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## Chan-Pure Land: An Interpretation of Xu Yun's (1840-1959) Oral Instructions

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### Abstract

Pure Land and Chan have typically been acknowledged as the two remaining poles of Chinese Buddhism. Pure Land practitioners revere Amitabha Buddha and seek not nirvana but rebirth in the Land of Bliss (*jile shijie* 極樂世界). Enlightenment is thereby conferred in another time and through another power (i.e. the vows of Amitabha). No more is there retrogression on the path, and the devotee can place all his efforts toward the realization of Buddhahood. By way of comparison, Chan accentuates sudden awakening, advocating the completeness of human capacities and directly pointing to the mind itself. Whereas Pure Land calls upon faith, vows and practice (xin, yuan, xing 信、願、行), Chan asserts the sealing of mind to mind, a 'transmission outside the teaching.' The remarkable disparity between the two led to Pure Land philosophy and devotion solidifying "into a carefully-defined and narrowly conceived sectarian movement which claimed to be the only effective method and all-sufficient source of salvation for everyone." Although this movement dissolved into the very vitality of Chinese Buddhism, debate has, contrary to popular opinion, remained alive and even been revived again in contemporary Chinese Buddhism. It is the aim of the paper to explore this continued debate by focusing on the teachings and advice of Xu Yun 虛雲 as one of the many figures promoting dialectical harmony and understanding.

### Keywords:

Xu Yun (1840-1959), Chan, Pure Land, Hermeneutics, Chinese Buddhism

## 禪與淨土：虛雲言教之詮釋

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### 摘要

淨土與禪通常被視為中國佛教僅剩之二主軸。淨土修行者 尊崇阿彌陀佛並求生極樂淨土而非求涅槃，因此解脫成於另時。再者，藉由他力—也就是阿彌陀佛的誓願—而得成生於淨土且不再退轉，行者將一心一意努力於成佛的修證。淨土法門依於信、願、行，而禪宗強調頓悟，提倡人之完滿並直指人心，且禪宗主張以心印心，教外別傳。此兩者之差異將淨土哲學與堅定虔敬的精神導向一謹慎清晰且嚴密構想的宗派運動，此宗派強調這是唯一有效的方式且具足使人解脫之基礎。雖然此運動消融於充滿活力的中國佛教中，與主流不同取向的爭議也依舊存在，但卻再次於現代中國佛教中復甦，此篇將藉由推動對話和諧與互解之代表人物—虛雲—的教導探索此爭議。

關鍵字：虛雲 (1840-1959)、禪、淨土、詮釋學、中國佛教

## Introduction

Although eighth century China was dubbed the fountainhead of Chinese Buddhism, the very essence of the tradition was remembered for its vibrant and effervescent dialogue. Stevenson (1995, 359), like many other in the field, claim that Pure Land devotion was not an autonomous sect (宗), complete with its doctrinal corpus, philosophical underpinning and historical lineage. While the opposite can be said for sectarian structure in Japan, current opinion is that institutional organization only congealed within 'intermitted points' in China's history (ibid, 359). Whereas this may have been seen at local level, much more can be said for the school as a national movement. In fact, by the middle of the seventh century, Pure Land had already established an evolving movement, one given momentum by its first historian—Jia Cai 迦才. Not only did he compile the biographies of twenty of the initial devotees, but he also wrote the *Jingtu Lun* 淨土論, a three fascicle piece to elucidate the philosophy of Pure Land practice. The potency of the school as an independent institution, is evident by means of Shan-Dao developing his recommendation of five right practices (*wu zheng xing* 五正行), of which *chiming nianfo* 持名念佛, or vocal recitation, was given utmost prominence (T 1754, 272a28-b8.). Moreover, unlike his predecessor Dao Chuo 道綽, he advanced his religious expression virtually within a Pure Land framework (see Chappell, 1986, 169). This, in itself, emphasizes the notion of a centrally organized system of doctrine and practice, one that even falls within the framework of a historical lineage.

