

Bo Juyi's Memorial Inscription for Chan Teacher Weikuan

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Abstract

The article provides a complete translation and detailed study of “Inscription for the Hall of Transmission of the Teaching” (*Chuan fa tang bei* 傳法堂碑), a memorial composition dedicated to Xingshan Weikuan 興善惟寬 (755–817), a prominent Chan master and a major representative of the Hongzhou school 洪州宗 in Chang’an 長安, the imperial capital of Tang China. Composed in 819 by Bo Juyi 白居易 (772–846), one of China’s best-known poets, this text is an important source of information about the life and ideas of a prominent Chan monk, as well as a prime example of the ways in which influential literati such as Bo were engaged in the recoding of Chan history and teachings. The inscription also sheds light on several key aspects of Tang Chan, including the close relationship between Chan monks and literati, the evolving notions about spiritual lineage and Chan orthodoxy, and the position of Chan in relation to the broad Buddhist tradition.

Keywords:

Chan, Bo Juyi, Weikuan, Tang Dynasty, memorial inscription, Hongzhou school, Xingshan monastery, Chang’an

白居易為惟寬禪師所寫的碑銘

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摘要

本文對〈傳法堂碑〉進行完整的翻譯與詳細的研究。此碑文是紀念唐代洪州宗在京都長安的代表人物興善惟寬禪師（755–817），由中國著名的詩人白居易（772–846）寫於 819 年，是關於一位傑出禪師的生活和思想的重要文獻，也是如白居易這樣有影響力的文人參與陳述禪宗歷史與教義的典型例子。此碑文也闡明了唐禪的幾個重要觀點，包括：禪僧與文人之間的密切關係、不斷發展的精神傳承與禪宗正統觀念、禪宗在全體佛教中的地位。

關鍵詞：

禪、白居易、惟寬、唐朝、碑銘、洪州宗、興善寺、長安

Introduction

Among the major features of religious life during the Tang 唐 era (618–907) was the pervasive presence of Buddhism and its far-reaching impact on Chinese society and culture.¹ Within the pluralistic landscape of medieval China, Buddhism was by no means the only “religion” competing for the hearts and minds—as well as economic resources—of the Chinese. Nonetheless, led by members of its monastic order, the initially foreign religion undoubtedly occupied a most central, vibrant, and ubiquitous position within the sprawling empire, at both the local and the central (capital) levels. While its embrace spanned the whole spectrum of social classes and educational backgrounds, key aspects of Buddhism’s institutional strength and cultural impact were largely predicated on a close relationship between leading members of the Buddhist clergy and the sociopolitical elite of Tang China, including the ruling family.

In this article, I touch upon select issues in Chan history and literature, including facets of the relationship between monks and literati, as revealed in a commemorative text composed by a prominent writer and official for an eminent Chan monk, who had passed away not long before the time of writing. The text, translated in its entirety for the first time, is titled “Inscription for the Hall of Transmission of the Teaching” *Chuan fa tang bei* 傳法堂碑, and belongs to the genre of memorial inscriptions (*beiming* 碑銘).² Its writer is no other than Bo Juyi 白居易 (772–846; also known as Bai Juyi), one of the best-known poets of Tang China. The monk in question is Xingshan Weikuan 興善惟寬 (755–817), a prominent figure within the Hongzhou school 洪州宗,

¹ I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Peter Gregory for his extensive comments on an earlier version of the article. I am also appreciative of the feedback I received from Chen Yujing (Shi Dixuan) on a couple of translated passages, as well as of the encouragement and support extended by Jimmy Yu and Daniel Stevenson.

² Alternatively, there is a longer version of the title: *Xijing xingshansi chuanfatang bei* 西京興善寺傳法堂碑. This version of the title adds information about the location of the hall associated with Weikuan: Xingshan monastery, in the Western Capital (Chang’an). Major editions of the original text can be found in these collections: (1) *Quan tang wen* 全唐文 678.3069c–3070a; (2) *Boshi wenji* 白氏文集 41.11a–14a (*Sibu congkan* ed.); (3) *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 866.4570b–4571b; and (4) *Bo Juyi ji* 白居易集 41.911–13, the last one being the primary version used here. For a slightly different version, see also *Jingde chuan deng lu* 景德傳燈錄 7, T 2076, 51: 255a–b.

which at the time was emerging as a leading representative of the burgeoning Chan movement.

At a basic level, the article can be read as a study and translation of a short but significant Tang-era text, associated with two important individuals. By rendering Bo's inscription as a whole, it makes a contribution to Chan studies by providing an opportunity to reconsider the text's contents in its totality, in ways that go beyond earlier treatments of select parts of the text (especially the discussion between Bo and Weikuan). Although it is closely associated with the Chan school, the inscription is also indicative of other leitmotifs and trends in medieval Buddhism. Specifically, the text serves as a significant source of information about several areas in the study of Tang Buddhism. First, it sheds light on the connections between prominent monks and literati, especially in the spheres of literary production and cultural exchange. Second, it serves as a unique record of important developments within the nascent Chan movement, including the diffusion of fluid notions regarding spiritual lineage and Chan orthodoxy, as they were constructed and negotiated at the beginning of the ninth century. Third, besides helping us ascertain the changing contours of the Chan movement, it enhances our understanding of the close ties between Chan and the broad Buddhist tradition.

Bo's engagement with Buddhism

On the whole, Bo Juyi had a very full and interesting life.³ In addition to his relatively successful career as an official in the imperial bureaucracy—which at times involved frustrations with court politics and disappointments with particular postings—he achieved great renown and popular approbation as a leading poet and cultural icon.⁴ His fame also spread to other parts of East Asia, especially Japan, and over the centuries he continued to be celebrated as one of the greatest poets of the Tang era, traditionally regarded as the golden age of Chinese poetry. One of the conspicuous features of Bo's voluminous literary oeuvre—which, in addition to his poems, includes many prose pieces—is the frequent presence of “religious” themes and ideas, expressed in

³ For Bo Juyi's life and poetry, see Arthur Waley, *The Life and Times of Po Chü-yi*; Shimosada Masahiro, *Hakushi bunshū o yomu*; and Hanabusa Hideki, *Haku Kyōi kenkyū*.

⁴ Classical sources about Bo's life include his biography in *Jiu tang shu* 舊唐書 (fascicle 166), translated in Eugene Feifel, “Biography of Po Chü-yi—Annotated translation from *chüan* 166 of the *Chiu T'ang shu*.”

both overt and veiled fashions. That includes mentions of Daoist classics such as *Zhuangzi* and the practice of inner alchemy, as well as expressions of social and political concerns, (partially) expressed in the language of Confucianism moralism, which at times led him into trouble.

Bo's ongoing engagement with multiple religious traditions was very much in tune with the type of pluralistic outlook that was prevalent in Tang China. His interest in Buddhism was especially strong, and grew even more intense during the latter part of his life. It manifested itself in several ways, including his lifelong engagement with a range of Buddhist teachings and practices, as well as his close relationships with a number of prominent monks.⁵ Consequently, Bo's poems and writings are full of references to Buddhist beliefs, doctrines, texts, sites, practices, and the like, as well as depictions of monks and monasteries. Many of them assume a personal tone, as Bo reflects on Buddhist ideals and principles, or describes his experiences with Buddhist practice.

In tune with his time, Bo mostly approached the study of Buddhism in an open-minded and ecumenical manner. Nonetheless, it is apparent that he had an especially strong interest in Chan teachings and practices.⁶ That interest was shaped and reinforced by his contacts with prominent Chan monks, such as Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780–841), the famous capital-based intellectual who was also known for his association with Huayan Buddhism,⁷ and Niaoke 鳥窠 (d.u.), an unconventional Chan master Bo met in the early 820s during an official tour of duty in Hangzhou.⁸ His connections with monks associated with the Hongzhou school are especially notable. In addition to Weikuan, he also had contacts with Guizong Zhichang 歸宗知常 (d.u.) at

⁵ Bo's engagement with Buddhism is discussed in Ch'en, *Chinese Transformation*, 184–239; Hachiya Kunio, "Haku Kyoï no shi to bukyō"; Sun Changwu, *Chansi yu shiqing*, 178–209; Hirano Kensho, "Haku Kyoï no bungaku to bukyō"; and Burton Watson, "Buddhism in the Poetry of Po Chü-yi."

⁶ For Bo Juyi's involvement with Chan, see Mario Poceski, "Lay Models of Engagement with Chan Teachings and Practices among the Literati in Mid Tang China," 77–87; and Shinohara Hisao, "Tōdai zenshisō to Haku Kyoï."

⁷ See the poem dedicated to Zongmi in *Bo Juyi ji* 31.698. Also see Ch'en, *Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 220, and Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, 77–79.

