

Adamek, Wendi L. *The Mystique of Transmission: On an Early Chan History and its contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. xv + 578 pp. Notes, Appendix, Bibliography, Index. ISBN 978-0-231-13664-8 (hb). US\$ 50.00. £32.50.

Between 774 and 780 in Chengdu, then known as Yizhou, the *Lidai fabao ji* [Record of the Dharma-Jewel Through the Generations] was compiled to champion the ideas and lineage of Wuzhu (714-774), a Chan Buddhist monk who founded the short-lived Baotang “school”. Although long lost, the text has been discovered at Dunhuang in several copies in Chinese and in a number of partial Tibetan translations. Produced in Sichuan, it was attacked by monks with roots in Sichuan, Shenqing (d. 814) of Zizhou and Zongmi (780-841), for falsifications of Wuzhu’s Chan genealogy and “history” and for an antinomianism that discarded the key forms of Buddhist monasticism. Despite the denunciations, this text exerted a covert influence on the development of elements of what came to be mainstream Chan, and it possibly contributed to the introduction and ultimate rejection of Chan in Tibet. Moreover, as Wuzhu claimed a transmission from Musang (Ch. Wuxiang, 684-762), a Silla monk allegedly a scion of the royal house, one might expect reference to this text in Korea, but there is no evidence of this.

Compiled during a period when the genealogies and practices of Chan were contested, the *Lidai fabao ji* reveals what Adamek terms seams or gaps, the tensions and paradoxes that were part of the motivations for developments in the formation of a Chan ideology and institution. These are the contexts of the book’s title.

The chief of these contexts was the “crisis in the meaning of spiritual transmission” and the fabrications made to resolve this and give the transmission a “mystique”. As there were no stable criteria for the legitimacy of the transmission, the Chan monks of the period and the authors of the

*Lidai fabao ji* in particular adopted contradictory standards. One basic contradiction was located in the gradualist means of preaching and teaching a sudden doctrine, the possibility of teaching and transmitting (a mediating activity) immediacy. Wuzhu took the ideas of Shenhui (684-758), the champion of the “sudden teaching” of the Southern lineage as allegedly transmitted via Huineng, on these topics to their logical conclusion.

The *Lidai fabao ji* then is an outcome of a number of paradoxes that troubled Chinese Buddhists, which is why it begins with the introduction of Buddhism into China and the subsequent magical contest for influence between Buddhism and Daoism. This contest, though no longer magical, was still a major concern in Sichuan during Wuzhu’s lifetime. One of the practices Wuzhu was criticised for was his ignoring of, or transcendence of, the monastic regulations. Consequently the text portrays the monastic code from Daoan (312-385) as merely outer form. Wuzhu countered with the formless transmission instead proceeding through the generations of Indian patriarchs to Bodhidharma and then through six generations to Huineng. Huineng’s transmission, symbolised by a robe (an invention by Shenhui) went allegedly via a circuitous route involving Empress Wu Zetian to Musang and then via an intermediary to Wuzhu. That is the formless transmission was symbolised by a form and the immediate teaching was transmitted through media. Another of the formalities of Buddhism was the precepts, and to maintain any legitimacy as a Buddhist Wuzhu had to redefine the precepts, in particular the bodhisattva precepts popular with the laity and authorised by the clergy. Adamek traces the history of the problems of the bodhisattva precepts in China and the challenges these posed for authority.

The next chapter turns to the rise of piety, the associated threat of spiritual materialism and the concomitant fear of the decline or eclipse of the Dharma, which Wuzhu tried to overcome via a spiritual genealogy and transcendence of the material and formal as encapsulated in confession and