This selection of doctrine is by no means characteristic of all institutional and canonical forms through which Pure Land has made its mark in China. One thing, however, is certain: Pure Land was and continues to be a dominant sect, with its own doctrine and practice, insinuating itself into the monastic life of Chinese Buddhism. Although this totalistic movement, as we shall see, often diffused back into mainstream Buddhism, it never really curtailed its contention and dialectical debate with other schools. While some argue that it only revived in Kamakura Japan (Chappell, 1996), Chan and Pure Land debate, contrary to scholastic opinion, is even making its mark in contemporary Buddhist circles. The works of Yin Guang 印光 (1861-1940), Jing Kong 淨空 (b. 1927), and more importantly, the translation of Xu Yun's (1840-1959) oral instructions, do more than enough to justify this point.

The first part of this study will focus on the historical backdrop to the Chan and Pure Land debate, dealing mainly with its evolution from scriptural sources to its Sui-Tang elucidation. Although each tradition employed similar if not the same sources, the discursive analysis that later became doctrine, fuelled the cradle of sectarian rivalry.

The second part mainly deals with modern developments, focusing more intently on how the debate has continued. Here we examine the eventful life of Yin Guang. While Chappell (1986) describes of eight century reconciliation between the split that had taken place between the Chan and Pure Land schools, very little scholarship has examined the distinct and competing Buddhist denominations of the modern period. As part of the theoretical framework

that will form the basis of this section, an examination of Yin Guang's pen and prose will help redefine our understanding of sectarianism and his influence on the reshaping of contemporary Buddhism. Not only did Yin Guang's literary skills and letter writing gain momentum, his calling attention to and circulation of Chih Hsu's *Ten Essentials of the Pure Land*, the *Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Ch'o wu*, along with his own reproaching of Chan and emphasizing Pure Land practice, including his *Treatise Resolving Doubts About the Pure Land*, caught the heart of the reformative movement.

In the third section of this study, the concept of continued sectarian dialogue will be placed within the context of the Shanghai Buddhist community, where Xu Yun offers a talk on the connection between reciting the Buddha's name (*nianfo*) and Chan practice.<sup>1</sup> An argument will be made that this dialogue reflects continued sectarian rivalry and that Xu Yun was one of many who advocated dialectical harmony. Finally, a complete translation of that talk will be rendered into English.

This standing hypothesis, i.e. that there has been a continued sectarian dialogue, remains to be dealt with in a more exhaustive way. A perfect demonstration would necessitate scrutiny of modern systematizers and the hermeneutical troubles they faced that framed the milieu in which they appropriated Buddhism. In addition to hermeneutical ramifications, the research would need to clarify Buddhism's decline in the Qing (1644 – 1911) dynasty and the effects it had on Buddhist circles in the early republican period. But such an analysis exceeds the framework of this study and must await future deliberation.

## The Historical Background: Chan and Pure Rivalry

Buddhism entered China in an extensive selection of Mahāyāna texts each advocating an even more diverse set of practices and ways to enlightenment. In order for early scholars to integrate these often conflicting arguments, they had to devise a system of interpretation and classification. This led to the practice of *panjiao* 判教 whereby all doctrines were placed in a hierarchical scale from expedient to most profound. These principles could include the stages in the Buddha's career where he set in motion the various 'turnings of the wheel,' or judgments (*pan* 判) on the profundity of doctrine (*jiao* 教). An additional means was to regard a particular sūtra or doctrine to embody the original intention (*benhuai* 本懷) of the Buddha. Other texts were viewed as expedient and only a means to reach a higher level of awareness or understanding. Hui Neng 慧能 and many of his contemporaries, for example, isolated the *Diamond Sūtra* and the doctrine of Buddha-mind, and downgraded other doctrines as inferior to them. The *Platform Sūtra* 六祖壇經 teaches:

When the Blessed One was in Shravasti, he preached about the Western Paradise in order to convert people. The sūtras clearly say it isn't far from here. It was only for

1 The talk was given on the 17th of December, 1952 as a part of a Dharma-gathering (*fahui*) to pray for world peace.

the sake of those with shallow roots that he said it was distant. But he said it was near for those with greater wisdom. There are two kinds of people but not two kinds of Dharma. Delusion and awareness differ, and understanding can be fast or slow. Deluded people chant the Buddha's name in order to be reborn there, while those who are aware purify their own minds. This is why the Buddha said, 'As their minds are purified, their buddhalands are purified' (Pine, 2006, 26)

