ON AUTHORSHIP OF *THE PLATFORM SUTRA*

Chaucer T.H. Hu*

ABSTRACT

The Platform Sutra has long been regarded as a major canonical piece of work of Buddhism in China, and its wide circulation has testified that it is worth a pivotal piece of Buddhist work. There have long been variants on versions in circulation among Buddhist followers and the intelligentsia. In 1925, however, a Japanese scholar found a unique version of the Platform Sutra in Sir Aurel Stein’s Tun-huang Discoveries. This Tun-huang version (T-version), considerably different from the popular versions in text, along with a more conventional Hui-hsin version (H-version) was incorporated into the Taisho Edition of the Buddhist Tripitaka as a standard Buddhist canon.

The prominent Chinese scholar Dr. Hu Shih conducted a series of research on the issue and published three articles on it. Dr. Hu propounded the authenticity of the H-version because T-version text was less tampered and better than that of the H-version. Moreover, the H-version did not include the passages which recorded the interactions between the 6th Patriarch Hui-neng and his disciple Shen-hui. The similarity in styles and wording of the T-version of the Platform Sutra and Shen-hui-yu-lu (神會語錄 Thus Spake Shen-hui) induced Dr. Hu to assume that the original author of the Sutra was none other than Shen-hui.

As the authorship of the Platform Sutra undoubtedly had a significant well-established belief of the rightfulness of the patriarch lineage of the Zen school of Buddhism in China, Dr. Hu’s findings caused not a small shock on the international literati. Many distinguished Japanese Buddhist scholars, such as D.T. Suzuki, Takakusu Junjiro, and Iliya Yoshitaka held sincere discussions with Dr. Hu about whether the author of the Sutra was Shen-hui. A Japanese scholar Yanagida Seizn collected all the argumentative articles of the discussions in a book entitled 胡適禪學案 (Hu Shih’s Thesis Papers and Letters on Zen) and published it in Taiwan and Japan, respectively.

In 1969, the issues of the Platform Sutra also caused many a frenzied discussion among Taiwanese scholars. The present article is an observation of this event.

Keywords: Hui-neng、The Platform Sutra、Hu Shih、Shen-hui

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is one of the important religions in China. Since its introduction to China, Buddhism had a profound influence on the culture in Chinese feudal society and its doctrine merged into the concept and behavior of people all over the country. Buddhism was sincized into Zen with huge amounts of oral or written literature of Buddhist discourses and sermons that inspired the thought of life of the general public. Many teachings of its Great Masters were collected

*Department of Applied English, St. John’s University.
into documents and preserved as significant Buddhist heritage for the disciples and followers.

Documents containing enlightenment of its Great Masters served as an insignia of apostolic succession, as a result, there have been heated arguments and debates over authentic authorships of some important, influential documents. Among them is the Platform Sutra whose authorship has been argued and debated for centuries. There are a variety of versions on the Platform Sutra, each claiming to be the authentic version. The current study is to verify whether the Tun-huang version was the authentic version of the Platform Sutra.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Much of the doctrine of Buddhism is related to the immortality of the soul and incarnation. Buddhism developed into Zen as the largest sect in Buddhism, which lays emphasis on practice and experiential wisdom through meditation and dharma practice.

The transmission of the doctrine of Buddhism was beyond the scriptures. A true insight into the soul and behavior of Great Masters is a crucial approach to spiritual enlightenment and experiential wisdom. Many a teaching is metaphoric, instead of explicit knowledge about all that Great Masters tried to convey. According to the common belief of Chinese Buddhist, Buddha Sakyamuni, in one of his sermons on the Vulture’s Peak (靈鷲山 Grdhrakuta) picked up a lily from a vase on the rostrum, put it to his nose, took a deep breath, and smiled. An air of profound peacefulness and serenity seemed to emerge from his person. None of the audience waiting for his speech appeared to have noticed this slight and seemingly irrelevant movement except Maha Kasyapa (摩訶迦葉), one of the Buddha’s disciples, who perceived in it teachings of enlightenment. Thus, according to the legends, Siddhartha Gautama’s esoteric teaching was transmitted to the disciple independent of any written texts. In this way the meditative Dhyana school of Buddhism was handed down in the line of Maha Ksyapa’s followers 1.

