Zen
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Zen is a school of Mahayana Buddhism[1] that developed in China during the 6th century as Chán. From China, Zen spread south to Vietnam, northeast to Korea and east to Japan.[2]

The word Zen is derived from the Japanese pronunciation of the Middle Chinese word 禪 (dzjen) (pinyin: Chán), which in turn is derived from the Sanskrit word dhyāna,[3] which can be approximately translated as "absorption" or "meditative state".[4]

Zen emphasizes insight into Buddha-nature and the personal expression of this insight in daily life, especially for the benefit of others.[5][6] As such, it de-emphasizes mere knowledge of sutras and doctrine[7][8] and favors direct understanding through zazen and interaction with an accomplished teacher.[9]

The teachings of Zen include various sources of Mahāyāna thought, especially Yogācāra, the Tathāgatagarbha Sutras and Huayan, with their emphasis on Buddha-nature, totality, and the Bodhisattva-ideal.[10][11] The Prajñāpāramitā literature[12] and, to a lesser extent, Madhyamaka have also been influential.

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Chinese Chán

Periodisation

The history of Chán in China can be divided in several periods. Zen as we know it today is the result of a long history, with many changes and contingent factors. Each period had different types of Zen, some of which remained influential while others vanished.[13][14]

Ferguson distinguishes three periods from the 5th century into the 13th century:

1. The **Legendary period**, from Bodhidharma in the late 5th century to the An Lushan Rebellion around 765 CE, in the middle of the Tang Dynasty. Little written information is left from this period.[15] It is the time of the Six Patriarchs, including Bodhidharma and Huineng, and the legendary "split" between the Northern and the Southern School of Chán.[13]
2. The **Classical period**, from the end An Lushan Rebellion around 765 CE to the beginning of the Song Dynasty around 950 CE.[15] This is the time of the great masters of Chán, such as Mazu Daoyi and Linji Yixuan, and the creation of the yü-lü genre, the recordings of the sayings and teachings of these great masters.
3. The **Literary period**, from around 950 to 1250,[15] which spans the era of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). In this time the gongan-collections were compiled, collections of sayings and deeds by the famous masters, appended with poetry and commentary. This genre reflects the influence of literati on the development of Chán. This period idealized the previous period as the "golden age" of Chán, producing the literature in which the spontaneity of the celebrated masters was portrayed.

Although McRae has reservations about the division of Chán-history in phases or periods,[16] he nevertheless distinguishes four phases in the history of Chán:[17]

1. **Proto-Chán** (c. 500-600) (Southern and Northern Dynasties (420 to 589) and Sui Dynasty (589–618 CE)). In this phase, Chán developed in multiple locations in northern China. It was based on the practice of *dhyana*, and is connected to the figures of Bodhidharma and Huike. Its principal text is the Two Entrances and Four Practices, attributed to Bodhidharma.[18]
2. **Early Chán** (c. 600-900) (Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE)). In this phase Chán took its first clear contours. Prime figures are the fifth patriarch Daman Hongren (601–674), his dharma-heir Yuquan Shenxiu (606?
-706), the sixth patriarch Huineng (638–713), antagonist of the quintessential Platform Sutra, and Shenhui (670-762), whose propaganda elevated Huineng to the status of sixth patriarch. Prime factions are the Northern School, Southern School and Oxhead School.[19]

3. **Middle Chán** (c. 750-1000) (from An Lushan Rebellion (755-763) till Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907–960/979)). In this phase developed the well-known Chán of the iconoclastic zen-masters. Prime figures are Mazu Daoyi (709–788), Shitou Xiqian (710-790), Linji Yixuan (died 867), and Xuefeng Yicun (822-908). Prime factions are the Hongzhou school and the Hubei faction[20] An important text is the Anthology of the Patriarchal Hall (952), which gives a great amount of "encounter-stories", and the well-known genealogy of the Chán-school.[22]

4. **Song Dynasty** Chán (c. 950-1300). In this phase Chán took its definitive shape, including the picture of the "golden age" of the Chán of the Tang-Dynasty, and the use of koans for individual study and meditation. Prime figures are Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163), who introduced the Hua Tou practice, and Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091-1157), who emphasized Shikantaza. Prime factions are the Linji school and the Caodong school. The classic koan-collections, such as the Blue Cliff Record were assembled in this period,[23] which reflect the influence of the "literati" on the development of Chán.[24][25] In this phase Chán is transported to Japan, and exerts a great influence on Korean Seon via Jinul.