This Chan emphasis of mind asserts the totality of individual effort and the readiness of the present moment, denouncing the so-called space-time duality of Pure Land devotion. Shan Dao 善導 (613-681), on the other hand, was attracted to neither profundity of doctrine nor the turnings of the Dharma-wheel, but what was practical and effective. In his commentary of the *Meditation Sūtra* (*Guan wuliang shou jing* 觀無量壽經, \**Amitāyur-dhyāna-sūtra*) he explains:

According to the sūtra, the Buddha's transformation body tells only of the merits of reciting the Buddha's name when he says, "We have come to welcome you." There is no discussion of the matter of listening to the sūtras. Moreover, it is clear that the intent of the Buddha's vow is only to encourage one to recite the name with right-mindfulness. The speed with which this practice brings about birth cannot be compared with the miscellaneous practices, in which the mind is easily distracted. The *Guan wuliang shou jing* and the various Mahāyāna sūtras praise and encourage the recitation of the name, saying that it will produce benefits of vital importance. This fact should surely be known (T 1753, 276, Senchakushu Translation project, 118-119).

Shan Dao regarded advocates of other schools as practitioners with destructive views who were dangerous to newly initiated Bodhisattvas. Chappell (1996, 159) explains that unlike his predecessor (Dao Chuo, 562-645), Shan Dao did little to substantiate Pure Land ideas and practices in relation to emptiness and the two truths. Conversely, he viewed them as something to be wary of and avoided at all costs. "If newly aroused Bodhisattvas-candidates would hear that all the dharmas are ultimately void in their nature and that even nirvana is a creation, their minds would be greatly frightened" (ibid, 159).

However, it was not until the time of Ci Min Hui Re 慈愍慧日 (680-748) that Chan and Pure Land debate was to reach full blossom. In fact, it was Hui Re who initiated refutation towards Chan disparagement in his *Lue zhu jing lun nianfo famen wangsheng jingtu ji* 略諸經論念佛法門往生淨土集 (*An Anthology Summarizing Various Sūtras and Commentaries Concerning Dharma-doors of Buddha Recollection and Rebirth in the Pure Land*).<sup>2</sup> He arranged the text into three fascicles, starting with what he believed to be most significant—a repudiation of Chan criticisms.

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2 T 2826.

It was more than likely that Hui Re encountered, either directly or indirectly, a rejection of Pure Land ideals from congregations of the Southern Chan School, particularly from disciples of Hui Neng and Shen Hui 神會. This is due to the fact that Hui Re did live in Guangzhou for some time, and it must have been here that the Chan and Pure Land elite felt the full intensity of vigorous dialogue. Hui Re argued that Chan practitioners were merely concerned with taming their own minds, which he viewed as an erroneous practice bent on emptiness. In reference to his *Anthology*, Chappell (1986, 170) explains that Hui Re “condemns their path to enlightenment, the cultivation of emptiness, because it is difficult, lengthy, and filled with suffering.”

However it was not all debate and refutation, Chan and Pure Land did reach intermittent periods or pockets of dialectical understanding. The dialectics of Zhi Yi 智顓 (538-597) and Tian Ru 天如 (14<sup>th</sup> century) for instance, and the various theoretical and practical methods they devised, were available for those who saw the possibilities of integrating Chan and Pure Land philosophy. Zhi Yi, like Hui Neng, made substantial contributions to the cultural value of East Asian Buddhism. Though regarded as the founder and Patriarch of the Tiantai 天台 tradition, he authored several treatises on Pure Land, as recorded in the Buddhist Canon. His *Jingtu shi yi lun* 淨土十疑論 (*Treatise on Ten Doubts about the Pure Land*)<sup>3</sup> in particular, attempts to accommodate the fundamental identity of all traditions—broadening the boundary for dual cultivation regimes. When asked “What does it mean to follow the Buddha’s teaching?” Zhi Yi appeals to scriptural authority and lists several sūtras recommending rebirth in the Pure Land. He explains:

During his entire preaching career, Buddha Sakyamuni constantly enjoined sentient beings to focus on Amitabha Buddha and seek rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. This is mentioned in such sūtras as the *Longer Amitabha Sūtra*, the *Meditation Sūtra*, the *Amitabha Sūtra*, the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*... In numerous sūtras, the Buddha constantly urged us to seek rebirth in the Western Land. This is not only true of the sūtras; in their commentaries, the Bodhisattvas and Patriarchs unanimously advise us to seek rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss (see Thich Thien Tam, 1992, 17).

