

The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism

in Eighth- through Tenth-Century China

Jinhua Jia



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To my father Jia Maozhi 賈茂芝
and mother Lin Jinxuan 林金瑄
who raised and educated me in very difficult circumstances.

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This book grew out of the Ph.D. dissertation I submitted to the University of Colorado at Boulder in 1999. The dissertation, as suggested by its title, “The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism and the Tang Literati,” is an interdisciplinary study comprising two parts, the first of which examines the Hongzhou school, and the second the interrelationship between the Hongzhou school and the Tang literati and literature. This new work greatly enhances the first part, but omits the second due to the limitation of space. Thus, it becomes a pure study of Chan Buddhist history.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND CONVENTIONS

CDL	<i>Jingde chuandeng lu</i> , ed. Daoyuan
Chan Chart	<i>Zhonghua chuan xindi chanmen shizi chengxi tu</i> , by Zongmi
Chan Preface	<i>Chanyuan zhuquanji duxu</i> , by Zongmi
GDL	<i>Tiansheng guandeng lu</i> , ed. Li Zunxu
P.	Numbered Paul Pelliot manuscripts from Dunhuang in the Bibliothèque National, Paris.
QTW	<i>Quan Tangwen</i> , ed. Dong Gao et al.
S.	Numbered Aurel Stein manuscripts from Dunhuang in the British Museum, London.
SBCK	<i>Sibu congkan</i>
SGSZ	<i>Song gaoseng zhuan</i> , by Zanning
SKQS	<i>Siku quanshu</i>
T.	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i>
XXSKQS	<i>Xuxiu Siku quanshu</i>
XZJ	<i>Xu zangjing</i> , reprint of <i>Dai Nihon zokuzōkyō</i>
ZJL	<i>Zongjing lu</i> , by Yanshou
ZTJ	<i>Zutang ji</i> , ed. Jing and Yun

Citations from the *Taishō* canon and *Xu zangjing* are listed in the following fashion: title; T. or XZJ; volume number; *juan* (fascicle) number; page, register (a, b, or c)—for example, *Huayan jing tanxuan ji*, T. 35: 16.405a; *Yuanjue jing dashu chao*, XZJ 14: 3.557b. The *Taishō* serial number of each text is given in the Bibliography.

Since most of the Sanskrit terms used in this study have been accepted as English words, all these terms are set in roman with diacritical marks for consistency.

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INTRODUCTION

The Hongzhou school of Chan Buddhism in eighth–tenth century China, with Mazu Daoyi (709–788) and his successors as its central figures, represents a crucial phase in the evolution of Chinese Chan Buddhism. It inherited and creatively developed the abundant legacy of Sinitic Buddhism and the early Chan movement and exerted great influence in later developments of Chan Buddhism with its doctrinal, practical, genealogical, and institutional paradigms. This work aims to present a comprehensive study of this school, including its literature, formation, doctrine and practice, transmission and spread, road to orthodoxy, and final schism and division.

To examine Chinese Chan Buddhism in terms of specific schools, we first need to clarify three interrelated concepts—school, lineage, and orthodoxy. Scholars of Chinese Buddhism have noted that the widely used English term “school” is the conventional translation of the Chinese word, *zong*. *Zong* originally denoted ancestral temple (*zumiao*) and later evolved into many different meanings, including “ancestor,” “lineage,” “leading personage,” “principle doctrine or theory,” and so forth.¹ Tang Yongtong was the first to discern the different senses of *zong* in Chinese Buddhist texts, and he was followed by Mano Shōjun, Hirai Shun’ei, Stanley Weinstein, and others. According to these scholars, *zong* is used in three main senses in Chinese Buddhist texts: (1) a specific doctrine or an interpretation of it; (2) the theme or theory of a text, or an exegetical tradition of it; (3) a group or tradition that traces its origin back to a founder and shares some common doctrines and practices among its lineal successors.² Whereas scholars in general agree that *zong* as in the third sense can be translated as “school,” recently some scholars suggest an alternative term “lineage.”³

“Lineage” is surely one of the basic connotations of *zong*, and there is evidence that the Chinese Buddhist concept of lineage, especially that of Chan Buddhism, was strongly influenced by the tradition of ancestor cult.⁴ Under the Chinese patriarchal clan system of legitimate and collateral lineages, lineage was closely associated with notions such as identity, legitimacy, and orthodoxy.

