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

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

The chief of these contexts was the “crisis in the meaning of spiritual transmission” and the fabrications made to resolve this and give the transmission a “mystique”. As there were no stable criteria for the legitimacy of the transmission, the Chan monks of the period and the authors of the *Lidai fabao ji* in particular adopted contradictory standards. One basic contradiction was located in the gradualist means of preaching and teaching a sudden doctrine, the possibility of teaching and transmitting (a mediating activity) immediacy. Wuzhu took the ideas of Shenhuī (684-758), the champion of the “sudden teaching” of the Southern lineage as allegedly transmitted via Huineng, on these topics to their logical conclusion.

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

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

Following a description of the development of a Chan lineage and the disputes over this, Adamek turns to the Chan conferral of the robe and Wuzhu's preference for physical asceticism. Wuzhu conferred Buddhist robes on persons without evidence of their merit, contradicting some other formulations in China, and yet the robe of Chan transmission was allegedly accompanied by persecution and secrecy in this period of the decline of the Dharma. Shenhui had invented much of this, but did not possess the robe he had conjured up. He had been influenced in his subitism and contention that the robe or ordaining was unnecessary for enlightenment by the apocryphal Vajrasamādhi Sūtra. Wuzhu took this further.