How Chan Buddhism Became a Reinvented School by the Song Dynasty

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Keywords: Chan Buddhism, Public announcement, Critical phrase, Silent illumination chan, Pure rules.

Abstract. The Song dynasty was a golden age of culture. During this period, Chan Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism and the philosophy of Changes reached a period of climax and became reinvented schools. This paper will use hermeneutics as its research method, approach how Chan Buddhism became a reinvented school by Song dynasty by focusing on (1) the source of Song dynasty Chan materials, (2) how Chan became a reinvented school by the Song dynasty, (3) institutionalization of Song dynasty Chan monastic system, and (4) Song dynasty literati’s relationship with Chan Buddhism.

Induction

Early Song government promulgated the ideal of the unity of the Three Teachings – Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism—along with the Philosophy of Change. Early Song culture was faced with the problem of how to adapt better to the needs of Song dynasty politics and society, so as to gain a wider applicability to the world. This situation provided beneficial inspiration for the development of Chan Buddhism in the Song dynasty (960-1279).

Literatures

According to hermeneutical research methods, before we use resource materials we must first research the source of this material and its reliability. Therefore, this paper researches on how Chan Buddhism became a reinvented school begins with the sources related to the topic of development of Chan Buddhism during Song dynasty.

Table 1. The concept of Samatha and Vipassana in suttic and commentarial sources.

| Author   | Title                                                                 | Subject Matte                                                                 |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Yunwen | Record of Chan Master Dahui pujue (Dahui pujue chanshi yulu)[1]       | Discusses Chan master Dahui Zonggao’s concept of “key word” or “critical phrase” (huatou 话头) and his meditative path of “examining the key word” (kan huan 复话头). |
| 2 Daoyuan| Record of Jingde Transmission of the Lamp (Jingde chuandeng lu) [2]    | The aim of Chan is to realize the basic nature of enlightenment in sentient beings through direct experience and insight into the true nature of things. |
| 3 Keqin  | The Blue Cliff Record [3]                                            | Discusses to attain mental purity by the way of using gongan 公案（public announcement). |
| 4 Juding | Continuation Transmission of the lamp records (Xuchuan denglu) [2]    | Attains the tranquility of no-thought (wunian 无念) by concentrating on the direct experience of every movement. |
| 5 Wenxiu | Record of Increase in Continuation Transmission                      | Be in harmony with others and nature.                                         |
 Chan Became a Reinvented School by the Song

According to these literatures, prior to the Song, Chan consisted mainly of the Five Houses (Caodong, Linji, Yunmen, Weiyang and Fayan). The Weiyang and Fayan houses did not survive into the new epoch. During the second half of the Song, the masters of the Yunmen house received great recognition. Caodong house, which had declined rapidly after its great achievements during the Tang period (618-907), was revived as the period progressed during the Song. It was Linji house that was dominant among Chan school during the Song period. This house, which was to continue in Japan as the Rinzai school, entered the Song period under the leadership of Shanchao (947-1024). His successor was Chuyuan (986-1039), whose two disciples Fanghui (922-1049) and Huinan (1002-1069) established the two lines that have made up the Linji school since the Song period.

The practice of using gongan took clear shape during the Song period. Literally, the word gongan is a combination of graphs that signifies “public announcement.” A gongan, therefore, presents a challenge and an invitation to take seriously what has been announced, to ponder it and respond to it. But the special character of this “announcement” confronts the listener or reader with a perplexing puzzle. As one becomes confused, the more confused one gets. The essence of the gongan is to be rationally unresolvable and thus to point to what is arational. The gongan urges practitioners to abandon their rational thought structures and step beyond their usual state of consciousness in order to press into new and unknown dimensions. This is the common purpose of all gongan, no matter how much they may differ in content or literary form.

Yunmen house contributed to the gongan evolution through the sayings of its founder, Yunmen Wenyan (864-949), as it picked out earlier enlightenment exchanges (niangu), commented on them (zhuyu), and provided substitute answers to questions and dialogues (daiyu, bieyu). Eventually the Fayan, Yunmen and Linji houses combined to create the enlightenment dialogues in legal precedents.
From the enlightenment dialogues in *Records of Transmission the Lamp (Chuandeng lu)*, Yunmen and Linji scholar monks selected cases, to which they appended verses. These juxtapositions of colloquial dialogues and literary poems morphed into collections like *the Blue Cliff Records* by Keqin (1063-1135). He and Fayan (1024-1104), who made famous the *wu* (English, no) *gongan*, promoted each *gongan* as a singular aid to an instantaneous enlightenment. Fayan advised practitioners to concentrate on the *wu* word only, and not think of the entire dialogue on the Buddha-nature. Zonggao (1089-1163), who took up *wu* topic, supposedly burnt his master’s *the Blue Cliff Records* anthology as students became infatuated with its literary qualities. This was a period when “lettered Chan” (*wenzi chan*), and indulgence in Chan literature, was popular. Led by Huihong (1071-1128), a poet of the Huanglong faction of the Linji house, this type of Chan was denigrated by Zonggao as mere bookishness. He said Huihong’s *gongan* ignored daily life and were only random poetical cases. Zonggao, in contrast, directed attention to one word only, *wu*, or Wenyan’s “dried shit-stick,” in order to assist the many lay followers by simplifying contemplation practice.