As a matter of fact, the original meaning of the term “orthodoxy,” *zhengzong* or *zhengtong*, refers to “orthodox lineage.” However, lineage has also always been an important organizational framework in the Buddhist tradition. In Indian Buddhism, as early as about one century after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa, there were already accounts of different lineages descending from immediate disciples of the Buddha, and these were considered to be sacred issues for monks because tracing a lineage back through a series of preceptors and disciples was an acknowledged way of proving the orthodoxy of a person’s ordination.⁵ During the period of schism, lineage further became a means of sectarian disputation, as various schools developed lineages tracing back fictitiously to immediate disciples of the Buddha in order to claim legitimacy and authority for their doctrines.⁶ In Chinese Buddhism, the Tiantai tradition was the first to create a lineage of “sūtra-transmission” tracing back to twenty-three (or twenty-four) Indian patriarchs based on the *Fu fazang yinyuan zhuan* (Biographies of the Circumstances of the Transmission of the Dharma Collection).⁷ However, it is in the Chan tradition that lineage became a central concern, because, as Bernard Faure indicates, it represents the desire of the marginal group to become the party of the orthodox.⁸ According to the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, from the early sixth century to the mid-seventh century, there were at least six meditation groups active in China. While the other five groups were brought to the capital during the Sui dynasty, the group in the line of Bodhidharma-Huikē was excluded from the national meditation center.⁹ In the early Tang, the Dongshan/Northern group connected itself to the Bodhidharma-Huikē line, which was marginal in the Sui, and eventually to the Buddha. This genealogy helped them to advance from marginal to orthodox. Then, the Heze, Niutou, Baotang, and Hongzhou groups further revised and recreated the genealogy in order to become the party of orthodox.¹⁰

Historically, from both the broader cultural and specifically Buddhist contexts, *zong* in the sense of Buddhist group, with its actual or fictitious founder(s) and lineal successors, may indeed be most correctly translated as “lineage.” However, there were two major types of lineage: (1) some major and influential, not only comprising founder(s) and lineal successors, but also having their own distinctive doctrines and practices; (2) others small and subordinate, forming only master-disciple or monastery-abbotship successions, without setting up their own doctrinal system. To classify the different types of lineage more exactly and to define research scopes more clearly, the modern term “school” is still applicable to the fully fledged lineages of the first type.¹¹ Thus, in this work, the Hongzhou tradition/lineage, as well as other fully fledged lineages such as the Northern, the Heze, the Niutou, or the Baotang, is regarded as a school, though in its early stage of formation when the Hongzhou lineage was not yet fully fledged, “community” or “lineage” is used to designate it, whereas any other group that was derived from the Hongzhou school and not yet or never fully developed is referred to as a “lineage” or “house.”¹²

In the traditional Chan genealogy, Mazu, literally “Patriarch Ma,” was connected to the six great patriarchs of early Chan, from Bodhidharma to Huineng (638–713), via his mentor Nanyue Huairang (677–744). Discourses attributed to Mazu and his major disciples and encounter stories about them remained the core of traditional Chan literature and were repeatedly read, performed, interpreted, and eulogized. Their images were idolized as representatives of Chan spirit and identity not only by the successors of Chinese Chan but also of Korean Sŏn, Japanese Zen, and Vietnamese Thiền.

The discovery of the Dunhuang manuscripts has greatly changed our view of Chan history. On the basis of interpretations of the Dunhuang texts, recent scholarship has rewritten the history of early Chan and reveals convincingly that the traditional Chan genealogy that erases the significant contributions of the Northern school and other early schools and lineages is historically inaccurate, and that the old paradigms of gradualism versus subitism and North versus South do not reflect the historical development of early Chan. Unfortunately, since there are few Dunhuang texts related to Mazu and his Tang successors, we must return to the traditional “discourse record” (*yulu*) texts and “transmission of the lamp” (*chuandeng*) histories, and thus face two methodological and hermeneutical dilemmas.