III. INSIGNIA OF APOSTOKIC SUCCESSION

The 28th Patriarch, Bodhidharma by name, arrived in China around 520 A.D. Having failed to convert Emperor Lian-wu-ti (梁武帝) to his faith, Bodhidharma went to North China where he founded the Ch’an (Zen) school in China and became its first patriarch. Before his death he appointed his disciple Hui-k’o (慧可) as his successor and gave him a robe and a bowl as an insignia of apostolic succession. The teaching was carried on until two disciples of the 5th patriarch Hung-jen (弘忍) split in the school. One of the disciples, Shen-hsiu (神秀), became the founder of the North School, whereas the other, Hui-neng (惠能 or more commonly 慧能) founded the Southern School 2.

The incident that caused this split was a very well-known story 3: One day The 5th Patriarch, realizing his time was nearly over, summoned all his disciples together and told them that a successor would be appointed to be determined by the authorship of the best poem summarizing the true teachings of Zen. Shen-hsiu’s poem read:

The body is like unto the bodhi-tree,
And the mind to a mirror bright;

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1 Department of Applied English, St. John’s University
2 《指月錄》卷一,《大正大藏經》, 第50冊
3 《景德傳燈錄》 (Record of the Transmission of the Light).
4 見《五燈會元》, or 黃愘華,《佛教各宗大意》BKII, 禪宗大意 Chapter3, p. 27.
Carefully we cleanse them hour by hour
Lest dust should fall upon them.

To refute Shen-hsiu’s point of view, Hui-neng submitted his poem, which read:

Originally there was no bodhi-tree,
Nor was there any mirror;
Since originally there was nothing,
Whereon can the dust fall?

It is said the 5th Patriarch, upon hearing Hui-neng’s poem, favored his insightful Zen thought and handed him the apostolic insignia, officially proclaiming him the 6th Patriarch.

However, Hui-neng, being a new convert who could neither read nor write, was unable to win the hearts and respects of his fellow disciples. Alone, he left for the South determined to preach and establish his zen school there. However, since he could not read, Hui-neng was unable to base his teachings on the canonical Lankavatara Sutra as his predecessors had done. As a substitute, he sanctioned the Diamond Sutra which he had heard and had learned by heart while still a boy. The Diamond Sutra was a favorite book of the T’ien-tai School of Buddhism that emphasized sunyata (void) and immateriality as the door to nirvana. All that the Zen master Hui-neng taught was labeled as the Southern School of Sudden Enlightenment. In the north, Shen-hsiu continued his role as the actual leader of the Orthodox School of Gradual Attainment until his death in 706 A.D.

Hui-neng’s religious discourses and sermons were collected and entitled T’an-ching by his follower Fa-hai. The book was soon to become one of the most popular Buddhist canons in the Far East. Hui-neng died at the age of 75. Strangely enough, he didn’t pass the Apostolic Insignia he had inherited from his mentor to one of his most accomplished senior disciples Huai-jang or Hsing-su, but to his favorite junior disciple Shen-hui instead. Years later, Shen-hui went north to claim his patriarchship over both the north and the south schools. After years of vigorous and forceful arguments and debates with the “northerners”, Sheng-hui succeeded in reunifying the two major sects. He was acknowledged as the 7th Patriarch, an appellation later endorsed by imperial decree in 796 A.D.

IV. AUTHENTIC AUTHORSHIPS OF THE PLATFORM SUTRA

By the turn of the 20th century, the above account had long been established as a historical fact and the authorship and contents of the Platform Sutra had never been challenged.

However, with the arrival of the 20th century, a brand new page turned up. In 1925, a Japanese scholar Yabuki Keiki found among Sir Aurel Stein’s Tun-huang Discoveries, which were kept in the British Museum, a rare copy of the Platform Sutra.