Zhi Yi goes on to defend the practice of nianfo: “As long as, on his deathbed, he utters the Buddha’s name... he will be assured of rebirth (ibid, 29).” Considering the relevance of this advice, we should not forget that Zhi Yi’s interpretation of mindfulness of the Buddha still differed from that of his Pure Land counterparts, as he distinguishes this, Stevenson (1986, 60-61) notes, into three stages, i.e. “contemplation of the Buddha through: (a) visualization of the major marks and minor excellent qualities of his idealized physical form; (b) abstract qualities that mark a Buddha’s spiritual omniscience; and (c) the essential nature or true character of all phenomena.”<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, we can conclude that this laid the developmental model for sectarian dialogue—one that never congealed to complete dialectical harmony.

3 T 1961.

4 Stevenson notes that these three stages of Buddha recollection are based on chapters nineteen to

Tian Ru, a well-known Chan adept of his day, also authored a similar treatise entitled *Jingtu huo wen* 淨土惑問 (*Doubts and Questions about the Pure Land*).<sup>5</sup> Though little is known about him, it is clear that he had some following in the Yuan Ming dynasties. Like Zhi Yi, we can summarize his position by looking at his response to the twenty-third question:

Buddha recitation has several meanings. One is to visualize the thirty-two auspicious signs, concentrating the mind so that, asleep or awake, you always see the Buddha. Another, more commonly employed method is to concentrate exclusively on reciting the Buddha's name, holding fast single-mindedly and without interruption. In this way, the practitioner will see the Buddha in this very life (see Thich Thien Tam, 1992, 97).

While these principles provided a medium for elevating Pure Land practice amongst Chan criticism, they also went beyond any sectarian opposition by demonstrating cultivation as a process. In the thought of Zhi Yi and Tian Ru, Pure Land had become multifaceted and included views that shaped the way to a multidimensional interpretation.

## Modern Developments

Studies in contemporary Chinese Buddhism also reveal that Chan Pure Land debate, though arriving at some level of dialectical balance, never completely came to a halt. In fact, by turning our attention to Yin Guang, we can see how he revived the debate over whether Chan or Pure Land was the correct path.

The life of Patriarch Yin Guang (1861-1940) extends across a turbulent era in Chinese history and coincides with the Chinese Revolution of 1911 and the Sino Japanese War. The ousting of the Manchurian elite and the founding of the Chinese Republic brought in its wake numerous dilemmas for the Buddhist establishment. First and foremost, was the intellectual climate denouncing feudalistic and religious values. Chen (1964, 455) notes that secular leaders who had some level of influence “wanted to liberate the people from the shackles of all religions and the conservative old Chinese culture.” Their denouncement, Chen continues, would have been “reinforced by another development in the 1920's—the introduction and subsequent widespread popularity of Marxist ideas” (ibid, 455). This condemnation hit Buddhism with full velocity.<sup>6</sup>

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twenty-five of the *Shi zhu pibosha lun* (T 1521, 68-88).

5 T 1972.

6 Chen (1964, 455) highlights that the attack on Buddhism from these sources resulted in various discriminatory measures, including: unique taxes, contributions being levied on temples, monasteries being transformed into military barracks and police stations, tenants occupying monastic land being forced not to pay rent, the destruction of Buddhist images and the movement to promote schools with temple resources.



Within this milieu, two monks emerged to lead Buddhists and reassure them of their beliefs: Master Tai Xu 太虛 (1890-1947), who was active in the revitalization of the Mind-Only school and Master Yin Guang, who later became the thirteenth patriarch of Pure Land.

Being a revolutionary monk, Tai Xu did, as Long (2000) suggests, elevate the term “Humanistic Buddhism” and introduce it in his reform. But as current trends in Buddhist practice indicate, Pure Land, by far, has become the most widely taught tradition of all the schools in Chinese Buddhism. The Mind-Only school, on the other hand, with the advancement of “humanistic Buddhism” introduced by Tai Xu (which advocated Buddhists to serve society so that the Dharma would not diminish), failed to address civil conflict, the Japanese invasion and attacks and criticisms against Buddhism.

