The Interpretation of Buddha-nature in Chan Tradition

Buddha-nature is an important topic in Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially within the Chan school 禪宗.¹ Did all Chan masters interpret it in a similar way, a different way, or accord with, or not in accord with the original meanings? In this paper I am going to argue that the Chan masters interpreted the Buddha-nature in various ways. Some of them defined and mentioned it directly or indirectly. Some of them used analogy, symbol, or example to describe it. Some of them reminded their students even to drop its word, concept, and definition. Finally, some of them did not mention it at all.

I will first define the etymology of Buddha-nature, its origin, its essential doctrine, its development, and its relations to the major Mahāyāna and Chan doctrines. Later, I am going to categorize the Chan masters who mentioned Buddha-nature directly, the Chan masters who mentioned Buddha-nature indirectly, the Chan masters who used analogy to illustrate the Buddha-nature, the Chan masters who pointed out that the Buddha-nature's word and concept served as expedient means for genuine realization, and the Chan masters who did not mention the Buddha-nature at all.

Buddha-nature is referred to "inherent enlightenment potential," or "co-arising which is the principle embodied in *Tathāgatagarbha* (緣 起即如来)."² This Buddha-nature, or its synonym *Tathāgatagarbha* 如来藏, is "eternal, neither originating nor becoming extinct," and is defined as the womb from which the *Tathāgata* arises." The term "womb" serves as a symbolic

¹ Buddha-nature (Ch. 佛性; Skt. *Buddha-dhātu*).

² Minoru Kiyota, "*Tathāgatagarbha* Thought: A Basis of Buddhist Devotionalism in East Asia," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 12/2 (1985): 215-216.

representation of a potential, which in turn is defined as Buddha-nature.³ Originally, the Anguttara Nikāya refers to a "luminous mind" present within all people, be they corrupt, stained or pure. By nature brightly shining and pure, it is enveloped in the garments of the *skandhas*. dhatus and ayatamas and soiled with the dirt of attachments, hatred, delusion, and false imagination. This unstained citta could be conceived as the "womb" of the arahat, a synonym of the *Tathāgata*, or the *Tathāgatagarbha* (as defined in Mahāyāna *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*) which it is also identified with nirvāna. Some Mahāyāna scholars disagreed with the notion of Buddhanature, arguing that it was too close to the non-Buddhist idea of atman, a permanent self in Hinduism. Nevertheless, the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* rejects the *Tathāgatagarbha*'s notion of an atman or a God within. 6 However, it holds within itself the causes for both good and evil. As a result, it produces all forms of existence. It plays a role in the realization of nirvāṇa even though the Pali source does not support the identification of the "luminous citta" with nirvanic consciousness. In the end, after the destruction of the mental fetters, this shining *nirvanic* consciousness flashes out of the womb of arahatship, being without object or support, so transcending all limitation. 8 In the Buddha-nature Treatise (Ch. 佛性論), attributed to Vasubandhu and translated into Chinese by Paramārtha, the author provided an interpretative view about the Buddha-nature; it aboriginally exists as an affirmation of each person's ability to realize Buddhahood. It has no name because of its perfection and non-dual nature of all

³ Ibid.

⁴ Peter Harvey, "Consciousness Mysticism in the Discourses of the Buddha," in *The Yogi and the Mystic*, ed. Karel Werner (New York, NY: Curzon Press, 1989), 94.

⁵ The word atman is generally translated as soul, self or spirit (Bansi Pandit, Explore Hinduism (England: Explore Books, 2005),63).

⁶ Harvey, 98.

⁷ Ibid., 97.

⁸ Ibid., 99.

⁹ Sallie B. King, "Buddha Nature and the Concept of Person," *Philosophy East and West* 39, no. 2 (April, 1989): 153. www.jstor.org/stable/1399375. (accessed, November 23, 2010). Vasubandhu (Ch. 世親, 4th c.). Paramārtha (499-569).

reality. ¹⁰ In the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, the Buddha compares the Buddha-nature to true emancipation, the *Tathāgata*, the *Nirvāṇa*, the infinite, the definiteness, or the unsurpassed Enlightenment. ¹¹ Namely, whoever could recognize the Buddha-nature, would realize the true liberation. In the *Angulimaliya Sūtra*, the Buddha said that the intrinsically and lucidly pure is the *Tathāgatagarbha* which is severed from all billions of afflictions and is revealed after achieving Buddhahood. ¹² Namely, only after one has attained Buddhahood, one could recognize this Buddha-nature. In the Śrīmālā Sūtra, the Buddha said that the *Tathāgatagarbha* is eternal and unchanging, neither life nor death, and is separate from the karmic condition. It is the womb of the *dharmas*, the womb of the Dharma body, the transcendental womb, and the inherently pure womb. ¹³

