freedom is meant to teach us a deep spiritual message? The stock of legendary accounts that might be used, each with slightly different import, is endless. And there are other possible beginnings, as well. Many authors have their own favored ways of characterizing the most essential features of Chan, presenting some short list of features to sum up the entire tradition. Or we could avoid such bland generalization and simply celebrate the incredible creativity of the Chan tradition over the centuries, its vibrancy as a religious phenomenon.

The approach adopted here—already taken by posing these very deliberations—is to begin by asking questions, to arouse in the reader not merely a raw curiosity but the faculties of critical interrogation as well. Specifically, let us begin by directly considering the question of how we should look at Chan Buddhism: What approaches should we adopt, and which should we avoid? What forms of analysis will be fruitful, and which would merely repeat commonly accepted stereotypes?

The question of how we should look at Chan Buddhism is one we should not attempt to avoid; to simply ignore the issue and begin a recitation of facts and concepts would be to make an unspoken decision, to answer the question by adopting a policy of denial. But neither would it be appropriate for me to dictate the answer in flat and simple terms: as I compose these lines on the outskirts of Taipei at the very end of the twentieth century, and edit them in Honolulu at the beginning of the twenty-first, I am conscious of the incredible multivalence of cultural identity implicit in this process of exposition, both in my own person and those of my intended audiences. That is, in various ways and at different times I have been a scholar and practitioner, student and teacher, lover and hermit, and what I am about to present here I have learned through a series of extended educational encounters in America, Japan, and Taiwan. This text is intended for use by listeners and readers not only in China, but in Europe, the United States, and Japan as well—so how could I possibly presume to argue that there should be *one* way to look at Chan Buddhism? A multiplicity of perspectives and a certain fluidity of analytical typologies are givens in this postmodern world.

Deconstructing the Chan Lineage Diagram

For convenience, let me begin by defining a perspective on Chan that I wish to deconstruct and thereby avoid. I should confess that I mean only to caricature this perspective, so that we can use the observations made now to form a lever with which to push ourselves into a certain type of understanding (to paraphrase the positivist philosopher John Dewey and his student Hu Shih, who spoke of studying the past to create a lever with which to push China into a certain sort of future). The perspective to which I refer is the traditionalist approach depicted graphically in the lineage diagram presented in figure 1. Diagrams such as this are included in virtually every book on Chan that has ever been written, where they are used as a framework for presenting a historical narrative. Instead of plunging directly into that narrative and building upon the content of the diagram per se, though, we should first consider its semiotic impact as a medium of interpretation and communication. If the medium is the message (according to the saying popularized by Marshall McLuhan), what message is conveyed by the structure of the diagram itself? It is often noted that Chan claims to "not posit words" *(bu li wenzi, furyū monji)* and that it represents a "separate transmission outside the teachings" *(jiaowai bie-*

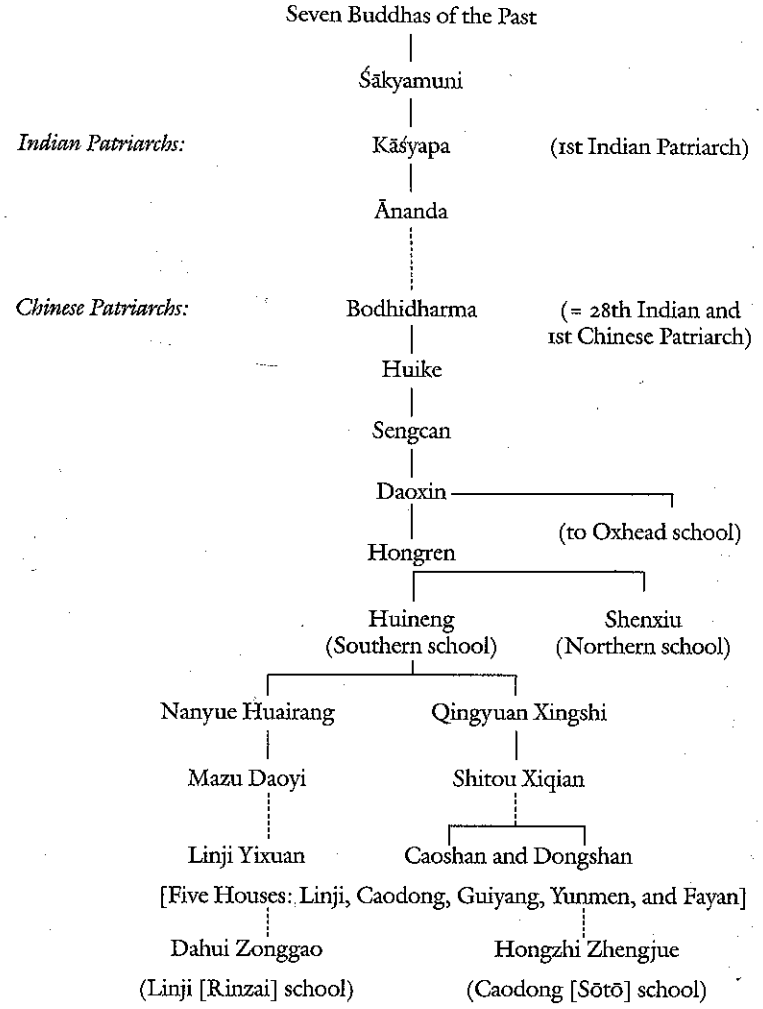


FIGURE 1. Lineage diagram of Chinese Chan Buddhism.

zhuan, kyōge betsuden). Almost always—as I am about to do right now—these phrases are introduced with the ironic observation that Chan certainly does use a lot of words in describing its own teachings. We will come back to the Chan use of language and its not "positing" of words later, but here we can observe that the lineage diagram provides the basic model for how Chan appreciates its own historical background. That

is, Chan does not define itself as being one among a number of Buddhist schools based on a particular scripture (such as the Tiantai [Tendai] school with its emphasis on the *Lotus Sūtra,* for example). Instead, Chan texts present the school as Buddhism itself, or as *the* central teaching of Buddhism, which has been transmitted from the seven Buddhas of the past to the twenty-eight Indian patriarchs, the six Chinese patriarchs, and all the generations of Chinese and Japanese Chan and Zen masters that follow. (Bodhidharma occupies a pivotal position as both the twenty-eighth Indian and first Chinese patriarch.) It took several centuries for this entire schema to be developed; the earliest building blocks appeared at the very end of the seventh century, and the complete system was published perhaps as early as 801 but certainly by the year 952.

One of the advantages of beginning by considering this lineage diagram, to be sure, is that it introduces the most important players in our story. The seven Buddhas of the past are legendary figures to whom we need pay only scant attention; although Chan texts amplify and modify their religious identities somewhat, for our purposes we can admit them into evidence solely as part of the cultural repertoire Chan inherited from the larger tradition of East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism. Chan has its own mythic take on Śākyamuni, of course, quite different from our own conception of him as the "historical" Buddha—but this too is a subject for another time. Nor must we pay much attention to the twenty-eight Indian patriarchs. The manner in which their hagiographies were explicated is a fascinating and exceedingly complex subject of study, but we do not have the space to consider it here.[1] On the other hand, the six Chinese patriarchs from Bodhidharma onward, along with Huineng and Shenxiu in the sixth generation and their several generations of disciples, will appear more often than any of the other players in this drama. (The reader will note at once that no disciples of Shenxiu's are listed in our lineage diagram, which is a telling omission in itself. I consider this briefly on p. 14 below.) The figures remembered as icons of the Linji (Rinzai) and Caodong (Sōtō) schools, whose names adorn the balance of the diagram, are among the most important in the history of the tradition.

We can draw some important basic inferences from this transmission diagram. First, a note on historical origins: the Chan lineage scheme is a combined product of Indian and Chinese culture. Often authors describe Chan as the "most Chinese" of all the Chinese Buddhist schools, and part of what they are referring to is the Chan genealogical model. (I am particularly allergic to this rhetoric, since such expressions are generally little more than unexplicated tautologies generated through a sense of cultural chauvinism rather than real analytical insight. And the fact that D. T. Suzuki and others say virtually the same thing with regard to Japanese Zen, that it represents somehow the essence of *Japanese* culture, should alert us to both the essential vacuity and the strategic intentions of such sentiments.)[2] Actually, the origins of this lineage-based transmission scheme are to be found in Indian Buddhism and the fourth- and fifth-century Buddhist meditation tradition of Kashmir. There are a number of parallels between the Chan transmission scheme and Chinese family genealogies of the eighth century and later, but we should remember that Indian Buddhists had parents and teachers, family genealogies and initiation lineages, just as the Chinese did.[3] As an amalgamation of Indian and Chinese elements, though, the Chinese Chan transmission schema developed within the Chinese Buddhist context and was particularly well adapted to that milieu. Just as DENG Xiaoping talked about "socialism with Chinese characteristics," we could refer to the Chinese Chan transmission model as a "Buddhist genealogical theory with Chinese characteristics."

Second, by using the lineage diagram to define Chan as a "separate transmission outside the teachings," the advocates of Chan were declaring their school to be profoundly different from, and fundamentally better than, all other Buddhist schools: where the other schools represented only interpretations of Buddhism, Chan constitutes the real thing, Buddhism itself. This is a polemical move, meant to establish the superiority of Chan over all other schools. Other East Asian Buddhist schools reacted in part by devising their own lineage transmission schemes, and in part by saying that Chan emphasized only one of the "three learnings" of morality, meditation, and wisdom. Whether we view medieval Chinese Buddhists as concerned solely with the highest forms of wisdom or as working to obtain imperial patronage and other this-worldly benefits, or engaged in both endeavors simultaneously, at the very least they were competing with their contemporaries for intellectual and cultural hegemony. We should thus not overlook the polemical quality of the lineage theory. Incidentally, to describe Chan Buddhism in terms of polemics and contestation is not to exercise any value judgment, let alone to denigrate the tradition, but merely to recognize historical fact.

Third, what counts in the Chan transmission scheme are not the "facts" of what happened in the lives of Śākyamuni, Bodhidharma, Huineng, and others, but rather how these figures were perceived in terms of Chan mythology. This point will come up repeatedly here, and I will argue a rather complex position: In case after case, what the texts say happened almost certainly did *not* occur, in terms of a straightforward but simple-

minded criterion of journalistic accuracy. But rather than being fixated on notions of fact and fabrication, we should notice the very dynamism of the mythopoeic processes involved. Whether or not any anecdote actually represents the words spoken and events that occurred "accurately" is only a historical accident, and in any case the supposedly "original" events would have involved only a very small number of people, at most the members of a single local community. What is of far greater consequence is the process by which that anecdote was generated and circulated, edited and improved, and thus transmitted throughout an entire population of Chan practitioners and devotees, until it became part of the fluid body of legendary lore by which Chan masters came to be identified throughout Chinese culture. This is McRae's first law of Zen studies: "It's not true, and therefore it's more important." This is to say that fiction—actually, a different sort of truth—is more important than the simplistic criterion of the question "Did it really happen?"[4]

Fourth, based on the rhetoric of *śūnyatā,* or emptiness,[5] nothing is actually transmitted in this transmission scheme. What occurs between each teacher and his successor is merely an approval or authorization *(yinke; inka)* of the successor's attainment of complete enlightenment.[6] This is first of all a doctrinal principle of Chan Buddhism itself, but we should recognize that the most important parts of the diagram are not the separate names of individual patriarchs, but the spaces between them, the lines that join them. That is, what is being represented is not only a series of human figures but the encounters between each figure and his immediate predecessor and successor. As is frequently stressed in the texts of Chan, there is no "thing"—such as enlightenment, the Buddha-mind, or whatever—that is actually passed from one patriarch to the next. The existence of such an entity would violate a fundamental Buddhist doctrinal theme, the denial of unchanging, substantive, and individual identity to the things and beings of this world. With regard to persons, this doctrinal theme is called "no-self" *(anātman)*; with regard to all the various component elements of existence, including persons, this is called "emptiness" *(śūnyatā)*. This is not a merely philosophical consideration, but rather an existential posture with profound genealogical impact: the focus is not on "what" is being transmitted, but on the relationship of encounter between the Buddhas and Patriarchs. The act of transmission thus involves not the bestowing of some "thing" from one master to the next, but the recognition of shared spiritual maturity. It is a cosmic dance involving a special set of partners, a relationship of encounter, a meeting at the deepest spiritual level.