⁸ *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統記 42, T 2035, 49: 384b22–26, and *Jingde chuan deng lu* 4, T 2076, 51: 230b21–26. See also Shaku Ogata, *Transmission*, 108–09.

the latter's monastery on Lushan 廬山,⁹ and Foguang Ruman 佛光如滿 (752–842?). During the final decade of Bo's life, Ruman became his primary spiritual advisor. When Ruman died, the retired poet wrote a memorial inscription for the old monk.¹⁰ Upon Bo's death a couple of years later, he was buried at Ruman's Xiangshan monastery 香山寺, located at Longmen 龍門, the famous complex of Buddhist caves.¹¹

Bo met with Weikuan for the first time in 814. At the time, he had just returned to the capital to take over a new (and not very prestigious) assignment in the central bureaucracy, as an assistant secretary to the crown prince. That followed three years of recuse from official duty while he was observing mourning for his mother, who died in 811. He did not stay in the capital very long, as in the summer of 815 he was demoted to a minor provincial post, as the marshal of Jiangzhou 江州 (Jiangxi). This undesirable move was related to political intrigue surrounding the assassination of the chief minister in 815, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise; it may even be viewed as a turning point in Bo's life.¹²

As we learn from the inscription, after his arrival in Chang'an, Bo went to Xingshan monastery 興善寺, where Weikuan was already established as an influential Chan teacher. Apparently, the two developed a close relationship. It is probable that during this period Weikuan emerged as Bo's primary spiritual mentor,¹³ as the poet was becoming increasingly interested in and committed to the study of Buddhism, especially in its Chan expression. While there are scattered references to Buddhist themes, ideas, and practices in Bo's earlier poems, the presence of Buddhism is much more conspicuous in his later poetry. Within the larger developmental trajectory of Bo's life, the decade of the 810s might be viewed as an important period in his increasingly inward turn, which was closely related to his growing commitment to Buddhist teachings and practices.

As indicated in its later part, Bo wrote the text for the inscription sometime after his move to Zhongzhou 忠州 (Sichuan, now in Chongqing) in 818. While we do not have a definitive date, it is probable that he wrote it in

⁹ *Bo Juyi ji* 16.328–329. See also Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*, 53–54, and Sun Changwu, *Tangdai wenxue yu fojiao*, 186.

¹⁰ *Foguang heshang zhenzan bingxu* 佛光和尚真讚並序, *Quan tang wen* 677.3054c.

¹¹ For more about Ruman, see Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*, 68–69.

¹² Ch'en, *Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 200.

¹³ Waley, *Life and Times of Po Chü-i*, 99.

819—or in late 818, at the earliest—before his return to the capital in 820.¹⁴ That takes us to within two years of Weikuan's passing away, soon after the unveiling of Weikuan's memorial stupa. It seems that he was approached about it by Weikuan's surviving disciples, which was a common occurrence within the context of Tang society and religion. That makes even more sense if we consider that at the time he was already a well-known poet, as well as a student or disciple of Weikuan. While the precise circumstances or factors that affected the text's composition are impossible to reconstruct with absolute certainty, it is probable that its content was influenced by Bo's study and understanding of Buddhism during this period, as well as by his personal encounter with Weikuan and his disciples.

Weikuan and the Hongzhou School

Weikuan is recognized as a leading disciple of Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709–788), the leader of the Hongzhou school and one of the most prominent Chan masters of all time.¹⁵ Weikuan's name is not featured prominently in most lineage charts or histories of Tang Chan. That is due in large part to the fact that none of the major lineages of later Chan traced their spiritual ancestry back to him, which led to a gradual demotion of his historical stature. Nonetheless, during his lifetime he was a major figure within the Chan movement. That was especially the case during the latter part of his life, which he spent at the imperial capital. His high standing within Chan circles during the early ninth century is attested in several early sources. They include the memorial inscription for Xitang Zhizang 西堂智藏 (735–817)—who succeeded Mazu as a leader of the monastic community in Hongzhou (present-day Nanchang, Jiangxi)—which presents Xitang and Weikuan as Mazu's two main disciples,¹⁶ as well as the writings of Zongmi.¹⁷

¹⁴ See his brief comments about the composition circumstances towards the end of the inscription, translated below.

¹⁵ Besides Bo's inscription, additional sources about Weikuan include his biographical entries in *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 10, T 2061, 50: 768a13–b11, and *Jingde chuan deng lu* 7, T 2976, 51: 255a12–b14.

¹⁶ Ishii Shūdō, “Kōshūshū ni okeru Seidō Chizō no ichi ni tsuite,” 281.

¹⁷ See Yanagida Seizan, “Goroku no rekishi: Zen bunken no seiritsu shiteki kenkyū,” 464, and Ishii, “Kōshūshū ni okeru Seidō Chizō no ichi ni tsuite,” 284. Weikuan's name is listed as one of five successors to Mazu in Zongmi's chart of Chan lineages; see *Zhonghua chuanxindi shizi chengxi tu* 中華傳心地禪門師資

Born in Xin'an, Quzhou (present-day Zhejiang), Weikuan entered monastic life when he was only twelve. After receiving the full monastic precepts in 778, he joined Mazu's monastic congregation in Hongzhou. He left Hongzhou not long after Mazu's death in 788, initially moving to the Minyue area (present-day Fujian) in 790. After establishing a reputation as a well-regarded Chan master, in 809 he was invited to move to Chang'an 長安 by Emperor Xianzong, a formidable supporter of Buddhism. According to Bo's account, Weikuan preached at many important venues in the imperial capital, and attracted numerous disciples. Together with Ehu Dayi 鵝湖大義 (746–818) and Zhangjing Huaihui 章敬懷暉 (756–815),¹⁸ he was among the earliest cohort of Mazu disciples to enter Chang'an. His considerable influence and successful tenure at the empire's cultural and political center were instrumental in bolstering the status of the Hongzhou school as the main representative of the Chan movement, with strongholds in both capitals and most of the provinces.¹⁹

Memorial inscriptions

Overall, Bo Juyi's memorial inscription for Weikuan follows the basic conventions of the genre. These are also evident in similar inscriptions for other Chan monks from the Tang era, such as the two inscriptions composed by Quan Deyu 權德輿 (759–818),²⁰ a prominent politician and intellectual, for Weikuan's teacher Mazu,²¹ and for the aforementioned Huaihui, also a

承襲圖, X (*Xu zang jing* 續藏經) 1225, 63: 32a; R 110: 868b (435a). See also Jeffrey Broughton, *Zongmi on Chan*, 78.

¹⁸ For Dayi, see his stele inscription, composed by Wei Chuhou 韋處厚 (773–823), in *Quan tang wen* 715.3258a–59a, as well as his biographical entries in *Zu tang ji* 15.328–29, and *Jingde chuan deng lu* 7, T 2076, 51: 253a.

¹⁹ For more information about Weikuan and the growing influence of the Hongzhou school in Chang'an, see Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*, 61–67.

²⁰ For Quan Deyu, see his two official biographies: *Jiu tang shu* 148.4001–05, and *Xin tang shu* 新唐書 165.5076–80. Additional information about his life and influence can be found in Anthony DeBlasi, "Quan Deyu (759–818) and the Spread of Elite Culture in Tang China," and Anthony DeBlasi, *Reform in the Balance: The Defense of Literary Culture in Mid-Tang China*, Chapter 4.

²¹ *Tang gu hongzhou kaiyuansi shimen daoyi chanshi beiming bingxu* 唐故洪州開元寺石門道一禪師碑銘并序, in *Quan zaizhi wenji* 權載之文集 28.167a–68a, *Quan tang wen* 501.5106a–7a, and *Tang wen cui* 唐文粹 64.1058–59. Translated in Poceski, *Records of Mazu and the Making of Classical Chan*

noted disciple of Mazu who was active in Chang'an.²² While sharing general features with the epitaphs composed for other types of monks, the inscriptions for Chan monks tend to incorporate specific themes that resonate with ideas and concerns that were prominent within the nascent Chan movement. Bo's inscription is an especially good example of that, as we will see below in the discussion of Weikuan spiritual lineage.

Nonetheless, in form and style, the inscriptions for Chan monks are closely related to prevalent pan-Buddhist models of commemorative writing. These, in turn, are connected with analogous prototypes of secular writing that had high currency in Tang China, where it was customary to compose epitaphs upon the deaths of notable persons. These texts provide basic biographical information about the deceased, along with highlights of their careers, accomplishments, and legacies. At times, they also incorporate excerpts from speeches or writings, as means for illustrating the main subjects' thoughts and ideas.

In the subsequent sections, I provide the original text of Weikuan's memorial inscription in its entirety, accompanied with my translation and relevant annotation. The translation aims to follow a middle ground, between a rigidly literal and an overly free rendering. In accordance with classical literary conventions, the original text is not divided into any distinctive parts or segments. To facilitate easier reading and effective analysis, I have divided Bo's text into smaller sections that reflect the main thematic units, and follow the overall flow and structure of the original narrative.