Concerning the developments of the Buddha-nature, the Sautrāntika suggested two types of seed: planting by wholesome and unwholesome deeds; and subsisting in the mental continuum of beings from time immemorial and constituting an innate potentiality for indestructible wholesome behavior. This theory paves the way for two extremely important concepts of later Mahāyāna Buddhist thought: the *Yogācārin* "store consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*)" and the notion of "the embryo of Buddha (*Tathāgatagarbha*)" or Buddha-nature, the innate capacity in all beings to gain enlightenment. ¹⁴ Technically, the Chinese interpreted heavily in their translations the terms Buddha-nature, dharma-nature, self-nature, and others, but it is practically unavoidable because of the inherent ambiguity in Sanskrit terms . Also, the Chinese translators have divided up the overlapping conceptual meanings differently from the Indians. However, actually they just

¹⁰ Diamond Sūtra.

¹¹ Kosho Yamamoto, trans. *The Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, ed. Tony Page (London, UK: Nirvana Publications, 1999-2000), 61, http://www.nirvanaSūtra.org.uk. (accessed, November 25, 2010). ¹² *Angulimaliya Sūtra*.

¹³ Śrīmālā Sūtra, 45-46.

¹⁴ Rupert Gethin, *The Foundation of Buddhism* (New York, NY: Oxford University, 1998), 222.

make explicit what as implicit (about Buddha-nature, self-nature, and others). 15 Obviously. Buddha-nature thought is deeply rooted in the Chinese conception of the dynamic and relational nature of all things. ¹⁶ Also, the concept of Buddha-nature performed the countercultural service of cutting through the opposition of Confucian self-cultivation (with its emphasis on clear and formal goals for exemplary conduct) and Daoist no-cultivation (with its emphasis on undirected spontaneity). 17 In his lengthy commentary on the Avatamsaka Sūtra 華嚴經, Fazang 法藏 (643-712) said that while the three vehicles (the Indian forms of Buddhism) admit only to the existence of Buddha-nature, in its causal form in the minds of beings, the *Huayan* school 華嚴宗 sees them as also possessing it in the form of result. Namely, while all other forms of Indian Buddhism admit only to the existence of some sort of seed-potential which functions as cause for the final realization of Buddhahood, his own traditions offer the view that Buddha-nature which exists within all beings is none other than perfect Buddhahood itself, and animate and inanimate possess this intrinsic elements too. 18 Jizang 吉蔵 (549–623) stated in Sanlun school's 三論宗 position that the Buddha-nature will appear whenever the water of the mind is pure or the mirror of the mind is clean. 19 In fact, a passage in chapter three of the Treasure Store Treatise 寶蔵論 amplified that idea; namely, it unambiguously grants Buddha-nature to the insentient: "[Buddhanature] fills everything: it completely suffuses the grass and the trees and fully pervades even the ants. It reaches to even the tiniest mote of dust and to the very tip of a strand of hair; there is

¹⁵ Andrew Rawlingson, "The Ambiguity of the Buddha-nature Concept in India and China," in *Early Ch'an in China and Tibet*, ed. Whalen Lai and Lewis R. Lancaster, (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1983), 268.

¹⁶ Peter D. Hershock, *Chan Buddhism* (Hawaii: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 58.

¹⁷ Hershock, 58

¹⁸ Francis H. Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (USA: The Pennsylvania State University, 1977), 51.

¹⁹ Robert Sharf, *Coming to terms with Chinese Buddhism: a reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (USA: Kuroda Institute, 2002), 123.

nothing that exists that does not embody the one."²⁰ In short, as the above evidences, the concept of Buddha-nature has been transformed in Chinese Buddhism even before the emergence of Chan.

In Mahāyāna, the Buddha-nature was conceived as a germ that would grow and in due time bear the fruit of Nirvāṇa. Associated with that of the "mind-ground," this metaphor came to play an important role in the Chan "verse of transmission." Indeed, it is well known that much of Chan doctrine derives from the *Tathāgatagarbha* tradition and its speculation on the Buddhanature. ²²

As one of the Indian Buddhist sects transmitted in China, Chan created great influences and strong appeal on Chinese society due to its austere simplicity and its lesser emphasis on ritual and text, which may have appealed to some Chinese due to its similarity to the teaching of Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, as well as the anti-metaphysical speculation of Confucianism.²³ Also, early Buddhists accepted the idea of Buddha-hood, but believed that it is impossible for ordinary beings to attain; they taught that even to reach the Arhat's level of realization required many lifetimes of earnest endeavor. Furthermore, although Mahāyāna Buddhists rely on the doctrines of emptiness, nondualism, and Buddha-nature (believing that every sentient being inherits that "seed" or potential for full enlightenment), it still followed the early Buddhist pattern of implying that to pursue the highest goal of the religious life, most individuals need to have great efforts in many lifetime of dedications through different paradigms for gradualism in Mahāyāna (of three Vehicles, or six perfections, or ten stages of attainments) and attain final enlightenment

²⁰ Sharf, Coming to term with Chinese Buddhism, 47.