Fifth, since the enlightenment of each Buddha and Pa[triarch] is complete, there is no differentiation between the religious statu[s] of Indian Buddhas and Patriarchs and their Chinese counterparts. This is perhaps the most important reason why this lineage-based exposition was so attractive to medieval Chinese Buddhists, since it raised the authority of native Chinese figures to equal those of their Indian predecessors. This is very important in terms of the sinification of Buddhism, that is, the adaptation of Buddhism within Chinese culture, a subject that is vitally relevant to a wide range of subjects in Chinese religions and Chinese studies in general. At the moment, though, what I want to emphasize is the most striking and most frequently overlooked characteristic of this diagram: the homologizing impact of its very simple lines of succession.

By representing Chan Buddhism in terms of a straight-line succession from the seven Buddhas of the past through the six Chinese Patriarchs, diagrams such as this are used to simplify fantastically complicated sets of cultural and religious phenomena. Every time a straight-line relationship between two masters is posited in a lineage diagram, an entire world of complexity, an intricate universe of human relationships and experiences, is effectively eliminated from view. Could any religious figure's identity possibly be adequately summarized by selecting only one out of a whole lifetime of relationships? Even a quick look at the biographies of Chinese Chan masters shows the extent of the distortion involved: where the sources are adequate, we sometimes see multiple awakening experiences[7] catalyzed by different teachers and events, yet in the lineage diagrams these are all reduced to single lines of transmission. The use of lineage diagrams to represent the Chan tradition, then—and their use is as old as the tradition itself, since it was by explicating genealogical specifics that Chan generated its own identity as a specific religious movement—is a hegemonic trope, the willful extension of one way of perceiving the world to the exclusion of all other viewpoints. (I briefly discuss the various branches and divisions of the diagram beginning on p. 9 below.)

Sixth, the "genealogical model" is important not only for the historical self-understanding of the Chan school in its transmission from Śākyamuni Buddha through Bodhidharma and onward, but also for the manner in which it defines how Chan spiritual practice itself is carried out. That is, in contrast to a basically Indian conception of meditation practice as an individual yogic endeavor of self-purification and progressive advancement toward buddhahood, the Chan genealogical model implies that the most important aspect of spiritual cultivation takes place in the *encounter* between teacher and student. Chan trainees still spent long hours

in the meditation hall—we can be sure of that, even though the texts often do not bother confirming the fact—but the focus of Chan rhetoric and literature is on the dialogues and exchanges between each master and his students, or between each student destined to be a master and his various teachers. It is thus not only the Chan school's self-understanding of its own religious history, but the religious practice of Chan itself that is fundamentally genealogical. By saying that Chan practice is fundamentally *genealogical,* I mean that it is derived from a genealogically understood encounter experience that is *relational* (involving interaction between individuals rather than being based solely on individual effort), *generational* (in that it is organized according to parent-child, or rather teacher-student, generations), and *reiterative* (i.e., intended for emulation and repetition in the lives of present and future teachers and students). No matter what the comparison or relationship between Chinese Chan and earlier forms of Indian Buddhist meditation practice, this particular complex of qualities is not found in other schools or forms of Buddhist training.[8]

In the most basic historical terms, though, we should recognize that the homologizing impact of the Chan lineage diagram represents a profound distortion of the subject matter. This is McRae's second rule of Zen studies: "Lineage assertions are as wrong as they are strong." In more formal language, this means that lineage assertions are problematic in direct proportion to their significance. That is, every time we read that the masters of such-and-such a group are related to each other in a lineal succession, the statement is probably inaccurate in some sense, and the more important it is to the religious identity of the individuals involved, the less accurate it will be. If nothing much is made of the relationship, the lineage assertion is more likely to be correct than if a great deal rides on it. Almost always, of course, the figure at the end of the list, or even that individual's students, has the most at stake in making such assertions. And if his religious identity must be defined on the basis of a lineal succession, if his historical status depends on being the recipient of the cumulative charisma of one particular set of predecessors, then it always seems that some significant distortion of the facts has taken place. Of course, my use of the word *facts* should remind you of the first rule, which remains relevant here: The presentation of reality in lineage schema represents a certain type of myth-making, and what is not "true" per se is inevitably more important!

Seventh, I referred above to "each teacher and *his* successor" (see p. 6), and the gender-specific terminology is appropriate. The Chan tradition is overwhelmingly male-dominated, and the strong implications of the term *patriarchal* in English (referring both to Chan figureheads and a male-centered ideology) is entirely suitable here. Nancy Jay has analyzed how genealogical systems tend to create justifications for removing women from the nexus of power and fecundity,[9] and in a later chapter, we will consider the manner in which Chan represented a way of organizing power within the Chinese Buddhist monastic establishment. There is also, of course, a broader, gender-related issue concerning Chan as a patriarchal ideology: to put it bluntly, Was Chan a weapon used to oppress women within Chinese society? Alas, I cannot deliberate on this issue in these pages, but when the subject comes up, scholars should certainly not shrink from it. This awareness, however, is helpful here in a different and perhaps even larger sense. I do find it germane to deal with the following variant of the question: Was Chan a weapon in the oppression of Chinese religious practitioners in general, or did it serve to suppress certain groups of them? This is a shocking question, to be sure, but it seems to me that any means by which knowledge is structured—and the lineage format is certainly that—both *allows* and *suppresses* different types of perspectives. I am by no means unsympathetic to the Chan tradition, nor to the realm of Buddhist meditation and spiritual cultivation in general, but a consideration of how the Chan school's dominance in Chinese Buddhism may have militated against alternative viewpoints seems an obvious aspect of our intellectual responsibility.

At this point, you may be surprised that we have derived so many inferences from one simple diagram, but we could certainly coax numerous additional insights from it if space were not an issue. Let us leave further comment on the Chan lineage diagram and the genealogical identity of the Chan tradition until later, though, and turn instead to the reason we began this discussion in the first place.

Avoiding the "String of Pearls" Fallacy

The preceding observations regarding the lineage diagram are to some extent preventive medicine, prophylaxis against a type of interpretation to be avoided. Simply put, the message is this: To represent Chan Buddhism in terms that are congruent with the lineage paradigm is to run the risk of mere repetition, without saying anything fundamentally insightful. Rather than performing legitimate analytical investigations, to do so would be merely to recapitulate an inherited symbolic system, and

in this context one's most cherished intellectual nuances would be nothing more than trivial variations on the genealogical model. Here it is useful to make a clear insider/outsider distinction: What is both expected and natural for a religious practitioner operating *within* the Chan episteme, what is necessary in order to achieve membership within the patriarchal lineage, becomes intellectually debilitating for those standing, even if only temporarily, *outside* the realm of Chan as its observers and analysts. What from the standpoint of Chan religious practice may be absolutely essential becomes, from the standpoint of intellectual analysis, the passive submission to a hegemony, the unwitting contraction of an intellectual pathology.

So what is it that we should not be doing? Or, to put it another way, how can we recognize when we are falling, or in danger of falling, into patterns that inhibit our ability to see the history of Chan in all its rich complexity?

Seen from this perspective, the issue is really quite simple: Whenever we pretend to explain Chan in terms of lineal successions from one great master to another, we run the risk of committing the "string of pearls" fallacy, in which the evolution of Chan Buddhism is described in terms of a sequence of individual masters like pearls on a string. This is a variant of the "great man" fallacy of historical writing, in which one explains the inevitably messy details of past realities in terms of the willful endeavors of a limited number of heroic men. (Once again, the gender-specific terminology is warranted.) To be more logically precise, it is also an example of the fallacy of archetypes, which "consists in conceptualizing change in terms of the re-enactment of primordial archetypes which exist outside of time."[10]

In terms of Zen studies, this tendency is starkly apparent in the way Dunhuang manuscripts have been used to supplement rather than radically transform the appreciation of Chan in many writings. A trove of cultural treasures similar to the Dead Sea scrolls, the Dunhuang manuscripts were discovered in a walled-up cave in Chinese Central Asia at the turn of the twentieth century and then dispersed to various libraries throughout the world. They provided a cross-section of Chan documents from the eighth to the tenth centuries, just before the great editorial homogenization of the Song dynasty took place.[11] Access to these manuscripts has allowed scholars to explore the early phases of Chinese Chan Buddhism in ways that would simply not have been possible in their absence, and the analysis of this magnificent trove has occupied the attentions of scholars (not only in Chan, but in other fields of Buddhist and Daoist studies, and various realms of historical and sociological research as well) for the entire twentieth century. However, in Chan studies, evidence from the Dunhuang manuscripts has most often been used merely to paint better features onto the same old traditional picture, merely to add attractive detail to the genealogical model described above. Thus, scholars have used Dunhuang manuscripts in conjunction with other evidence to devise more vivid portraits of Bodhidharma, Huineng, and others as *individual* figures, without changing the framework in which these individuals are presented in any substantial manner, and certainly without trying to work out the cultural and religious dynamics that led to their inclusion in the genealogical paradigm in the first place. There are exceptions, of course, but they are comparatively few and far between.

I am not suggesting that we never include descriptions of lineage successions in our writing on Chan—far from it—but only that, when we do so, we should be conscious of the reasons for their use and remain aware of the risks involved. Not only would it be impossible to talk about Chan without ever using concepts related to lineage—to the extent it can be described as a continuous set of processes, Chan is at its most profound level a *genealogical* set of phenomena—but we will gain the greatest benefit from shifting our focus and perspective repeatedly as we move through the evidence. To commit the "string of pearls" fallacy is to remain fixed and unaware in a single posture. Rather than simply move to a different static position, however, we should work to illuminate our subject from a number of angles, to encounter it with different aspects of our interpretive capacities.

A Provisional Device: The Phases of Chan

Figure 2 (p. 13) is a simple chart describing Chan in a manner quite different from that of the lineage diagram (fig. 1) discussed above. Where the traditional Chan diagram lists names of individual human beings, this chart lists named phases or trends in the evolution of Chan.[12] The names of these phases or trends are not universally accepted in writings about Chan, and the boundaries between them are subject to debate. I preserve these ambiguities by not adopting this terminology and periodization without question throughout these chapters; on the contrary, we should pay close attention to the intrinsic fuzziness of the borders between the phases named so uniquely and unambiguously here. It is in large part through considering the failure of any margins to tightly cap-

ture these arbitrary entities that we will be able to see the utility of this periodization.

Each of the named phases refers not to a specific set of individuals per se (although some of the most representative figures are listed), but to a style or configuration of religious activity that is known through a variety of sources. One of the primary models by which each phase is characterized is, of course, a list of teachers, known as patriarchs in the traditional lineage scheme, who function as figureheads for a certain type of religious identity. These men (and very occasionally women) serve as exemplars of enlightened behavior, whose stories are told and retold in order to pattern the behavior of subsequent generations of students.[13] (Even as Chan involves the transcendence of patterned behavior in enlightened spontaneity, this abandoning of patterning must itself be patterned in order to be understood, modeled before it can be imitated, deconstructed, and refigured.) Information about these figureheads, as well as doctrinal explanations and other types of information, was circulated both orally and through written texts. Hence each phase of Chan can be described in terms of multiple dimensions: its exemplary human representatives, the geography and timing of their activities, the texts that describe their activities and convey their teachings, and so forth. Figure 2 provides information of this sort briefly in the summary for each phase.

