NOTES

The Platform Sutra in Religious and Cultural Perspective

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The "Fo Kuang Shan International Conference on Ch'an Buddhism," subtitled "The *Sixth Patriarch's Platform Sutra* in Religious and Cultural Perspective," was held January 9–13, 1989, at Fo Kuang Shan in Kao-hsiung, Taiwan. Scholars were invited from the United States, Japan, Korea, France, and Australia, with papers given in absentia by scholars from the United States, mainland China, and Italy. In all more than fifty papers were presented, and there were over two hundred registered participants: some two hundred ordained and lay residents of Fo Kuang Shan also attended the opening and closing sessions. In addition, a delegation including United States Senator Albert Gore, Jr. of Tennessee and Lieutenant Governor Leo McCarthy of California attended the closing banquet as part of their visit to Fo Kuang Shan.

This conference was envisioned as the first in a series of cooperative ventures, with future meetings to take place both at Fo Kuang Shan and at the branch temple Hsi Lai Ssu in Hacienda Heights, California. The initial idea for the conference was proposed by John R. McRae, then a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University, and Assistant Professor at Case Western Reserve University at the time of the meeting. The concept of a conference on the *Platform Sutra* was then developed by Professor David Chappell of the University of Hawaii and transmitted to Dr. Yo Hsiang-chou of the Fo Kuang Shan Academy of Chinese Buddhism, who elicited the enthusiastic support of Venerable Hsing Yun, the founder and spiritual head of Fo Kuang Shan. Venerable Hsing Yun served as the official conference organizer, with his disciple Ven. Tz'u-hui the deputy organizer. Other members of the organizing committee were Professors Yoshizu Yoshihide of Komazawa University, Tokyo; Han Ki-doo of Wŏnkwang University, Korea; Lewis Lancaster of the Univer-

sity of California, Berkeley; Charles Wei-hsün Fu of Temple University; Chang Yün-chün of National Taiwan University; and Cheng Chen-huang of Taipei Women's Buddhist College.

The long-range goal of this conference was to facilitate vigorous and meaningful communication between scholars working on various areas of Ch'an, Sŏn, and Zen studies. Using the *Platform Sutra* as a central focus, the conference had two specific aims: to survey the overall scope and interests of the field and to plan future joint research projects.

As a seminal and imaginative text of Chinese Ch'an, the *Liu-tsu t'an-ching or Sixth Patriarch's Platform Sutra* occupies a unique role in the East Asian meditation tradition. Deriving from the transitional period between early and classical Ch'an, the dramatic narration of the Sixth Patriarch's teachings draw deeply upon centuries of traditional Buddhist doctrine in a manner that molded the evolution of Ch'an through its apparent peak in the Sung dynasty and beyond. As such, the legacy of this text reverberates throughout East Asia, including the Sŏn tradition of Korea and the Rinzai and Sŏtŏ schools of Japan.

Scholars working in Ch'an studies or related areas were encouraged to submit proposals for presentations dealing with the *Platform Sutra*, and the conference papers covered a wide range of different subjects. It is easiest to organize these subjects under the following headings: textual development, background, doctrine, and influence.

1. Textual development

Several Scholars, in particular several from Japan, discussed issues pertaining to the textual development of the *Platform Sutra*. In the opening keynote address, Yanagida Seizan, formerly of Kyoto University, repudiated the conventional wisdom that there was an "old text" of the *Platform Sutra* antedating the Tun-huang version. Although Yanagida himself had formerly subscribed to this theory, he now suggests that the Tun-huang version represents the oldest form of the *Platform Sutra*, and that the reference to an "old text" of it by Nan-yang Hui-chung (d. 775) was actually made in reference to a set of scriptures describing ordination platforms compiled by the great Vinaya master Tao-hsüan (596–667). As Yanagida put it, there was no *Platform Sutra* at the time of Hui-neng (638–713), who later came to be considered the Sixth Patriarch. However, there may be some memory of Hui-neng in the *Platform Sutra*, so that there is some relationship, however tenuous, between Hui-neng and the text written in his name.