Neither Ferguson nor McRae give a periodisation for Chinese Chán following the Song-dynasty, though McRae mentions

[5.] "at least a postclassical phase or perhaps multiple phases".[26][note 3]

**Origins and Taoist influences (c. 200-500)**

When Buddhism came to China from India, it was initially adapted to the Chinese culture and understanding. Buddhism was exposed to Confucianist[28] and Taoist[29][30][31] influences. Goddard quotes D.T. Suzuki,[32] calling Chán a "natural evolution of Buddhism under Taoist conditions."[32] Buddhism was first identified to be "a barbarian variant of Taoism".[31]

Judging from the reception by the Han of the Hinayana works and from the early commentaries, it appears that Buddhism was being perceived and digested through the medium of religious Daoism (Taoism). Buddha was seen as a foreign immortal who had achieved some form of Daoist nondeath. The Buddhists’ mindfulness of the breath was regarded as an extension of Daoist breathing exercises.[33]

Taoist terminology was used to express Buddhist doctrines in the oldest translations of Buddhist texts,[31] a practice termed ko-i, "matching the concepts",[34] while the emerging Chinese Buddhism had to compete with Taoism and Confucianism.[28]
The first Buddhist recruits in China were Taoists.[31] They developed high esteem for the newly introduced Buddhist meditational techniques,[35] and blended them with Taoist meditation.[36] Representatives of early Chinese Buddhism like Sengzhao and Tao Sheng were deeply influenced by the Taoist keystone works of Laozi and Zhuangzi.[37] Against this background, especially the Taoist concept of naturalness was inherited by the early Chán disciples.[38] They equated - to some extent - the ineffable Tao and Buddha-nature,[39] and thus, rather than feeling bound to the abstract "wisdom of the sūtras", emphasized Buddha-nature to be found in "everyday" human life, just as the Tao.[39]

In addition to Taoist ideas, also Neo-Taoist concepts were taken over in Chinese Buddhism.[34] Concepts such as "T'i -yung" (Essence and Function) and "Li-shih" (Noumenon and Phenomenon) were first taken over by Hua-yen Buddhism,[34] which consequently influenced Chán deeply.[40] On the other hand, Taoists at first misunderstood sunyata to be akin to the Taoist non-being.[41]

**Legendary or Proto-Chán - Six Patriarchs (c. 500–600)**

Traditionally the origin of Chán in China is credited to the Indian monk Bodhidharma. The story of his life, and of the Six Patriarchs, was constructed during the Tang Dynasty to lend credibility to the growing Chán-school.[13]

Bodhidharma is recorded as having come into China from India during the time of Southern and Northern Dynasties to teach a "special transmission outside scriptures" which "did not stand upon words".[42] Only scarce historical information is available about him, but his hagiography developed when the Chan tradition grew stronger and gained prominence in the early 8th century. By this time a lineage of the six ancestral founders of Chán in China was developed.[43] The short text *Two Entrances and Four Acts*, written by Tan-lin (曇林; 506–574), contains teachings which are attributed to Bodhidharma. The text is known from the Dunhuang-manuscripts.

The actual origins of Chán may lie in ascetic practitioners of Buddhism, who found refuge in forests and mountains.[44] Huike, "a dhuta (extreme ascetic) who schooled others",[44] figures in the stories about Bodhidharma. Huike is regarded as the second Chán patriarch, appointed by Bodhidharma to succeed him. One of Huike's students, Sengcan, to whom is ascribed the Xinxin Ming, is regarded as the third patriarch.

**Early Chán - Tang Dynasty (c. 600–900)**

The link between Huike and Sengcan, and the fourth patriarch Daoxin (道信 580–651), "is far from clear and remains tenuous".[44] With Daoxin and his successor, the fifth patriarch Hongren (弘忍 601–674), there emerged a new style of teaching. A large group of students gathered at a permanent residence, and extreme ascetism became outdated.[44] The period of Daoxin and Hongren came to be called the East Mountain Teaching, due to the location of the residence of Hongren at Huamgei. Hui-neng, a minor student of Hongren, came to be regarded as the Sixth Patriarch, due to the influence of his student Shenhu.[45][13]
The term "East Mountain Teaching" was used by Shenxiu (神秀 606?-706), the most important successor to Hongren. In 701 he was invited to the Imperial Court by Empress Wu, who paid him imperial reverence. This gave his school the support and the legitimation of the imperial court.[46]

But the Chán-tradition depicts another student of Hongren, Huineng (惠能; 638–713), as the sixth and last patriarch, due to the influence of Shenhui, a successor to Huineng. The dramatic story of Huineng's life, as narrated in the Platform Sutra, tells that there was a contest for the transmission of the title of patriarch. After being chosen by Hongren, the fifth patriarch, Huineng had to flee by night to Nanhua Temple in the south to avoid the wrath of Hongren's jealous senior disciples.