Hence, the basic difference between the lineage diagram and the chart in figure 2 is that, where the diagram tends to homologize all the individuals represented as identically enlightened representatives of a single confraternity—to enable (and simultaneously limit) the understanding of them according to a meaningful yet unitary religious mode—the chart seeks to distinguish qualitative differences along a chronological axis, to facilitate multiple perspectives and modes of understanding. The goal of the chart is the generation of meaningful distinctions, not the assertion of an unbroken continuity of patriarchal authority.

You will note that the lineage diagram is not monolithically unilinear, that there are divisions into double lines at a number of points, and that five different "houses" of Chan are specified. How can we account for these differentiations, while at the same time acknowledging the "homologizing" impact of the lineage diagram and its underlying religious assumptions? We will consider most of these examples in detail later, but they are to a certain extent exceptions that prove the rule. It has long been recognized that Huineng and Shenxiu, the figureheads of the so-called Southern and Northern schools, function within traditional Chan ideology not as two isolated individuals, but as an inextricably related

FIGURE 2. Simplified chart of the phases of Chinese Chan.

PROTO-CHAN ca. 500–600	Bodhidharma (d. ca. 530) Huike (ca. 485 to ca. 555 or after 574) *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* SUMMARY: Multiple locations in north China; practice based on Buddha-nature; no known lineage theory. Known through traditional texts and a few Dunhuang documents.
EARLY CHAN ca. 600–900	Hongren (601–74) Shenxiu (606?–706), Huineng (638–713) Shenhui (684–758) Northern, Southern, Oxhead factions *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* SUMMARY: Various loosely defined factions/groups, with different approaches to "contemplation of the mind"; relationship between this and proto-Chan unclear; lineage theories appear from 689 on as a unifying ideology; known through numerous Dunhuang documents and traditional sources.
MIDDLE CHAN ca. 750–1000	Mazu (709–88), Shitou (710–90) Linji (d. 867), Xuefeng Yicun (822–908) Hongzhou and Hubei factions, antecedents of the Five Houses *Anthology of the Patriarchal Hall* SUMMARY: Emergence of "encounter dialogue" as primary mode of practice and discourse, recorded in colloquial form and massive quantity in 952, and implying a genealogical model of religious cultivation; not present in Dunhuang documents but known through Song dynasty texts and idealized as a golden age during Song.
SONG-DYNASTY CHAN ca. 950–1300	Dahui (1089–1163), Hongzhi (1091–1157) Five Houses, Linji and Caodong schools *Blue Cliff Record* SUMMARY: Greatest flourishing of Chan, which as an administrative ideology dominated the Chinese monastic establishment; the image of Tang-dynasty masters operating in enlightened spontaneity was inscribed in highly ritualized Song-dynasty settings; snippets of encounter dialogue were collected, edited to serve as precedents of enlightened activity, and used as topics of meditative inquiry.

NOTE: In order to cover Chan from the end of the Song dynasty up to the present, this chart should include at least a postclassical phase or perhaps multiple later phases. However, since the developments of these later periods are not treated in this book, I will not attempt a periodization here.

pair simultaneously linked in collaborative and competitive relationship. Together they constitute a single literary and religious polarity expressed as a relationship between two human exemplars. A convenient shorthand for this complex bimodality is the French word *duel,* which carries the meanings of both "duel" and "dual" in English.[14] Thus the doctrine of sudden enlightenment associated with the Southern school cannot be explained without reference to a gradualist doctrine attributed to the Northern school. (This simplistic explanation of sudden versus gradual is woefully inadequate in the face of historical reality, but it must have been very effective in disabusing trainees of their simplistic notions of meditative "achievement.") Note that these two schools, along with Oxhead Chan, are included together in the "early Chan" phase of the eighth century—and this is an intentional grouping, meant to indicate that these three factions were more alike than different, or at least that their religious identities were so intimately intertwined that they must be represented together. The fact that none of Shenxiu's disciples are included in the Chan lineage diagram (already noticed on p. 4 above) is due to their exclusion from consideration in traditionalistic accounts of Chan; here their meaningful absence serves to highlight the unilinearity of the "orthodox" line traced from the legendary (i.e., fictional, but therefore more important) Huineng. In chapter 6 (see p. 138) we consider whether the distinction between the Linji/Rinzai and Caodong/Sōtō schools implies a similar polarity, that is, two groups paired together in a duel or binary relationship that is both contrastive and competitive.

You might assume that the chart depicts a chain of historical causality, but it actually characterizes the retrospective identity of the various phases of Chan. The periodization of any set of past events represents an act of reconstruction—not the mere reorganization and ordering of information, but the total remaking of the past as the structured image of our imaginations. Now, there is nothing wrong with creating an image of the past—indeed, I believe it is our task as historians, both professional and occasional, to visualize the past in the best ways we know how. But we should work to remain aware that the ordering of developments from the fifth through the thirteenth centuries inevitably involves this kind of re-creation; we cannot get off the hook with the naive belief that we are merely ordering the information for the sake of convenience, but not really altering it in the process.

This retrospective quality pervades the Chan tradition. Time and again we find we are dealing, not with what happened at any given point, but with what people thought happened previously. We deal not so much in

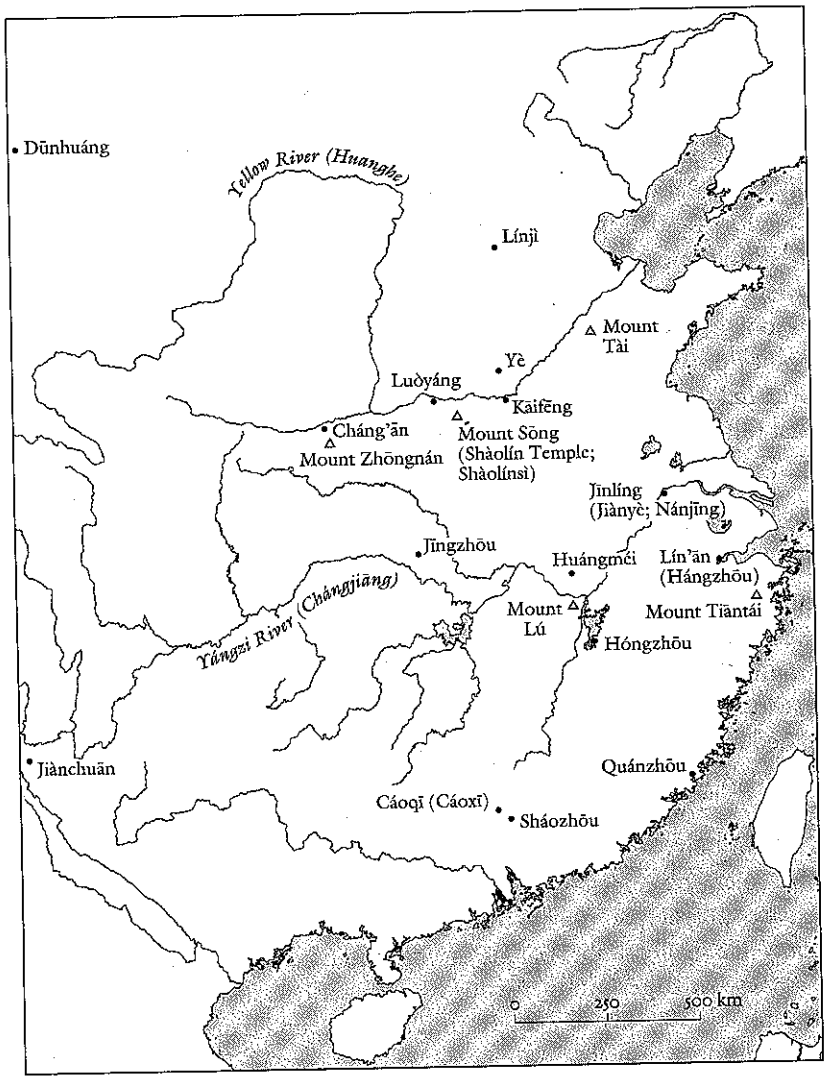
facts and events as in legends and reconstructions, not so much with accomplishments and contributions as with attributions and legacies. The legends and reconstructions, not the supposedly "actual" events, determined later religious and social praxis. This observation may have a broad application beyond Chinese Chan, in describing what it is that makes traditions traditions.[15] But it is certainly applicable to Chan: not true, and therefore more important.

With these considerations in mind, then, and in order to get a better perspective on the subjects to be covered in the remaining chapters, let us look in somewhat greater detail at the phases listed in figure 2. At this point I provide only a few introductory comments to help you become oriented to the material and thus prepared for the more detailed analysis that follows.[16]

PROTO-CHAN

The designation *proto-Chan* refers to the ill-defined activities of a set of practitioners surrounding Bodhidharma and Huike who were known for their dedication to ascetic practices and meditation. Beginning roughly around the year 500 and overlapping with the so-called early Chan phase in the seventh and perhaps even into the eighth century, this group operated in a variety of north China locations. The extent to which the individuals involved conceived of themselves as participating in a single group or movement is unclear, and since they had no way of knowing of the continuity of their activities with any later "Chan school," even the convenient term *proto-Chan* does not bear close scrutiny. (Their activities are "prototypic" only to those who already know what followed.) We know of a small number of figures who studied under Bodhidharma, and a somewhat larger number who were primarily associated with Huike, presumably after his master's death. There is a certain quantity of biographical information about the participants in proto-Chan, and although it attests to the variety of their backgrounds, it imparts only a shadowy image of any shared group esprit.

One important feature of proto-Chan—at the very least, a feature important for the subsequent evolution of the school—was its common focus on a text circulated under Bodhidharma's name, the *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices (Erru sixing lun).* As this text circulated, practitioners who identified with Bodhidharma's message appended their own comments to it, making it an expanding anthology of the earliest Chan teachings.[17] Thus, while we cannot describe the scope of proto-Chan



MAP 1. Locations for Proto-Chan, Early Chan, and Middle Chan.

activities with any accuracy, the *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* provides insight into precisely those ideas that formed the doctrinal nucleus of subsequent Chan practice ideology. This text describes a fundamental attitude of emphasis on the existence of the Buddha-nature or potential for enlightenment within all sentient beings, as well as an attitude toward how this understanding of Buddhism may be carried out in daily life.[18]

EARLY CHAN

Early Chan designates the phase when the school, or what was to become a school eventually,[19] first articulated its lineage-based ideology in clear and extensive form. Actually, the Dunhuang manuscripts and traditional Chan records include an amazing variety of different formulations from this phase, and it seems evident that a great deal of experimentation was taking place, involving a number of variations on commonly accepted themes, as the Chan movement matured and crystallized over time. Some of these formulations describe specific methods of contemplation practice, sometimes presented in a progressive series of steps. Others describe the role of the Buddha-nature, or "pure mind," within, as well as the behavior of the illusions—the false thoughts, or "impure mind"—that obscure the appreciation of our inner purity. Compared to later Chan texts, these formulations often seem odd but are not particularly enigmatic or difficult; the emphasis at this point was on clarity in expressing this new form of the Buddhist teaching, not on generating entirely different modes of expression.