²¹ Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 185.

²² Faure, 147

²³ John Blofeld, trans. *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po: On the transmission of mind* (New York, NY: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), 12-13.

through a sudden breakthrough after many years of preparations. On the other hand, based on the concept of Buddha-nature inborn in the individual and the accessibility of enlightenment to all beings, which can be found in the major Mahāyāna sūtras such as the *Lotus Sūtra* and the Vimalakīrti Sūtra, Chan masters advocated the methods of detachment from scriptures, tenets, rules of conduct, devotional practices, or even Chan teaching itself, preferring instead to turn their gazes within to contemplate the inherited Buddha-nature, to break through the barrier of ignorance into the undifferentiated realm of emptiness, and to have true experience of enlightenment. Specifically, Bodhidharma initiated the teaching of pointing directly to one's mind to see one's own true nature without relying on the scriptures. ²⁴ Actually, later Chan generations mostly followed the standardization of this slogan, which is a quite different approach from that of "mainstream" Mahāyāna, including Yogacara and Madhyamika, which were the foundations for all later forms of Mahāyāna around the world. The Yogacarin philosophy, or mind-only school, believed that our minds create reality as we experience it. The Madhyamika or middle way school, held that we cannot ever know whether reality really exists. People should remain in the middle and take neither side. ²⁵ Neither of these major Mahāyāna traditions speaks much about the Buddha-nature nor the direct experience of enlightenment as that of the Chan tradition.

According to the Chan masters, lacking of the confidence to attain immediate enlightenment and the attachment of external practices are their main obstructions. Therefore, the

²⁴菩提達摩(480-520) is considered as the twenty-eighth Indian Chan patriarch and the first Chinese Chan patriarch (Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History in India and China* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company,1988), 85).

²⁵ C. Alexander Simpkins, Annellen M. Simpkins, *Simple Buddhism: A Guide to Enlighten Living* (Boston, MA: Tuttle Publishing, 2000), 22.

Chan masters employed various techniques to assist their students to cross over the threshold of understanding and make the leap into enlightenment.²⁶

The Chan masters that mentioned Buddha-nature directly are as follows: Bodhidharma, Daoxin, Hongren, Huineng, Hsuan Chueh, Mazu Daoyi, Zhongyi Hongen, Changsha Jingcen, Zhaozhou Congshen, Zongmi, and Huangpo Xiyun.

According to those texts that are traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma, books, logical ideas, study, ritual, and worship were useless; only simple "seeking" or tireless "wall-gazing" was sufficient. All mental discriminations of self or not-self, comfort or discomfort, joy or suffering, desire or aversion, and success or failure must be ignored and left behind in the sole effort to merge oneself with mind-essence which alone is reality. Inasmuch as one's own inner conscience is mind-essence; so, why do we seek for it elsewhere? This "treasure of the heart" is the only Buddha that there ever was, or is, or ever will be. "There is no Buddha but your own thought. Buddha is Dao. Dao is Dhyāna. Dhyāna cannot be understood by definitions of the wise. Dhyāna is a man's successful realization of his own fundamental nature." In his Entrance by Principle 理人, he emphasizes that a cultivator should deeply believe that all living beings, common and sagely, are identical to the True Nature. If one wants to recognize the True Nature, one should uncover the dust of mental afflictions by abiding in wall-examining. In Outline of The Practice 菩提達磨大飾略辨大乘入道四行觀, Bodhidharma advised cultivators that books, logical ideas, study, ritual, worship, and attachment to duality were useless; only simple

²⁶ Burton Watson, trans. *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi* (Boston, MA: Shambala Dragon Editions, 1993), xxi-xxiv.

²⁷ For further discussion of the controversy authorship of these texts, please see the book *The Bodhidharma* anthology: the earliest records of Zen by Jeffrey Broughton.

²⁸ Dwight Goddard, A Buddhist Bible (Biblio Bazaar, 2008), 23.

