

The Influence of “Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch” on Japanese Zen

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Abstract: This paper is based on speech of master Hui-neng and his well-known " Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch", which showed us the endless wisdom by Hui-neng's enlightenment. There are some different version of “Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch” till now in the world. Based on master Jing-hui's viewpoint, “the original Sutras of Caoxi” was the oldest version. No matter how the methods of enlightenment are different, they are helpful to see one's self-nature. Let us think about what Chinese Zen is, what the awakening mind is, and so on. In the process of Zen being introduced and inherited into Japan, this paper selects two representative figures of Japanese Zen. One is master Myoan Eisai who was the founder of Rinzai Zen, and the other is master Eihei Dogen who brought the Sōtō school of Zen from China to Japan. The paper introduces the influence and application of Zen in Japan at the original time and in modern Japan till now.

Keywords: Master Hui-neng, Platform Sutra, Rinzai and Sōtō school of Zen, awakening of self-nature, Zen tea blindly

1. Introduction

The well-known verses by Shen-hsiu and Hui-neng in “Platform Sutra”, which are usually compared and explained by people between the “Sudden Enlightenmen” and “Gradual Enlightenment”.

Monk Shen-hsiu's verse:

The body is the Bodhi tree,
The mind like a bright mirror,
Clean the mirror from time to time,
Avoid any dust to pollute my mind.

Master Hui-neng's verse:

Bodhi is not a tree originally,
The mirror also has no stand.
Buddha nature is always clean and pure,
Where is the stand for dust? [1]



Figure 1: Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch

"Platform Sutra" preached by the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng (638-713 AD), which was recorded by the disciple Fa-hai. As the important Buddhist scriptures of Chinese Zen, the Platform Sutra is the only "Sutra" by Chinese monk instead of "Doctrines" by the others. [1] There are many versions of the "Platform Sutra". Most scholars, such as Hu-shi, believed the Dunhuang version to be the oldest. Other versions have been circulated to date, such as "Huixin Edition" (967 AD), "Qisong Edition" (1056 AD), "Deyi Edition" (1290 AD) and "Zongbao Edition" (1291 AD).

Master Jing-hui (1933-2013, abbot of Hubei Sizu Temple and Yuquan Temple) believed that "the original Sutras of Caoxi" was the oldest version. The Japanese translation of the famous *Biography of Master Caoxi* in Japan was written about 780-785. It was lost in China for a long time. At the beginning of the ninth century, it was copied by a Japanese monk, Zui-cheng (AD 767-822), when he was seeking the dharma in the Tang Dynasty, and brought back to Japan in 805.

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The Indian monk Bodhidharma (5th–6th century) is credited with bringing Buddhism to China and is called the "first Patriarch," of Chinese Chan (Japanese called as Zen). Bodhidharma taught his dharma to the second master Hui-ke who cut off his arm to learn the dharma. Final the dharma passed to the sixth Patriarch Hui-neng. Hui-neng preached the dharma in the late Tang Dynasty and the Five Dynasties for about 150 years, and had many disciples from the first generation to the ninth generation. He developed Chinese Zen to a vigorous period.

Master Dharma had a verse that predicted the development of Zen: "

I originally came to China to spread the dharma, and to save the sentient beings.

Five blossoms' flowers from the stem together will create the fruits naturally." (Platform Sutra. Chapter Ten)



Figure 2: photo of Master Dharma

Since the master Hui-neng, Zen Buddhism gradually divided into five sects (one flower blossoming to five). There were two famous disciples from master Hui-neng, one named Nanyue Huilang and the other named Qingyuan Xingsi. Master Nanyue Huilang and his disciples established the Chinese Lingji Zen (by founder Lingji Yixuan) and WeiYang Zen (by founder Yangshan Huiji). Master Qingyuan Xingsi and his disciples established the Caodong Zen (by founder DongShan Liangjie), Yunmeng Zen (by founder Yunmeng Wenyan) and Fayan Zen (by founder Fayan Wenyi). Fayan Zen was the latest one from the five sects.

2. The origin and representative figures of Zen in Japan

In 1191, the Japanese monk Myoan Eisai (1141-1215) introduced the Chinese Lin-ji Zen method to Japan, called Rinzai Zen in Japan. After that, Eihei Dogen (1200-1253), a Japanese monk who traveled to the Song Dynasty in 1227, sent Cao-dong Zen back to Japan.