Yin Guang, on the other hand, was mainly credited for infusing new life and meaning to the practice of nianfo and the study of Pure Land literature. Though aspiring to solitude and undergoing two uninterrupted periods of individual retreat (*biguan* 閉關), he still responded to letters and questions about Buddhist practice. These endeavors brought about a far-reaching revival of the Pure Land School. His literary skills and exchanges not only led to the resurgence of numerous Buddhist recitation societies, but the collection and publication of his letters by his correspondents. It is here where we see the renewed attach on Chan Buddhism. Keown (2003, 340) explains:

He himself oversaw the republication of classics of Pure Land literature such as Chih hsu’s *Ten Essentials of the Pure Land* and *The Recorded Sayings of Ch’an Master Ch’o wu*, along with his essays of his own denigrating Chan and endorsing Pure Land practice, including in his *Treatise Resolving Doubts about the Pure Land*.

These publications, along with *Yin Guang fashi wenchao* 印光法師文鈔 and *Yin Guang dashi jia yan lu* 印光大師嘉言錄 caught the heart of the Chinese Buddhist world, and today very seldom can a monastery be found where several editions of these letters are not on the shelves. It is in these works that Yin Guang launches a vigorous attack on Chan practice. In his letter to layman Hsi-chou Chen, and perhaps influenced by Tan Luan’s teachings, Yin Guang is convinced that the Dharma had entered its final stage (*mofa* 末法), and as a consequence, only the path of the Pure Land remained an option:

The Chan tradition points directly to the self-mind...However, in the midst of this Dharma-ending age; there are very few good spiritual advisors, while the capacities of sentient beings are limited. It is difficult enough to find someone who is awakened to the Way, not to mention one who has truly attained enlightenment! Thus, knowing that sentient beings would find it extremely difficult to achieve liberation by relying on self-power alone, Sakyamuni Buddha taught, in addition to other methods, the special approach of Pure Land (see Thich Thien Tam, 1993, 56-57).

Of course such a recommendation was destined to meet with success among Buddhist practitioners, living amidst accounts of war and revolution, torture and repression. All that Yin Guang could do was resort to the saving power of the Buddha. In fact, to make his



case more enticing, he mentions that even the higher level Bodhisattvas rely on the power of the Buddhas—“not to mention ordinary beings such as ourselves, who are full of karmic obstructions” (ibid, 116). This was clearly an appeal to scripture, and would have been received well by the cultured elite.<sup>7</sup>

In the same letter, addressed to all followers, Yin Guang boldly claims that Pure Land cultivators: “should not follow Chan methods.” This he argues is because Chan fails to accentuate the important issue of rebirth in the Pure Land through the two requirements of ‘faith’ and ‘vows.’ He goes on to defend the practice of nianfo and that even when Chan practitioners engage in such practice, “they merely stress the koan 公案 who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” (ibid., 115-116) Yin Guang finally admonishes practitioners to recite the Buddha’s name for the sole purpose of achieving rebirth. To prove this, he outlines that meditation alone, without the elimination of delusive karma, does not lead to liberation.

These responses, by the most renowned Pure Land master of the modern era, remind us of how strong sectarian rivalry remains between Chan and Pure Land. It also highlights that the affirmation of a dialectic framework for philosophic balance was no guarantee for mutual harmony.

## Xu Yun's Heartfelt Response

Xu Yun (1840-1959) was a monk of the Chan lineage and is credited as one of the four key figures in revitalizing Chinese Buddhism.<sup>8</sup> Though following a sectarian lineage himself, his views, as we shall see, were eclectic. Not only did he teach traditional Chan techniques, but he also encouraged his disciple to recite the Buddha’s name. We have some knowledge about his life, through works such as Charles Luk (1898-1978) and others who knew him; but as biographers of eminent monks write hagiographic accounts in the retelling of events, we can only speculate about their authenticity. Keown (2003, 111-112) describes that he was “known for his rigorous practice, his warm preaching, his encounters with the Bodhisattva Manjusri (Wenshu pusa 文殊菩薩) while on pilgrimage, his austere and simple lifestyle, his uncompromising adherence to Buddhist morality, and his remarkable longevity.”

But as our translation shows, Xu Yun was also instrumental in providing the various theoretical methods to allow those who listened to integrate Chan and Pure Land practice. Representative of the effort to embrace the different approaches was his position on expedient means (*fangbian* 方便):

You should understand that a *huatou* 話頭 and even one utterance of the Buddha’s name are all but expedient measures; not the ultimate. In fact, those who have

7 Both the *Lankavatara Sūtra* and *Avatamsaka Sūtra* emphasize this point.

8 The others being Tai Xu (1890-1947), the Vinaya master Hong Yi (1880-1942), and the Pure Land Patriarch Yin Guang (1861-1940).

utilized the teachings to the utmost do not even require them. Why? Because they have attained the ultimate, in which movement and tranquility are one.