First, modern scholars’ view of the Chan literature of the eighth to tenth centuries can be summarized as consisting of three types. (1) Earlier and some current historians often accept almost all the discourse records and “transmission of the lamp” histories at face value as historical fact and use the transmission framework of traditional genealogy as a base on which to construct a narrative history of “classical” Chan Buddhism. (2) Since the famous debate about Chan historicity between Hu Shi (1891–1962) and D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966) in the 1950s,¹³ some scholars have assumed a more balanced stance toward the Chan literature. While noticing the ever ongoing “supplementarity” in Chan literature,¹⁴ they also recognize that Chan historians’ sense of history differs significantly from that of modern historians in areas such as their fervent concern for genealogical metaphors, their enlightenment and transmission experience, and the literary nature of the genres of Chan texts.¹⁵ (3) Recently a number of scholars have adopted the view that texts attributed to the Tang Chan masters in the generations following Huineng, especially encounter dialogues and relevant stories that were the central content of Chan literature,¹⁶ were the retrospective creations of Song-dynasty Chan monks.¹⁷

The second dilemma is closely related to the first. Modern scholarship has usually described the eighth to tenth century Chan centered on Mazu and his successors as the “golden age” or “classical” Chan, which represented a revolutionarily iconoclastic tradition, with the Song-dynasty Chan in decline. Recently, along with question of the validity of the Chan literature attributed to the Tang masters, scholars have also challenged the validity of these definitions and argue that the true “golden age” is the Song Chan tradition, and that Mazu and his Tang successors came to represent a “classical” age only

after their time had passed, and were merely images created by the imaginations of their Song devotees.¹⁸

In order to deal with these two dilemmas, this work adopts a synthetic approach combining historical-philological and philosophical-hermeneutical studies. The author believes that the first important task facing modern students of mid-Tang to Five-Dynasties Chan studies is the discrimination between original or relatively datable materials and later layers of modification and recreation, and that no assertion of truth or fabrication can be made before a solid investigation of each text is completed. Therefore, we need to perform a thorough examination of the texts attributed to Mazu and his disciples to present credible texts for further study of the Chan doctrine and religious practice of the Hongzhou school. On the other hand, as many scholars have noted, fabrications and legends are also of historical and doctrinal value and should not simply be discarded. This is especially true of the literature attributed to the Hongzhou school, as the results of our examination reveal that the retrospective creation and updating did not begin with the Song-dynasty monks but was begun by the third- and fourth-generation disciples of Mazu in the late Tang. This project was then continuously repeated by Five-Dynasties and Song successors. Hence, the separate texts of original parts and later layers are all useful and serve different purposes in our philosophical analysis and historical reconstruction. With the identified original and relatively datable texts of the Hongzhou literature, we are able to observe the Hongzhou doctrine and practice through our own lens instead of the lens of the late-Tang, Five-Dynasties, or Song-dynasty Chan monks. From the identified layers of the late-Tang and Five-Dynasties creations, we can get the sense of the responses to and criticisms of the Hongzhou doctrine by their successors of that period and consequently find the reasons for the schism of the Hongzhou line and the rise of the Shitou line and various houses during that period.

The philological approach is applicable due to the existence of three bodies of reliably datable texts. The first body of texts is the extant stele inscriptions of Tang monks and monasteries written by contemporary writers. Scholars have made use of some common, well-known stele inscriptions, such as the epitaphs and stūpa inscriptions of Mazu Daoyi and his several disciples. However, there are still many inscriptions that have been insufficiently studied or almost totally ignored. For example, the stele inscriptions written for the Korean disciples of Tang masters contain much useful information but are rarely studied.¹⁹ Many biographies in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* (Biographies of Eminent Monks Compiled in the Song Dynasty, comp. 988) are acknowledged by Zanning (919–1001) as based on original Tang stele inscriptions and thus reliably datable.²⁰ Many inscriptions included in the *Quan Tangwen* (Complete Tang Prose), *Tangdai muzhi huibian* (Collection of Tang Epitaphs), *Quan Tangwen bubian* (Supplement to the Complete Tang Prose), and so forth have not been examined. A thorough investigation of all extant inscriptions is very encouraging. We find in them information about the emergence and maturity of

encounter dialogues, the transcriptions of encounter dialogues much older than the *Zutang ji* (Anthology of the Patriarchal Hall; 952),²¹ *Jingde chuandeng lu* (Records of the Transmission of the Lamp Compiled during the Jingde Reign-Period; 1004),²² and so forth.