²⁹ Jeffrey Broughton, trans. *The Bodhidharma Anthology: The Earliest Records of Zen* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 9.

recognizing the mind internally as Buddha was sufficient. Generally, he defines the treasure of the heart, ultimate mind, our own thought, our own self-nature, our nature, our mortal nature, True Nature, the Unstoppable Tathāgata, the Incomprehensible, the Sacred Self, the Immortal, or the Great Sage, and others as the Buddha-nature. 30

Daoxin 道信 (580–651), Sengcan's dharma heir, said in his Fundamental Expedient Teachings for Calming the Mind Which Attains Enlightenment 入道安心要方便法門: "Apart from the mind, there is no Buddha at all. Apart from the Buddha, there is no mind at all. Thinking on Buddha is identical to the thinking mind. To seek the mind means to seek for the Buddha."³¹ In another part of this writing, he said that the mind is called the True Dharma, the Tathāgata's true nature, the Buddha-nature, the Real nature, the Real Ultimate of various dharma, the Pure Land, enlightenment, Diamond Samadhi, nirvāna, and wisdom. ³² He said further that those who see their Buddha-nature are forever free from birth and death, and are called "people who have transcended the world." Namely, if one sees the Buddha-nature, then one could be free from rebirth cycle. Here, he explicitly pointed out that mind is the Buddha, the True Dharma, the *Tathāgata*'s true nature, the Buddha-nature, the Real nature, the Real Ultimate of various dharma, the Pure Land, enlightenment, Diamond Samadhi, nirvāṇa, and wisdom.

Later on, Hongren 弘忍 (601–674), Daoxin's dharma heir, wrote in the *Treatise on the* Supreme Vehicle 最上乘論 that one should discern the basic essence of attaining enlightenment is that it is inherently complete and pure, i.e. no false discrimination, and body and mind are fundamental pure, unborn, and undying. He also goes further by referring in the Sūtra of The Ten

³⁰ Red Pine, trans. "Outline of Practice" in *The Zen Teachings Of Bodhidharma* (Union Square West, NY: North Point Press, 1987), 9, 19-23.

³¹ David W. Chappell, trans. "The Fundamental Expedient Teachings for Calming the Mind Which Attains Enlightenment," in Early Cha'n in China and Tibet, ed. Whalen Lai and Lewis R. Lancaster (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1983), 108.

³² Chappell, 108. ³³ Ibid., 119.

Stages 十地經 mentioning that there is an indestructible Buddha-nature in the bodies of living beings, which is like a bright sun; due to the coverage of the cloud, this bright sun cannot shine through.³⁴ Namely, Hongren described basic essence as inherently complete and pure, unborn, undying, indestructible Buddha-nature, and a bright sun. Furthermore, Hongren once asked Great Master Daoxin: "What is one-practice Samadhi? It is realizing that the *dharmakāya* of the Buddhas and the nature of sentient beings are identical." The Great Master Daoxin understood then that Hongren had entered directly into the one-practice Samadhi and had perfectly reached the deep *Dharmadhatu*. 35 Here, Hongren pointed out that through one-practice Samadhi one could realize the identical in the Buddha's Dharmkaya and sentient beings' nature. In Hongren's Treatise on The Supreme Vehicle, he elaborated about nature as: the basic essence of cultivating enlightenment should be discerned. It is the inherently complete and pure mind;³⁶ this is how we know the inherent mind is originally pure;³⁷ this true mind is natural and does not come from outside. It is not confined to cultivation in the past, present, or future;³⁸ if you know the mind, you will reach transcendence by preserving it. If you are confused about the mind and ignore it, you will fall into miserable states;³⁹ enlightenment is realized by knowing the mind, and confusion happens because of losing touch with nature; 40 realize your own mind is the true mind, and the errant imagining ceases; then, one eventually recognizes the nature of reality, namely attaining nirvāna; 41 the Buddhas of past, present, and future are infinite, but not one of them

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³⁴ Thomas Cleary, trans. *Treatise on the Supreme Vehicle by Chan Master Hongren in the Minding Mind* (Boston, MA: Shambala Publication, 1995), 1.

³⁵ Salies King, *Buddha Nature* (New Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1991), 151.

³⁶ Thomas Cleary, Minding Mind: A Course in Basic Meditation (Boston, MA: Shambala, 1995), 1.

³⁷ Cleary, *Minding Mind*, 2.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁴¹ Ibid., 5.

attained Buddhahood without preserving the basic true mind;⁴² the pure mind's brightness is like that of the bright mirror, which will shine out after wiping off the dust;⁴³ and if you know the basic mind firsthand and continue to polish it moment to moment, then you will naturally see the Buddha-nature.⁴⁴ Here, he described clearly the nature of the mind: inherently complete and pure mind, internal true mind, the nature of reality, namely attaining nirvāṇa, preserving the basic true mind, bright mirror, and Buddha-nature.