Thus Xu Yun can be remembered as a mediator, rejoining both schools in dialectical harmony. This was made possible because he believed that both methods “are without the least bit of difference,” downplaying them as merely *upaya*. In citing the *Platform Sūtra* he explains: “The Dharma can neither be sudden nor gradual. It is our awakening that is quick and slow”.

Placing Pure Land on par with Chan is no more than a reflection of continued mediation, a process that continues today. On the basis of this dialogue, Xu Yun, along with the Ming Masters Han Shan 憨山 (1546-1623) and Ou Yi 藕益 (1599-1655), can be remembered as being active in advocating dialectical agreement.

The following section contains a full translation of *Nianfo yu can chan* 念佛與參禪 (*Reciting the Buddha's Name and Chan Practice*), designed to make this significant text available to specialists in Buddhist literature. For those who have access to the source language, it is evident that more attention has been placed in conveying the essential meaning rather than adhering accurately to the content.

The work is brief, consisting of a short introduction and a set of analogies that outline the dialectical balance that lies between the Pure Land and Chan traditions. It introduces an argument for how to comprehend the relationship between ultimate reality and skillful means. From the outset, Xu Yun places Chan and Pure Land under this rubric and equalizes them as mere methods.

The text also has a section warning about the lax in upholding the precepts—a clear sign of defending Buddhism and Chan in particular, against the perils of modernism and Communist ideologies. The talk is set under the banner of a “Dharma Meeting for World Peace.” The year was 1952, December, the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty between Japan and the Republic of China had just gone into effect and the Mainland saw an all out war against the bourgeoisie. The previous year, 1951, the Yunmen temple in Guangdong was accused of concealing weapons and treasures. Xu Yun, along with twenty six monks, were placed under arrest and persecuted. Huimin (2009, 60) explains:

Some were tortured to death or suffered having their arms broken. The Master also endured several beatings. On the third day of the third lunar month, the Master, now seriously ill, sat cross-legged and entered into *samadhi*. He closed his eyes and would not talk, eat, or drink, while his attendants Fayun and Kuanchun waited on him day and night. In this manner he stayed in *samadhi* for nine days.

It was within such an environment that Xu Yun, and the Buddhist community that he was largely a part of, sought peace. It was a period when intensive communist thought-reform sessions were imposed day in and day out. The communists killed members of the *saṃgha* pushed for the redistribution of any items of wealth, imposed indoctrination in Maoist

ideologies, and enlisted those who could work into production units and work communes (See Thurman 1995, 40).

These episodes, no doubt, shaped Xu Yun's stance for peace and the need to strictly observe the precepts. Not only did Xu Yun feel obliged to defend Buddhism in the face of communist upheaval, but he remained committed to the idea that monastics should be responsible for their actions.

As will become evident from the framework and nature of the text, the initial interest is not to convey a doctrinal analysis, but merely to reestablish and reinforce the eclectic spirit of the Buddhist tradition. The translation is from *Xu Yun lao heshang shuofa* 虛雲老和尚說法 (*Dharma Talks of Elder Xu Yun*) edited by Li Liming.

## *Nian-fo* and Chan Practice

Now our Dharma Meeting for World Peace 和平法會 has been in progress for several days—this is extremely rare. Today, Dharma Master Wei Fang 葦舫法師, Monk Miao Zhen 妙真和尚 and Upasakas Pu-Chu Zhao 趙朴初, Si-Hao Li 李思浩 and Zi-Fan Fang 方子藩, have all requested that Xu Yun come forward and speak the Dharma (*shuofa* 說法). I would like to take this opportunity to informally discuss the relationship between reciting the Buddha's name (*nianfo* 念佛) and Chan (lit. *can chan* 參禪); so that to offer those who have just developed the mind of studying the Buddha-Dharma something to refer to. Today marks the beginning of the Buddha Name Recitation Platform (*nianfo tan* 念佛壇) for the World Peace Dharma Meeting. Originally, it was to be spoken by Monk Miao Zhen. Since he modestly declined, Xu Yun has come out to talk to everyone.