In contrast to proto-Chan, the early Chan phase manifests a great stability of location: Daoxin and Hongren spent exactly a half-century, from 624 to 674, in the same monastic complex in Huangmei ("Yellow Plum," Hubei Province) and it is not unreasonable to include Shenxiu's quarter-century, from 675 to 701, at the not-too-distant Jade Spring Temple (Yuquansi, in Jingzhou, which overlaps both Hubei and Hunan Provinces) in this phase as well. Matters become more complex with the explosion of Chan into the two imperial capitals of Chang'an and Luoyang during the eighth century. Therefore, whereas investigation of proto-Chan leaves one with the impression of an indefinable will-o'-the-wisp, analyzing the sources for early Chan imparts a sense of continuous community development and a growth pattern that moves from geometric increase throughout much of the seventh century to explosive expansion in the eighth. Also, where proto-Chan refers to a single, albeit incohesive and

ill-defined, style of religiosity, early Chan may be understood as a collection of different communities, groups, and factions.

In the most straightforward sense, the label *East Mountain teaching* refers to both the community and doctrines of Daoxin and Hongren, but there is an important sense in which these matters are known solely through information transmitted by their successors. Those successors identified themselves not as purveyors of their own doctrinal innovations, but as transmitters of the East Mountain teaching. We need to recognize that the ideas associated with the names Daoxin and Hongren were primarily those of their followers' later reconstruction; this recognition does not sever the connection between those ideas and the East Mountain teaching figureheads themselves, but it does lend an important retrospective quality to the process. That those successors, who were active in Chang'an and Luoyang in the early decades of the eighth century, came to be known by the label *Northern school* is a curious historical detail. The *Southern school* derives from the mid-eighth-century activities of Shenhui (684–758), although later this label came to be adopted for the Chan school as a whole. The *Oxhead school* is a somewhat later development, a faction or lineage that played an important historical role through its apparent involvement in the composition of the *Platform Sūtra,* the hallmark and culminating text of early Chan.

We will deal with the East Mountain teaching in chapter 2, along with Bodhidharma and proto-Chan. The Northern, Southern, and Oxhead schools, as the most important trends of metropolitan Chan (i.e., those factions that evolved in the two capitals of Chang'an and Luoyang),[20] will be treated together in chapter 3. It is appropriate that the last three schools should be taken together, since they were in dialogue with one another, and the supposed distinctions between them in their original historical identities are not nearly as sharp as the Chan legends would have us believe. It would also be appropriate to mark the East Mountain teaching off as an entirely separate phase, but I hope that adding these comments here—and organizing chart and chapters differently—will be sufficient to show the provisional nature of the boundaries involved. The lack of congruence between the categories "early Chan" and "metropolitan Chan" as used here is intentional.

MIDDLE CHAN

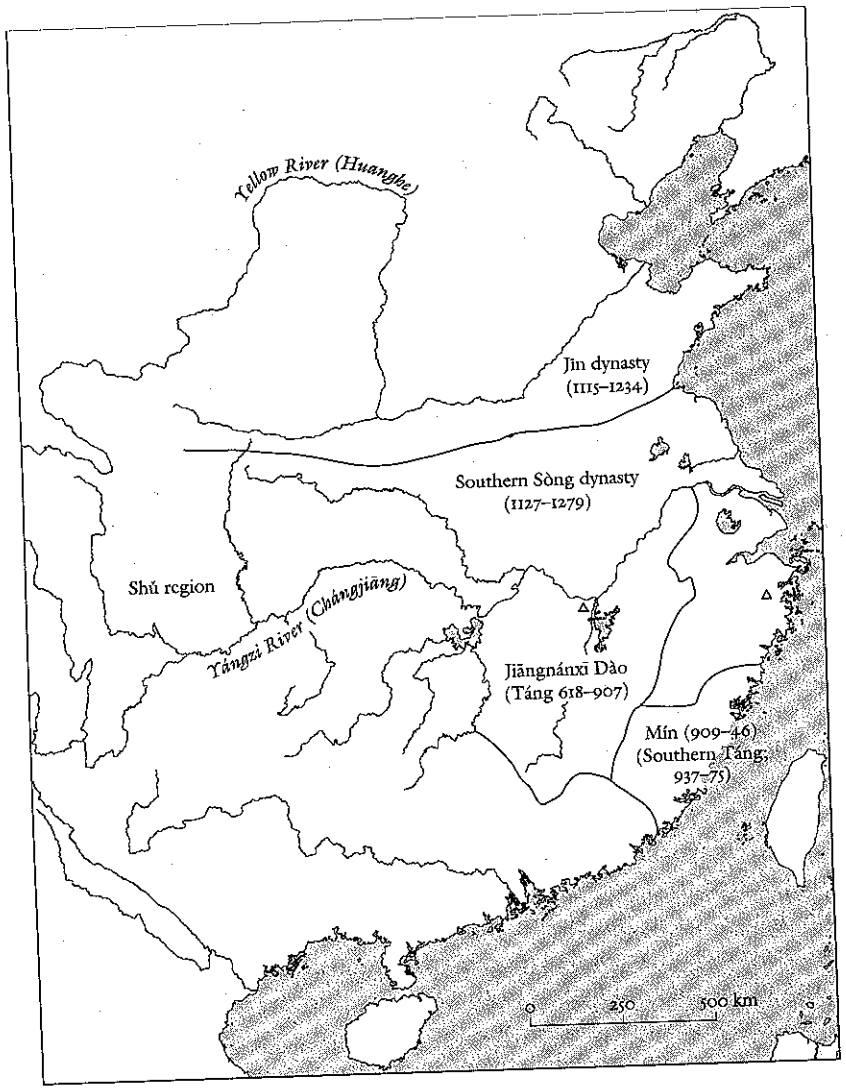
An event of overwhelming significance takes place in the "middle Chan" phase: the emergence of "encounter dialogue," the idiosyncratic manner

in which Chan masters are depicted in dialogue with their students.[21] Associated initially with such celebrated figures as Mazu Daoyi (709–88) and his successors Baizhang Huaihai (749–814), Nanquan Puyuan (748–834), and Linji Yixuan (d. 867), as well as Shitou Xiqian and his successors Dongshan Liangjie (807–69) and Caoshan Benji (840–901), this is when Chan appears to have become really Chan, when Chan masters seem to have really behaved like Chan masters. The anecdotes of middle Chan encounter dialogue represent the stories repeated most often in popular books on Chan/Zen as examples of paradoxical but enlightened behavior. Here the locus of religious practice was firmly removed from individual effort in the meditation hall and replaced by a demanding genre of interrogation that sought to destabilize all habitual, logical patterns. Spontaneity was the rule, iconoclastic behavior the norm.

Or so it seems. For here we will have to consider, not only the momentous import of encounter dialogue as the dominant model of religious undertaking, but also the difficult questions of *when* all this spontaneous interaction was actually being practiced and *what* precisely was going on. We will see that there is a substantial gap between when the most famous stories of Chan lore are supposed to have happened, and when we first see them in written form. We will also see that these stories have complex origins, bearing features of both oral and written literature. In the past scholars (myself included) have referred to the middle phase as the "golden age" or "classical period" of Chan. The first of these terms may easily be discarded for its romantic coloring.[22] The latter term may still be used, but only with the provision that what is being referred to is not some collection of activities and events that actually happened in the eighth through tenth centuries, but instead the retrospective re-creation of those activities and events, the imagined identities of the magical figures of the Tang, within the minds of Song dynasty Chan devotees. Mazu and the other Tang figures came to represent a classical age only when their time had passed, when their identities were redesigned to fit the needs of Song-dynasty Chan. Although middle Chan may be considered as a historical phase, "classical" Chan is itself a romantic depiction of activities from that phase within the later texts of encounter dialogue.

SONG-DYNASTY CHAN

The contours assumed by Chan Buddhism during the Song dynasty represent the mature pattern which defines the tradition up until the



MAP 2. Locations for Song-Dynasty Chan.

modern period. Using an ecological metaphor, I refer to this pattern as a "climax paradigm," which describes the dynamic equilibrium achieved by a mature forest or ecological system. Earlier writers (both scholarly and apologist) have tended to ignore this period, partly out of the wish to explore the more "creative" masters of the Tang, or to jump across the waters to emphasize the emerging Zen school of Japan. The Song has also been denigrated in general textbooks as the beginning of the decline of Chinese Buddhism, its ossification into institutional formalism. This attitude is changing, as Song-dynasty religion has become perhaps the primary focus of the study of premodern Chinese religion, by Euro-American scholars at least. And with this change our impression of Song-dynasty Chan has been transformed as well. It is now increasingly recognized that the Song dynasty witnessed the emergence of a basic configuration of Chan that was disseminated throughout East Asia, and now the world. This is apparent most dramatically in the life and teachings of Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163), the innovator and greatest exponent of "viewing the critical phrase" or *kōan* practice in the history of Chinese Chan. But the picture of Song-dynasty Chan is not complete without looking closely at the style of meditative introspection advocated by Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091–1157) and other members of the Caodong lineage, evaluating their recommendations on their own terms and not simply in light of the polemical characterization by Dahui as mere "silent illumination." Ultimately, we will see that the Linji and Caodong approaches present an inseparable pair that mimics the sudden/gradual debate of the eighth century, and which resonates with the "two entrances" of the treatise attributed to Bodhidharma. But this is to get ahead of our story. Let us now turn to the legendary account of Bodhidharma himself, to see how Chan Buddhism emerged in the first place.

CHAPTER 2

Beginnings

Differentiating/Connecting Bodhidharma and the East Mountain Teaching

Bodhidharma, it is said in the traditional accounts, was the third son of a great Brahman king of southern India, who left home to undertake the life of a Buddhist monk.[1] Attracted to the profundity of the Mahāyāna, he eventually became the twenty-eighth patriarch in succession to Śākyamuni Buddha. After traveling by sea to China in order to spread the true teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism, he had the following interview with Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (r. 502–549), who was renowned for building temples, casting images, and supporting the teaching activities of Buddhist monks:

Emperor Wu: "What is the religious merit of all my efforts on behalf of Buddhism?"

Bodhidharma: "None whatsoever."

Emperor Wu: "Who are you to say such a thing to me!?"

Bodhidharma: "I don't know."

Seeing that conditions were not right for him to teach in southern China, Bodhidharma crossed the Yangzi River by floating across on a reed[2] and went to Mount Song, just south of the great city of Luoyang. There he took up residence at Shaolin Temple (Shaolinsi), but instead of joining the regular activities of the congregation of monks, he spent nine years in a cave, sitting in meditation while facing a wall. His extraordinary discipline eventually attracted the attention of a student named Huike, who was to become Bodhidharma's successor and thus the second patriarch of Chan Buddhism. But Huike did not achieve this new identity without demonstrating his total dedication to the Dharma: since the master was absorbed in meditation and would not recognize him, the student knelt behind Bodhidharma in silent supplication, the snow piling up around him in the cold north China winter. Eventually, Bodhidharma broke his silence and asked what Huike wanted—the answer being "instruction in the teachings of Buddhism," of course—only to ignore the student once again. In desperation, to show the depths of his dedication Huike cut off his own arm and placed it before the master. Seeing this, Bodhidharma at last recognized the student's sincerity and allowed him to inquire of the teachings:

Huike: "My mind is not at ease—please pacify it for me!"

Bodhidharma: "Bring me your mind, and I will."

Huike: "But no matter how I might look, the mind is not a 'thing' I can find."

Bodhidharma: "There, I've pacified your mind for you!"

Huike was suddenly awakened at this reply. He continued to study under Bodhidharma and was eventually recognized as his successor.