One of the most famous sayings of Huineng in the *Platform Sūtra* 六祖大師法寶壇經 about his first encounter with Hongren is that when Hongren gave a comment about the low status of Southern people, Huineng replied that although they have differences in body, appearance, and social status, their Buddha-nature is the same. ⁴⁵ According to the Chan tradition, the reason why Hongren passed the robe and bow to Huineng is because of Huineng's famous verse of the mind: "The Bodhi is not like the tree, the mirror bright is nowhere shining; as there is nothing from the first, where can the dust itself collect?" Here, Huineng negated Shenxiu's views of Bodhi and the mind that the Bodhi is awakening mind, not like a tree; the mind's mirror bright is nowhere shining; namely it shines everywhere un-obstructively; the natural mind exists beyond the duality of dirty and clean. When a monk asked him about the viewpoint of Mahāyāna, Huineng replied that the non-dual nature is the real nature, which neither decreases in the ignorant man nor increases in the wise man, neither born nor destroyed, neither outside nor inside, neither cut off nor persist, and neither come nor go. ⁴⁷ Later on, he went further to differentiate wise and common men by saying that a person who is awakened within a thought is

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁵ Philip B. Yampolsky, *Platform Sūtra of the 6th Patriarch: The Text of the Tun-Huang Manuscript* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1967), 72.

⁴⁶ D.T.Suzuki, Essay in Zen Buddhism (London, UK: The Anchor Press Ltd., 1953), 207.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 83.

a Buddha, and he would be a common person if his Buddha-nature is unenlightened or deluded.⁴⁸ He also viewed Buddha-nature as the king in the city of body (containing eyes, ears, nose, and tongue). He also elaborated that if the self-nature contains evil activities, then we are sentient beings; if it contains good activities, then we are Buddha. 49 He reminded his students that the mind of each one is itself the Buddha.⁵⁰ Here, he mentioned again that our own mind itself is the Buddha; there is no doubt about it. He left his last verse to his followers, which is titled "Seeing the True nature and gaining liberation."⁵¹ Even the translator of this sūtra reminded the readers that all the terms such as reality, purity, the original nature, self-nature, and the Buddha-nature indicate the same undefined Absolute, or the direct enlightened experience.⁵² Generally, Huineng pointed out that the Buddha-nature pervades everyone's mind equally, but its nature goes beyond duality such as dirty and clean; our own mind is the Buddha; if we are deluded we are sentient beings; if we are awakened we will be Buddha. Although he used different terms throughout the teaching such as true reality, purity, the original nature, self-nature, and the Buddha-nature, all of them have the same meanings for the undefined absolute or the mind, which can be seen or experienced by anyone.

Following the pattern, in the Song of Enlightenment 永嘉證道歌, Yung Chia Hsuan Chueh 永嘉玄覺 (665-713) emphasized that the real nature of ignorance is Buddha-nature; the original self-nature is the innate Buddha; one can find the *mani* pearl (which is unknown to people) within the *Tathāgatagarbha*; the priceless treasures of the Dao are stored in the minds; no form, no emptiness, Buddha-nature and the precepts jewel are sealed in the mind-ground; and

⁴⁸ Suzuki, 151, 158. ⁴⁹ Ibid., 171.

⁵⁰ Yampolsky, 83.

⁵¹ Yampolsky, 180. ⁵² Ibid., 117.

no non-emptiness are the true mark of the *Tathāgata*.⁵³ Here, Yung Chia said that the mind-ground contains the precepts jewel and Buddha-nature, which even is the real nature of ignorance. Also, the original self-nature is the innate Buddha.

In one occasion, Mazu Daoyi 馬祖 道一 (709-788) told his followers that they should believe in their own mind, because that mind is Buddha-mind; apart from mind, there is no other Buddha; apart from Buddha there is no other mind; do not grasp what is good nor reject what is bad; do not lean toward either purity or pollution. Later on, when a monk asked him why he said the mind is Buddha, he replied that is just an expedient method to stop babies from crying. When the monk asked him what he was going to do if the babies stop crying, he responded that there is no mind and no Buddha.⁵⁴ He also mentioned that all human mental and physical activities are the functions of the Buddha-nature. 55 Here, Mazu indicated that people should believe in their own mind, because that mind is Buddha-mind; apart from mind, there is no other Buddha; apart from Buddha there is no other mind. Namely, the mind and the Buddha are identical (with that of Buddha-nature, implicitly). However, according to him, it was only the expedient mean to teach the beginners as to stop the babies from crying, i.e. to stop the errant thoughts. And, after one can still one's mind, one should not neither attach to the ideas of mind nor Buddha. Namely, the word "mind" or "Buddha" is just a mean of teaching, not the ultimate goal. According to him, one should put down all of the words and languages to recognize the Buddha-nature.

⁵³ Sheng Yen, *The Poetry of Enlightenment: poems by Ancients Chan Masters* (Elmhurst, NY: Dharma Drum Publication, 1987), 49-53.

⁵⁴ Andy Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage: the Masters and their Teachings* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publication, 2000), 68.

⁵⁵ Yanagida Seizan, "The 'Recorded Saying' Texts of Chinese Ch'an Buddhism," in *Early Chan in China and Tibet*, ed. Whalen Lai and Lewis R. Lanscaster, trans. John McRae (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1983), 187.