Our human existence in the Saha World is as if we live in a Bitter Sea. Consequently, there is not one among us who does not desire emergence (lit. *tuoli* 脫離). But to emerge from the bitter sea of birth and death, we require the Buddha-Dharma. Strictly speaking, the true essence of the Buddha-Dharma cannot be spoken of. It is beyond words and forms. Thus, the *Surangama Sūtra* 楞嚴經 says: “the language employed has no true meaning (on its own).” Nevertheless, to receive and guide (lit. *jieyin* 接引) different sentient beings of various predispositions, innumerable Dharma-doors have been formulated. In China, Buddha-Dharma is divided into five sects: Chan, Jiao 教 (a school of Buddhism based on written scriptures), Vinaya, Pure Land and Secret 密(宗). To experienced practitioners and the erudite, these divisions are unimportant. This is because they have already understood the nature of the Dharma, which is beyond discrimination. But beginners respond with a great many opinions. More often than not, they divide the Dharma into the various sects and teachings. What is more, they praise one and slander the other, causing damage and degrading the Dharma.

You should understand that a *huatou* 話頭 (or critical phrase) and even one utterance of the Buddha's name are all but expedient measures; not the ultimate. In fact, those who have utilized the teachings to the utmost do not even require them. Why? Because they have attained the

ultimate, in which movement and tranquility are one. This can be likened to the moon leaving its imprint in a thousand rivers—no matter where—all is clear and without obstruction. On the other hand, obscurations resemble floating clouds in the sky or mud in water. If there are obstructions, the moon cannot manifest despite its brightness and its reflection cannot be seen despite of the clear water.

If we practitioners can realize this principle and can understand that the self mind (lit. *zixin* 自心) is like the autumn moon and does not stray externally for longings, yet reflects back in illumination, without giving birth to a single thought or any notion of attainment, then how could there be any ground for various names and terminology? It is only due to wrong thoughts, attachment and our heavily ingrained bad habits—which have been with us for innumerable kalpas 劫—that the World Honored held over three hundred assemblies to teach the Dharma over forty-nine years. But the main purpose of these Dharma-doors is no more than to cure sentient beings of different kinds of bad habits and illnesses caused by greed, anger, stupidity and arrogance. If you can keep away from these, you're a Buddha, and there will be no differences among sentient beings. Hence, in line with this principle, an ancient once said: "There are numerous doors of expedience, but to return to the source, there can only be one path."

With the Buddha-Dharma of today, both Chan and Pure land methods are currently in vogue. But the Saṃgha in general have lost sight of discipline. This is irrational because the basic essentials of the Dharma are discipline, concentration and wisdom. These are like the three feet of a tripod: with one lacking the tripod cannot stand. This is something that we, as students of the Dharma, should particularly pay attention.

The Chan School traces its lineage to the assembly on Vulture Peak, where the World Honored One held up a flower in an act that only Mahakasyapa could acknowledge. This was described as the sealing of mind to mind, a 'transmission outside the teaching,' that became the lifeblood of the Buddha-Dharma. The Buddha name recitation method, in conjunction with sūtra reading and the upholding of mantras, is also a doorway to escaping the cycle of birth and death.

Some argue that Chan is a sudden approach, whereas Buddha name remembrance and the upholding of mantras are gradual ones. This, although true, is merely a difference in names and terminology. In reality, they are without the least bit of difference. Therefore the Sixth Patriarch explained: 'The Dharma can neither be sudden nor gradual. It is our awakening that is slow or quick.'

I believe that each and every vehicle of practice can be cultivated. Whichever one suits you, then practice it; but you cannot place one in acclaim and vilify another. This can only lead to illusory thoughts and attachment. The most important thing is to abide in discipline. At present there are monks who do not strictly adhere to the precepts, and further claim that upholding them is a form of attachment. Such high-sounding words are extremely dangerous.

