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*Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan  
Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China*

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# A Review of *Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China*

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*Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China*. By Jiang Wu. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, 457 pages, ISBN: 978-0195333572 (cloth), US \$74.00.

In recent years, buddhologists and historians have devoted themselves to research on Chan (Zen) Buddhism in Chinese history. Jiang Wu's study draws attention to the development of Chan Buddhism in seventeenth-century China. He seeks to challenge previous assumptions of Buddhist decline during the Ming and Qing periods. Drawing on a wide range of Buddhist and historical sources, including the Jiaying Buddhist canon, monastic gazetteers, Chan recorded sayings and lamp records, rare sources from the Manpukuji archive in Japan, as well as *Dharma* transmission records from the Shanghai Library, Wu successfully highlights the robust activities, dialogues and disputes among the various Chan communities in the seventeenth century.

Wu focuses on two major controversies among Chan monks to illustrate the transformations of Chan Buddhism in seventeenth-century China. The first controversy is the dispute between Miyun Yuanwu (1566–1642) and his *Dharma* heir Hanyue Fazang (1573–1635). Hanyue Fazang questioned his master's revival of beating and shouting practices

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and challenged his position within the Linji Chan lineage. The second controversy was caused by Miyun Yuanwu's *Dharma* heir Feiyin Tongrong's (1593–1662) provocative book, *Wudeng yantong* (The strict transmission of the five Chan schools), which was intended to relegate self-proclaimed Chan monks without proper *Dharma* transmission to the category of “lineage unknown” (*sifa weixiang*). This led to the marginalization of several eminent masters and an under-representation of Caodong monks. The controversial book resulted in a lawsuit in 1654. Taken together, Wu suggests that Chan Buddhism in seventeenth-century China was a “systemic reinvention” of Chan ideals, which consisted of beating and shouting practices and a hierarchy of *Dharma* transmission. In other words, Chan Buddhist communities were innovative and vibrant.

This book is divided into four parts. Part one introduces the history of Chan Buddhism in the context of seventeenth-century China. The intellectual, cultural and economic influence of the literati contributed to the gradual rise of Chan Buddhism as an institutional establishment from the late-Ming period. Because of their authority and knowledge in textual practice, literati such as Wang Yangming had pivotal influence on the Chan monks. From the 1630s, Chan masters from the Caodong and Linji lineages of Chan Buddhism became prominent in spreading their *Dharma* transmissions. This religious revival, as Wu emphasizes, cut across the Ming-Qing transition and was uninterrupted by the dynastic change. Following the retreat of the Ming government from southeast to southwest after 1644, Chan Buddhism spread quickly to the southwest, Vietnam, as well as Japan. Furthermore, the growth of Chan Buddhism accelerated as some literati and loyalists became monks after the fall of the Ming Dynasty.

The second part of the book discusses the dispute between Miyun Yuanwu and Hanyue Fazang. The tenuous relations between these two

Chan masters led to an exchange of voluminous polemical texts targeting specific points raised by their opponent. They debated three contentious issues: 1) using observable standards to objectify subjective experience of enlightenment; 2) understanding the meaning of Hanyue Fazang's perfect circle, which was directly linked to an esoteric tantric practice; and 3) the matter of beatings and shouting between master and disciple. The controversy between Miyun Yuanwu and Hanyue Fazang continued after their deaths and caught the attention of the Yongzheng emperor. Yongzheng, a patron and practitioner of Chan Buddhism, found out about the dispute between the two Chan masters after reading some polemical essays collected in their respective recorded sayings. He refuted Hanyue Fazang in his eight-fascicle book, *Jianmo bianyi lu* (Records of pointing out demons and discerning heterodoxy), and ordered all works written by Hanyue Fazang to be removed from the Buddhist canon and destroyed. The emperor's intervention demonstrates how a spiritual dispute over enlightenment was arbitrated by imperial decision.

Part three focuses on the controversy over Feiyin Tongrong's *Wudeng yantong*, published in 1654. In his book, Feiyin Tongrong advocates for a change of *Dharma* transmission according to the two-Daowu theory and for the correction of two kinds of widespread misguided practices of *Dharma* transmission: transmission by proxy (*daifu*) and transmission by remote succession (*yaosi*). Hence, he placed those contemporary Chan masters who failed these criteria of *Dharma* transmission in the category of "lineage unknown." His writing greatly angered the Caodong monks, as many of their accomplished masters were relegated to the "unknown" category. In response, a group of Caodong monks led by Sanyi Mingyu filed a lawsuit against Feiyin Tongrong at the court of Zhejiang province. In 1654, Feiyin Tongrong lost the lawsuit and fled. There was no serious attempt to arrest him, but

the printing blocks of *Wudeng yantong* were retrieved and burned, and all printed copies were recalled and strictly prohibited from circulation.

Wu offers his analysis in the final section. He identifies several factors—including the reinvention of textual ideals, involvement of literati, development of Chan communities and disputes over *Dharma* transmission—which can be attributed to the rise and fall of Chan Buddhism in seventeenth-century China. In addition, Wu suggests that Buddhist revivals in general and Chan revival in particular can be observed in the light of “localist turns” in Chinese history. In other words, Buddhist revivals occurred in times when the state was weak and the local society was prosperous.

*Enlightenment in Dispute* is an impressive and rich study that demonstrates the revival of Chan Buddhism in the seventeenth century. Its innovation lies in highlighting how controversies and disputes within the Buddhist communities were not signs of its religious decline. On the contrary, the two controversies presented in the book shed light on the spiritual innovation, intellectual involvement and imperial patronage of Buddhism. Furthermore, this study shows that Buddhism in general and Chan in particular did not decline as a result of Ming-Qing dynastic transition. In fact, the tumultuous political environment facilitated the spread of Chan Buddhism beyond China and expansion of the Buddhist order.

This book is a useful resource for students and scholars of Chinese Buddhism. As Wu mentions in the preface, with its comprehensive index and bibliography, this well-documented work can serve as a handbook of seventeenth-century Chan Buddhism. In addition, the three appendices provide translations of official documents, a discussion of major controversies surrounding Chan Buddhism in the seventeenth century, and translations of evidence concerning the issue of the two Daowus.

Nevertheless, there are a few minor issues that Wu may like to consider. First is his emphasis on the centrality of Chan texts in revealing disputes within Chan communities. It is important to bear in mind that such critical discourses were generated mainly by intellectual Chan masters and literati. It is hard to tell whether ordinary monks or lay devotees had any role to play in the controversies. Second, Wu provides little information on the scale of the disputes. Did the controversy over Feiyin Tongrong's *Wudeng yantong* have any impact outside of Zhejiang province? If so, it would be helpful to have more information on the involvement of others across different parts of China. Lastly, Wu briefly mentions how the Ming-Qing transition accelerated the spread of Chan Buddhism overseas to Japan and Vietnam. It would be interesting to know whether the disputes between Chan masters also made their way to temples beyond China.

In sum, Wu has successfully offered a new perspective for understanding the revival of Chan Buddhism in seventeenth-century Chinese history. This book is a significant contribution to studies of Ming-Qing transition and Chinese Buddhist history.