When Yangshan 仰山慧寂 (807-883) asked how one can see Buddha-nature, Zhongyi Hongen 中邑洪恩 (740-810) replied by giving an analogy of two monkeys that each stays inside and outside of a room with six windows, who response in harmony with one another. Shamely, if the mind responds harmoniously with the external condition, it is pure mind. Here, Zhonggyi explained that if one's mind is in harmony with external conditions as two monkeys playing in harmony inside and outside, then one can recognize one's own Buddha-nature. Namely, if one accords with any external conditions such as in favor or not in favor with one's wishes, or pleasant or non-pleasant with fighting or running away from them, then that is the Buddha mind (or the Buddha-nature).

Zhaozhou Congshen 趙州從諗 (778-897) entered the hall and told his followers that the genuine Buddha sits within you. All of the followings, Bodhi and nirvāṇa, true suchness and Buddha-nature, are just clothes stuck to the body and they are known as 'affliction.' Here, Zhaozhou reminded his students that a genuine Buddha is sitting within their mind. Any concept of Bodhi, nirvāṇa, true suchness, Buddha-nature, and so on is an obstruction for the pure mind. So, he reminded people not to attach to the language, description, or the "finger" that "point to the moon."

Zongmi 宗密(780-841) described the *Hongzhou* School 洪州宗 as follows: [The school taught that all actions such as] the arising of mind, the movements of thought, a snapping of fingers, a sigh or a cough, or to raise the eyebrows, all the functions of the whole substance of Buddha-nature... All coveting, hatred and delusion, all acts of good and evil with their fruit of

⁵⁶ Ferguson, 103.

⁵⁷ Ferguson, 139.

suffering and pleasure are nothing but Buddha-nature.⁵⁸ According to Zongmi's description of *Hongzhou* School, it pointed out that the Buddha-nature contains every action from the mind and body; they are the functions of the Buddha-nature. Namely, Buddha-nature can be manifested through body and mind.

Huangpo Xiyun 黃蘗希運 (?-850) said that our original Buddha-nature is void, omnipresent, silent, pure, and glorious and mysterious peaceful joy. ⁵⁹ This pure mind (the source of everything) shines forever and on with the brilliance of its own perfection. But the people of the world do not awaken to it, regarding only that which sees, hears, feels, and knows as the mind. Then, when you are deprived of your perceptions, your way to the mind will be cut off and you will find nowhere to enter. 60 Above, below, and around you, all is spontaneously existence, for there is nowhere which is outside the Buddha-nature. ⁶¹ When you prevent the rise of conceptual thought that you will realize the Buddha who has always existed in your own mind! Aeons of striving will prove to be so much wasted effort. ⁶² When someone asked him what is the Buddha, he replied that mind is the Buddha, while the cessation of conceptual thought is the way. Once one stops all the arousing concepts and thinking, i.e. long and short, other and self, etc., then one will recognize that the mind is intrinsically the Buddha; that Buddha is intrinsically mind. 63 When someone asked him that if our own mind is the Buddha, then why Bodhidharma needed to come to China to transmit it, Huangpo replied that when Bodhidharma came from India, he transmitted only the Mind-Buddha. 64 Seeking outside for a Buddha possessed of form

⁵⁸ Jan Yun-hua, "The Mind as the Buddha-Nature: The Concept of the Absolute in Ch'an Buddhism." *Philosophy East and West* 31, no. 4 (Oct., 1981): 468.

⁵⁹ John Blofeld, trans. *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po: On the transmission of mind* (New York, NY: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), 35.

⁶⁰ Blofeld, 36.

⁶¹ Ibid., 37.

⁶² Ibid., 38.

⁶³ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 78.

has nothing to do with you. ⁶⁵ Since the Mind is Buddha, it embraces all things, from the Buddhas at one extreme to the meanest of belly-craving reptiles or insects. All these alike share the Buddha-nature, and all are of the substance of the one-mind. ⁶⁶ Your true nature is something never lost to you even in moments of delusion, nor is it gained at the moment of Enlightenment. ⁶⁷ None of the numerous doctrines has any existence outside your original Mind. ⁶⁸ We return to our original nature beyond duality, which in fact is also the real nature of the universe of primordial darkness, which again is the Buddha-nature. ⁶⁹ In short, Huangpo's view of Buddha-nature as one-mind, pure mind, inclusive mind of all manifestations, true nature, Buddha-mind, non-increased and non-decreased mind, and other.

Next, the Chan masters mentioned Buddha-nature indirectly as follows: Huike (Buddha-nature as Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha); Sengcan (Buddha-nature as oneness), Niutou (Buddha-nature as natural wisdom), Huairang, Huizhong, Shenhui, Shitou, Hangzhou Tianlong, Dasui Fazhen, Damei Fachang, Guishan Lingyou, and Yangshan Huiji.