repentance. With the great material prosperity of Buddhism in the Northern Wei, Sui and under Empress Wu came a perceived need to determine and isolate the true spiritual transmission that was manifested in a chronicle of the Indian transmission of the Dharma, the *Fu fazing zhuan*. But in this record the lineage was broken by a persecution, which had to be reconnected to avoid the decline. Chan did this by claiming that the transmission was actually never broken and that the lineage was that of Chan. Alternatively, the reversal of the decline was hoped by some to come via a Dharma king or temporal power in a form of messianism, a strategy adopted by Empress Wu and her clique. Yet another move was to suggest that the decline was due to ignorance and delusion. The Sanjie movement (often called the Sect of the Three Stages) recognised the decline but also the potential of the Buddha-nature, in which there is both an “absolute delusion” but also a “perfect Buddha-hood”, for the delusion is only apparent and one really is enlightened. Wuzhu adopted a similar stance that evil was ignorance of one’s true nature, and that one can suddenly recognise the emptiness of one’s nature, which is Buddha-hood. On a similar basis to the Sanjie followers, Wuzhu arrived at an opposite conclusion. The Sanjie were sticklers for form, but Wuzhu tried to transcend it. However, both tried to divorce themselves from establishment Buddhism. Yet the distinctive feature of Wuzhu’s teaching, the rejection of sin and the dismissal of the power of merit and ritual did not appeal to many people. Moreover, the robe that was such an important sign of Chan transmission was also seen as a merit field, and such contradictions may have contributed to the decline of the Baotang school.

Following a description of the development of a Chan lineage and the disputes over this, Adamek turns to the Chan conferral of the robe and Wuzhu’s preference for physical asceticism. Wuzhu conferred Buddhist robes on persons without evidence of their merit, contradicting some other formulations in China, and yet the robe of Chan transmission was allegedly accompanied by persecution and secrecy in this period of the decline of the Dharma. Shenhui had invented much of

this, but did not possess the robe he had conjured up. Shenhui had been influenced in his subitism and contention that the robe or ordaining was unnecessary for enlightenment by the apocryphal *Vajrasamādhī Sūtra*. Wuzhu took this further. The robe invented by Shenhui was allegedly passed through the hands of Empress Wu according to the *Lidai fabao ji*. Yet this was the empress attacked by Shenhui for her materialist version of Buddhism, which is another contradiction in this part of Chan propaganda.

The latter part of the *Lidai fabao ji* deals with Wuzhu, his contrived relationship with Musang, his pupils, his mass bodhisattva-precepts ceremonies and the formless precepts, his inclusion of women and hostility to Daoism. Musang and Wuzhu supposedly had a long-distance (telepathic?) relationship, formless and yet there was a mind-to-mind transmission via no-thought that was exclusive despite the Buddha-nature being inclusive. Such contradictions conceal an anxiety to remove the gradual and to hide the absence of transmission. The antinomianism, which was often seen as laxity, to the contrary, in Adamek's assessment was asceticism in relinquishing expectations. Wuzhu's anti-institutionalism may also have attracted women who were usually placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, and his formlessness meant that gender should not matter.

The last chapter deals with a portrait of and eulogy for Wuzhu and the issue of portraiture and death in Chan, how that is related to effect and response or sympathetic resonance (*gan ying*) and how one can have an iconoclastic icon. Finally, there is an examination of the later references to Wuzhu and his Baotang school and its influence on the Chan of Mazu Daoyi (706-786) and its traces in Tibet.

At the end of this wonderfully analytical volume is an annotated translation and an edition of the *Lidai fabao ji*. The translation is excellent, with very few inconsistencies (*fu* as both sub-prefecture

and superior prefecture, 342 versus 353) and several individuals not identified, such as Chen Cen (really Cen Shen, 715-ca. 770), a poet of the marchlands who was on Du Hongjian's staff in 766 (Marie Chan, *Cen Shen*, University of Arizona: Twayne's World Authors Series, 1983). Du Hongjian was allegedly Wuzhu's chief patron. I have only a couple of minor quibbles over translation. For example, where Bodhidharma gives Huike the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra*, the words, "The benevolent one who relies on it to practice will himself be able to save the world" (160), should read directly, "You rely on it to practice and you will be able to save the world," for *renzhe* (the benevolent one) is a polite second person pronoun used as an address for monks and in the sutras.