The Tung-huang version differed considerably from the traditional Hui-hsin version in both bulk and

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Footnotes:
2. "六祖壇經" 行由第 -.
3. 胡適：〈壇經考二〉，《胡適禪學案》, pp. 76-92.
contents, the former being only three fourths the length of the latter.8

The textual discrepancy created by the two different versions, forced Japanese scholars to include the two versions in the Taisho Edition of the Buddhist Tripitaka in Chinese (大正新修藏經).

When the great scholar Dr. Hu Shih joined the discussion about the authenticity of the version of the Platform Sutra and published his three articles on the topic in 1930, 1934, and 2935 respectively, he propounded the theories of the discoveries so drastically unconventionally that the whole picture of the Platform Sutra had to be reconstructed.

According to Hu Shih: (1) The Tung-huang version (abbreviated T-version) predates the Huihsin version (H-version) and therefore is more faithful to the original composition; (2) The Sutra was the product of Shen-hui or that of his followers. (3) The Sutra was in circulation during Shen-hui’s lifetime; (4) The H-version is a corrupt one with many interpolations, possibly by followers of Huai-jang, and/or Hsing-su.9

Hu Shih’s verifications are as follows:11

(1) In the T-version there is a prophetic passage by Hui-neng that reads, “Twenty odd years after I leave this world, there will appear on this land a certain person who will stand out risking his own life to refute all existing heresies and set up the standard teachings of our school.12

This prophecy was realized 21 years after Hui-neng’s death in 734 A.D. by none other than Shen-hui who defeated all his northern opponents in debates held at Hua-t’ai (滑台), to win an overwhelming victory for the southern school.

This is evidence that this prophetic passage has been deleted from the H-version and proves the Sutra to be a product of Shen-hui the propagandist, and consequently, the T-version claims the superiority and credibility of the Sutra over the H-version.

(2) The last statement is supported further by the accounts of all the deeds of Shen-hui and none of Huai-jang or Hsing-su, Hui-neng’s senior disciples.

(3) On a tablet installed in memory of Zen Master Ta-yi of Hsing-fu Temple (興福寺大義禪師碑), the author Wei Ch’u-ho (韋處厚), who was Shen-hui’s contemporary, clearly stated that the Sutra was the work of some “practitioners of Zen” under Shen-hui. (Here Dr. Hu Shih went one step further in maintaining that a large portion of it was actually written by Shen-hui himself.)

(4) That there are many identical passages found in the T-version and Thus Spake Shen-hui (神會語錄) is an additional piece of evidence confirming the authorship of the Sutra.

However, Shen-hui did not sign his own name as the author when he produced such an important work as the Sutra. Hu Shih maintained that Shen-hui was smart enough not to leave any trace of a personal connection with a work that glorified himself and that the Sutra was written under the pseudonym of Fa-hai, who was one of his fellow disciples and

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8 The Tun-huang version is short of over 3,000 words. cf 胡適:〈壇經考二〉, P. 69.
10 胡適:〈壇經考二〉, 胡適文存 IV, 卷二, 文存, 胡適文存 pp. 76-92.
11 Propounded by Hu Shih and summarized by 藍吉富 in 學術不是宗教 (Academic Studies are Different from Religious Belief).
12 胡適:〈論佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教在中國佛教 in June 6, 1969. (Lan Chih-fu: Academic Studies are Different from Religious Belief).
had passed away long before.