Weikuan's background

Bo's adoption of a conventional style of commemorative writing is readily discernable in the initial part of the inscription, which provides essential information about the deceased monk. He starts by pointing to a physical place, the teaching (Dharma) hall at Xingshan (Flourishing Goodness) Monastery, which was closely associated with Weikuan.²³ Also known as Da xingshan Monastery 大興善寺, Xingshan was one of the largest monastic

Literature, 175–94. For a Japanese version that only provides a *yomikudashi* rendering, see Iriya Yoshitaka, *Baso no goroku*, 212–14.

²² *Tang zhangjingsi baiyan dashi beiming bingxu* 唐章敬寺百巘大師碑銘並序, in *Quan Tang wen* 501.2260b–c, and *Wenyuan yinghua* 866.4568a–b.

²³ Emperor Xianzong's invitation to Weikuan to take up residence at this monastery is recorded in *Fozu tongji*, T 2035, 49: 380c.

complexes in Chang'an, the main imperial capital. The origins of the monastery went back to the early years of the Sui 隋 dynasty (581–618). Over the subsequent decades, the monastery became a home base of many noted monks, as well as the location of varied religious events and cultural activities.²⁴ Bo also uses the name of the same place, namely a specific building within the larger monastic complex, in the title of the whole composition, perhaps a bit of a peculiar choice.

王城離域有佛寺，號興善。寺之次也，有僧舍名傳法堂。先是大徽禪師宴居於是寺，說法於是堂，因名(曰)焉。

In the vicinity of the imperial capital there is a monastery called Xingshan. Within the monastery, there is a monastic residence where the transmission of the teaching always took place. Formerly, when Chan teacher Dache resided leisurely at this monastery,²⁵ he lectured about the Buddhist teaching at this hall, hence the name.

As is typically the case, Bo goes on to provide basic biographical data about Weikuan and his personal background: monastic name and title, family name, the names of his father and grandfather, and the location of their ancestral home. Then Bo tells us about three important events, or major milestones, in Weikuan's life: entry into monastic life as a novice at the age of thirteen (or twelve in Western reckoning, in 767), full ordination at the age of twenty-four (or twenty-three, in 778), and passing away at the age of sixty-three (in 817). Following Chinese custom, the age calculation starts with one (rather than zero) at the time of birth. We are not given the year of birth—which is common in this type of text—but we can calculate it by subtracting his age from the year of his death.

有問師之名跡，曰：號惟寬，姓祝氏，衢州信安人。祖曰安，父曰皎。生十三歲出家，二十四具戒。僧腊三十九，報年六十三。終興善寺，葬灞陵西原，詔謚曰大徽禪師，元和正直之塔云。

Regarding the question about the master's background, his [monastic] name was Weikuan, his family's surname was Zhu, and he was a native

²⁴ For more on the monastery, see Yamazaki Hiroshi, *Zui-tō bukkū shi no kenkyū*, 45–47; Ono Katsutoshi, *Chūgoku zui tō chōan jīn shiryō shūsei: kaisetsu hen*, 8–20; Ono Katsutoshi, *Chūgoku zui tō chōan jīn shiryō shūsei: shiryō hen*, 118–28; and Victor Cunrui Xiong, *Sui-Tang Chang'an: A Study in the Urban History of Medieval China*, 253–54.

²⁵ Here Bo refers to Weikuan by the posthumous title he received from the royal court, rather than by his monastic name.

of Xinan in Quzhou (in present-day Zhejiang). His grandfather's [given] name was An, while his father's name was Jiao. He left home for monastic life at the age of thirteen, and received the full monastic precepts at the age of twenty-four. He was a monk for thirty-nine years, and lived to be sixty-three years old. He passed away at Xingshan monastery, and was buried at the western foot of Baling.²⁶ On imperial order, he received the posthumous title Chan Teacher of Great Penetration (Dache chanshi). During the Yuanhe era (806–820), a stupa [named] Upstanding was built for him.

The introductory section ends with brief information about the locations of Weikuan's death and burial, the posthumous title he received from the imperial court, and the building of a memorial pagoda soon after he passed away. These elements bear testimony to his great renown, already reflected in the official recognition he received from the imperial government during his lifetime.

The format and content of this section will be familiar to students of Chan hagiographies and other related text. Moreover, there is hardly anything uniquely Chan in this section, save for the title of "Chan teacher" (which, at any rate, was also ascribed to monks without affiliation to the Chan school). Basically, this is the initial section of a conventional epitaph for an eminent Buddhist monk. At the onset, Bo follows established norms and precedents, and is treading on a familiar ground. The tone and the topic change in the next section, however. There we encounter terms and themes that are more readily associated with Chan Buddhism.

Lineage and orthodoxy

In the next section, Bo provides basic information about Weikuan's spiritual descent in terms of his Chan lineage. That situates him in relation to other important Chan figures, and helps solidify his stature as a legitimate and authoritative representative of the Chan school. Such affirmation of spiritual identity and affiliation mirrors an evolving Chan discourse about the legendary line of transmission that supposedly links the contemporaneous Chan movement with the historical Buddha, via an unbroken line of masters who transmit the essence of the Buddha's awakening. In that sense, despite the

²⁶ Baling is the site of the mausoleum of Wendi 文帝 (r. 180–157 BCE), one of the early Han emperors.

presence of certain idiosyncratic elements, Bo's description of Weikuan's lineage can be situated within the larger historical process of the Chan school's construction of its lineage(s), as it evolved during the Tang era.

There are notable discrepancies between Bo's depiction of Weikuan's lineage and the lineage schematizations presented in other early (and late) sources.²⁷ That points to a relative fluidity of views and beliefs, held within the larger Chan movement at the beginning of the ninth century, regarding the precise delineation of the main line(s) of transmission. At the same time, we can see how the list of early patriarchs in China had coalesced around the so-called six patriarchs, starting with Bodhidharma (Putidamo 菩提達磨) as the first and Huineng 慧能 (638–713) as the sixth Chinese patriarch. It is also apparent that the inscription resonates with a general move away from exclusive claims regarding lineage orthodoxy, meant to secure the primacy of one line of transmission, towards an inclusive framework that embraces the legitimacy of multiple lines of spiritual succession.²⁸

Bo's depiction of the Chan lineage leading to Weikuan is unusual in as much as it digresses from the widely-accepted scheme of twenty-eight Indian and six Chinese patriarchs (with Bodhidharma as the last Indian and first Chinese patriarch). What came to be accepted as the "standard" lineage is featured in the influential *Baolin zhuan* 寶林傳 (Baolin Biographies), composed in 801, not long before Bo wrote his piece.²⁹ Within Bo's scheme, Weikuan is the fifty-ninth patriarch, which makes Bodhidharma the fifty-first patriarch in the orthodox line of transmission (rather than the twenty-eight). As pointed out by Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), Bo's lineage chart seems to tally with the one presented in *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 (Collected Records on the Buddhist Canon),³⁰ an annotated catalogue of Buddhist texts composed by Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518) long before the emergence of Chan as

²⁷ For a survey of pre-Chan notions about lineage, see Elizabeth Morrison, *The Power of Patriarchs: Qisong and Lineage in Chinese Buddhism*, 13–50. For a general discussion of the functions of lineage and transmission, see T. H. Barrett, "Kill the Patriarchs!"

²⁸ See Morrison, *Power of Patriarchs*, 52. This would correspond to the last of the three phases identified by Morrison in her analysis of the developing conception of the Chan lineage.

²⁹ The extant portions of *Baolin zhuan* are included in Yanagida Seizan, ed., *Sōzō ichin hōrinden, dentō gyokuei shū*. For discussion of its contents, including the missing portions, see Shiina Kōyū's two articles: "Hōrinden itsubun no kenkyū," and "Hōrinden makikyū makijū no itsubun."

³⁰ T 2145, 55.

a distinct tradition within Chinese Buddhism,³¹ but as we will see shortly, there are other sources that also overlap with parts of it.

From this and other relevant sources, we can ascertain that during the middle part of the Tang era the notion of Chan lineage was in the process of becoming a centerpiece of Chan ideology. The earliest examples of texts that explicitly evoke a specific Chan lineage include the epithet for Faru 法如 (638–689),³² *Lengqie shi zi ji* 楞伽師資記 (Record of the Teachers and Disciples of the Laṅkāvatāra), compiled by Jingjue 淨覺 (683–750),³³ and *Lidai fa bao ji* 歷代法寶記 (Record of the Dharma Jewel through Successive Generations), a late eighth century chronicle produced in Sichuan by the Baotang school 保唐宗.³⁴ That is indicative of a growing awareness of Chan as a distinctive tradition within Chinese Buddhism.

Elements of the notions of lineage can be traced to a variety of earlier Buddhist texts and traditions, in India and China, including the early Tiantai school 天台.³⁵ Prime examples of sources used by the authors of early Tiantai and Chan genealogies include *Fu fazang zhuan* 付法藏傳 (Record of Transmission of the Dharma Treasury),³⁶ a text with obscure provenance that was influential in the early attempts to construct a patriarchal lineage that went back to India. In this text we find a list of twenty-three Indian masters who supposedly transmitted the true teaching after the Buddha's entry into final Nirvana. This points to evolving notions about the propagation of the true teaching via a linear transmission from a master to a disciple. Among the peculiar features of this text—which created problems for Chan writers and ideologues—is the central idea that the single line of transmission was cut-off with the murder of Simha bhikṣu, the twenty-third and last patriarch.³⁷

31 Hu Shi, “Bo Juyi shidaide chanzong shixi.”

32 See Morrison, *Power of Patriarchs*, 53–55, and John R. McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*, 85–86.