Despite the very high level of scholarship and brilliant analyses of the Buddhist context, the secular political context is less well developed. For example, it is claimed that the *Lidai fabao ji* was compiled in the reign of Dezong (r. 779-805) and yet the text is said to have been written between 774 and 780 (6 versus 45). It is also implied that the existence of Baotang Chan may have been threatened by a memorial from Li Shuming (d. 787) in 778 requesting a purge of useless clerics (45). In it Li mentioned earlier persecutions and asks,

Why did previous emperors and kings hate the goodness of monks and Daoists so deeply? It was because they deluded people so profoundly. Now the teaching established by Buddhism is purity and inaction (*wuwei*), so "if one sees it through matter that is a perverse Dharma/teaching". They open and reveal the access to enlightenment through only this one gate. Therefore the followers of the Three Vehicles (of Buddhism) are compared to the non-Buddhists. Further, those who take ordination currently all belong to the inferior stream of no-consciousness, and even if their practice of the precepts is eminent and pure, they are still

of no use to the ruler. Now my mind is very good, but I fear corrupt underlings (officials) have slandered and insulted (me). (*Tang huiyao* 47)

This looks very much like an attack on Baotang Chan for the quote from the *Diamond Sutra* on materialist perceptions of Buddhism is found in the *Lidai fabao ji* (325), and the reference to attacks by the exclusivist (one gate) useless monks of no-consciousness on the Three Vehicles is found there also (327-8, 370). No-consciousness is similar to one of Wuzhu's slogans. Li Shuming, a native of Sichuan, met Wuzhu on December 6, 766, but then he was still known as Xianyu Shuming (359). He was part of a group headed by Du Hongjian, and so the criticism in the memorial of slanderous underlings may have been directed at a pupil of Shenhui, one Wuming (722-794, see *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, T50.817b2-3) or rather at Cui Gan/Ning who was at court at the time the memorial was presented. Cui was implicated in attacks on Yang Yan, a protégé of Du Hongjian. Shuming was a favourite of the emperor, for he was granted the imperial surname of Li sometime ca. 786 or 779-780 (*Tang Shangshusheng langguan shizhu timing kao* 8: 26a; cf. *Jiu Tangshu* 122, *Xin Tangshu* 147). Shuming may have been acting in concert with Yang Yan to restrict Buddhism. As Du Hongjian was in Sichuan for only a year (766-767) and died in late 769, the appeal by the *Lidai fabao ji* to his alleged patronage may instead have been to Cui Gan rather than to Du's followers at court. The politics of this appear complex and merit further investigation. I suspect that the *Lidai fabao ji* was written after 778 and may have been a partial response to the memorial of Shuming.

The second issue is the identity of the nun Liaojianxing, who Adamek nominates as a candidate for author of the *Lidai fabao ji* (235-237). As the grand-daughter of Grand Councilor Su with the surname Wei, and cousin of the Murong family then living in Qingzhou (231-232), she is unlikely to have been the grand-daughter of Su Chang (500 note 587). As a Grand Councilor (*zaixiang*) was

the highest rank in the bureaucracy, they were carefully listed in the standard histories of the Tang, and so cannot have been obscure persons. The most likely candidate would be Su Ting (670-727), *zaixiang* in the reigns of Zhongzong and Ruizong. He was demoted in 720 and sent to be a governor and inspector in Jiannan, headquartered in Yizhou, where he stayed from 720 to 724. He seems to have been pro-Buddhist. Su Ting had friends and associates in Wei Hang (d. 726), governor of Yizhou 715-716, knowing two of Hang's sons (*Quan Tangwen* 253/1146c18; 258/1172b-c), and Wei Baozhen, prefect of Zizhou in Sichuan from ca. 718-719. Baozhen's son Wei Zheng was born there and later was a minor official in Hanzhou, a sub-prefecture of Yizhou. Su Ting wrote a poem for Baozhen's funeral. Perhaps then Wei Zheng married one of Su Ting's daughters, and Zheng's daughter was Liaojianxing. She may have been orphaned early, for Wei Zheng seems to have died in the 760s as his son Wei Dan (762-810) was orphaned (*Xin Tangshu* 10/74A/3095-6; Lin Bao, *Yuanhe xingsuan*, commentary by Cen Zhongmian et al, 1/2/151-152; *Quan Tangwen* 566/2570a-c). Further investigation of the Murong clan, especially Murong Ding, may reveal more.

All in all, this is a fine book, illuminating one of the more difficult aspects of the history of Chan, and is an exemplar in the richness of analysis that can be applied to an obscure text.

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