The reasons for the Sutra to be written under pseudonym are at least two: (1) The Sutra was an “official” document, testified to the hereditary lineage of Shen-hui, tracing it from Hung-jen the 5th Patriarch to Hui-neng the 6th, thereby paving the way for his claim to be the 7th Patriarch. (2) The Sutra was an integral part of the revolt against the dominating influences of Hindu on Chinese metaphysical and religious thought. Dr. Hu Shih wrote13, “Ever since the introduction of Buddhism to China in the 3rd century B.C., China was overwhelmed, dazzled and dumbfounded by the vast output of the religious zeal and genius of the Indian nation. China acknowledge its defeat and was completely conquered. But after a few centuries of bewilderment and enthusiasm for beliefs and practices of Buddhism, the Chinese mentality gradually re-asserted itself and began to search for those things which could really understand and accept.” When Shen-hui came to the scene he not only doubted Bodhidharma’s capacity as the religious leader of the Dhyana school in India but also the credibility of the Lankavatara Sutra as a true revelation of Sakyamuni. By forging the Platform Sutra to take the place of the Lankavatara for future Zen students he toppled the authority of the Indian heritage and thereby severing the “umbilical cord” connecting the Indian Dhyana and Chinese Zen. What followed was the rise of a sinicized meditation system known under the name of the School of Sudden Enlightenment, which was to become the mainstream of the Buddhist faith in China.

Because of these reasons, Hu Shih regarded Shen-hui as “the greatest revolutionist in the history of Chinese Buddhism; the destroyer of Indian Dhyana heritage (in China); and the founder of Chinese Zen Buddhism,”14

Dr. Hu Shih’s studies on Zen didn’t receive due and immediate attention in China. Nevertheless, they were taken seriously in Japan. The Japanese scholar Imaseki Tenyo (今関天彭) translated six of Hu Shih’s articles into Japanese and published them in book form as 支那禪學の変遷 (Development of Zen Buddhism in China) in 193615.

Prominent Zen scholars such as Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (鈴木大拙), Takakusu Junjiro (高楠順次郎), Iliya Yoshitaka (入矢義高), Yanagida Seizan (柳田聖山), have all had sincere discussions with Dr. Hu concerning either the Platform Sutra or Shen-hui16.

Dr. Suzuki, in particular, had very different viewpoints on both topics17.

Interests in Dr. Hu Shih’s studies from his own compatriots came in vew as late as 1969, seven years after Dr. Hu’s death. An introductory article on the intrinsic value of the Platform Sutra 六祖壇經大義 written by Professor Ch’ien Mu (錢穆) appeared in the Literary Supplement of the Central Daily News (中央日報) from March 13 through 15 and triggered fervent zest on the Sutra. Discussions, debates, critiques on textual problems on Shen-hui, and on Dr. Hu’s theories were presented in the subsequent issue of the Literary Supplement. We can sense the intensity of interests among the literati of that age from the following list of titles on the subject as they appeared on the Central Daily News over a three month period in 196919.

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14 胡適:〈荷澤大師神會傳〉,《胡適禪學案》, p. 142.
16 Ibid.
17 Cf C.T. Suzuki: Studies of Zen, series II, Chapter V.
19 《中央日報》合訂本.
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Among these scholars Yang Hung-fei and Lan Chih-fu supported Dr. Hu Shih’s viewpoints whereas Ch’ien Mu, Tung Ch’u and Tan Su denounced them as a complete shambles. Hua-yen-kuan-chu tried without success to discontinue the heated dispute over the controversy over the authentic author of the Platform Sutra. Later, the discussion about it was carried on for quite a period on some Buddhist publications such as 慧炬, 菩提樹, 海潮音.

The differences of viewpoints seemed to have arisen from two totally opposite approaches: One, from the historical that believes in rational dialectics and facts; and the other, which is based upon tradition and faith.

According to this point of view, Shen-hui, the ambitious and self-conceited monk, having been extolled by the 6th Patriarch as being “an excellent vessel for the teaching” (非凡法器) began a struggle for the dominance of the entire Zen sect. After Hui-neng’s death, he altered and tempered with the original text of the Platform Sutra, until it suited him well for his purpose of claiming the patriarchship among the followers of the North School. The Tun-huang version was the outcome of such an ambition.