The second body of texts consists of datable Buddhist texts such as Guifeng Zongmi's (780–841) works, Huangbo Xiyun's (d. 855) *Chuanxin fayao* (Essential Teachings of the Transmission of Mind), and the works and catalogs of visiting Japanese scholars. Although Zongmi depicted the vision of his own Heze school as superior, modern scholars in general agree that Zongmi's works are valuable in that they offer a contemporary, basically accurate account of the various factions of Chan during the mid-Tang and so provide a corrective to the traditional picture described by Song monks.²³ In archaeological studies, scholars utilize a few bronze wares whose dates are known as "standard ware" to determine the dates of similar wares. Since Zongmi was a younger contemporary of Mazu's immediate disciples, his works can be used as "standard texts" to determine the dates and authenticity of those texts attributed to Mazu and his disciples. For example, because the main themes and even some expressions from Mazu's sermons are seen in Zongmi's summaries and criticisms of the Hongzhou doctrine,²⁴ we can determine that those sermons in general represent Mazu's ideas, though they may contain certain editorial modifications by his immediate disciples who were the recorders and compilers of those sermons. Huangbo's *Chuanxin fayao*, compiled by Pei Xiu (ca. 787–860) in 857, can also serve as a "standard text" in the same way, although certain modifications by Pei Xiu and Huangbo's disciples are also possible.²⁵ The works and catalogs of the visiting Japanese monks during the mid-Tang such as Saichō (767–822), Ennin (794–864), Eun, and Enchin (814–891) are all datable and can serve the same function.

The third body of reliably datable texts comprises the works of the Tang literati, such as Bai Juyi's (772–846) collected works, Duan Chengshi's (d. 863) *Youyang zazhi* (Assorted Records from Youyang), and other relevant poems and essays, which also contain much valuable information about the development of Chan.

Equipped with these three bodies of texts, we are able to perform a thorough examination on the lives of Mazu and his disciples and the texts attributed to them. The first chapter provides a complete biography of Mazu Daoyi, which clarifies many previous misunderstandings of the sources and therefore more accurately describes the various stages of training, teaching, and establishment of the Hongzhou community in Mazu's life. Chapter two examines Mazu's immediate disciples who comprised the main body of the Hongzhou lineage and pushed it toward its maturity as a religious school. It focuses on solving the controversies over three second-generation masters of the mid-Tang Chan, Tianhuang Daowu (727–808), Danxia Tianran (739–824), and Yaoshan Weiyan (744–827), who were traditionally ascribed as disciples of Shitou Xiqian (700–790). Our new studies in this chapter demonstrate that all three actually learned from both Mazu and Shitou, and that Yaoshan even

had a much closer relationship with Mazu. On the basis of Yanagida's studies, this chapter further produces a new list of Mazu's disciples with relevant data such as dates, native places, locations and foundations of monasteries, and sources. The third chapter and some parts of the fifth are dedicated to one of the major concerns of this work—a thorough examination of the Hongzhou literature. First, according to stele inscriptions and other reliably datable Tang texts, during the mid-Tang period when Mazu and his immediate disciples were active, encounter dialogue emerged in two forms, one being the vogue of witty, paradoxical phrases, and the other the fictionalized account of enlightenment dialogue. Then during the late Tang and Five Dynasties, encounter dialogue achieved full maturity in multiple forms and styles. Second, with reference to this background of the evolution of encounter dialogue, the Hongzhou literature is carefully examined and some original or relatively datable texts and discourses are identified: Mazu's six sermons and four dialogues, the *Extended Records of Baizhang*, *Pang Yun's Verses*, the *Extended Discourses* of Dazhu Huihai (fl. 788), Yaoshan Weiyān, Fenzhou Wuyue (760–821), and Nanquan Puyuan (748–834) in *Juan* 28 of the *CDL*, sixteen discourses of Mazu's disciples, three fragments of Li Fan's (d. 829) *Xuansheng qulu* (Inn of the Mysterious Sages), the *Baolin zhuan* (Chronicle of the Baolin Monastery), the Chan verses attributed to the Liang-dynasty monk Baozhi (ca. 418–514), and the “Song of Realizing the Way” attributed to the early-Tang monk Yongjia Xuanjue (665–713).