Concentration on *wu* word *gongan* leads to a breakthrough. This single word was called a *huatou* (key word or critical phrase) and “examining the key word” (*kan huatou*) was touted as a shortcut method. It had to be experienced, like the sword of the barbarian enemy, as an immediate problem of life and death. This contemplation became Chan practice in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, for it could be used even during everyday activities.

In addition, based on the concentration on the *gongan*, Zonggao attacked “silent illumination Chan” (*mozhao chan*) as the heresy of quietism, which lacks self-doubt. The barb was aimed at Hongzhi Chengjue (1091-1157) of the Caogong house, and at meeting the demands for a patriotic Buddhism after the loss of North China to the Jurchens in 1126. Asserting that the mundane law is the same as the Buddha Law, Zonggao maintained that one had to be active, not pacifist and quietist. This patriotic Chan resulted in the building of the “Five Mountain and Ten Monasteries” (*wushan shicha*) system, wherein the state-appointed Chan abbots, whose sermons and rituals were for the salvation of the state and sentient beings.

**Institutionalization of Chan Monastic System**

For institutionalization of Chan monastic system, masters edited Pure Rules: *Chan Monastery Pure Rules (Chanyuan qinggui)*, [12] *Competed Chan Monastery Calibration Pure Rules (Conglin jiaoding qinggui zongyang)*, [13] *Official Calibration Baizhang Pure Rules (Chixiu baizhang qinggui)*, [12] *Chan Monastery Spare Pure Rules (Chanlin beiyong qinggui)* [13] and *Chan Monastery Public Rules (Conglin gonglun)* [11] etc. Descriptions of routines in these Pure Rules show that sitting in meditation and concentration on *huatou* are the norm. Meditation was the prime practice in Chan monasteries. Chan monks lived, meditated, and slept in the meditation hall (*chantang*). During intensive meditation periods, monks typically meditated nineteen hours and slept five hours per day. The monks could consult the abbot or instructor regarding their meditation practice. Summer was for pilgrimage, consultations with other teachers... The Pure Rules are the most important safeguard for the maintenance and prolongation of the Chan monastic system. Similar routines are presently maintained in China, Korea, Japan, Singapore, and Vietnam.

**Literati’s Relationship with Chan Buddhism**

The Chan ideas of simplicity, purity, and harmony are deeply rooted in the cultural backbone of the Song dynasty.

According to the *Passing Down the Light to Laity (Jushi fendeng lu)*, [14] *Han Shang Commentary on Zhouyi* [15] and *Supplementing the Biography of Continuing Loftiness*,[16] there are clear Chan influences on Zhou Dunyi’s (1017-1073) “diagram of the Supreme Ultimate” (*taiji tu*), especially in the way he turned to Chan to satisfy his metaphysical appetites. Regarding this, Zhou Dunyi mentioned: “this marvelous mind of mine, was edified by Venerable Huanglong (1002-1069), and was enlightened by Venerable Foyin (1019-1098)... without Venerable Donglin’s (1025-1091) help and training. I would not have been able to completely understand the *Book of*
Likewise, Shao Yong’s (1012-1077) concept of “the mind constitutes the Supreme Ultimate” [17] is evidently affected by Chan. Chan ideology such as “the Buddha is in the mind, not outside the mind,” and “what is important is to make the effort to cultivate one’s own mind,” etc., deeply influenced Shao Yong.

Additionally, according to Sources of Songyuan Dynasties Neo-Confucianism (Songyuan xuean)[18] and A History of the Song Dynasty,[19] in the records of Zhu Xi (1130-1200), Lu Jiuyuan (1139-1193), Cheng Hao (1032-1085) and Cheng Yi (1033-1107), the relatives of Chan report that they have practiced Chan and their thoughts certainly contain Chan Buddhist elements. Chan exerted a tremendous, profound and far-reaching influence upon Neo-Confucianism and the philosophy of the Book of Changes during Song dynasty.

Conclusion

The aim of Chan is to realize the basic nature of enlightenment in the mind of human beings through direct experience and insight into the true nature of things. The practice of using gongan, lettered Chan, “examining the key word” (kan huatou) and “silent illumination Chan” (mozhao chan), laid stress upon attaining Enlightenment and Buddhahood through spiritual practice based on one’s originally pure mind - self-nature. According to this idea, whether sentient beings can attain Buddhahood or not is dependent on their thought. Thus, the Chan ideas of simplicity, purity, and harmony are deeply rooted in the cultural backbone of the Song dynasty. Therefore, after Emperor Shi Zong’s great persecution (955), Chan reached the heights of its religious, cultural and social development during the Song dynasty. Hence, it became a “reinvented school.”

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