Bodhidharma later became the target of criticism by jealous monks who did not understand the true teachings of Buddhism. Although they tried to poison him several times, it was only when Bodhidharma himself decided the time was right that he allowed their potions to kill him. Huike supervised his burial along the banks of a river south of Luoyang, but later the master returned to India, leaving only one shoe in his grave; he was seen crossing the Chinese border carrying the other shoe.[3] Huike went on to transmit the teachings to Sengcan, from whom they were passed on to Daoxin, Hongren, and then to the sixth patriarch Huineng.

This, in a nutshell, is the legend of Bodhidharma as it has been passed down within the Chan tradition. There can be no doubt of its utility as a coherent distillation of classical Chan doctrine: Bodhidharma, the enlightened but iconoclastic master, transmits the true teachings of Buddhism to China, where until his time it had only been understood in a superficial and self-seeking manner. The "nine years facing the wall" at Shaolin Temple and the implicit demand made of Huike—or rather, Huike's macabre demonstration of his inner drive for true understanding at all costs—imply both a disregard for conventional representations of Buddhism and the demand that students spare no effort or personal sacrifice in order to achieve enlightenment. How many times this story must have been told in meditation halls in China, Korea, Japan—and now America and Europe—in order to spur practitioners on to greater effort!

The "pacification of the mind" dialogue is in fact an archetypal example of Chan spiritual training itself, which is less an individual endeavor than an interactive event, the interpersonal encounter between master and student set in a genealogical context. The attacks upon Bodhidharma serve to highlight the unique status he held as sole transmitter of the true teachings, and the autonomous control he had over his death and subsequent return to his native land add an occult aura to his extraordinary capabilities. Indeed, the account of Bodhidharma—I should actually refer to the "accounts," since the preceding is but a bare outline abstracted from a number of divergent sources—represents a highly integrated distillation of the Chan message, and as such it has been among the most treasured subjects of Chan sermons and dialogues over the centuries.

But the story is not true.

The Evolving Hagiography of Bodhidharma

It is not that parts of the story are in doubt, or that some of it is accurate and some not, or that it is a false composite of individually acceptable elements. All of these alternatives are correct to some extent, but even in combination they do not accurately represent the true situation. The issue is more fundamental.

The image of Bodhidharma that has been transmitted to us is the result of a long hagiographical process, and it is not "biographical" in some sense of being a more-or-less "accurate" depiction of the man's life. Rather, it is the idealized image of a sage, the human demonstration of enlightened charisma, the life of an Indian saint on Chinese soil. It is ultimately impossible to reconstruct any original or accurate biography of the man whose life serves as the original trace of this hagiography—where "trace" is a term from Jacques Derrida meaning the beginningless beginning of a phenomenon, the imagined but always intellectually unattainable origin. Hence any such attempt by modern biographers to reconstruct a definitive account of Bodhidharma's life is both doomed to failure and potentially no different in intent from the hagiographical efforts of premodern writers.[4] This does not mean that we should disdain examining the sources and evolution of this hagiographical process, of course—only that we should remain firmly aware of the hagiographical dynamic while doing so.

The earliest evidence for Bodhidharma's biography derives from ultimately incommensurable sources. In other words, the hagiographical image of Bodhidharma is fundamentally different from whatever "historical" Bodhidharma may have existed at one point. This understanding of

the hagiographical nature of the Bodhidharma who occurs in Chan legends is not just a trivial academic nicety, but a profoundly important key to the understanding of Chinese Chan as a cultural and religious tradition. Before considering the implications of the hagiographical process concerning Bodhidharma, though, we need to establish a baseline, the beginning of the story—not as a kernel of biographical truth, of course, but as the earliest manifestation of mythopoeic creativity about him.[5]

The following chronological assertions can be made with reasonable confidence about the earliest hagiographical image of Bodhidharma. According to sources from the mid-seventh century and earlier, it was thought that he *(a)* arrived in south China by sea sometime in or before 479; *(b)* moved to north China before 495, perhaps by 480 or so; *(c)* was in Luoyang sometime during the years 516–26; and *(d)* died around 530 (i.e., sometime during the years 524–34). In addition, there are a few other characterizations we can make with some confidence about the earliest image of Bodhidharma. That is, he *(e)* was a native of south India, of Brahman caste, and perhaps a member of some royal family; *(f)* professed Mahāyāna Buddhism, taught meditation, and focused his efforts on the Luoyang area; *(g)* had a small number of known students, including Huike—who was the dominant figure in the development of Bodhidharma's following; and *(h)* was the beneficiary (perhaps postmortem) of an editorial contribution by a monk named Tanlin, who produced a text called the *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* in his name.[6]

Although all of the eight statements above are based on documentary evidence (of different levels of reliability), we must resist the temptation to accept them as jointly contributing to a single, comprehensive image of the first patriarch of Chan. The eight assertions derive from different sources written at different times and with different authorial agendas. In addition to issues of accuracy, it is not even certain that all of them (especially item *(c)* pertain to the Chan school's founder, rather than to some other figure of the same name. Taking the first four assertions together, we also arrive at the unlikely scenario that Bodhidharma spent a full half-century in China—not impossible, but it would mean that he arrived in China a relatively young man, which is contrary to the legend that he was 150 years old (which occurs in the source of item *c*, for example). Also, given the time frame suggested by the evidence, the story involving Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty is clearly anachronistic, given the latter's reign dates of 502–49. Examining the information available regarding Bodhidharma's life requires dealing with endless subtleties and contradictions. Indeed, his hagiography is a particularly good example of the fluidity of legendary Chan imagery.

The easiest way to understand the dynamics of Chan hagiography is to see how Bodhidharma's image developed over time. The following list of the earliest dates at which each element of his hagiography appeared in written sources reveals an overall pattern of accretion and reinscription. That is, not only does the image of Bodhidharma as Chan patriarch become increasingly detailed over time, but new motifs effectively substitute for earlier ones, changing the very quality of the image as religious icon.[7]

547 Said to have been from Persia and was 150 years old when he arrived in Luoyang sometime during the years 516–26.

645 Described as a Brahman monk from south India who arrived in south China during the Liang dynasty (420–79); Huike's arm is said to have been cut off by bandits/rebels.

667 Depicted transmitting the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* to Huike.

689 Listing of the succession from Bodhidharma to Huike, Sengcan, Daoxin, and Hongren.

ca. 710 Identified with Shaolin Temple on Mt. Song; story of Huike cutting off his own arm;[8] Bodhidharma described as dying voluntarily by poison, then as seen at the Chinese border on his way back to India, leaving an empty grave.

ca. 715 Described as the third son of a Brahman king of south India; identified as second patriarch after Guṇabhadra, translator of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*.

730 Story of meeting with Emperor Wu; said to transmit robe to Huike after the latter cut off his own arm.

758 or shortly after Specifically labeled "first patriarch"; transmitted the *Diamond Sūtra* to Huike.

801 Described reciting a "transmission verse" before death.

952 Occurrence of the "pacification of the mind" dialogue with Huike.

988 Said to have "faced the wall" in meditation.

ca. 1200 "Relics" (*śarīra,* from a cremated body [!]) venerated by the "Daruma school" in Japan.[9]

1224 Reference to how he "faced the wall for nine years."[10]

Thirteenth century Association of Shaolin Temple with martial arts.

1642 Attribution of a martial arts book to Bodhidharma.[11]

None of the various details of Bodhidharma's life is "true," in the sense of being journalistically accurate, and therefore each is more important than a mere "fact" might be. Presentations of Bodhidharma's biography that are unreasonably detailed—such as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*'s entry for him (written by Heinrich Dumoulin) that identifies him as a "native of Conjeeveram, near Madras"[12]—exemplify the third rule of Zen studies: "Precision implies inaccuracy." Rather than the stark contrast of true/false, of course, it is the overall fabric of creativity within which the hagiography developed that is most impressive.

In fact, if we looked at the matter more closely, we would see that the evolution of Bodhidharma's image functions as a veritable index to the evolution of Chan itself. That is, if we could do analytical cross-sections at different points in time, we would see that the members of the Chan school were reformulating Bodhidharma's identity to fit their own conceptions of religious sagehood in each particular age; each substantive reconfiguration thus implies a qualitative change in the religious identity of Chinese Chan. This is a dynamic process that continues into the present, of course: A 1992 Taiwanese movie account of Bodhidharma's life shows him not only sitting rock-solid in meditation—a full nine years without moving a muscle!—but also as a miraculously gifted martial artist catching arrows in his teeth and flying through the air, his legs churning in the manner of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon!* The modern martial arts cinema tradition has remade the image of Bodhidharma according to its own needs, just as the medieval Chan tradition did. The results are different, but the process is basically unchanged.

In other words, both medieval Chinese Chan factions and modern martial arts schools have created images of Bodhidharma to fit their own conceptions of enlightened sagehood. These imagined sages serve the need felt by each faction or school for a primal figurehead to personify and thus legitimate its particular style of spiritual and athletic training. To accept any one of the various hagiographical images of Bodhidharma as accurate would be to choose only one legendary image out of a series of continuous change. On the one hand, to tell any version of Bodhidharma's hagiography is to present a Sunday-school image of Chan. Doing so is of course acceptable for participants within the tradition itself, but to present such simplistic stories as historically accurate in works of historical narration is an indefensible commission of the "string of pearls" fallacy. On the other hand, it would be even more egregious to deny the religious and cultural significance of the hagiographical process as a whole, to fixate on the technical accuracy of the images of Bodhidharma produced by generation after generation of Chinese practitioners. Those images are not true, and therefore they are more important. More precisely, those im-

ages were used by generations of Chan practitioners and enthusiasts, and therefore they are more important than a simplistic reconstruction of historically verifiable events might be.

Proto-Chan and the *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices*

In all this, there *is* one useful point to hold on to: Bodhidharma's early followers remembered his teachings through a short but extremely influential text known as the *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices*. The absolute *terminus ad quem* for the appearance of this text is 645, but at this point it already includes some material probably from Huike's life; hence the text no doubt dates back at least to the second half of the sixth century, if not necessarily to the lifetime of Bodhidharma himself. The text does not read like a translation, and the role of the "historical" Bodhidharma in its composition is beyond our knowing at this point. Probably it was written on his behalf by Tanlin on the basis of information about the master's teachings conveyed to him by Huike, so that the text has a kind of retrospective authenticity that is common in the Chan tradition. But the important point is that this treatise was accepted by a community of Bodhidharma's successors as embodying his teachings.

Before I turn to the content of the *Treatise* itself, let me make just a few brief comments about the nature of the "proto-Chan" community that developed in Bodhidharma's name. First, the overall impression one gets from the historical evidence is that Huike, rather than Bodhidharma, was the central figure of this loosely associated group of practitioners. Huike was already a mature adult when he studied with the master, not a fresh-faced trainee, and there is a sense in which Bodhidharma functioned for him primarily as a source of validation of his own level of attainment, a means of legitimation for his own teaching activities. Second, there is a certain range of variation in the individuals associated with Huike and Bodhidharma, including wandering ascetics, Confucian practitioners (of a rather mysterious sort), and eventually specialists in the study of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. Third, Huike and the figures associated with him, however distantly in some cases, were identified with various locations in northern China, not only Luoyang. In part this was due to the vicissitudes of time—a significant persecution of Buddhism occurred in the Northern Zhou regime in 574—but, whatever the reason, they did not establish any fixed, lasting base of operations.