Yanagida's radical new position regarding Hui-chung's statement and the absence of any old text of the *Platform Sutra* effectively undercut several of the papers given later in the conference, but there were interesting papers given on the formation and development of the text. Ogawa Takashi, a

graduate student at Komazawa University currently studying in Peking, presented a paper in Chinese suggesting that there are three developmental steps apparent in the textual formation of the Tun-huang text of the *Platform Sutra*: (1) the use of materials added posthumously to Shen-hui's (684–758) works in a recompilation of the sermon attributed to Hui-neng; (2) the addition of stories and verses pertaining to the transmission of the robe and Shen-hui's identity as Hui-neng's only legitimate successor, added to counter the influence of the *Li-tai fa-pao chi* (Records of the [Transmission of the] Dharma-treasure Though the Generations); and (3) selection of Fa-hai as redactor of the *Platform Sūtra* and the fabrication of a lineage that ignored Shen-hui. In the later Hui-hsin version, dated 967 but no longer extant, the transmission verses were de-emphasized and the text become unsuitable for use in master-disciple succession.

In addition, Ozaki Masayoshi and Takeuchi Kōdō of Komazawa University gave papers on "The 'transmission of the robe' as explained in the *Platform Sutra*" and "Shen-hui and the *Platform Sutra*," respectively, both of which explore relationship between the doctrines of Shen-hui and the formation of the *Platform Sutra*. Ishii Shūdō of Komazawa and Morten Schlütter of Yale offered papers (both in English, the latter being read in absentia) on the stemma of textual development from the Tun-huang version through the Kōshōji, Daijōji, and other versions known mostly from Japanese manuscript sources. Finally, Yang Tseng-wen of the People's Republic of China, in a paper read in absentia, announced the existence of a newly-discovered Tun-huang manuscript of the *Platform Sutra*. this manuscript would appear to derive from the same source as the previously-known manuscript, but it contains fewer scribal errors and is easier to understand in many places.

2. Background

Tanaka Ryōshō of Komazawa University described the modern history of the study of the *Platform Sutra*. Lewis Lancaster's paper, read in absentia, argued that we should read the *Platform Sutra* within the context of East Asian Buddhism, without always assuming that Ch'an represents a totally unique phenomenon. Paul Groner of the University of Virginia and David Chappell gave papers which were in accord with this injunction, both of them dealing with the relationship between the ordination ritual (Groner) and formless precepts (Chappell) in the text and those found in other Chinese and Japanese contexts. John McRae and Hsüeh-li Cheng of the University of Hawaii at Hilo discussed continuities between anecdotes and story forms found in the *Platform Sutra* with similar material found in the pre-Confucian classics and later vernacular literature (McRae) and the Confucian classics (Cheng), with the implication that the doctrinal and anecdotal contents of the text derive from a

deep stratum of the Chinese mythical imagination (McRae) and should be interpreted on the basis of native Chinese ideas rather than solely with reference to the Buddhist meanings of technical terms (Cheng).

3. Doctrine

The reader will notice that up to this point only a very few papers written by Chinese authors have been mentioned. There are two reasons for this. First, the Chinese language group was entirely separate from the English, Japanese, and Korean groups (which met both separately and together), and did not attempt to cross the language barriers as much the other three groups. Second, it is my impression from talking with participants and from scanning the abstracts that the Chinese papers were fundamentally unconcerned with the historical development of the text of the *Platform Sutra* and essentially unwilling to accept either the validity or the utility of Yanagida's maxim that there was no *Platform Sutra* during the lifetime of the historical Hui-neng. The Chinese papers seem to have all begun from the premise that the Hui-neng of the *Platform Sutra* should be taken at face value as the teachings of Hui-neng. The reasons for this basic position were again twofold. First, the primarily Japanese tradition fo textual study of the *Platform Sutra* is not well known in Taiwan. Second, the Chinese participants were more likely to be members of the extended Fo Kuang Shan religious community, and thus more interested in the explication of gospel than the analysis of textual and religious developments.