2.1. Myoan Eisai (1141-1215)

Master Myoan Eisai was respected as the founder of Rinzai Zen in Japan, and he made great contributions to the promotion of Zen throughout his life. Myoan Eisai spent only six months in China on his first trip, but returned to China in 1187 for 4 years as a disciple of the Chinese monk Xuan Huaichang, a master in the Ling-ji Zen in Tian-tong Temple. Eisai not only inherited the Zen from the southern Chinese Zen, but also combined the Chinese Zen with the up-dated Japanese culture. Since the changes of the Times, he finally developed into the Japanese Zen with Japanese characteristics.



Figure 3: photo of Myoan Eisai

“Promotion of Zen for the Protection of the Country” is the most important work in Myoan Eisai's life. Just like the book name, he expected to protect the country by promoting Zen. However, due to the difference between the politics and economy of Japan and between of China, Myoan Eisai's thoughts inevitably were conflicted with the social culture of Japan.

“Promotion of Zen for the Protection of the Country” has 10 sections. In Section 2: “Protecting the Country (Through Zen): In the process of this development, Buddhism became, in fact, a strong force promoting political as well as religious ideology. The impact of Buddhist political ideology in Japan was particularly strong. Early religious and political theory in Japan was heavily influenced by developments in China during the Sui (518-617) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, an era when Buddhism was the dominant ideological force.” (Eisai's Promotion of Zen for the Protection of the Country, by Albert Welter). [2] The reason why Eisai advocated that "Zen" could "protect the country" was to obtain the support of the Kamakura shogunate at that time. If Zen wants to grow and develop in Japan, it must seek the protection of the ruling class, and "protecting the country" is the best reason. Japanese Buddhism has always taken "protecting the country" as its distinctive idea, and the concept of Buddhist protecting of the country can be traced back to the reign of Prince Sengtak (574-622). Eisai also inherited this traditional concept, and his propaganda and practice of "revitalize Zen and protect the country" made Rinzai Zen quickly accepted by the Kamakura shogunate, Minamoto's wife Masako Hojo converted to Rinzai Zen with Eisai, and granted land to build a temple as the teaching ground of Rinzai Zen. Under the continuous promotion of Eisai, Rinzai Zen became increasingly prosperous in Japan.

Section 2: “According to the Benevolent Kings Sutra, ‘The Buddha has entrusted the Buddhist teaching on wisdom to all present and future rulers of petty kingdoms; it is considered a secret treasure for protecting their countries.’ The Buddhist teaching on wisdom referred to here is the teaching of the Zen school. In other words, if people within a country uphold the Buddhist rules governing moral behavior, the various heavenly beings will protect that country.” (Eisai's Promotion of Zen for the Protection of the Country, translated by Albert Welter). [3] Myoan Eisai quoted the Buddhist Sutra to discuss the "protection of the state". If any suffering in the land, Zen and Prajna were wisdom and beneficial to the country. Reading of Buddhist Sutras would bring peace and happiness the people and eliminate the country's disease was eliminated. The land would be harmony and prosperous by developing Zen.

In this book, Myoan Eisai also recorded the experience how he inherited the Zen from master Huai-chang and aspired to reviving Zen and Protecting the State. “The phrase, ‘Without writing, facing your mind directly’, appears seven times in “Promotion of Zen for the Protection of the

Country”, and works through the whole upper, middle and lower volumes. Myoan Eisai profoundly inherited the Zen of Master Hui-neng.” [5] Myoan Eisai insisted that Zen did not appear in name or in appearance, which “originally do not move, and there is nothing to get”. And Zen need the practice in the daily walking, standing, sitting and sleeping. Zen is a kind of state of ‘forgetting both dynamic and steady”, and the state of no mind and no thoughts. This is exactly the inheritance of the ‘Platform Sutra’ of Master Hui-neng in Zen is everywhere, no matter walking, standing, sitting or lying. Always being mindfulness.

Myoan Eisai once picked up a Bodhi branch on the Tian-tai Mountain in 1190 AD and brought back to Japan. Japan didn’t have this tree before, and the Bodhi tree he brought back survived, and grew very well with luxuriant foliage. Eisai studied and spread the cultivation and brewing methods of tea in Japan. There are many rites and rituals about tea in the Zen rules, and he wrote the first professional book on tea in Japan, *Kissa Yōjōki* (in English, "Drinking Tea for Health"). This led to the reintroduction of tea culture in Japan, because this time the lower classes began to drink it. Until then, tea was reserved for nobles and monks only. Eisai died in 1215 and buried in Kennin-ji temple. He is now known as the father of Japanese tea culture.