Probably the most important characteristic to justify referring to these men (and probably a few women) in one breath as the "proto-Chan" movement was their shared interest in the *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices*. They discussed this text in letters and used its contents as the framework for written dialogues, which, as time went on, were appended to the text itself. Although I consider only the opening essay proper, the text as it has been transmitted down to us through Dunhuang manuscripts contains a substantial number of additions, which in sum are more extensive than the original essay itself. None of this material is datable, and for all we know the process of accretion may have continued well into the eighth century.[13]

The heart of the *Treatise,* and indeed the doctrinal germ of much if not all later Chan theory, is the following passage:

> The entrance of principle is to become enlightened to the Truth on the basis of the teaching. One must have a profound faith in the fact that one and the same True Nature is possessed by all sentient beings, both ordinary and enlightened, and that this True Nature is only covered up and made imperceptible [in the case of ordinary people] by false sense impressions. If one discards the false and takes refuge in the True, one resides frozen in "wall contemplation," in which self and other, ordinary person and sage, are one and the same; one resides fixedly without wavering, never again to be swayed by written teachings. To be thus mysteriously identified with the True Principle, to be without discrimination, serene and inactive: this is called the entrance of principle.[14]

In the most straightforward sense, this passage is an elaboration of the idea of the Buddha-nature, the potential or actual quality of enlightenment that is latent within all of us, the only difference between buddhas and ordinary people being that the latter do not perceive this inner source of strength due to their foolish discrimination and sensory activity. The terminology used here, with one notorious exception to be discussed in the next paragraph, is not that difficult: the "True Nature," or the Buddha-nature, is a perfect, absolute (if fundamentally nonsubstantial, nonextant) entity, but it is merely obscured from our view by the false conceptualization and mistaken views of ordinary consciousness.

YANAGIDA Seizan, the greatest scholar of Chinese Chan of the twentieth century, has warned that we should not overlook an important clue to the relationship between the Buddha-nature, or True Nature, and the world of sensory discrimination: this is the word "only" toward the end of the second sentence. This inconspicuous qualifier indicates a differ-

ence of valence between the two realities—colloquially, we would say a different quantum level of significance—with the Buddha-nature understood as fundamentally more important, profoundly more real, than the constantly changing appearances of our daily lives. In other words, rather than being distracted by the superficial manifestations of our own consciousnesses—though of course these include the attributes of personal identity to which we are usually most closely attached—practitioners should instead emphasize their profound confidence in the existence of the Buddha-nature at the very heart of our innermost being. In Buddhism "faith" is precisely to "reside fixedly without wavering" in one's correct understanding. In Chinese terms this is to be "mysteriously identified with the True Principle," that is, to be united with the Buddha-nature at a level that is inscrutably hidden beneath our ordinary levels of perception, at that level of undifferentiated reality that is obscure yet oddly luminescent.[15]

Although the peculiarly Chinese rhetoric may seem unusual, all this is actually fairly straightforward—except for the notorious exception I alluded to above. This is of course the term "wall contemplation" *(biguan)*, which has bedeviled the Chan tradition ever since its introduction here. Ultimately, no one really knows what the term means. It only occurs in one other more-or-less contemporaneous source, a list of meditation practices recommended for beginners, where it occurs without explanation.[16] The occurrence of the term in this list is not terribly helpful, especially since the estimation of it as a beginner's practice is at odds with the comments made by the historian Daoxuan (596–667) that the "achievements of Mahāyāna wall contemplation are the highest."[17] Eventually, the term came to be interpreted in the Chan tradition as referring to the act of sitting in meditation facing a wall, but as indicated in the discussion of Bodhidharma's hagiographical evolution above, it took some time for this meaning to take hold. (As shown on p. 6, important first references in this process occurred only in 988 and 1224.)

Paul Swanson has recently suggested that the compound *biguan* might be a combination of two characters that both stand for the word *vipaśyanā* or "insight meditation." Hence the character *bi* 壁 is not used in its substantive meaning as "wall" but rather as the transliteration of the first syllable of *vipaśyanā*, a Sanskrit term usually translated into Chinese as *guan* 觀, the second character in the compound. The character *guan* can, of course, be used in different senses in Chinese, but here the compound *biguan* was thus intended as "the meaning of *guan* that corresponds to *vipaśyanā*." Unfortunately, the phonology does not quite work: In medieval Chinese the character for "wall" had a final *k* ending (in modern Japanese the character is pronounced *heki*), and it seems never to have been used for transliteration purposes.[18] Finally, the association of *biguan* with *vipaśyanā* seems off; there is no sense of meditative investigation or discernment about the "entrance of principle."

Zhiyi's magnum opus on meditation theory and practice, the *Great Calming and Contemplation (Mohe zhiguan)*, includes what I suspect is a better possibility: "Concentration *(zhi, śamatha)* is wall concentration *(biding)*, in which the evil perceptions of the eight winds cannot enter. Concentration is pure water, which overflows the eight confusions of lust."[19]

In glossing the term *biding*, Zhanran (711–82) writes that

> a room has four walls, so the eight winds cannot enter. If one is able to stop them, then one has transcended this realm's evil perceptions of internal and external, concordant and discordant. The eight winds are only the four discordant and four concordant. . . . The room's walls also prevent these eight winds [from entering]; hence they are used as a metaphor.[20]

This usage by Zhiyi and Zhanran seems to fit the *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* very well: "wall contemplation" in that text might be considered to mean "fixed in *śamatha* or concentration meditation, without allowing the eight winds of good and bad fortune to influence one at all." Whether the specific reference to the eight winds applies to Bodhidharma's treatise or not, the general sense of "wall contemplation" as the solid exclusion of distractions fits well with the "entrance of principle."

Although this metaphoric explanation seems reasonable, it was apparently not transparent to the members of the later Chan movement, who eventually introduced the more graphic image of Bodhidharma sitting in front of a cave wall. The issue is profoundly irresolvable, and we should take clear note of the uncertainty that exists.

In any case, the entrance of principle is Bodhidharma's expression—or, rather, the proto-Chan movement's expression, attributed retrospectively to Bodhidharma—of the fundamental stance of the religious practitioner. It is not altogether clear, unfortunately, exactly how this fundamental stance worked in actual practice. Does this refer to some kind of yogic absorption, some kind of forced mental extinction or tranquilization? The text is elusive on this point, and it remains for the East Mountain teaching phase of early Chan to provide specific details. Now, however, let us look briefly at the structure and content of the *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* as a whole.

First, what of the "two entrances"? We should not dismiss this duality as an insignificant convenience of exposition, since in positing two separate types of access to religious truth, the *Treatise* exhibits a bimodality that is endemic to the Chan tradition. This bimodality is often negated, sometimes with polemical vehemence, but its near-universal distribution is noteworthy. In the text of the *Treatise* itself the relationship between the entrances of principle and practice is simultaneously bipolar and unitary: each is contrasted with the other, and ultimately they end up being the same thing. This is but the earliest manifestation of a "duel" relationship in Chan. (Recall that the term *duel* is used according to its double meaning in French, corresponding to both "duel" and "dual" in English; see p. 12.) The earliest description we have of Bodhidharma depicts him in part in terms of his duel relationship with another early meditation specialist, Sengchou (480–560); where Bodhidharma was known for the unmatched profundity of his teachings, Sengchou was known for the purity and efficacy of his ascetic endeavors.[21]

The entrance of practice includes the following four increments:

1. Practice of the retribution of enmity: to accept all suffering as the fruition of past transgressions, without enmity or complaint
2. Practice of the acceptance of circumstances: to remain unmoved even by good fortune, recognizing it as evanescent
3. Practice of the absence of craving: to be without craving, which is the source of all suffering
4. Practice of accordance with the Dharma: to eradicate wrong thoughts and practice the six perfections, without having any "practice"

As should be clear from the contents of these four steps, the term *practice* is used here to refer not to spiritual cultivation as an ongoing religious endeavor, but rather to the activities of one's daily behavior.[22] The "four practices" of the second entrance thus represent a progression in which one adopts an increasingly detached perspective on the varying circumstances of one's own life, culminating in the realization that everything that occurs does so in accordance with the ultimate principles of Buddhism. At this point, although attained from different directions or styles of endeavor, the two entrances culminate in the same realization.

The important issue here is the highly contextualized or outer-focused quality of the second entrance, the attention to the details of phenomenal reality as one actually lives it. There is thus an important contrast between the two entrances. Where the entrance of principle is variously abstract, introspective, and yogic (all of these characterizations being open to reinterpretation, of course, given the allusive quality of the original text), the entrance of practice represents the concrete, extrovertive, and quotidian. Buddhist texts, not only those of the Chan school, often use formulations couched in terms of inner and outer, but the distinction is particularly important here. We will see that the bimodality between principle and practice, or rather between an abstract description of one's inner attitude and the progressive elaboration of one's ongoing activities, is a recurrent theme throughout the Chan tradition—one that will help us to organize the sometimes unruly creativity of later periods.

Hongren and the East Mountain Teaching

The *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* came to be ignored in later centuries, no doubt precisely because it was too straightforward, too explicit. Just a little too humdrum in presentation, it simply did not match the image that the Chan tradition wanted to have of its founding patriarch. Given the fundamental Buddhist doctrine that everything changes, it is easy to recognize that everyone and everything is transitory or, in historical terms, transitional. The *Treatise* continued to play an important role, though, through the seventh and early eighth centuries.

This period encompasses the phase of Chan known as the "East Mountain teaching," a term that is based on the location where Hongren (601–74) taught in Huangmei. The reference is to one of the "twin peaks," Shuangfeng, of Huangmei, and even though Hongren's teacher, Daoxin (580–651), resided on the other peak, the name "East Mountain teaching" is used for both masters. Actually, the term was used by Shenxiu (606?–706) and his immediate successors in reference to the teachings they had inherited from Daoxin and Hongren, so it is also appropriate to include Shenxiu's quarter-century of residence at Jade Spring Temple (675–701) in Jingzhou here as well. (See p. 47 for an explanation of the use of the term in association with Shenxiu.)

One of the most basic features of the East Mountain teaching, which distinguishes it clearly from proto-Chan, is that it was centered at a single, fixed location. Of course, this is certainly not to say that *all* Chan-tradition activity during this period occurred at Huangmei and Jade Spring Temple, but that the East Mountain teaching phase included long, uninterrupted periods of community development in one or two fixed

locations. This is a radical transition from the unsettled wanderings of Bodhidharma, Huike, and their associates.

Understandably, we have more information about the East Mountain teaching than about proto-Chan, and it is possible to make the following generalizations about the community and its teachers. First, just as Huike was the dominant personality of proto-Chan, Hongren was the central figure of the East Mountain teaching. From the description of their biographies, it appears that Daoxin may have been brought in and installed as the young Hongren's tutor. Hongren is described as being a quiet and unassuming student, who did meditation by day and took care of the cattle by night, so that when he began to teach, everyone was surprised at his brilliance. (This image of Hongren is a clear antecedent to that of Huineng; see the discussion beginning on p. 68.) When Daoxin was about to pass on, he was quoted as saying, roughly, "I guess Hongren would be all right" as his successor—and this half-hearted endorsement is actually an ironic revelation of the real situation, that Hongren was the one and only choice all along. Huangmei was Hongren's native place, where his family was known for its tradition of religious reclusion, but after Hongren's death the community was never heard of again. And, as we will see, when Shenxiu and his entourage moved into Luoyang in 701, they presented themselves as transmitters of the "pure teaching of East Mountain" and circulated a text attributed to Hongren as the content of their teachings.

Second, Daoxin and Hongren taught meditation and nothing else. In all the material we have about them, there is no reference to their advocating or practicing *sūtra* recitation, devotion to the Buddha Amitābha, or philosophical analysis—in contrast to the numerous references to them as meditation teachers.

