

Exploring the Origin of the Chinese Chan School

—Also a Brief Comment on the Saints of Three Vehicles

Hearing Mahayana Teachings Together

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Abstract

The academic society always regards the Chinese Chan School as a unique culture development of Buddhism in China, which is different from the Indian Chan; with some specific purposes, a few persons in Japanese academic society started to criticize the Chinese Chan School and tried to expel the Chinese Chan School from Buddhism by claiming it as non-Buddhism; if they succeeded, the Chinese Chan School would lose its supremacy, which is originally unique to worldwide Buddhism. This article uses the Chan Koans, which only exist in Chinese Chan School, as the subjects to explore its origin in the sutras of the Agama division and finds there are many Chan Koans in those sutras. This article thinks only through the method of positivist criticism in *The Sutra of Honey Pill Simile* can one correctly interpret the meanings of the Chan Koans and Buddhist sutras or treatises. From the method of positivist criticism, this article proves that it should not be called the “initial stage of Mahayana” when Bodhisattva Nagarjuna started the stage of Mahayana Buddhism, but called the first revival of Mahayana Buddhism, which is a correct positioning in conformity with the historical fact. Therefore, the applicability of positivist criticism method has higher priority over all methods of document study and hermeneutics.

This article thinks that some academic persons regard Angulimala’s “Koan of Chasing the Buddha” as a Buddhist story rather than a Koan because they do not know the Chan School always follows the Buddhist tradition of teaching with the true meaning hidden; it is also because the saints of Two Vehicles do not know the contents of enlightenment in the Chan School; therefore, they do not know it is in fact a Chan Koan. According to the study on Angulimala’s Koan, this article finds that the purpose of Chan Koans are all for the dharma debate on exploring the ultimate reality of dharma-realm, the eighth *vijnana* Tathagatarabha; with the wisdom of Mahayana enlightenment, which is obtained through the actual realization of the Chan Koan, the practitioners can eliminate the error and fault of the fields of six views. The Chan Koan is a method to eliminate the fields of six views; it is also a method to correct the practitioners of nihilism, eternalism, and Two Vehicles,

who do not actually realize the ultimate reality of dharma-realm and fall into imagination and speculation. Therefore, eliminating the fields of six views is the realization of Mahayana enlightenment, rather than the content actually realized by the practitioners of Two Vehicles; it also manifests the difference between the real Chan of Mahayana and the expedient Chan thought of Two Vehicles.

This article lists three Koans in the sutras of Agama division and one of Wild-Fox Chan to prove the historical fact that the Buddha had expounded the Mahayana Chan frequently during His lifetime. This article also proves, using another Koan in Agama division, that when the Buddha gave the Mahayana “*prajna*” teachings of the second round of dharma transmission, the practitioners of Two Vehicles not only attended the dharma-teaching assembly but also witnessed the occurrence of Koans about the enlightenment of Mahayana bodhisattvas; those facts were finally recorded in the sutras of Agama division. Because there is lots of documental evidence about Mahayana doctrines in the sutras of Agama division, we can prove that the Buddha personally gave the Mahayana teachings, and that all practitioners of Three Vehicles witnessed the historical fact of “Mahayana being the Buddha’s teaching.”

Keywords: Chan history, Chan Koan, first revival of Mahayana Buddhism, initial stage of Mahayana, textual criticism, positivist criticism, Mahayana Chan, Hinayana Chan, real Chan, expedient Chan thought, fields of six views