Although accepting the orthodox position regarding the *Platform Sūtra* and Hui-neng, Lan Chi-fu found similarities between these teachings and the doctrines of the Tibetan Nyingma school. Yang Huei-nan, Tu Sung-po, and Paul Jung-po Chen discussed the meaning and implications of the term "own-nature" or "self-nature" (*tzu-hsing*), the last of these scholars using this as a springboard for a consideration of the text's influence of later developments in Ch'an language. Cheng Shin-yen offered a psychological analysis of the experience of "seeing The [self]-nature" (*chien-hsing*) in the *Platform Sutra*.

There were two papers given in Korean on the doctrinal content of the *Platform Sutra*: one by Han Ki-doo on the doctrine of "knowing" (*chih*), and another by Kim Young-doo of Wonkwang University of the contents of the *Platform Sutra* and the interpretation of *Diamond Sutra* attributed to Hui-neng (the latter paper also discussed the continuation of these ideas in certain Korean texts). The papers given in English on purely doctrinal issues were intensely philosophical in orientation: Chung-ying Cheng of the University of Hawaii suggested that the thirty-six or thirty-seven "polarities" (*tui*) found in the text were compiled under the influence of the *I ching or Book of Changes*, while Nishimura Eshin of Hanazono University argued that the doctrine of

sudden enlightenment is an important religious contribution even within contemporary society.

4. Influence

In this reporter's mind some of the most fascinating papers were on the ling-range influence of the *Platform Sutra* throughout East Asia. Robert Gimello of the University of Arizona discussed the apparent contrast between the radical image of Hui-neng in the *Platform Sutra* and the demands of the more conservative status of Ch'an during the Sung Dynasty, when the school achieved its greatest success. Choi Byong-hon of Seoul National University related the story of the attempted theft of the Hui-neng's head by Korean monks and the tradition of veneration of the Sixth Patriarch in Korea. Park Sang-kuk of the Korean Bureau of cultural Properties Preservation discussed the history of the *Platform Sutra's* printing, based on colophons from thirteenth-and fourteenth-century Korea. Sungbae Park of SUNY Stonybrook discussed the understanding of the *Platform Sutra* evinced in the works of Pojo Chinul (1158–1210) of Korea, and David Putney of the University of Hawaii explored the ramifications of the well-known criticism of the *Platform Sutra* by the Japanese Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253).

Due to limitations of space, it has been impossible to mention all the papers given at the conference in this report. However, all conference papers will soon be published in their original languages, with selected ones translate into English and Chinese, in a set of volumes to be produced by the Fo Kuang Shan Academy of Chinese Buddhism.

In conclusion, let me point out some of the numerous ways in which this conference was successful in sponsoring communication between humanistic scholars working in several different countries and using a variety of methodologies. First of all, it was extremely impressive to witness firsthand the vitality and energy of Buddhism in Taiwan. The monastic system established at Fo Kuang Shan and its several branch temples is massive (with 407 ordained nuns, 100 monks, and seemingly innumerable lay trainees) and extremely well-organized. Conference participants were uniformly impressed by the diligence and harmony of those arranging our academic discussions, not to mention the excellent facilities and bounteous meals.

Second, this was a truly international conference, highlighted by the participation of first-line scholars from Japan and Korea. It was unfortunate that several important American scholars were unable to attend due to lack of travel funds, but the communication between American and scholars from other countries made possible by the conference are thought to be of inestimable values. Since Fo Kuang Shan is actively planning for future

meetings both there and at Hsi Lai Ssu involving various topics in the entire spectrum of Buddhist studies, the experience gained from this conference will reap benefits for years to come.