Third, the East Mountain teachers had a gradually increasing number of students. The biographies assert that "eight or nine of every ten" spiritual practitioners in all China practiced under them, but we actually know of only a half-dozen or so individuals who studied with Daoxin and about twenty-five who studied with Hongren. Since the comparable figure for Shenxiu is about seventy, the overall trend is clear.

Fourth, in direct contrast to the single-minded dedication to meditation of their teachers, the students of Daoxin and Hongren included individuals of various religious interests. Whether practitioners of the *Lotus Sūtra,* students of Mādhyamika philosophy, or specialists in the monastic regulations of Buddhist Vinaya, monks traveled to Huangmei to undertake meditation training. Indeed, the East Mountain community at Huangmei seems to have been recognized throughout China by the second half of the seventh century as a specialized training center in the second of the "three learnings" of morality, meditation, and wisdom.

Fifth, as far as we can tell, Hongren's disciples stayed with him for limited periods of time. The most famous case of course is that of Huineng, who is supposed to have stayed at Huangmei for only eight months or so, which was meant to appear to contemporary Chinese as surprisingly brief. The most significant exception to the pattern of short-term residence, on the other hand, is the monk Faru (613–89), who seems to have served as Hongren's attendant or assistant during his sixteen years at Huangmei—which reminds one of the example of the Buddha's cousin and long-time attendant, Ānanda. (Faru is an important transitional figure between the East Mountain teaching and metropolitan Chan phases; see p. 48.) Judging from the biographies, most of Hongren's students were more like Shenxiu, who stayed with the master for six years at the very beginning of his teaching career. Although this information may also be subject to some doubt—six years was the length of time Gautama spent performing austerities before he became enlightened under the *bodhi* tree, and Buddhist hagiography often echoes this figure in order to invoke the Buddha's example—the pattern seems to have been that Daoxin and Hongren's students stayed with them for a few years and then went on to other things.

Sixth, nothing special can be said about the East Mountain community's size, administration, or spiritual lifestyle. The great Japanese scholar Ui Hakuju (1882–1953) suggested that it included five hundred or a thousand members, but the figures he uses actually refer to the attendance figures for Hongren's funeral. There must have been quite a number of lay devotees and admirers present at this event, not to mention some pious exaggeration in the written references. Seeing that we know of about twenty-five men who studied with Hongren in about as many years, even taking into consideration the probability that the number of his students increased as time went on, only a handful of these figures would have been present at any one time. There is no accurate way to estimate the actual number of monks and nuns in training at any one time, which might have fluctuated over time from just a handful to as many as several dozen. *Pace* Ui, there is also no evidence whatsoever that these monks participated in anything other than meditation and ordinary religious services—that is, there is no evidence whatsoever that the famous and probably illusory ideal of Chan monastic labor was known at East Mountain. The famous dictum that "a day without work means a day without food" only appears

centuries later, and Hongren's community no doubt had its share of lay workers and tenant agricultural laborers, like other Buddhist centers of the time. Here our best evidence is the *Platform Sūtra,* which depicts the eventual sixth patriarch Huineng as a low-status temple menial. Since this was the image of Hongren's community generated a century afterward, and our first evidence for any special "Chan" style of monastic system does not come for centuries after that, the only possible conclusion is negative: there is no basis for suggesting that Chan had developed a specific lifestyle in which monastic labor was performed as part of spiritual cultivation.

From Proto-Chan to Metropolitan Chan: The *Treatise on the Essentials of Cultivating the Mind*

So, what style of meditation practice did Daoxin and Hongren teach? The usual—almost inevitable—approach is to first explain what we know about the former, then turn to the latter. When this style of presentation is combined with treatments of the earlier patriarchs, as it almost always is, the result is a clear instance of the "string of pearls" fallacy. That is, rather than probing the dynamics of evolution of the Chan movement over time, most authors actually present a static elaboration based on the traditional genealogical configuration of the Chan orthodoxy that developed in the Song dynasty and beyond, a simple form of transposition posing as analysis. In fact, the "teachings of Daoxin" and the "teachings of Hongren" as they are now understood did not exist during the actual lifetimes of these historical figures, but only appeared during the transition from the East Mountain to the metropolitan Chan phase. The time lag was only a few decades, which might seem brief in the overall span of Chinese Buddhist history, but considerable change can occur in such a seemingly brief period. The teachings of Daoxin and Hongren were recorded retrospectively, as written reconstructions of lessons from the past. As it turns out, this retrospective quality of the East Mountain teaching is very significant.

At Huangmei, Daoxin and Hongren would not have needed to present their teachings in writing. In the relatively intimate context of teacher-student interaction, written guidelines might have been useful but would not have been necessary. When their students moved into the much larger arena of the two capitals of Chang'an and Luoyang, though, the situation was entirely different. Chang'an was the greatest cosmopolitan center on earth at the time, with a population of perhaps a million people

and enriched by close trading connections across the Silk Road to India, Persia, and the Middle East. Luoyang was a somewhat smaller city, but a venerable center of culture and religion, and the imperial court moved back and forth between the two capitals from time to time. The imperial court and literate society surrounding it were a magnet for intellectual and religious innovations from all over China, and indeed from throughout East Asia, Buddhist India, and Central Asia as well, and this "imperial center" had been the focal point of translation and research activities for Buddhism for centuries, as it continued to be throughout the eighth century. Even though Chan is portrayed in modern writings as having developed in rustic surroundings and as a rejection of merit-oriented activities and imperial largesse, this image of Chan and its fundamental identity developed precisely within the context of the imperial center, rather than on its periphery. We need only recall the legendary encounter between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu of the Liang, which was concocted in the middle of the eighth century, to realize how these themes played out in medieval China. Just as Chinese nature poetry originally developed among city dwellers, so was the almost barnyard primitivism and anti-intellectualism of "classical" Tang-dynasty Chan created in a highly sophisticated, literate milieu of the Five Dynasties and Song dynasty periods. (Actually, even the encounter between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu was generated in a context that undercuts the iconoclastic image of Chan; see the discussion beginning on p. 108.)

When Hongren's students moved from the provincial community at Huangmei to the imperial center, one of their first steps was to compile a written record of their master's teachings. This was the *Treatise on the Essentials of Cultivating the Mind,* which includes the straightforward admission that it was compiled not by Hongren himself but by his students, presumably after his demise. Actually, this is the earliest example within the Chan tradition of the composition of texts representing a given master's teachings, that is, of texts that were compiled and edited shortly after the master's death. The *Treatise on the Essentials of Cultivating the Mind* may have been prepared for use by Faru, who taught at Mount Song for a few years prior to his death in 689; the text was almost certainly known to Shenxiu by about the same time, and it was quoted in other texts during the second decade of the eighth century.

Although Daoxin is treated in Chan hagiography as Hongren's predecessor, the written teachings attributed to Daoxin only appeared *after* the text attributed retrospectively to Hongren.[23] One or two of the basic slogans associated with Daoxin may have existed earlier, but the as-

sertions found in scholarly works published to date of a doctrinal evolution from Daoxin to Hongren are impressionistic and thoroughly unconvincing. Moreover, the teachings of this "Daoxin" are composed in an intellectually sophisticated format that belies the supposed succession of ideas. In any case, since "Daoxin's" teachings first appeared in the second decade of the eighth century, we can clearly detect a chronological trend of retrospective attribution. In other words, the members of the Chan movement moved in reverse order through the commonly accepted list of patriarchs, publishing suitable writings first for Hongren, then for Daoxin, and then (in the middle of the eighth century) for Sengcan. Hence any attempt to re-create the evolution of Chan teachings by moving from patriarch to patriarch in a forward order is condemned to failure for methodological reasons that are simultaneously elementary and profound. Such attempts exemplify the "string of pearls" fallacy, which cripples the ability of most authors to deal with the evidence as it evolved instead of how it was designed to look. Therefore, when we look at the *Treatise on the Essentials of Cultivating the Mind,* we are not seeing Hongren himself, but Hongren as he was remembered several decades after his death.

Even so, the *Treatise on the Essentials of Cultivating the Mind* is a masterpiece of religious literature. Concise and unpretentious, it frequently exhorts its readers to make greater effort on behalf of their own enlightenment. It is not merely that life is too short, as we might put it today, but that the opportunity to undertake Buddhist spiritual training in a supportive environment is a rarity that may not happen again for many lifetimes. To complement this vigorous encouragement, the text describes an attitude toward religious attainment that is wonderfully delicate, and the practices it recommends are designed to avoid placing too strong an emphasis on the final goal. (As every beginning student of Buddhist philosophy quickly recognizes, to desire *nirvāṇa* as a final goal contradicts the very desirelessness of *nirvāṇa* itself.) The *Treatise on the Essentials of Cultivating the Mind* manipulates these considerations with a charmingly palpable sensitivity. And it provides a welcome elaboration of the basic themes adumbrated in such deliciously elusive fashion in the *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* attributed to Bodhidharma.

The heart of the *Treatise on the Essentials of Cultivating the Mind* is the following dialogue, which includes a made-to-order but spurious scriptural quotation:

> The *Treatise on the Sūtra of the Ten Stages* says, "There is an adamantine Buddha-nature within the bodies of sentient beings. Like the sun, it is essentially bright, perfect, and complete." Although vast and limitless, it is merely covered by the layered clouds of the five skandhas. Like a lamp inside a jar, its light cannot shine.
>
> Further, to use the bright sun as a metaphor, it is as if the clouds and mists of this world were to arise together in all the eight directions, so that the world would become dark. How could the sun ever be extinguished?
>
> [Question: Without the sun being extinguished,] why would there be no light?
>
> Answer: The sun's light is not destroyed, but merely deflected by the clouds and mists. The pure mind possessed by all sentient beings is also like this, in simply being covered by the layered clouds of discriminative thinking, false thoughts, and ascriptive views. If one can just distinctly maintain [awareness of the mind] and not produce false thoughts, then the Dharma sun of *nirvāṇa* will naturally be made manifest.[24]

The relationship between the "sun-and-clouds" metaphor here and the explanation of the True Nature in the Bodhidharma treatise is obvious, and a similar qualifier is even used to describe how the Buddha-nature or sun of enlightenment is "merely" obscured by one's ordinary psychological identity. In addition to thus adopting the same value structure in this initial formulation, the Hongren treatise describes the fundamental attitude toward spiritual cultivation in terms of "maintaining [awareness of the mind]" *(shouxin),* which is essentially a posture of nurturing the Buddha-nature as a treasure within one's own person. Rather than aggressively intruding into one's own being to scrape away the clouds of ignorance—which would be rather like reaching a giant claw into the sky to drag away the clouds and mists blocking the sun—the appropriate response is to affirm the ultimate reality of one's beginningless enlightenment, to maintain constant awareness of this pristine condition within oneself, and then to work in an energetic but unharried fashion toward the circumstantial manifestation of the on-going enlightenment experience.

The *Treatise on the Essentials of Cultivating the Mind* describes two specific meditation techniques, which neatly demonstrate the two aspects of this fundamentally vigorous but composed attitude. The first is to visualize the orb of the sun just as it sets, shining back at one from a fixed point on the horizon, large and round as a giant temple drum hanging sideways on a stand. This technique is actually drawn from the *Sūtra of the Contemplation of the Buddha Amitāyus,* one of the major scriptures of the East Asian Pure Land tradition, and although its explicit use here is as an exercise in concentration (one is to focus on the one point of the sun without distraction) it also serves implicitly as a symbolic reminder of the "sun of *nirvāṇa*" within.