33 T 2837, 85: 1283c–90c. For its provenance and contents, see Yanagida Seizan, *Shoki zenshū shisho no kenkyū*, 58–100. Also available in a Japanese translation: Yanagida Seizan, *Shoki no zenshi I: Ryōga shijiki, Denhōbōki*, 49–326.

34 T 2075, 51. For a detailed study, see Wendi Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission: On an Early Chan History and Its Contexts*.

35 See Linda Penkower, “In the Beginning. . . Guanding (561–632) and the Creation of Early Tiantai.”

36 T 2085, 50.

37 Stuart H. Young, *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs in China*, 67–110; Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission*, 101–10.

Another example of an early source relevant in this context is *Damoduolo chan jing* 達摩多羅禪經 (Meditation Scripture of Dharmatrāta). Translated by Buddhahadra (C: Fotuobatuoluo 佛陀跋陀羅, 359–429) soon after his arrival at Lushan 廬山 in 410,³⁸ this text contains one of the earliest extant lists of Indian masters.³⁹ The text is noteworthy for its focus on meditation masters in its listing of Indian patriarchs. Buddhahadra was a disciple of Buddhasena (C: Fodaxian 佛大先, d.u.), a noted meditation master from Kashmir usually associated with the Sarvāstivāda school. As we will see below, Bo included Buddhasena in his list of Chan patriarchs, which provides us with possible clues about some of the sources that influenced—directly or indirectly—the construction of his version of the Chan lineage. The translation of *Damoduolo chan jing* was undertaken at the request of Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416), Buddhahadra’s host and famous leader of the monastic community at Lushan.⁴⁰

These and other pertinent sources were used to join the intertwined notions of authenticity and authority to a sense of uninterrupted continuity. Within the context of medieval China, that connected present-day groups (and teachings) with the ultimate sources of authority: the founder of the religion, the Buddha himself. Nonetheless, the growth of Chan brought a distinctive conception of lineage, with important ramifications for the construction of religious orthodoxy and the distinct identity linked with it. It also helped establish its basic model of spiritual ancestry as a key feature of Chinese Buddhism.

The early process of genealogical gestation, in conjunction with other pertinent developments, led to the conception of an orthodox line of Chan transmission, especially in the well-known formulation of twenty-eight Indian and six Chinese patriarchs. As we move to the early Song era, its function as a linchpin of Chan orthodoxy is evidenced in many texts, including prominent Chan chronicles such as *Zu tang ji* 祖堂集 (Hall of Patriarchs Collection; compiled in 952) and *Jingde chuan deng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (Record of the Lamp’s Transmission from the Jingde Era; compiled in 1004). Among other things, these voluminous texts present quasi-historical accounts of the transmission and growth of Chan, up to the time of their compilation,

³⁸ T 618, 15. Its two prefaces, by Huiyuan and Huiguan 慧觀 (d. 440?), are preserved in *Chu sanzang jijī*; see T 2145, 55: 65b–66a, 66b–67a.

³⁹ Young, *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs*, 71.

⁴⁰ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 223.

organized in terms of complex genealogical schemata that incorporate and link many generations of Chan monks.

Bo frames his discussion of spiritual lineage in terms of a question about the provenance of Weikuan's teaching and his line of transmission, which is a common rhetorical device. In response, he provides an extended answer that features the names of a number of Indian and Chinese patriarchs (or ancestors). That implies the existence of numerous generations of patriarchs who have transmitted the bright flame of the Buddha's original awakening. As is to be expected, the first name on the list is the historical Buddha, and the list ends with Weikuan's teacher, Mazu.

Bo's depiction of the Chan lineage in India is truncated and schematic, featuring the names of only five Indian patriarchs: Mahākāśyapa (C: Mohe jiaye 摩訶迦葉, d.u.), Aśvaghōṣa (C: Maming 馬鳴, d.u.), Simha (Shizi 師子, d.u.), Buddhasena,⁴¹ and Bodhidharma. The first three names appear in the list provided in *Fu fazang zhuan*, which seems to be a source (or an indirect inspiration) for the first twenty-three patriarchs in Bo's list. Interestingly, Bo omits any mention of Nāgārjuna (C: Longshu 龍樹, c. 150–250 CE), the famous exponent of Middle Way philosophy, even though he is featured prominently in *Fu fazang zhuan*,⁴² as well as in other Chan and non-Chan lists of prominent Indian patriarchs.

The inclusion of Simha in the list is somewhat anomalous, given that he is said to have been killed before he could transmit the true teaching. After a notable lacunae—where the list only mentioned that there were fourteen patriarchs, without giving any names—the next figure on the list is the above-mentioned Buddhasena, whose name appears in the lineage presented in *Chu sanzang jiji*.⁴³ The main role of Buddhasena seems to be to provide a crucial link to Bodhidharma, whose coming to China marks the transmission of the true teaching into the Middle Kingdom.

In contrast to the sketchy coverage of Indian patriarchs, Bo lists all seven Chinese patriarchs that purportedly followed Bodhidharma and preceded Weikuan: Huike 慧可 (487–593), Sengcan 僧璨 (d. 606?), Daoxin 道信 (580–651), Hongren 弘忍 (601–674), Huineng 懷讓 (677–744), and Mazu. That makes Bo's inscription accord with other early documents that

41 Bo's Chinese transliteration of Buddhasena's name, Fotuouxianna 佛馱先那, is a bit unusual. Usually he is referred to as Fodaxian 佛大先, or Fotuoxian 佛馱先.

42 Young, *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs*, 85–91.

43 Hu, "Bo Juyi shidaide chanzong shixi," 38.

present what, from the early ninth century onward (and all the way to the present), came to be widely recognized as the main Chan line of transmission.

有問師之傳授，曰：釋迦如來欲涅槃時，以正法密印付摩訶迦葉，傳至馬鳴。又十二葉傳至師子比丘，及二十四葉傳至佛馱先那。先那傳圓覺達摩，達摩傳大弘可，可傳鏡智璨，璨傳大醫信，信傳圓滿忍，忍傳大鑒能，是為六祖。能傳南岳讓，讓傳洪州道一，謚曰大寂。寂即師之師，貫而次之，其傳授可知矣。

Regarding the question about the provenance of master's teaching, it can be said that when Śākyamuni Tathāgata was about to pass away into Nirvana, he handed over the secret seal of the true teaching to Mahākāśyapa,⁴⁴ and the transmission eventually reached Aśvaghōṣa.⁴⁵ After another twelve generations, the transmission reached Simha bhikṣu.⁴⁶ After twenty-four generations, the transmission reached Buddhasena.⁴⁷ Buddhasena transmitted it to Yuanjue Damo (Bodhidharma),⁴⁸ while Bodhidharma transmitted it to Dahong Huike.⁴⁹ Huike transmitted it to Jingzhi Sengcan,⁵⁰ Sengcan

⁴⁴ In a Chan context, the sacred seal implies attainment of the same realization of the essence of reality by both the teacher and the disciple, along with the teacher's recognition of the disciple's realization. In contrast, in esoteric Buddhism, it denotes the making of a sign or gesture that signifies a certain Buddhist principle or teaching.

⁴⁵ Aśvaghōṣa (c. 80–150 CE) was a Buddhist monk, poet, and thinker who lived in ancient India. He wrote in classical Sanskrit, and is arguably best-known as the author of *Buddhacarita* (Acts of the Buddha), an epic retelling of the Buddha's life. He is also attributed with the writing of important doctrinal or philosophical works, including the *Awakening of Faith*, but his authorship of that and other texts have been questioned by modern scholars.

⁴⁶ Simha, also known as Simhabodhi, is traditionally recognized as the twenty-fourth Indian patriarch. He is said to have been killed in Kashmir. Within the Tendai tradition of Japanese Buddhism, he is said to be the last Tiantai/Tendai patriarch in India.

⁴⁷ There are various accounts regarding Buddhasena's place in the putative Chan lineage and his relationship with Bodhidharma. At times, he and Bodhidharma are depicted as fellow disciples of Buddhahadra; see Morrison, *The Power of Patriarchs*, 188.

⁴⁸ Yuanjue dashi 圓覺大師 (Great Master of Perfect Awakening) is a posthumous title that was conferred to Bodhidharma by Emperor Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–779). See *Jingde chuan deng lu* 3, T 2076, 51: 220b20.