Bodhidharma later was said to have transmitted the Chan teaching and a copy of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* to his disciple, Huike 慧可(487–593). In a response to a letter from a certain lay man named Hsiang, Huike said that after sudden self-enlightenment one could recognize a *mani*-jewel (mistaken as a piece of brick prior to enlightenment) within oneself. Thus, ignorance and the enlightenment are of one essence and connected. Replying to the inquiry of Sengcan 僧璨 (d. 606), his Dharma heir, about the Buddha and Dharma, Huike said that the mind is the Buddha; the mind is the Dharma; the Buddha and Dharma are not two, and

⁶⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 87.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 93.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 110.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 129.

⁷⁰ Salies King, 157.

⁷¹ D.T Suzuki, Essays In Zen Buddhism, vol 1 (London, UK: Rider and Company, 1950), 194.

the same goes for the Sangha.⁷² Although he did not use the terminology of 佛性 or 如来藏 for Buddha-nature specifically, he referred to the recognition of the *mani*-jewel and the mind as the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. This usual phenomenon of not using the terminology of 佛性 or 如来藏 for Buddha-nature prevailed in later Chan generations.

Niutou Fajung 牛頭法融 (594-657), a disciple of Daoxin, indicated the Buddha-nature in different ways. In his Song of Mind 心銘, he said that Bodhi has always existed; no need to preserve it; vexation has never existed; then, no need to eliminate it. Natural wisdom is selfilluminating. Mind and nature are originally alike; together, yet not mutually dependent.⁷³ Here, Niutou used the words Bodhi, Natural wisdom, and self-illuminating to describe the Buddhanature implicitly.

Later on, Sengcan followed suit by composing an enlightened poem Faith in Mind 信心 銘 in which he said that if the mind retains its oneness, the ten thousand things are of the one suchness. The moment we are enlightened within, we go beyond the voidness of a world confronting us. In the higher realm of True Suchness, there is neither 'other' nor 'self.' He implemented different a way to describe the Buddha-nature. Namely, he used the words "oneness, voidness, and true suchness" to describe the nature of the mind that contains everything, enlightens, and go beyond the duality. These characteristics of the mind are similar to that of the definition of the Buddha-nature that I have mentioned above in note number six to ten.

Failing to recognize Buddha-nature during the first encounter with his teacher (Huineng), eight years later Nanyue Huairang 南嶽懷讓 (677-744) was certified by his teacher through his

 ⁷² Suzuki, vol 1, 195.
 ⁷³ Sheng Yen, 38.
 ⁷⁴ Suzuki, vol 1, 196-201.

recognition of the true-nature, which can neither be made evidence nor defiled.⁷⁵ Namely, Huairang recognized the true nature as non-duality as the Buddha-nature.

When a monk asked Nanyang Huizhong 南陽慧忠 (675-755) that how can one become a Buddha, he replied that just cast off the Buddha and all beings, and at that moment you will be liberated. When another monk asked him that how can one be in accord with it, he replied that do not think of good or evil; personally see the Buddha-nature. When another monk asked him that what is Buddha, he responded that the mind is Buddha. ⁷⁶ Following the same pattern, Nanyang Huizhong pointed out to others that the mind is the Buddha. If one puts down the thoughts of good and bad, one can perceive the Buddha-nature directly. Here, Huizhong utilized the word Buddha-nature to explain the nature of the mind that goes beyond good and bad thoughts.

One day Huineng asked the assembly, "I have something which has no head or tail; it is nameless and cannot be described. It has no back and no front. Do any of you know what it is?" Then, even as a young novice, Shenhui 神會 (684-758), came forward and said that it is the source of all things; it is the Buddha-nature of Shenhui. Here, even when he was young, Shenhui could recognize his Buddha-nature, which does not have any form or name.

Master Shitou Xiqian 石頭希遷 (700-790) addressed his followers that this mind is Buddha mind; although the names of Buddha mind, all being, wisdom, and defilement are different, they are one body; its essence is apart from temporary or everlasting; its nature is without pollution or purity; it is clear and perfect, and the six realms are manifested from it.⁷⁷ Here Shitou indicated that the mind is the Buddha mind, which is the everlasting purity, clear,

⁷⁷ Ferguson, 73.

⁷⁵ Ferguson, 45. ⁷⁶ Ibid., 53.

and perfect, and it is the manifestation of all phenomenon. This is how he interpreted the Buddha-nature.

Hangzhou Tianlong 杭州天龍 (n.d) reminded his disciples that each of them possesses the glorious treasure-nature and is fully endowed with virtuous merit and the pervasive illumination. Here, Hangzhou Tianlong did not point out the Buddha-nature directly for his students, but he just reminded them that everyone possesses the glorious treasure nature, which is pervasive illumination and fully endowed with virtuous merits. His glorious treasury nature is nothing except Buddha-nature.