The reader will then see that these original or relatively datable materials make feasible a philosophical-hermeneutical study of the Hongzhou doctrine and practice, free of the views and mythologies of later times. Like early Chan, the doctrinal foundation of the Hongzhou school was mainly a mixture of the tathāgata-garbha thought and prajñāpāramitā theory, with a salient emphasis on the kataphasis of the former. Despite the iconoclastic image depicted by his successors of the late Tang to early Song, Mazu was well versed in Buddhist scriptures. He followed the early Chan tradition to claim Bodhidharma's transmission of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, and applied this sūtra and the *Awakening of Faith*,²⁶ as well as other tathāgata-garbha texts, to construct the doctrinal framework of the Hongzhou school and introduce some new themes and practices into the Chan movement. His proposition that “this mind is the Buddha” or “ordinary mind is the Way” followed the fundamental belief of early Chan in the existence of Buddha-nature within all sentient beings, and further identified the ordinary, empirical human mind with Buddha-nature, with the equivalence of tathāgata-garbha and ālayavijñāna in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, and the two inseparable aspects of one-mind in the *Awakening of Faith* as scriptural support. He simplified the enlightenment cycle of “original enlightenment”–“non-enlightenment”–“actualized enlightenment” illustrated in the *Awakening of Faith* by directly highlighting immanent or original enlightenment. He also utilized the tathāgata-garbha notion of non-origination to advocate that “the Way needs no cultivation.” Inspired by the Huayan theory of nature origination from the Tathāgata, which was an interpretation

of the essence/function paradigm of the two aspects of one-mind in the *Awakening of Faith*, Mazu proposed that the ultimate reality of enlightenment was manifested in function, and consequently affirmed that the entirety of daily life was of ultimate truth and value. These new doctrines provided a theoretical underpinning for the emergence and maturity of encounter dialogue, a rhetoric style that germinated in early Chan and became an important feature of Chan practice after Mazu. These doctrines and practices represented a major development from early Chan and constructed the theoretical framework for the later Chan movement, which has been regarded as the most Chinese-style Chan. Yet these doctrines remained genuinely Buddhist,²⁷ as they were not revolutionarily iconoclastic innovations that repudiated the beliefs and doctrines of early Chinese Buddhism, as their admirers among Song Chan monks thought, but rather drew out some of the ramifications of the ambiguous tathāgata-garbha theory and made explicit those that were implicit.

After Mazu passed away, his immediate disciples strove for the self identity of the Chan movement and the orthodoxy of their own lineage. Chapter five depicts their rough road toward these aims. They first revised and completed the century-long project of Chan genealogy with the *Baolin zhuan*, which implies a propagandistic, polemical claim of Chan movement as a “separate” and “mind-to-mind” transmission tracing back to the Buddha(s) and superior to other scholastic teachings of Buddhism, and which sets their own lineage as the orthodox one after the sixth patriarch, Huineng, in order to legitimize their new doctrines and practices and elevate their lineage from marginal to orthodox. Because of the inseparable relationship between lineage and orthodoxy in both Chinese culture and Buddhist tradition, this twofold polemical claim was validated and eventually became the doctrinal background for the late-Tang to Song-dynasty Chan movement, from which a new kind of Chan—the Patriarchal Chan—emerged. At the same time, those second-generation masters of the Hongzhou school created more texts and attributed them to mythologized or famous monks such as Baozhi and Yongjia Xuanjue in order to legitimize and disseminate their doctrinal teachings. They established and administered sixteen monasteries as centers of development. They expanded gradually from remote, regional Jiangxi to the whole nation and the two capitals to obtain official, imperial recognition and authority. Thus, through the nearly forty-year cooperative effort of these masters, the Hongzhou lineage grew from a regional community to a fully fledged and national school and assumed a dominant position in the Chan movement. This chapter also identifies that the true author of the *Baolin zhuan* was Zhangjing Huaihui and determines that Baizhang Huaihai (749–814) did not create a set of monastic regulations but his immediate disciples led by Baizhang Fazheng (d. 819) did.

The new doctrine and practice of the Hongzhou school brought serious criticism from contemporaries of Mazu and his disciples, such as Nanyang Huizhong (683–769) and Zongmi. After the Huichang persecution of