⁴⁹ Dahong chanshi 大弘禪師 (Chan Master of Great Expansiveness) is a posthumous title conferred to Huike by Emperor Dezong. See *Zu tang ji* 2.50.

transmitted it to Dayi Daoxin,⁵¹ Daoxin transmitted it to Yuanman Hongren,⁵² and Hongren transmitted it to Dajing Huineng,⁵³ who is known as the Sixth Patriarch. Huineng transmitted it to Nanyue Huairang, while Huairang transmitted it to Hongzhou Daoyi, who received the posthumous title Daji (Great Quiescence). Daji is no other than the teacher of the master. Having passed through such sequence, we can thus know of the provenance of [Weikuan's] teaching.

The inclusion of basic information about a specific monk's teacher or his earlier spiritual predecessors is a common feature of narratives of this kind. However, the insertion of such a detailed overview of a given spiritual lineage is not that common in the stele inscriptions for monks from the Tang era. That makes Bo's texts an exceptionally valuable and interesting source of information about evolving notions of lineage and orthodoxy, within the context of a developing Chan milieu.

We cannot be completely sure about the exact sources Bo used for this genealogical chart. They probably included both written and oral narratives. The first group may contain early Chan texts that showcase certain version of the Chan lineage, as well as other sources such as the aforementioned *Chu sanzang jiji* and *Fu fazang zhuan*. The second category perhaps included oral accounts Bo received from Weikuan's disciples and other related monks.

The list is indicative of ongoing efforts to reconcile various versions of the early Indian patriarchate. When it comes to the list of Chinese patriarchs, the basic question of the main or orthodox line of transmission, which stems from Bodhidharma and leads to Huineng, was apparently pretty much settled by the

⁵⁰ Jingzhi 鏡智 (Mirror Wisdom) is a posthumous title conferred to Sengcan 僧璨 (d. 606?) by Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756). See *Tiansheng guangdeng lu* 天聖廣燈錄 7, X 1553, 78: 444b5–6; *Chuan fa zhen zong ji* 傳法正宗記 6, T 2078, 51: 745c14.

⁵¹ Dayi chanshi 大醫禪師 (Chan Master of Great Medicine) is a posthumous title given to Daoxin 道信 by Emperor Daizong. See *Jingde chuan deng lu* 3, T 2076, 51: 222c4.

⁵² Daman chanshi 大滿禪師 (Chan Master of Great Fulness) is a posthumous title given to Hongren by Emperor Daizong. See *Fo zu tong ji* 佛祖統紀 29, T 2035, 49: 292a5–6. Here the title is (probably mistakenly) rendered as Yuanman (Perfectly Full).

⁵³ Dajing chanshi 大鑑禪師 (Chan Master of Great Mirror) is a posthumous title given to Huineng by Emperor Xianzong. See *Fo zu tong ji* 29, T 2035, 49: 292b22.

early ninth century. Furthermore, while there is still a notion of main and collateral lines of transmission within the context of Chinese Chan (see also the next section), the old idea of a single line of transmission, wherein there is only one patriarch per generation, is no longer operative. Consequently, a single master—such as Huineng or Mazu—can have multiple disciples, each of whom can be considered a legitimate successor of his teaching. This is indicative of a general move towards inclusive attitudes, wherein a number of lines of descent can be deemed to be legitimate, in contrast to earlier efforts to promote exclusive claims of orthodoxy in order to secure the authority of a specific individual or lineage.⁵⁴

It is interesting to note that for most of his listings of the Chinese patriarchs, Bo provides the posthumous titles they received from several Tang emperors, in addition to their monastic names, which tend to be abbreviated.⁵⁵ That is indicative of an overarching concern with highlighting the links between the imperial state and the growing Chan movement, as represented by its leading monks or patriarchs. Overall, the passage is suggestive of larger issues regarding orthodoxy and concerns about lineage construction that were current in Chan circles at that time, especially at or around the imperial capital, which merit further discussion in a separate article. It also points to the important roles that noted literati, such as Bo, played in these developments, with significant ramifications for the subsequent history of Chan and the rest of Buddhism in China.

One big family

In the next section, Bo situates Weikuan's religious persona and stature in relation to other important Chan monks from the early and mid-Tang periods, including other disciples of Mazu. He starts on an inclusive note, acknowledging multiple lines of transmission, all of which have inherited the "true teaching" transmitted by Bodhidharma. He traces the shift from a singular line to multiple lines of transmission to Daoxin, the putative fourth Chan patriarch in China. Then, in a familiar turn also observable in other Chan texts, he asserts a sense of hierarchy or distinction among the various branches of Chan's genealogical tree. Namely, he reiterates the difference between main and collateral lines of transmission. In due course, that became an

⁵⁴ See Morrison, *The Power of Patriarchs*, 8.

⁵⁵ For instance, Huineng is referred to as Neng, Hongren as Ren, Huike as Ke, etc. For greater clarity, here and elsewhere I have added the full names, if available.

established feature of Chan beliefs, dogmas, and institutions. Interestingly, he uses the nomenclature of “great” and “small” to establish a sense of hierarchy among the major lines of transmission, which is somewhat reminiscent of the well-known distinction between the great and small vehicles, or Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna.

有問師之道屬，曰：自四祖以降，雖嗣正法有塚嫡，而支派者猶大宗、小宗焉。

Regarding the question about the master's spiritual affiliation,⁵⁶ it can be said that from the time of the fourth patriarch, although there was an inheritance of the true teaching, there were [distinctions in terms of] familial seniority and rank. When it comes to the [various] offshoots [of the Chan tradition], we can think in terms of primary (lit. large) and secondary (lit. small) lines of transmission.

Bo then goes on to compare a sizable coterie of noted monks—associated with several major lineages subsumed within the larger Chan movement—to an extended Chinese family. Accordingly, the relationships among various monks belonging to different Chan lineages can be understood in terms of kinship ties, analogous to those that existed among the aristocratic families of the Tang empire. All these monks supposedly share kinship bonds that unite them together: as fathers, sons, brothers, uncles, cousins, and so on. This points to the importance of secular genealogical models in the construction of Chan's genealogical schemata, especially the genealogies of the imperial family and the great aristocratic clans of Tang China. These, in turn, are related to broader sociopolitical concerns about legitimate succession.⁵⁷

以世族譬之，即師與西堂藏、甘泉賢、勒潭海、百巖暉，俱父事大寂，若兄弟然。章敬澄，若從父兄弟。徑山欽，若從祖兄弟。鶴林素、華嚴寂，若伯叔然。當山忠、東京會，若伯叔祖。嵩山秀、牛頭融，若曾伯叔祖。推而序之，其道屬可知矣。

If we are to compare that to a noble family, then the master, along with

⁵⁶ “Spiritual affiliation” can also be rendered as “spiritual family.”

⁵⁷ The notion that early Chan conception of lineage are modeled on indigenous Chinese formulations of familiar descent and patriarchal succession, especially those of the imperial line, is discussed in John Jorgensen, “The ‘Imperial’ Lineage of Ch’an Buddhism: The Role of Confucian Ritual and Ancestor Worship in Ch’an’s Search for Legitimation in the Mid T’ang Dynasty.”

Xitang Zhizang,⁵⁸ Ganquan Zhixian, Letan Hai,⁵⁹ and Baiyan Huaihui,⁶⁰ are all like children of Daji (i.e. Mazu), and thus they are akin to brothers.⁶¹ Zhangjing Cheng is like their first male cousin.⁶² Jing Qin is like a second cousin.⁶³ Helin Xuansu and Huayan Puji are like uncles.⁶⁴ Dangshan Huihong⁶⁵ and Dongjing Shenhui are like granduncles.⁶⁶ Songshan Shenxiu and Niutou Farong are like great

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- ⁵⁸ Again, Bo abbreviates the names of these monks (Xitang Zang, Niutou Rong, Huayan Ji, etc.). When available, I have provided the full names in the translation.
- ⁵⁹ This might be a reference to Letan Fahui 泐潭法會 (d.u.); otherwise, I have been unable to find additional information about this monk, whose name can also be pronounced as Leitan Hai.
- ⁶⁰ This is a reference to Zhangjing Huaihui, a prominent disciple of Mazu who resided at Baiyan monastery in Dingzhou (present-day Hebei), prior to his move to the capital. See Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*, 67.
- ⁶¹ For the earliest list of Mazu's disciples, which includes eleven names and appears in Quan Deyu's stele inscription composed in 791, see Poceski, *The Records of Mazu and the Making of Classical Chan Literature*, 189, and Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*, 44–45. Zongmi provides the names of five main disciples: Weikuan, Daowu, Huaihui, Baizhang, and Xitang; see Broughton, *Zongmi on Chan*, 78.
- ⁶² This might be pointing to a monk called Cheng (no complete name available), who was active in the imperial capital and resided at Zhangjing monastery 章敬寺, the same monastery where Huaihui (see previous note) resided. In *Jingde chuan deng lu* he is listed as a disciple of Puji 普寂 (651–739), a leading figure in the Northern school of early Chan. See *Jingde chuan deng lu* 4, T 2076, 51: 224c11–12.
- ⁶³ Probably a reference to Jingshan Daoqin 徑山道欽, aka Jingshan Faqin 徑山法欽 (714–792), a prominent Chan monk associated with the Niutou school.
- ⁶⁴ For Helin Xuansu, another monk associated with the Niutou School, see *Jingde chuan deng lu* 4, T 2076, 51: 230a10–b1.
- ⁶⁵ The text only has Dangshan Zhong, which I take to mean Huizhong 慧忠 (d. 775) of Wudang mountain 武當山. For Huizhong's biography, see *Song gaoseng zhuan* 9, T 2061, 50: 762b12–763b21.
- ⁶⁶ Dongjing Hui is undoubtedly Shenhui, the well-known promoter of Chan orthodoxy centered on the so-called Southern school, who was active in Luoyang, the eastern capital (Dongjing).

granduncles.⁶⁷ If we put it in these terms, we can know [Weikuan's] spiritual affiliation.