Figure 4: Kennin-ji Temple

Kennin-ji Temple, founded in the Kamakura period in 1202, is the oldest Zen temple in Kyoto. As the headquarter temples of Rinzai Zen, people today can see the stone monument erected in honor of Myoan Eisai bringing tea back to Japan. Behind the stone monument, you can also see a small tea garden, which was specially planted when the temple was founded 800 years ago. Every year around May 10, people will pick and grind new tea here, and the finished tea will be used as matcha for the annual celebration.

2.2. Eihei Dogen (1200-1253)

Master Dogen, the founder of the Cao-dong Zen (Sōtō school of Zen in Japan), also known as **Dōgen Kigen** (道元希玄), **Kōso Jōyō Daishi** (高祖承陽大師), or **Busshō Dentō Kokushi** (仏性伝東国師).



Figure 5: Movie of Zen

"Zen" is a Japanese film about the legendary monk Dogen in the 13th century. He became a monk at the age of 12 and read many Buddhist scriptures, but he still had many questions about the Dharma during his practice. In order to seek the true meaning of the Dharma, he came to the Song Dynasty to seek the Dharma.

On the trip, Dogen accidentally met the Zen master Ru-jing of Tian-tong Mountain, and stayed over there for some years. Under Master Ru-jing, Dōgen realized the liberation of body and mind upon hearing the master say, "cast off body and mind" (身心脱落). This view gave Dogen the great importance throughout his life. For example—in a famous section of his Genjōkōan (現成公案): "To study the Way is to study the Self. To study the Self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things of the universe. To be enlightened by all things of the universe is to cast off the body and mind of the self as well as those of others. Even the traces of enlightenment are wiped out, and life with traceless enlightenment goes on forever and ever." [6] Dogen got the approval from Ru-jing successfully and returned back Japan.

When Dogen returned Japan, Japan was in the Kamakura chaos period. The people were poor and suffering the looting, rape and rampant, even monks did not want to practice but the greedy pleasure. Dogen founded the Cao-dong Zen himself, and attracted sincere people to the Buddhism, but he also caused the hatred of other Japanese schools. He eventually gave up the relations completely with the Tendai School, and after several years fictions, he left Kyoto for the mountainous countryside where he founded the monastery Eihei-ji, which remains the head temple of the Sōtō school today.

The master Dogen advocated shikandaz, which is most characteristic of the Japanese Caodong school. Many of his Zen teachings came from the "Platform Sutras of the Sixth Patriarch".

(1) It's not the wind that is moving and neither is it the flag that is moving, but it's the mind of self is moving. (" Platform Sutras of Sixth Patriarch. Chapter 1".)

In the film, the master Dogen fingers the moon in the sky and reveals the General Kamakura, who is tortured by the evil spirits of the dead souls, that the wisdom of Bodhi Prajna is existing natural which is confused by ignorance and cannot realize itself. The wisdom of the Dharma is like an endless sea, but if the mind is covered by the floating clouds of wishful thinking, it is like being in a sea indeed without seeing the water. When you look up to see the moon, you can see moon, but what you see in your eyes is something that is impermanent and not real. In order to explain this truth, Dogen let the general cut the moon in the water by sword, although the general's sword touched the moon shadow, but no matter how hard he tried, the moon in the water was broken and still recovered. The master is teaching Zen to the general that only the wisdom is permanent, and the moon is

impermanent. The Buddha nature is beyond of the cycle of life and death.

All Dharma self-nature is called pure Dharma body. By it, everything can be seen. Once you realize both body and mind can fall off, the wisdom can appear. When the angry general was ready to swing the sword to cut off the Zen master, Dogen was calm and free to sit down and not fear the death, truly giving up his body and mind.

(2) Buddhas is not related to words. ("Platform Sutas of Sixth Patriarch. Chapter 7".)

This is the key to practice that Dogen has been advocating. When he was advocating Buddhism in the temple, the other ruling Japanese sect challenged him. They asked the master Dogen what important scriptures or Buddha images he had brought back from the Song Dynasty. The master calmly replied what he brought back the mind of "straight eyes and straight nose".

The people of the Beisu School (比墟派) admire the actual dharma objects such as writing and Buddha statues, while Dogan advocates the mind nature of understanding and wisdom. This is same with the teachings of the sixth patriarch Hui-neng. Because master Hui-neng is an illiterate, he believes that Buddhism does not have to connect to the specific words in the Buddhist scriptures, not have to connect to fixed text interpretation, the key lies in personal experience and mental enlightenment, and clear mind to see nature.