Following Mahakasyapa, the 'Mind-ground' Dharma Door 心地法門 of Chan was successively handed down by his successors. From India it was transmitted to China, where it eventually reached the Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng. This period is called the 'bequeathing of the authentic Dharma' and was in full flourish for a period of time. The Vinaya School was led by Upali, who accepted the World Honored One's admonition that sentient beings take the precepts as our teacher in the Dharma ending age. After Upagupta, it was developed into five sects. In China, Dao Xuan 道宣 of Mount Nan 南山 relied on the Dharmagupta version of the Vinaya. He formulated a commentary on the text that was later put into practice; thereby receiving the title 'Renaissance Patriarch of the Vinaya.' (It should also be mentioned that) the Tiantai 天台 School's Elder of the Bei-qi 北齊 period also realized the 'mind-ground 心地.' This was achieved after studying Nagarjuna's *Madhyamaka-kārikā*. Conversely, Elder Du Shun 杜顺老人 placed his allegiance in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*; in effect, establishing the Xian shou 賢首宗 School (of the Hua yan 華嚴 branch of teachings). Hui-Yuan (lit. *yuangong* 遠公) advocated the Pure Land teaching which was transmitted through its Nine Patriarchs.

After Yong Ming 永明 the patriarchal masters spread the Pure Land doctrine in relation to Chan practice, and the two blended together like milk and water (*shui ru xiang rong* 水乳相融). Despite the various divisions into different sects, they did not depart from the life-blood embedded in the teaching by the Buddha when he raised a flower in reflection. This shows that Chan and Pure Land are intimately related and, more importantly, that the ancients were earnestly and kindly advising us when they expounded the Buddha-Dharma. The Esoteric School was transmitted to China by Elder Bu Kong 不空尊者 and Vajrabodhi. Due to the efforts of Chan Master Yi Xing 一行, it was able to spread far and wide.

But all of this is Buddha-Dharma and should be mutually spread and used to enlighten others. Never should it be separated into sectarian schools and factions, mutually designed to destroy one another; for to be hostile, one would not comprehend the Buddha's original intention. When the ancients taught the Dharma they were like giving children golden leaves, all in an effort to prevent them from crying. The Elder from Zhao Zhou 趙州老人 said: "I do not enjoy hearing the word Buddha" and "if the Buddha's name is uttered but once, rinse the mouth for three days." Because of (profound teachings like) this, there are people who do not comprehend the bitter efforts of those before them; claiming that Buddha name recitation is an act of old (ignorant) women, or that Chan practice is an erroneous (lit. external) path bent on emptiness.

In brief, they say that they are correct while others are wrong. This form of dispute is never-ending. Not only does it run counter to the original intention of the Buddha and the Patriarchs in expediently setting up the Dharma, but it also provides outsiders with the opportunity to attack others. The consequences are deep and profound, hindering the future development of Buddhism. For this reason, I particularly make an appeal to experienced practitioners and friends who have just given birth to the bodhi-mind 初發心的道友; in hope that each one of

you can put an end to such behavior. If permitted to continue, it shall become Buddhism's road to ruin. We should realize the principle that 'all roads lead to Chang-an 條條大路通長安.'

Students of Buddhism should spend more time reading Elder Yong Ming's 永明老人 *Zong jing lu* 宗鏡錄 and *Wan shan tong gui ji* 萬善同歸集. Those who recite the Buddha's name should also have an understanding of *Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta's Means of Perfection via Recollection of the Buddha's Name*, and thus realize self-nature as Pure Land by abandoning delusion and returning to reality, without beseeching anything externally. If we understand this principle we can, at the same time, speak of either Chan or Pure Land, of going to the East or the West, and even 'existence' and 'non-existence.' At this moment, even a form or a sound are but the profound middle way, self-nature is Amitabha, and only mind the Pure Land, all of which are attainable in an instant, devoid of any entanglements or difficulties.

The *Śūrangama Sūtra* explains: "Just exhaust the ordinary mind, beyond that, nothing can be understood as holy." If we are able to practice so, thereby severing wrong thoughts, attachment and habitual tendencies, we become Bodhisattvas, Patriarchs and Buddhas. If not, we remain ordinary sentient beings.

Moreover, those who recite the Buddha's name should not cling to it in an obsessive manner; otherwise, this too, can become a toxicant. We now recite Amitabha Buddha's name because our habitual tendencies, from time without beginning, are profoundly entrenched, and because wrong thoughts are hard to sever. In so doing we use the Buddha's name as a means of support, bearing it in mind, thought after thought. With the lapse of time, wrong thoughts dissipate and the Pure Land will manifest naturally. Then, what need will there be for anything else?<sup>9</sup>

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9 Transcribed by Yue Yao 月耀 and Fo Yuan 佛源 on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December, 1952.



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