In addition to Weikuan, here the text lists the names of thirteen other monks. Many of them are prominent members of the Chan tradition, whose names appear in various genealogical charts created during the Tang and subsequent eras. Others are less prominently featured in the historical records, although presumably they were well-known at the time. In addition to monks associated with Mazu and his Hongzhou school, the named individuals include important monks connected with several other Chan schools/lineages. For instance, the Northern school is represented by two of its most prominent members, Shenxiu 神秀 (606?–706) and Puji 普寂 (651–739). The Niutou school, which was influential during the eighth century but then disappeared from the scene, is represented by Xuansu 玄素 (668–752), Jingshan Faqin 徑山法欽 (714–792), and Niutou Farong 牛頭法融 (594–657). Bo also includes Heze Shenhui 荷澤神會 (684–758), the notorious champion of the Southern school's orthodoxy, as one of Weikuan's kinsman.⁶⁸

The inclusion of Shenhui is perhaps a bit curious as well as fairly predictable. On one hand, Shenhui was a divisive figure, best known for his virulent attacks against the Northern school. His stringent sectarianism and self-serving agenda contrast with the broadminded tenor adopted by Bo, whose writing centers on tolerance and inclusivity. Shenhui's partisanship and divisiveness were criticized by some of Bo's and Weikuan's contemporaries, as evidenced in a commemorative inscription composed by Wei Chuhou 韋處厚 (773–823) in 818. This text eulogizes the aforementioned Dayi, another prominent disciple of Mazu active in Chang'an. In it, Wei criticizes Shenhui and his followers for their intolerant attitude and unfortunate efforts to create sectarian divisions within the Chan school.⁶⁹ Overall, there are notable similarities between Bo's and Wei's inscriptions. They both promote a sense of inclusivity, identify the same major lineages of Chan, and promote the teachings and legacies of two prominent figures associated with the Hongzhou school who were active in the imperial capital.

⁶⁷ These are the founding masters of the Northern and Niutou schools of early Chan, respectively. Here Bo is mixing up the various generations a bit, as these monks did not belong to the same generation.

⁶⁸ Often Shenhui is represented as a founder of a distinct lineage or school of early Chan, usually referred as the Heze school.

⁶⁹ "Xijing xingshansi chuanfatang bei," *Quan Tang wen* 715.3258a. Discussed in Poceski, *Records of Mazu and the Making of Classical Chan Literature*, 100–102.

Then again, at the time Shenhui was still remembered as an influential figure within court-oriented circles. From that perspective, he probably deserves a mention as a prominent Chan monk from the early Tang era. In any case, by echoing the inclusive ideals and broad-minded sentiments that prevailed within major segments of the Chan movement, especially the Hongzhou school, Bo asserts that even if individual monks might belong to different clans or familial branches, they are all members of the same large family, which in turn is part of the larger Buddhist tradition.

Weikuan's training and early vocation

Bo's description of Weikuan's formative years, especially his entry into religious life and pursuit of monastic training, contain several familiar tropes. There is, for instance, an intimation of Weikuan's youthful precociousness and predisposition for monastic lifestyle, evidenced in his revulsion to killing and adoption of vegetarianism. There are also brief mentions of his early teachers and mastery of essential elements of Tiantai Buddhism, especially its teachings about calmness (*zhi* 止) and insight (*guan* 觀). The extent of his grounding in Tiantai teachings and practices is difficult to ascertain, but it is possible that they left a lasting impact on his overall understanding of Buddhism, as we will see below in Weikuan's comments about the close link between meditation practice and doctrinal study.

Weikuan's early studies served as prelude for his training under the illustrious Mazu Daoyi. The text provides no details about the scope and nature of the religious instruction he received at Mazu's monastery in Hongzhou. Nonetheless, its centrality in Weikuan's monastic life is highlighted by the assertion that under Mazu's tutelage he "attained the truth of the most supreme vehicle."

有問師之化緣，曰：師為童男時，見殺生者，蠱然不忍食，退而發出家心。遂求落髮於僧曇，受屍羅於僧崇，學毗尼於僧如，證大乘法於天台止觀，成最上乘道於大寂道一。

Regarding the question about the master's training and proselytization, it can be said that when he was a young boy, seeing the slaughter of animals, he became sad and could not bring himself to eat their flesh; as he gave that up, he decided to leave home and enter monastic life.

Thereafter, he sought Sengtan in order to become a novice,⁷⁰ received the full monastic precepts under Sengchong, and studied the Vinaya under Sengru. Having realized the Mahāyāna doctrine, as expressed by the Tiantai school's [teaching about] calmness and insight, he attained the truth of the most supreme vehicle under [the guidance of] Daji Daoyi.⁷¹

The text then goes on to describe Weikuan's movements and activities after his departure from Hongzhou in 790, soon after Mazu's passing away. Apparently, he adopted a peripatetic life, which initially involved a move east to Minyue 閩越 (roughly present-day Fujian), where he embarked on a successful teaching career. Other stops on the way included Huiji 會稽 (in present-day Zhejiang), Poyang 鄱陽 (Jiangxi), the famous Shaolin Monastery 少林寺 at Songshan 嵩山, one of China's main sacred mountains (in Henan), Weiguo Monastery 衛國寺,⁷² and Tiangong Monastery 天宮寺 in Hangzhou 杭州 (Zhejiang).

貞元六年，始行化閩越間，歲餘而回心改服者百數。七年，馴猛虎於會稽，作滕(勝?)家道場。八年，與山神受八戒於鄱陽，作回響(向)道場。十三年，感非人於少林寺。二十一年，作有為功德於衛國寺。明年，施無為功德於天宮寺。

During the sixth year of the Zhenyuan era (790), he first moved and became active in the Minyue area; by the end of the year, those who converted and changed their clothes numbered hundred(s) [of individuals].⁷³ During the following year (791), he tamed a fierce tiger at Huiji, and made a Teng family sanctuary.⁷⁴ During the eighth

⁷⁰ For this and the next two names, it is possible that the text is meant to read “the monk Tan” (or Chong, or Ru, respectively). The identity of these monks is uncertain.

⁷¹ Daji is Mazu's posthumous title; Daoyi is the monastic name he received at his ordination.

⁷² It is unclear which Weiguo (Protecting the Nation) monastery the text is referring to.

⁷³ The change of clothes implies a change in status or circumstance, like when officials adopt new formal dress with the inauguration of new dynastic regime. Here it suggests a change in religious status.

⁷⁴ The text has *teng* 滕, a family surname, but as suggested by Hu Shi, *sheng* 勝 might also be a viable reading. In either case, the meaning is not entirely clear. I take it to mean sanctuary for the Teng family.

year [of the same reign, i.e. 792],⁷⁵ he bestowed the eight precepts to a mountain spirit at Poyang, and made a [merit] dedication sanctuary.⁷⁶ During the thirteenth year (797), he [positively] affected a non-human being.⁷⁷ During the twenty-first year (805), he performed [activities that generated] conditioned merits at Weiguo monastery.⁷⁸ During the next year (806), he bestowed unconditioned merits at Tianguo monastery.

It is interesting to note Bo's inclusion of thaumaturgic elements in his depiction of Weiguan's life and monastic vocation. The display of thaumaturgic powers—which indicate exceptional charisma or spiritual ability, usually acquired via contemplative practice—is a familiar feature found in many monastic hagiographies. For instance, depictions of the Chan master as a thaumaturge appear in several of the biographical sources dealing with his teacher Mazu.⁷⁹ The mention of Weiguan's extraordinary feats, such as his taming of a tiger, a ferocious animal that evokes fear and respect, and his bestowal of the Buddhist precepts to a mountain spirit, are presumably meant to reinforce his image as a saintly monk with a high level of spiritual attainment. Coupled with some of the other elements highlighted in the text, such as his mastery of Buddhist doctrine, exemplary moral conduct, and expertise in contemplative practice, it indicates how his religious persona embodied several of the most cherished ideals of exemplary monkhood.

⁷⁵ Some versions of the text have the eighth day instead of the eighth year, which is probably an error.