The wisdom and nature are equal to all. Since the spirits of Zen practiced and developed by Dogan in Japan, Cao-dong school attracted the vast number of followers. The most important reason why they followed the Zen master, is the master Dogan's noble personality and wisdom which making people reduce the fear from suffering.

(3) All methods are inseparable from nature. Ask the teacher while losing yourself, enlighten self while awaken. (" Platform Sutas of Sixth Patriarch. Chapter 1".)

Master Hui-neng believes that Zen does not exist in the form outside your mind. Wisdom of Zen exists inside of everyone. While your mind is pure and clear, just like a mirror to see everything but not become the thing what you see. That is the true practice of ZEN. In meditation, one sees oneself as pure in nature, self-cultivation, self-enlightenment, and one sees self-nature of Buddhi.

Just like the lotus are out of the mud without staining, and this is also master Dogan repeatedly taught his disciples to learn the key. The monks still live in the real world, but through persistent zazen practice, the body and mind cannot be contaminated with the secular dust, maintain a clean and independent nature. "Walking, standing, sitting and lying down is nothing but Zen." In the movie, master Dogan and his disciples worked together, growing and farming rice, and supporting themselves. There is a scene in the film, the night moon is shining in the sky, reflecting on the water on the rice fields, and every pond is rippling with a beautiful and bright moon. Not only yellow flowers also green bamboo, everything is Prajna. What a vivid revelation it is.

(4) The Dharma is in the world, and awareness is relying on the world. Leaving the world to find Prajna, just like seeking rabbit horns as nowhere. (" Platform Sutas of Sixth Patriarch. Chapter 2".)

Master Hui-neng believes the world is the best place to practice. Sentient beings need to face the most painful emotions in the human heart.

This is not the explicit teaching of the Cao-dong Sect, but it is still fully reflected in the teachings of the Zen by Dogan. It can be said that human eros is also an important theme in this film. Mahayana insists that compassion is empathy. When a woman was crying to ask for help because her child lost his life, the master Dogan, who had empathy for the suffering of sentient beings, reminded her that you would find if a family in the village to see which one had not died, and you would bring back a bean to save your child from death. Certainly, the woman could not find a family without a dead human. This is actually a story of Sakyamuni recorded in the Buddhist scriptures, which is cleverly used in the film to show that the impermanence of life and death is the unchanging truth.

Master Dogan finally left the world while sitting in meditation with his disciples. When he was dying of illness, the other monk Ji-yuan, who had always been by his side and looked similar like

Dogan's young friend Gong Xiao Samurai in his mind. "Gong Xiao, is that you?" The Dogan muttered with the motion both sorrow and joy. And he said "nothing can be stayed, and nothing can be taken away." After master Dogan left, the disciples were continuous to practice the mediation but could not help crying.

In the move, there was a famous poem by Dogan: "Flowers in Spring, autumn moon in Autumn, cuckoo in Summer, snow in Winter. Joy, compassion, peace of mind are there. The pure land is original in the world." It is no doubt that master Dogan truly understood the Zen saying, "Every day is a good day."

3. The application of Zen on modern Japanese culture and life

3.1. "Sorrow" is a unique aesthetic of impermanence in Japan

Since ancient times, Japan has spread the concept of "all things have spirit, God and emperor is the unity". While advocating nature, it is also sad about the impermanence of the seasons and life. The same description in the nature of the world, could compare with the Chan poem of Chinese poet Wang Wei of "Walking until the water's edge, I sit silence and watch as clouds rise up and appear. "

After Zen's thought was introduced into Japan, this "sorrow" emotion has a method of liberation and sublimation: the aesthetic of empty and silence.

Wabi-sabi is a Japanese aesthetic and state of mind emphasizing simplicity and the incomplete beauty and awe of all things humble, imperfect, and unpretentious. For example, in Japanese literature, "I love you" is said as "Moonlight is beautiful tonight"; Kawabata Yasunari's "Four o'clock in the morning, I saw the begonia flowers not sleeping", and so on. Japanese has described this philosophy as a sort of hopeful sadness that recognizes that nothing is perfect, nothing is permanent, nothing is ever finished.

In Japan, Sakura does not just mean love and renewal, but also evanescence and the fleeting nature of existence.