The second technique is to focus, not on the Buddha-nature itself, but on the hyperactive mental processes that obscure it:

> Make your body and mind pure and peaceful, without any discriminative thinking at all. Sit properly with the body erect. Regulate the breath and concentrate the mind so it is not within you, not outside of you, and not in any intermediate location. Do this carefully and naturally. View your own consciousness tranquilly and attentively, so that you can see how it is always moving, like flowing water or a glittering mirage. After you have perceived this consciousness, simply continue to view it gently and naturally, without it assuming any fixed position inside or outside of yourself. Do this tranquilly and attentively, until its fluctuations dissolve into peaceful stability. This flowing consciousness will disappear like a gust of wind. When this consciousness disappears, all one's illusions will disappear along with it, even the [extremely subtle] illusions of bodhisattvas of the tenth stage.[25]

Other authorities might object that merely stopping the transformations of consciousness was not equivalent to complete and perfect enlightenment—certainly, this was to become a subject of discussion within Chan.[26] But the important point is the dedicated but undemanding attitude recommended here. Rather than forcing the issue, rather than trying to "achieve" enlightenment, the Hongren treatise counsels the practitioner to simply let it happen. Whether or not this approach is suitable for everyone—and at least one Chan master would openly deride similar approaches as uselessly waiting around for miracles to happen (see p. 135)—the sensitivity of the text in counterposing its two techniques against one another, of demanding energetic patience, if you will, represents a remarkable synthesis.

Indian and Chinese Buddhist Polarities

One of the most prominent features of Chan discussions of meditation is the use of polarities. To be sure, such discussions often include reminders of a fundamental nondualism, the absence of any absolute distinctions. Even so, the frequency of dualistic formulations is striking. Bodhidharma and Sengchou, Huineng and Shenxiu, principle and practice, sudden and gradual, Northern and Southern schools, and Linji (Rinzai) and Caodong (Sōtō): from hagiographical figures to doctrinal themes to lineage divisions, the Chan tradition veritably overflows with dualistic formulations. Given this situation, it is tempting simply to line up the dyads used in different contexts and suggest that they are all essentially the same in some

fashion. A better approach, of course, is to remain alert to the possibilities of nuanced differences between the various pairs. At present the question is, what inferences can we draw from comparing the contents of the Hongren treatise with earlier Buddhist meditation theory?

Certainly, the most important pair of themes in Indian Buddhist meditation doctrine is that of concentration *(śamatha)* and insight *(vipaśyanā)*. Very briefly, concentration refers to a set of exercises aimed at developing the mind's ability to focus without distraction on a given object. A variety of objects may be used, assigned by the meditation instructor as appropriate antidotes for the student's particular dispositional tendencies. A trainee given to anger might be instructed to work on the generation of loving-kindness, while one given to pride might be told to perform exercises involving the visualization of corpses. As the practitioner eliminates the hindrances blocking his ability to concentrate effectively, he moves through a set of four stages of *dhyāna*, or "concentration." (The Chinese word *chan* 禪, pronounced *zen* in Japanese, *sŏn* in Korean, and *thien* in Vietnamese, is a transliteration of this Sanskrit word.)[27] According to the canonical descriptions, in the first stage of *dhyāna* the practitioner's mind is characterized by singlepointedness of concentration along with two different types of mental deliberation and a combination of joy and bliss. By conscious decision the practitioner moves from one stage to the next, successively eliminating the two types of mental deliberation and the joy and bliss, which ultimately are considered distractions to the task at hand. With the fourth and "fundamental" stage of *dhyāna* the practitioner's mind is characterized solely by singlepointedness of mind. Although speech and discursive thought are impossible at this stage, it is here that the meditator becomes able to use the supernormal faculties of telepathy, superaudition, levitation, knowledge of his own past lives, and understanding of the karmic fates of others. The Buddha and his disciples often used these abilities for teaching purposes, but the Buddhist tradition considers them potentially hazardous diversions of no value to spiritual cultivation, and there are Vinaya regulations against monks' divulging competence in these powers to laypeople.

In contrast to the great elaboration of concentration exercises, insight or *vipaśyanā* meditation consists solely of the application of the concentrated mind to any object, in order to attain "clear comprehension" of it. In *śamatha* the mind becomes concentrated like a searchlight, while in *vipaśyanā* that searchlight-like mind illuminates the most important issues of the human condition: the transiency and composite nature of the human body, the dependent origination of thoughts and feelings, and the

inevitability of human suffering. By using the mind concentrated through *śamatha* to examine these issues, the practitioner sees and understands them through *vipaśyanā*. Thus concentration and insight are not really separate techniques, even though they may be explained separately for convenience. The meditation exercise that is most widely used throughout the Buddhist tradition is that of concentration on the breath, which has the virtue of drawing the practitioner naturally from concentration to insight: as the body settles and respiration slows, one's attention shifts from calming to knowing.

The objects selected for attention in insight meditation by any Buddhist community are congruent with the understanding of Buddhist doctrine within that community. Hence in early Buddhism one was to focus on the body and one's thoughts and feelings in order to recognize their inherent impermanence, causal interrelationship, quality of suffering, and so forth. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, on the other hand, the realization achieved in insight meditation tended to be the fundamental emptiness *(śūnyatā)* of all things, although this and other Mahāyāna themes were expressed in various ways by early Chinese meditators. Although Theravāda and other Mainstream Buddhist sources do adduce stages of progress in insight practice,[28] these stages tend to be increasing gradations of a single achievement of awareness rather than quintessentially different achievements. (In contrast, the explanation of the stages of concentration, or *dhyāna,* include significant conceptual distinctions.) Nor is there any real explanation of how insight happens—only the basic assumption that the mind, when directed at a given subject matter, has the innate capacity to understand. Like the Buddha's enlightenment, the experience of understanding is ineffable, but its impact is liberating.[29] It is axiomatic throughout the Buddhist tradition that the perfect understanding of the human situation yields one's liberation from the deleterious effects of that situation.[30]

To return to matters closer at hand, we may now ask the following question: To what extent do the two entrances of the Bodhidharma treatise or the two practices suggested in the Hongren treatise resemble the Indian Buddhist themes of concentration and insight? I have already introduced evidence to suggest that the entrance of principle might be considered an interpretation of concentration, or *śamatha,* and the same consideration would also apply to the practice of the visualization of the sun. The use of the Buddha-nature idea, the sun of enlightenment within all human beings (indeed, within all sentient beings), the quality of non-discriminatory wisdom that is the sine qua non of buddhahood itself, is a profound innovation that separates proto-Chan and early Chan from early Indian Buddhism. However, it is also a simple concentration exercise, the only peculiarity of which is that the mind is being trained to concentrate on the mind's most quintessential capability of understanding itself. The goal of the practice of "maintaining the mind" in the Hongren treatise is precisely to affirm the existence of that latent wisdom and to allow it to shine forth in unqualified form. Where I tend to describe the concentrated mind of Indian Buddhist *śamatha* theory as a searchlight that may then be focused on specific topics in *vipaśyanā,* in Chinese imagery the enlightened sun of *nirvāṇa* within is an all-encompassing source of illumination. Given this difference in metaphoric construction, though, the Indian Buddhist concept of concentration meditation thus correlates, if only approximately, with the entrance of principle and the visualization of the sun.

However, this is not the case for the comparison between insight meditation and Bodhidharma's entrance of practice and Hongren's focus on the activity of the discriminatory mind. Part of the problem, of course, is that the two specific meditation techniques attributed to Hongren include substantial components of both concentration and insight. (As we have seen just above, of course, the same can be said for many Indian Buddhist meditation exercises.) Hongren's instructions to concentrate on the movement of the discriminatory mind imply both cessation—in that it is expected that the mind's movement will eventually stop in the course of one's practice—and understanding—in that the cause of that cessation is said to be a "wind of wisdom." For the moment, however, we must grant that the second practice recommended in the Hongren treatise is more like concentration than insight.

The problem is that the entrance of practice in the Bodhidharma treatise simply does not fit into this pattern. Rather than being any kind of yogic practice at all, in fact, the four steps within this "entrance" to the path pertain to one's activity in the world. To be sure, the emphasis is on the mental posture with which one approaches one's life experience. However, the emphasis is on action, not realization. This should alert us to the fact that something is going on here that does not fit within the confines of "meditation practice" per se. Instead, we need to look within the Chinese tradition for a suitable analog to the pairing of the two entrances of the Bodhidharma treatise.

As Chinese clergy and laypeople were struggling to understand Buddhism in the fourth and fifth centuries of the common era, they were wont to use a uniquely Chinese formulation: the distinction between essence

(*ti*, lit., "body") and function (*yong*, lit., "use"). There is no sharp distinction between essence and function; depending on the perspective, any entity or situation can be approached in terms of either one. Nor is there any sharp transformation in moving from essence to function, since the difference between the two is more in the mind of the beholder rather than in the entity itself. In his *Treatise on the Immutability of Things* Sengzhao (374–414) explains the relationship as follows, based on an initial quotation from an early translation of the *Perfection of Wisdom:*

> The *Light-Emitting* [*Perfection of Wisdom*] *Sūtra* states, "Dharmas are without going and coming, without active transformation." In searching for the operations of inactivity, how could one possibly seek stillness by undoing the active? One must seek stillness within the activities [of things]. Since one must seek stillness within the activities [of things], although active they are always still. Since one should not undo the active to seek stillness, although [things] are still they do not transcend activity. Nevertheless, even though activity and stillness have never varied, the deluded take them as different.[31]

The early-twentieth-century scholar TANG Yongtong (1893–1964) explains that Sengzhao's entire treatise is devoted to showing that active and still are identical. This is not to say that there exists some unmoving fundamental essence that generates the myriad phenomenal manifestations, but that that the fundamental realities and phenomenal permutations are inseparably identical.[32]

Thus it is entirely reasonable that the two entrances of Bodhidharma's text are quite different and yet seem to merge in the fourth practice, where "practicing in accord with the Dharma" so closely resembles the entrance of principle. The two entrances may be separate, but in a certain sense they imply each other, even contain each other. From a more general perspective, this is only the beginning of a broader attention to the similarities and differences between the different types of polarities that are scattered about the Chan tradition. We will have occasion to return to the Bodhidharma treatise again, to recognize its signal role in establishing patterns that recur again and again throughout Chan. At this point, however, let us be content to notice that not all such polarities are identical, that different matchings may harbor substantially different implications. With this simple but important observation in hand, we may turn our attention to the next phase of Chinese Chan.

CHAPTER 3

Metropolitan Chan

Imperial Patronage and the Chan Style

A "Chan Boom" in the Imperial Chinese Capitals

In the first half of the eighth century, the northern Chinese cities of Chang'an and Luoyang were the greatest urban centers in the world. Chang'an had a population of over a million, a number far larger than any city in the Middle East (let alone Europe) would reach for centuries. Originally a safe military headquarters "within the passes" of the mountainous northwest, Chang'an was laid out on an extremely grand scale and in a cross-hatched design of wide boulevards running north-south and east-west. The city walls formed a nearly square rectangle enclosing a neatly ordered set of government centers, market areas, and neighborhoods. With the imperial palace in the north of the city and major thoroughfares connecting to regional highways leading eastward to Korea and Japan and westward to Central Asia, Persia, India, and the Middle East, the emperor could face south towards both city and realm, even as the entire world seemed to face north in paying homage toward this ruler of "all under heaven."

The imperial state was expressed in grand and imposing material form, with massive office buildings and official temples, and it was operated by a bureaucratic organization of ministries, bureaus, and departments manned by officials who achieved their positions through different combinations of hereditary advantage and civil service examinations. The most elite of these bureaucrats were required to attend an imperial audience every morning, some of whom recorded poetic laments of the windy chill of lonely city streets in wintertime as they rode on horseback from their homes to the palace in the far north of the city.