⁷⁶ Reading 回向 for 回響, following *Song gao seng zhuan*; see T 2061, 50: 768a21. I am indebted to Shi Dixuan for pointing this out to me.

⁷⁷ *Feiren* 非人 can also indicate an unusual human being, such as an ascetic living in mountain seclusion.

⁷⁸ The distinction between conditioned and unconditioned merits (or virtues) appears in a number of canonical texts. Unconditioned merits are related to the realm of Nirvana, while all other merits, being associated with causal factors, are mundane and belong to the category of conditioned merits. The text is unclear about the exact nature or scope of the actions performed by Weiguan that generated conditioned and unconditioned merits.

⁷⁹ See Poceski, *The Records of Mazu and the Making of Classical Chan Literature*, 67–77.

Move to the capital and passing away

One of the pivotal events in Weikuan's monastic career was his move to Chang'an in 809. That was occasioned by a formal invitation, extended by Emperor Xianzong 憲宗 (r. 805–820), to come to the royal court. Initially, Weikuan took up residence at Anguo monastery 安國寺, one of the main Buddhist establishments in the imperial capital.⁸⁰ The monastery had close connection with the royal family, as it was initially built by Gaozu 高祖 (r. 618–626), the first Tang emperor, prior to his assumption of the Tang throne. The following year, Weikuan was invited to preach at the Linde Hall 麟德殿. Located within the sprawling Daming Palace 大明宮 complex, Linde Hall was a prestigious venue, where many public lectures and rituals took place, in addition to royal banquets, receptions, and other public events.⁸¹ On numerous occasions, the hall was converted into a Buddhist chapel,⁸² as well as a site for interreligious debates featuring representatives of the “three teachings” (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism).

元和四年，憲宗章武皇帝召見於安國寺。五年，問法於麟德殿。其年，復靈泉於不空三藏也(池?)。十二年二月晦，大說法於是堂，說訖就化。其化緣云爾。

During the fourth year of the Yuanhe era (809), Emperor Xianzong Zhangwu summoned him for an audience at Anguo monastery.⁸³ In the following year (810), the emperor asked the master questions about the Buddhist teachings at the Linde Hall. That year, it was like the return of a numinous spring [stemming] from [the pond] of Bukong, master of the canon.⁸⁴ During the twelfth year [of the same reign] (817), on the last day of the third month, he gave a major Dharma lecture at this hall, and then he passed away, just after the conclusion of the lecture. That is what can be said about his training and proselytization.

⁸⁰ For additional information about the monastery, see Ono Katsutoshi's two volumes: *Chūgoku zui tō chōan jīn shiryō shūsei: kaisetsu hen*, 69–77, and *Chūgoku zui tō chōan jīn shiryō shūsei: shiryō hen*, 118–28.

⁸¹ Xiong, *Sui-Tang Chang'an*, 91–92.

⁸² See Jinhua Chen, “The Tang Buddhist Palace Chapels.”

⁸³ Emperor Zhangwu was Xianzong's posthumous name.

⁸⁴ The reference to Bugong's pond comes from Weikuan's biography in *Song gaoseng zhuan*, which roughly follows Bo's inscription. See *Song gaoseng zhuan* 10.228 (Zhonghu shuju ed.).

Bukong 不空 (705–774), also known as Amoghavajra, was a renowned translator and leading representative of esoteric Buddhism, which during the Tang era was in vogue, especially in and around the capital area. He is mentioned here because of his close connection with Xingshan monastery, where he resided during the last couple of decades of his life. There he gave numerous lectures and performed esoteric rituals, not very long before Weikuan’s arrival. It was largely because of him that the monastery became a major center for the study and practice of esoteric Buddhism.⁸⁵ The monastery was also the site of Bukong’s memorial pagoda, which enshrined his relics. Therefore, Bukong and Weikuan both preached and passed away at the same monastery. Here, Bo compares favorably Weikuan’s teaching and influence to those of the great esoteric master, who had a huge following in Chang’an and was a recipient of magnanimous imperial patronage.

有問師之心要，曰：師行禪演法垂三十年，度白黑眾殆百千萬億。應病授藥，安可以一說盡其心要乎？

Regarding the question about the master’s spiritual essence, it can be said that the master practiced Chan (meditation) and preached the Dharma for almost thirty years. He led to salvation [many] monastics and laity, their numbers beyond measurement. He dispensed medicine according to illness, so how can words fully capture his spiritual essence?

In the first sentence of this short passage, Bo introduces two key terms: Chan (meditation) and Dharma (teaching, especially canonically-based teaching). That closely follows the terse depiction of Weiguan’s final public lecture at the Dharma hall in the preceding passage, the last act prior to his passing away. The juxtaposition of these two terms (or categories) sets the stage for the discussion between Bo and Weikuan featured in the next section, which starts with a question-and-answer about the relationship between Chan and the (canonical) teachings.

Dialogues about Chan and its relationship with Buddhism

One of the most interesting parts in Bo’s text, at least as far as the teachings of Weikuan and the Hongzhou school are concerned, is the transcription of

⁸⁵ Geoffrey C. Goble, “Chinese Esoteric Buddhism: Amoghavarja and the Ruling Elite,” 245–48.

four short discussions between the poet and the monk. In each instance, Bo asks a question, followed by Weikuan's response. This is one of only two records that contain excerpts from the teaching of Weikuan.⁸⁶ The first question deals with the identity and role of the Chan master (*chanshi* 禪師), and by extension the relationship between Chan and the rest of Buddhism, especially in its canonical formulations. Bo frames the question in terms of a putative incompatibility or perceived conflict between Chan and conventional Buddhist teachings, or rather the prominent monks who represents these two major streams in Chinese Buddhism.

然居易為贊善大夫時，常四詣師，四問道。第一問云：「既曰禪師，何故說法？」師曰：「無上菩提者，被於身為律，說於口為法，行於心為禪。應用有三，其實一也。如江湖河漢，在處立名。名雖不一，水性無二。律即是法，法不離禪。云何於中，妄起分別？」

When I, Juji, served as an assistant to the crown prince,⁸⁷ at four occasions I went to visit the master, and I asked him four questions about the [Buddhist] path. My first question was, "Since you are called a Chan teacher (*chanshi*), why do you lecture on the Dharma (teaching)?" The master answered, "When the incomparable *bodhi* (awakening) is expressed via the physical body, it is the Vinaya (monastic discipline); when it is expounded via the mouth, it is the Dharma; when it is practiced via the mind, it is Chan (meditation). There are these three modes of application, but in reality they are all the same. It is like rivers and lakes that are given different names. Although their names are not the same, the nature of water is identical everywhere. Vinaya is Dharma, and Dharma is not apart from Chan. How can one falsely create distinctions among them?"⁸⁸

⁸⁶ The other record of Weikuan's teaching is a sermon excerpt, recorded in *Zongjing lu* 宗鏡錄 98, T 2016, 48: 942b–c.

⁸⁷ Other possible translations of Bo's official title include "assistant secretary to the crown prince," "grand master admonisher," and "advisor to the left of the crown prince." See Feifel, "Biography of Po Chü-I," 273; Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*, 65; Charles Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 156b; and Ch'en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 198. This was a relatively low position in the central bureaucracy.

⁸⁸ The translation of the four questions and answers is adapted from Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*, 65. For a slightly different version of the original text, see *Jingde chuan deng lu* 7, T 2076, 51: 255a–b. For other publications that

In the above passage, Weikuan points to the essential unity of Buddhism, represented by its three main parts or traditions—Chan, the Dharma (canonically-based teaching and traditions), and the Vinaya. In that sense, he deflects a potential criticism of Chan masters like himself, who stand accused of preaching by recourse to conventional Buddhist teachings. He also undermines the notion that there are sharp distinctions or irreconcilable differences among the monks who represent the three main types of prominent Buddhist teachers: Chan masters, Dharma masters, and Vinaya masters. Overall, he adopts an ecumenical stance and situates Chan firmly within the larger Buddhist tradition. The key idea of a sense of balance between the first two elements, contemplative praxis and doctrinal study, also invokes comparison with Tiantai doctrine, including its teaching about the requirement to maintain balance between calmness and insight, which, as already noted, Weikuan studied during the formative years of his monastic vocation.

第二問云：「既無分別，何以修心？」師曰：「心本無損傷，云何要修理？無論垢與淨，一切勿起念。」

My second question was, “If there are to be no distinctions, how should we engage in mental cultivation?” The master answered, “The [true] mind is fundamentally without any deficiency, so how can we talk about improving it by means of [spiritual] cultivation? Regardless of defilement or purity, we should not give rise to any thoughts.”