Historic research reveals that this story was created around the middle of the 8th century, beginning in 731 by Shenhui, a successor to Huineng, to win influence at the Imperial Court. He claimed Huineng to be the successor of Hongren's, instead of the then publicly recognized successor Shenxiu. Shenxiu's Northern School was denigrated as "gradual", in opposition to the self-acclaimed "sudden" approach of Shenhui's Southern School. Shenhui's story was so influential that all surviving schools regard Huineng as their ancestor. [13][45]

Classical or Middle Chán (c. 750-1000)

An Lushan Rebellion (755-763) till end of Tang Dynasty (907)

The An Lushan Rebellion (755-763) led to a loss of control by the Tang-dynasty, and changed the Chan scene again. Metropolitan Chan began to lose its status, while "other schools were arising in out-lying areas controlled by warlords. These are the forerunners of the Chan we know today."[47]

The most important of these schools is the Hongzhou school (洪州宗) of Mazu, to which also belong Shitou, Baizhang, Huangbo and Linji. This school became the archetypal expression of Zen, with its emphasis on the personal expression of insight, and its rejection of positive statements of this insight.[44] Shitou is regarded as the Patriarch of Caodong (Jp. Sōtō), while Linji is regarded as the founder of Rinzai-Zen.

During the Song Dynasty, when Chán was favoured by the imperial court and became the largest Buddhist school in China,[13] the period of the Tang Dynasty came to be regarded as the "golden age" of Chan. This proliferation is described in a famous saying:

    Look at the territory of the house of Tang —
    The whole of it is the realm of the Chán school.[48]

During 845-846 Emperor Wuzong persecuted the Buddhist schools in China.[49] This persecution was devastating for metropolitan Chan, but the Chan school of Ma-tsu and his likes survived, and took a leading role in the Chan of the later Tang.[49]

This surviving rural Chan developed into the Five Houses of Chán (Ch. 五家) of Zen, or five "schools". These were not originally regarded as "schools" or "sects", but historically they have come to be understood that way. Most Zen lineages throughout Asia and the rest of the world originally grew from or were heavily influenced by the original five houses of Zen.

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period (907–960/979)
After the fall of the Tang Dynasty, China was without effective central control during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period. China was divided into several autonomous regions. Support for Buddhism was limited to a few areas. The Hua-yen and T'ient-tai schools suffered from the changing circumstances, since they had depended on imperial support. The collapse of Tang society also deprived the aristocratic classes of wealth and influence, which meant a further drawback for Buddhism. Shenxiu's Northern School and Henshui's Southern School didn't survive the changing circumstances. Nevertheless, chán emerged as the dominant stream within Chinese Buddhism, but with various schools developing various emphases in their teachings, due to the regional orientation of the period. The Fayan school, named after Fa-yen Wen-i (885-958) became the dominant school in the southern kingdoms of Nan-T'ang (Jiangxi, Chiang-hsi) and Wuyue (Che-chiang).[50]

**Literary Chán - Song Dynasty (c. 960–1300)**

The Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period was followed by the Song Dynasty, which established a strong central government. During the Song Dynasty, Chán (禪) was used by the government to strengthen its control over the country, and Chán grew to become the largest sect in Chinese Buddhism. An ideal picture of the Chán of the Tang period was produced, which served the legacy of this newly acquired status.[51] With the establishment of the Wu-shan (Gozan) system during the Southern Sung, the Chinese bureaucratic system entered into Zen temples throughout the country, and a highly organized system of temple rank and administration developed.[52]

The Linji school became the dominant school within Chán, due to support from literati and the court.[53] Before the Song Dynasty, the Linji-school is rather obscure, and very little is known about its early history.[45] The first mention of Linji is in the Zutang ji, compiled in 952, 86 years after Linji's death.[53] But the Zutang ji pictures the Xuefeng Yicun lineage as heir to the legacy of Mazu and the Hongzhou-school.[53] According to Welter, the real founder of the Linji-school was Shoushan (or Baoying) Shengnian (首山省念)(926-993), a fourth generation dharma-heir of Linji. The Tiansheng Guangdeng lu (天聖廣燈錄), "Tiansheng Era Expanded Lamp Record", compiled by the official Li Zunxu (李遵勗)(988-1038) confirms the status of Shoushan Shengnian, but also pictures Linji as a major Chan patriarch and heir to the Mazu, displacing the prominence of the Fayan-lineage.[53] It also established the slogan of "a special transmission outside the teaching", supporting the Linji-school claim of "Chan as separate from and superior to all other Buddhist teachings".[54]

During the 12th century, a clear difference between the Linji and the Caodong schools emerged. The two schools were competing for support of the literati, who became more powerful when the Song-government started to limit her influence on society. Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091-1157) of the Caodong-school emphasized silent illumination or shikantaza as a means for solitary practice, which could be undertaken by lay-followers. Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163) introduced k’an-hua practice, "observing the word-head", as a means of solitary practice.[55]

During the Song, both schools were exported to Japan, were they eventually became two clearly distinguished schools or "sects".

**Post-Classical Chán (c. 1300 till present)**

This was different from China, where the Buddhist schools tended to coalesce into a syncretic Chinese Buddhist school.

**Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368)**