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20 Some of these articles are incorporated into (六祖壇經流傳本敦煌本合刊) as appendices.
21 (壇經釋品) 卷十.
Shen-hui’s ways of tempering were: (1) an alteration of the original plain-looking title 六祖法寶壇經 to more grandiose, but showy 南宗頓教最上摩訶般若波羅密經, (The Supreme Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra of the Southern School of Sudden Enlightenment) (2) The deletion from the original text two passages about his senior fellow disciples Huai-jang and Hsin-su; (3) The deletion of the passage that contain Hui-neng’s mild reproach for Shen-hui’s inability to speculate intuitively and (4) The fabrication of the prediction that unmistakably pointed to Shen-hui as the 6th patriarch’s destined successor.

The T-version was meant to be read by the northerners and not by the southerners, such as followers of Huai-jang and Hsing-su; therefore, it was circulated only in the North. The traditional H-version, on the other hand, was popular in the South. This theory coincided exactly with the geographical discoveries of both versions and can be taken as a shred of evidence against Hu Shih’s assumptions.

If this is the case, then the whole story seems to be a Buddhist version of Fin Kampf on the part of the vigorous and high-spirited intellectual monk Shen-hui the 7th Patriarch and Imposter.

When Shen-hui first met with Hui-neng, he was only 13 years of age but already extremely witty and argumentative. He was defeated in the first round of debate by the elder monk at their first encounter and remained tentative and submissive to the old Master. But among all his fellow disciples, he was undoubtedly one of the most outstanding and brilliant. There was a passage in the traditional version of the Sutra telling how Shen-hui responded to the situation when the 6th Patriarch was near the end of his life:

All the others were in tears, weeping and wailing save Shen-hui, who remained self-composed as usual. And the 6th Patriarch sanctioned him as the only disciple of his that really understood Zen. At that time, most of Hui-neng’s accomplished disciples had already left him to preach in the “five lakes and the four seas”—all over China. So the youth became a favorite of the old Master in his later days. Shen-hui, who was the only one upheld by the Master on his deathbed, must have felt his responsibility as the chosen apostle.

Therefore, after Hui-neng’s demise, he went north alone and found every possible opportunity to find faults and debates with Shen-hui’s disciples, particularly P’u-chih, the most influential monk in the north.

To successfully preach his revolutionary concepts of “sudden enlightenment” on a large scale, he had to doctor the official version of the South so as to facilitate his claim as Hui-neng’s official successor.

V. CONCLUSION

As a sutra might serve as an insignia of apostolic succession, the indication of a successor in the text of the Platform Sutra had the undoubted authority to decide the inheritor of the patriarchship of the school of Zen Buddhism. There are many viewpoints on the author of the Platform Sutra. Some may argue that the Tun-huang version of the Platform Sutra was the result of such an attempt to indicate the claim on the inheritance of patriarchship.

It will be kept doubtful about who was the authentic author of the Platform Sutra. Anyone who feels interested in the identification of the author of this historic sutra will have to wait for further investigation into more verification.
Until further evidence is unearthed, the question of the authorship of the document will remain unanswered.

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論《六祖壇經》的作者

胡聰賢

摘要

六祖壇經為佛教重要經典之一，流傳甚廣。坊間版本雖多，但差異不大。1925年一位日本學者於敦煌史料中發現一奇特版本，與傳統版本相當不同。此一版本與傳統版本後來一併納入《大正新修藏經》之中。胡適之博士研究這兩個版本後發表了三篇論文。氏以敦煌本久埋於沙土之中，唐宋以來未經傳刻，較近原貌；而傳統本則歷經删刻竄改，已然失真。敦煌本壇經中多處記載六祖慧能與其徒神會之間的互動，而其文字與現存之《神會語錄》雷同，以是，胡適之先生推論六祖壇經之實際作者為荷澤神會。

由於壇經的作者是誰可能涉及禪宗傳承的法統，所以格外重要。胡適之的結論引起國外學術界之注意，知名學者如鈴木大拙、高楠順次郎、入矢義高等均撰文討論。日人柳田聖山更將這批論著彙集成書，命名為《胡適禪學案》在台灣與日本出版。

民國五十八年，台灣學界亦吹起壇經的熱潮，許多學者亦紛紛加入論戰。本文即是申論此事。

關鍵詞：慧能、六祖壇經、敦煌本、胡適、神會