

Dharma Talk 8/14/22

Good morning

Today we'll talk a bit about Dongshan. Well, at least the talk will begin with him. Then we'll expand on the view to see a larger picture.

Unfortunately, the information we have about Dongshan is rather limited. Most zen masters of the time share this characteristic. We have some information, such as names and dates, but only limited information otherwise. Some Buddhist scholars believe that originally this information existed but that it was destroyed during the Buddhist persecution in 845.

Master Dongshan Liangjie (807–869) was born in the Tang period in China, he came from Zhejiang Province on China's eastern coast. As a youth he once read the Heart Sutra, and when he came to the words, “no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind...” he didn't just accept it, but wanted to understand the meaning. So he asked his tutor, “I have eyes, ears, a nose, and the rest. Why does this sacred scripture say there is none?” His tutor, realizing he could not provide a true answer to his inquisitive student, said, “I can no longer be your teacher.” At the age of ten he shaved his head and was on his way to become a monk. At the age of twenty-one, he went to Shaolin Monastery on Mount Song, where he took the complete monk's precepts as a bhikṣu. He spent much of his early life wandering between teachers in China's Hongzhou Wade–Giles: Hung-chou) region. He obtained instruction from Nanquan Puyuan /Nanchuan, and later from Guishan Lingyou (□ ) [1] But the teacher of preeminent influence was Master Yunyan Tansheng, Ugan Donjō of who later named Dongshan as his dharma heir.

Eventually Liangjie decided to leave Master Yunyan's place and continue traveling. As he was preparing to leave, he asked the master, “If in the future someone asks if I have a true picture of Master Yunyan, how should I respond?” After a long pause the master said, “Just this is it.”

As he traveled Liangjie continued to have some doubt. Then one day as he was crossing a stream, he saw his reflection in the water and had a deep realization. Later he composed a verse to express it:

Don't seek after other places, or the self will recede far away.  
Now I walk alone, yet everywhere I meet it.  
It's no other than myself, yet “I” am not it.  
You must see it like this to merge with “suchness.”

The key figure in the Caodong school was founder Dongshan Liangjie (807-869, Jpn. Tozan Ryokai). Some attribute the name “Cáodòng” as a union of “Dongshan” and “Caoshan”, the latter from one of Dongshan's Dharma-heirs, Caoshan Benji (840-901, Japan: Sōzan Honjaku). However, the “Cao” much more likely came from Cáoxī (□ □), the “mountain-name” of Huineng, the Sixth Ancestor of Chan, as Caoshan was of little importance unlike his contemporary and fellow Dharma-heir, Yunju Daoying (Ungo Dōyō) The school emphasised sitting meditation, and later “silent illumination” techniques.

Dongshan traced back his lineage to Shitou Xiqian (700-790). Sayings to the effect that Shitou and Mazu were the two great masters of their day date from decades after their respective deaths.

A side note: We often chant the merging of difference and unity and Joden Bob told us all about the grass hut when he was shuso. Both those poems, it is said were written by shiitou or in Japanese Sekito Kisen. Shítóu's found retrospective prominence as a teacher of Dongshan's lineage. It appears that he owes much to the importance of Dongshan Liangjie since Shítóu does not appear to have been influential or famous during his lifetime. He was a little-known teacher who led a reclusive life and had relatively few disciples. For decades after Shitou's death, his lineage remained an obscure provincial tradition. In the 11th century the Caodong-school nearly extinguished. Dayang Jingxuan (942-1027), the last descendant of the Caodong-lineage passed on his dharma-transmission via Fushan Fayuan, a teacher from the Linji school, to Fayuan's student Touzi Yiqing (1032-1083),<sup>[4]</sup> who was born five years after Jingxuan's death.

To put all this into a larger context: The Five Houses of Chán (also called the Five Houses of Zen) were the five major schools of Chan Buddhism that originated during Tang China. Although at the time they were not considered formal schools or sects of Buddhism, they are now regarded as important schools in the history of Chán Buddhism. Most Chán lineages throughout Asia and the rest of the world originally grew from or were heavily influenced by the original five houses of Chán.

#### The Five Houses

- 2.1 Guiyang school
- 2.2 Linji school
- 2.3 Caodong school
- 2.4 Fayan school
- 2.5 Yunmen school

Over the course of Song Dynasty (960–1279), the Guiyang, Fayan, and Yunmen houses were gradually absorbed into the Linji house. Caodong was transmitted to Japan in the 13th century from Ven. Rujing of Tiantong Temple to Ven. Dōgen leading to the creation of the Sōtō Zen school.

When Buddhism was introduced to China, the Two Truths doctrine was a point of confusion. Chinese thinking took this to refer to two *ontological truths*: reality exists of two modalities.[8] The doctrines of [Buddha-nature](#) and [Sunyata](#) were understood as akin to [Dao](#) and the Taoist non-being.[9] It was centuries later that Chinese Buddhism took Sunyata to mean the underlying unchanging essence of reality, the non-duality of being and non-being.[10]

In Madhyamaka the Two Truths are two *epistemological truths*: two different ways to look at reality, a relative truth and an ultimate truth. The [Prajnaparamita-sutras](#) and [Madhyamaka](#) emphasized the non-duality of form and emptiness: form is emptiness, emptiness is form, as the [heart sutra](#) says.[11] The ultimate truth in Madhyamaka is the truth that everything is empty ([Sunyata](#)), that which is an underlying unchanging essence.[12] Sunyata itself is also "empty," 'the emptiness of emptiness', which means that *Sunyata* itself does not constitute a higher or ultimate "essence" or "reality."

In the third watch,  
beginning of the night,  
before the moon is bright,  
do not wonder  
at meeting without recognition;  
still held hidden in the heart  
is the beauty of former days[6]

A sleepy-eyed grandma  
Encounters herself in an old mirror.  
Clearly she sees a face,  
But it doesn't resemble her at all.  
Too bad, with a muddled head,  
She tries to recognize her reflection![5]

Within nothingness there is a path  
Leading away from the dusts of the world.  
Even if you observe the taboo  
On the present emperor's name,  
You will surpass that eloquent one of yore  
Who silenced every tongue.

When two blades cross points,  
There's no need to withdraw.  
The master swordsman  
Is like the lotus blooming in the fire.  
Such a man has in and of himself  
A heaven-soaring spirit.[5]

Who dares to equal him

Who falls into neither being nor non-being!  
All men want to leave  
The current of ordinary life,  
But he, after all, comes back  
To sit among the coals and ashes.[]