Dasui Fazhen 大隋 法 真 (878-963) told the assembly that self-nature is original pure and replete with virtue. However, the sage has realized the reality through purity, and the deluded people engage in pollution; then, there is differentiation. Here, Dasui indicated that the differentiation between the sage and common people is through the recognition of reality of purity or engagement in pollution of the mind, even its original nature is pure and endowed with all virtues. Namely, one should recognize that original and pure nature, i.e. the Buddha-nature.

When Damei Fachang 大梅法常 (752-839) became the abbot of a monastery, he was asked by a colleague: "What have you learnt from the great Master that qualified you to become the abbot of this monastery?" The abbot replied, "The great Master has told me that this very mind is the Buddha". "The Great Master has lately changed his way of teaching," the questioner said, "he is now saying that this very mind is neither the Mind nor the Buddha". "The abbot said, "This old fellow has confused people ceaselessly without an end. I do not care that he has said that it is neither the Mind nor the Buddha; I still hold that this very mind is the Buddha." When

⁷⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁷⁹ Ferguson, 162.

the great Master heard the conversation, he said that the abbot had now become mature.⁸⁰ Here, after Fachang has recognized his mind as the Buddha mind (or the Buddha-nature), he was not persuaded anymore.

When Yangshan Huiji 仰山慧寂 (807-883) asked what is the true abode of Buddha, Guishan Lingyou 潙山靈祐 (771-853) replied that you should think of the unfathomable mystery and return your thoughts to the inexhaustible numinous light. When thoughts are exhausted you have arrived at the source, where true nature is revealed as eternally abiding. In that place there is no difference between affairs and principle, and the true Buddha is manifested. Here, Guishan indicated that the true Buddha is only manifested through the nonduality between affairs and principles as well as returning one's thought to the inexhaustible numinous light. Namely, if one goes beyond conceptualization and form, one can recognize one' own Buddha-nature. Again, that is his definition of Buddha-nature.

Later on, Yangshan encouraged his followers to go to the root of the natural mind, the true sea of self-nature, where matter and principle are united and the true eternal body of the *Tathāgata* is manifested instead of analyzing Buddhist literatures or using emotion to find it. 82 Again, Yangshan encouraged his followers to neither analyze the literature nor use the emotional thoughts of love and hatred to find the self-nature, which is manifested when one's action is in accord with one's mind. Namely, in finding self-nature (or Buddha-nature), one should go beyond the word, form, emotion, and others.

Next, the Chan masters that used analogy to illustrate the Buddha-nature that I have mentioned above are as follows: Huike (Buddha-nature as *mani*-jewel), Hongren (Buddha-nature

⁸⁰ Hua, 468.

⁸¹ Ferguson, 168.

⁸² Ferguson, 169.

as bright sun), Shengxiu (Buddha-nature as bright mirror), Hsuan Chueh (Buddha-nature as mani pearl), Zhongyi Hongen (Buddha-nature as two harmonious monkeys), and Hangzhou Tianlong (Buddha-nature as glorious treasure-nature).

Mazu Daoyi and Zhaozhou Congshen are the Chan masters who pointed out that the Buddha-nature's word and concept served as an expedient means for genuine realization. Hence, they suggested that the Chan practitioners should even drop it in order to have the direct experience with it. Finally, there were some Chan masters who did not mention the Buddhanature at all.

In summary, due to the notion of Buddha-nature concept, Chan tradition's approaches of gradual and sudden enlightenments were developed and prevailed for many centuries. Namely, in Chan tradition, some could recognize the Buddha-nature suddenly, and some could realize this nature gradually through many years of practice. Hence, Chan masters employed various ways to guide their students to recognize this Buddha-nature according to their students' temperaments. Also, Chan masters advocated the methods of detachment from scriptures, tenets, rules of conducts, devotional practices, or even Chan teaching itself to turn their gazes within the inherited Buddha-nature, to break through the barrier of ignorance into the undifferentiated realm of emptiness, and to have a true enlightened experience. As stated by Chan masters, lack of confidence to attain immediate enlightenment and the attachment of external practices are their main obstructions. Therefore, Chan masters employed various techniques to assist their students to cross over the threshold of understanding and make the leap into enlightenment. Especially, as we have examined the approaches of many prominent Chan masters, most of the implemented the expedient means to show the inherit Buddha-nature within everyone's mind regardless the terms or the descriptions that they tried to present so that their followers could have direct

experience and recognized that pure, unobstructed, priceless, and wonderful nature without relying on theory, logic, books, and others.

In short, by examining the above Chan masters' interpretations of the Buddha-nature, we can see how they interpreted it in various ways: direct, indirect, using analogy, or even rejecting it because of its expedient mean. Namely, although mostly there was consistency in the Chan masters' interpretation of Buddha-nature, there were variant interpretations of it throughout time according to the Chan masters' understanding, perspective, linage, and practice, which can be examined in different papers.

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