

Fathering Your Father: The Zen of Fabrication in Tang Buddhism, by Alan Cole. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. 340 + xix pp. Hb. \$65.00/£44.95, ISBN-13: 9780520254848; Pb. \$27.50/£19.95, ISBN-13: 9780520254855.

Chan (禪) and its Japanese counterpart, Zen, have always been a popular subject of scholarly attention. Recent years have witnessed an interesting burgeoning of literature on the history of Chan Buddhism, which grapples with various issues, including formative texts, the establishment of schools within the tradition, spiritual transmission and disputes over the nature of enlightenment.¹ Alan Cole's new book, *Fathering Your Father*, continues his tradition of utilizing familial terms — father, mother, and son — to discuss Buddhism. This study adopts a 'History of Religions' approach in its attempt to re-examine the history of early Chan Buddhism. By providing a close (re)reading of key Chan texts that were crucial to the formation of Chan styled discourse in Tang China, particularly between 600 and 750, it argues that the early Chan writings, or more specifically, the seventh and eighth century genealogies of Bodhidharma's (菩提達磨) so-called descendents, were neither written for Buddhist practices nor religious orthodoxy. Rather, these writings were produced within the broader context of cultural, historical, and political forces during the Tang period. Cole therefore provocatively suggests that the 'Chan' we understand today is an 'accidental creation, not born from men-with-truth and their trusty historians, but rather a wavering cycle of writing and rewriting narratives (fathering) that hoped to convincingly demonstrate the new ownership of the fullness of the Buddhist tradition (father) in China' (xii).

The first chapter begins by scrutinizing the emergence of Chan literature in Tang China. The Chan genealogies discussed in this study were discovered in a sealed temple cache located in Dunhuang (敦煌) at the beginning of the twentieth century. Cole points out that previous Chan studies have failed to recognize that these Chan writings were in fact what he calls 'selfish' works created to generate a discourse responsible for three agendas: first, crafting the 'truth-of-tradition' into a compact and transmittable form; secondly, establishing 'convincing formats and rules' for controlling the private ownership of the 'truth-of-tradition', restricting the discourse to a small group of monks, while at the same time being recognized by the public and authorities to obtain support; and thirdly, putting the audacious spiritual claims in a 'rhetorical framework' to make the two agendas seem convincing and acceptable (2). According to Cole, the origins of Chan genealogies therefore have to be examined critically in four ways: with regard to genre, genre development, content and politics. Cole suggests that Pierre Bourdieu's reading strategy — as presented in his 1977 essay exploring the complex dynamics of the art world² — should be adopted to read the Chan genealogies. The chapter then

1. See, for instance, Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, eds., *Zen Classics: Formative Texts in the History of Zen Buddhism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Mario Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Wendi L. Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission: On an Early Chan History and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Morten Schlütter, *How Zen became Zen: The Dispute over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-dynasty China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).
2. 'La production de la croyance: contribution à une économie des biens symboliques'. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 13 (February): 3–43. English translation: 1980. 'The Production

sets the context of this study by explaining how important contributory factors, such as dynastic upheaval, political instability, and Chinese authors' attempt to 'localize' Buddhism, gave rise to such Buddhist literature. Chapter 2 looks at how two Buddhist monks, Zhiyi (智顓) and Xinxing (信行), were elevated to the status of 'quasi-buddhas' during the Sui period. While the two religious figures are usually not regarded as precursors to early Chan Buddhism, Cole wants to use their genealogies to demonstrate how the various narrative techniques and strategies appeared to have influenced the early Chan writers later in the Tang period. Zhiyi was innovatively transformed into a buddha-like figure, thanks to the writings of his disciple Guanding (灌頂). **Guanding's creative endeavor was significant** for two reasons: first, the making of quasi-buddhas in Buddhist genealogies was largely unprecedented in the history of Chinese Buddhism; and secondly, early Chan writers appear to have adopted their 'form', 'content', and 'discourse logics' from Guanding's approach (31). Xinxing, a controversial Buddhist leader, was added into the chapter as an example to illustrate the making of an 'absolute master' who overcame two traditional structures that shaped early Chinese Buddhism, namely, the monk-laity divide and the India-China divide.

Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 are dedicated to examine four cases of religious 'fabrication' through the writing of Chan genealogies. Chapter 3 studies Faru's (法如) biographical stele in Shaolin Monastery (少林寺) on Mount Song. **This hagiography**, which is often regarded as the first Chan genealogy, chronicles the monk's life and offers a brief historical narrative of Buddhism, starting from Śākyamuni Buddha right up to seventh-century China. In addition, it makes Bodhidharma a pivotal figure, responsible for bridging the divide between two cultures and for bringing the perfect Chan tradition to China. This seminal work became the basic template for later Chan genealogies in Tang China and contributed to the creation of an 'in-house buddha' in Shaolin. Subsequent authors adopted the fabricated historical narrative in Faru's biography and used it to reinvent their genealogies. Chapter 4 examines how Du Fei (杜朮) adopted Faru's genealogy to write Shenxiu's (神秀) biography, *Record of the Transmission of the Dharma-Jewel* (*Chuan fabao ji* 傳法寶記). Cole suggests that Du Fei's basic agenda was similar to Guanding's and Shaolin's: he was trying to turn the present political situation into religious realities that supposedly had long histories that went all the way back to Buddha's time. Du Fei's writings allowed him to elevate Shenxiu's state-recognized identity posthumously to install him as the leader of Chinese Buddhism. In Chapter 5, Cole analyzes Jingjue's (淨覺) *History of the Masters and Disciples of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (*Lengqie shizi ji* 楞伽師資記), a genealogy of his master Xuanze (玄曠). Jingjue built his work on Du Fei's *History* and created a lineage 'brother', Xuanze, for Shenxiu. He boldly claimed that both Xuanze and Shenxiu received the same transmission from Hongren (弘忍). Cole, however, finds many problems both in Jingjue's extensive borrowing of Du Fei's writings, and in his dishonest use of historical sources. Chapter 6 discusses Shenhui's (神會) **attempt to rewrite the Chan lineage history**. Shenhui argued that the current Chan genealogies were all counterfeit. Therefore, he insisted that only his master, Huineng (慧能), had received the authentic transmission from Hongren. To do so, Shenhui simply ousts the prior claimants by terming them 'Northern',

of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods'. *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 2/3 (July): 261–293.

while using the title 'Southern' for himself and his invented master, Huineng. Hence, this legitimizes his claim to be the sole inheritor of the perfect tradition. In the final chapter, Cole concludes that the primary aim of early Chan genealogies was to allow the respective authors to present their 'selfish' ownership of religious truth and tradition. They were either written in bad faith or, in many instances, were 'fairy tales' that were made up to delude the readers and serve their agendas.

Cole's rereading of the early Chan literature offers a provocative and generally negative assessment of Chan Buddhism: he regards it as a dishonest self-invention. Or, to put it even more bluntly: he regards Chan Buddhism (and all its Chinese buddhas) as a scam. However, there is one big question worth considering: can we simply rely on these four case studies to conclude that Chan Buddhism is merely a creation of 'selfish' liars and plagiarizers? While this study presents a detailed analysis of the production of Chan genealogies, it does not, however, offer further information on the supply side. Many questions remain to be answered: How prevalent were these literatures? How and why were they circulated? And most importantly, who read them?

Another minor problem with Cole's book lies in his many humorous but often tangential analogies. It appears more confusing than convincing to try to draw parallels between Chan genealogies written in the seventh and eighth centuries, and wedding photo competitions at local county fairs (xii–xiii), American sitcom produced in the 1970s (xiv–xv), and the development of the violin in Western music (311). His 'algebra equations' are equally confusing (14, 177). Despite these shortcomings, this book is an important contribution to the study of Chinese Buddhism and Tang history. It offers an exciting way to examine early Chan Buddhist literature. Perhaps scholars and students of other religions can also consider Cole's reading strategy in rereading the various hagiographical texts.

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