In these and the next two dialogues, the discussion revolves around select aspects of Chan practice, or—more broadly—spiritual cultivation. In all three instances, Weikuan adopts doctrinal and soteriological positions that tally with the teachings of Mazu and other noted monks associated with the Hongzhou school, such as Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (749–814), Nanquan Puyuan 南泉普願 (748–834), and Dazhu Huihai 大珠慧海 (fl. 8th c.). In the above exchange, he evokes a familiar notion regarding the true mind’s fundamental wholeness and innate purity. The basic idea is that, instead of trying to control thoughts and other mental processes, the practitioner should simply let the mind’s fundamental clarity and wholesomeness manifest themselves. As the true mind is already complete, practitioners simply need to let go of dualistic thoughts of any kind. That opens the possibility of perceiving reality as it truly is, without adding or subtracting anything.

include the exchange, see Ch’en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 199–200, and Waley, *The Life and Times of Po Chü-i*, 99.

第三問云：「垢即不可念，淨無念可乎？」師曰：「如人眼睛上，一物不可住。金屑雖珍寶，在眼亦為病。」

My third question was, “Since we should not think about defilements, is it [also] that we should not think about purity?” The master answered, “It is like men’s eyes, which should not have anything inside. Even though gold dust is [deemed to be] precious, it becomes nothing but trouble when it enters the eyes.”

The third answer deals with a common theme: the transcendence of both purity and defilement. The need to abandon various forms of mental or spiritual defilements—exemplified by negative mental states such as greed, hatred, envy, and delusion—is a basic idea encountered across a wide spectrum of Buddhist texts and traditions. However, when they are misconstrued and become sources of attachment, pure things or states—including most beautiful ideas or teachings about truth—become obstacles on the path of practice and realization, which in a Chan context implies thoroughgoing detachment and radical transcendence.

第四問云：「無修無念，亦何異於凡夫耶？」師曰：「凡夫無明，二乘執著。離此二病，是名真修。真修者，不得動，不得忘。動即近執著，忘即落無明。」其心要云爾。

My fourth question was, “When there is no cultivation and no thought, how does [such a practitioner] differ from ordinary persons?” The master answered, “Ordinary people are ignorant [of reality], while the followers of the two vehicles [of hearers and solitary buddhas] are prone to attachment. The forsaking of these two defects is called true cultivation. As to true cultivation, one should not try hard, nor should one forget things.⁸⁹ Trying hard leads to attachment, while forgetting leads to sinking into a state of oblivious ignorance.” That is what [the master] would say about the essentials of mind [cultivation].

The final question evokes the related notions of “no-cultivation” (*wuxiu* 無修) and “no-thought” (*wunian* 無念), which appear in a number of Chan records from the Tang era. If it is not necessary to engage in any special or outward form of spiritual practice, in which way is the Chan adept different from ordinary persons, who fail to make any effort towards self-cultivation and

⁸⁹ Depending on which version of the original text one reads, the character *qin* 勤 (diligent, hardworking) can be replaced with *dong* 動 (movement). The same applies to the following sentence.

waste their whole lives stuck in clueless ignorance? In his response—in a brief and oblique manner—Weikuan explains how the superior practitioner is different from ordinary (unenlightened) people and followers of supposedly inferiors form of Buddhism (the “two vehicles”). In this version of the middle way, the Chan practitioner avoids two extremes: the restless and misguided striving (or mental movement) of ordinary people,⁹⁰ and the sinking into a dull state of quietude associated with followers of the two vehicles.

Disciples and legacy

As is often the case, the main body of Weikuan’s inscription ends with a brief note about his influence and legacy. That includes a brief mention of his disciples, whose number and impact bear testimony to Weikuan renown and importance. On the whole, this formulaic section adheres to established models and does not bring any radically new elements. Nonetheless, it provides the names of two of his key disciples. It also adds a personal note about the circumstances that led to Bo’s writing of the text for the memorial inscription.

師之徒殆千余，達者三十九人。其入室受道者，有義崇，有圓鏡。以先師常辱與予言，知予嘗醍醐、嗅薝蔔者有日矣。師既歿後，予出守南賓郡，遠托撰述，迨今而成。嗚呼！斯文豈直起師教，慰門弟子心哉？抑且志吾受然燈記，記靈山會於將來世，故其文不避繁。

Master’s disciples probably numbered over a thousand, while thirty-nine individuals penetrated [the truth of the teaching]. Among those who became his close disciples and received the essential purport, there were Yichong and Yuanjing. The late master often said, “I understand that you have tasted the ghee [of the teaching] and have smelled [the scent of] the *campaka* [flowers] for a long while.”⁹¹ After the master passed away, I departed for an official post in Nanbin

⁹⁰ “Movement” in this context primarily implies mental movement, i.e. the restless and chaotic mental activity of an ordinary person.

⁹¹ The yellow *campaka* flowers, which supposedly have the nicest or most sublime scent, are often mentioned in canonical texts. For instance, see *Da bao ji jing* 大寶積經, T 310, 11: 551a17. According to some interpretations, just as their scent is superior to that of other flowers, so is the bodhisattva path superior to other paths.

county.⁹² From away, I committed to writing the narrative [of master's life], and it is only now that I have been able to finish it.⁹³ Alas! How can this text straightforwardly present the master's teaching, thus being able to offer mental comfort to his disciples? Moreover, aspiring that I receive the record of the burning lamp, so that I can record [events transpiring at the] Vulture Peak assembly,⁹⁴ I could not shun writing this text.

The short inscription for Weikuan's memorial pagoda, which comes at the end, consists of two seven-character lines. They come across as an excerpt from a short (and not particularly memorable) poem.

銘曰：「佛以一印付迦葉，至師五十有九葉。」故名師堂為傳法。
His inscription reads: "With a single seal, the Buddha passed the transmission to Mahākāśyapa. As we come to the master, fifty-nine generations have passed." Therefore, the master's hall is called Transmission of the Teaching.

The final sentence brings us back to the physical location specified at the beginning of Bo's text: the teaching hall called Transmission of the Teaching, where Weikuan presented his—and his teacher's—Chan version of Buddhist teachings, centered around a singular path of practice and realization. Bo's choice to end with an inscription that evokes the legendary Chan transmission, which supposedly started with Buddha's smile directed to Mahākāśyapa, is quite telling. It basically says that Weikuan is the rightful recipient of the orthodox seal of the true teaching, which has been passed in a singular or unbroken line via fifty-nine generations of esteemed patriarchs. By extension, the text indicates how key notions regarding lineage and orthodoxy were a

⁹² Nanbin refers to Zhongzhou 忠州, located in the area of present-day Chongqing. Bo was assigned to serve as a governor of Zhongzhou in 818. That followed a poetically and spiritually fruitful stay in northern Jiangxi. There he spent considerable time at Lushan, the famous mountain, where he visited local monasteries and interacted with monks. See Ch'en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 205.

⁹³ Bo returned to Chang'an after his relatively brief stay in Zhongzhou. Afterwards, he left for Hangzhou, where he assumed the post of governor.

⁹⁴ During the Buddha's lifetime, Vulture Peak was in the vicinity of Rajagaha (in present-day Bihar), an area frequented by the Buddha and his disciples. The name appears in many canonical sources, and a number of scriptures—including the *Lotus Scripture*—are identified as being based on sermons that were delivered at the peak.

matter of major concern within Chan circles, especially in and around the imperial capital.

Concluding remarks

The intrinsic value and great historical significance of Bo's inscription, translated and analyzed in the preceding pages, is fairly obvious, given that we are dealing with a rare document connected to two outstanding individuals from the Tang era. The text and its context shed light on the lives of Bo and Weikuan, as well as on the religious and secular traditions with which they were connected. As an integral part of the remarkable literary oeuvre of Bo Juyi, one of the outstanding poets and cultural icons of the Tang era, the full translation of the text is long overdue. The same goes for the text's valuable coverage of the life and teachings of Weikuan, who was a major figure in Chan circles during the early ninth century. Widely recognized as a key disciple of Mazu and an influential representative of the Hongzhou school in the main Tang capital, Weikuan's actions and religious persona are representative of important leitmotifs that characterized the growing Chan movement.

Bo Juyi's memorial inscription for Weikuan provides valuable insights into several aspects of Tang Buddhism. First, it documents major concerns and prominent strands of religious discourse current within the flourishing Chan tradition, principally during the mid-Tang period. That includes evolving conceptions of spiritual lineage and its role as a source of religious legitimacy, as well as its deployment as a central element in the construction of complex and multilayered religious identities by monks associated with the burgeoning Chan movement. The text also sheds light on related ideas about authority and orthodoxy, as well as on prevailing views about the place of Chan within the larger religious landscape, especially its relationship with the Buddhist canon and the mainstream tradition.

Additionally, the text points to the close relationship between prominent literati and leading Chan monks. In that regard, Weikuan's epitaph indicates that the literati were not just passive recipients or consumers of Chan teachings and observances. Rather, some of them were also actively involved in the recording, or even the shaping, of principal modes of Chan discourse. Their writings touched upon a host of interrelated issues: Chan doctrines, practices, and institutions, as well as their complex relationship with the larger culture and society of Tang China. In that sense, literati such as Bo Juyi

exerted notable influence on the content, direction, and texture of Chan teachings, and participated in important developments in the literary sphere that had lasting effects on the historical trajectory of Chan and its place in Chinese religious life.

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