*Let me die
Underneath the blossoms
In the Spring
Around the day
Of the full moon*

When the poet and Buddhist monk Saigy Hoshi wrote this poem in the 12th century, he captured a characteristic Japanese sakura emotion -the blossom is beautiful but it is easy to go away, and our lives are impermanent.

The essence of Wabi-sabi embodies the fundamentals of Zen Buddhism, emphasizing intuitive insight over deliberate intellectual conception. Same as Master Hui-neng's view "Do not set up words, direct to the human mind." He insists in focusing on the internal understanding rather than the external analysis of brain rationality. From it we can see the Zen thoughts of "words are limited but meaning is infinite" and "heart to heart".

3.2. The "Zen" in Japanese "Dry Garden"

The word "dry garden" usually means no pool, no water, no colorful flowers, and it is instead of unchanged elements, such as gravels, rocks, moss and evergreen plants, creating a simple and far-reaching artistic atmosphere. In the design, large areas are left empty where "less is more". Usually, the dry gardens are rectangular in shape but free-form existed and became more popular in modern times after the 1600s.

Not like the traditional flower path of pursuing "health", the "dry garden" presents the natural landscape with static and unchanged elements to create a simple and profound artistic atmosphere.

"Dry" and "alive" are not the same, but both are the pursuit of natural beauty and the ultimate perception of the universe. Buddhism believes that there is no difference between living and death. Nothing really born or died. Everything is impermanent.

After the introduction of Chinese Chan to Japan, it has had a profound effect on its aesthetic and behavior, and through a series of heritage and local development, Japan has a new interpretation of the aesthetic of the "sorrow".

3.3. Taste Zen in the tea

The term "Zen tea blindly" was first proposed by Yuanwu-Keqin, a famous monk in the Song Dynasty of China. In the exchanges and development of Zen between China and Japan, the idea of combining Zen and tea was introduced into Japan, and "Zen tea blindly" became the highly codified ceremony in Japanese tea.

"One session at a time"(一期一会), "Sitting alone" and "harmony, respect, purity and serenity" are three important categories in explaining the spirit of Japanese tea ceremony. "One session" allows both hosts and guests to uphold the idea that a meeting is a chance by fate, and to devote themselves to the tea party completely. The world is variable, so please cherish and live in this moment. "The idea of sitting alone" means to understand in silence and reflect self after the tea party. The famous tea master Sen no Rikyu (1522—1591) who developed Japanese tea in a spiritual concept of "harmony, respect, purity and serenity." Chinese Monks appreciate tea, because it is useful for meditation. The gestures that accompany the preparation of the tea are just as important as the drinking itself. Since the master Myoan Eisai brought the Chinese tea back Japan, and the tea ceremony reached its climax in the 16th century and would play a key role in samurai way of life. The tea ceremony also has a social side, to taste nature and insight life.

Master Jing-hui has a poem about tea:

*A cup of tea of monk Zhao-zhou,
No difference on taste between modern and ancient
Plant the bodhi seed,
Leaves grow from wisdom.*

From a leaf, you can see yourself, see heaven and earth, see per sentient being. Whoever Zen master or you or me, everyone drinks the different tea, however the mind of drinking tea has no difference.

4. Conclusion

What is Chinese Chan/Japanese Zen? Master Hui-neng practiced his whole life and taught us by his wisdom. Chan is not Gradual Enlightenment, not Sudden Enlightenment, the Chan is existing everywhere and everyone, however you are smart or fool. If you believe yourself, no path is in the dark. Self-nature just like a pearl in your heart to awakening you. To practice, and don't make suspicious, the Dharma is always with you and never leaving you.

Overall, the Dharma is the truth to enlighten people. Everyone is searching for the way to know and awake self. Since the Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree more than 2,500 years ago, all sentient beings were enlightened at same time. Buddha said that "Amazing! Truly amazing! All the living beings have the wisdom of the Tathagata. Yet they do not know or see it because the ignorance and confusion." From India to China, Japan and all of the world, from generation to generation, Chan is like the eye of wisdom to arouse us over the ignorance and darkness. Let us choose our life between the ignorance and wisdom. Till now, Buddha left us but his speech and wisdom never disappeared, which awakened us forever. There are two ways from Buddhism. One is Dharma's theory and teachings. On the other hand is the practice. How to practice the Dharma in life,

in happiness and pain, in gain and lost, etc. If you find and live with Chan, that means you live with the wisdom of the Buddha, then you are awakening, and you are free now.

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