**Meditation in Early Chan**

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# Abstract

This paper explores the main attitudes and approaches to meditative praxis that developed within the Chan tradition, with a focus on the Tang 唐 era (618-907). It contextualizes and explains the central doctrinal outlooks, religious ideals, and modes of contemplative practice prevalent within the early Chan movement. These central components established the basic conceptual and ideological parameters, and paved the way for the subsequent growth of contemplative practice within the Chan tradition, which from the Song 宋 period (960-1279) onward came to be dominated by the Kanhua Chan 看話禪 (“observing the critical phrase”) technique pioneered by Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163). The paper’s analysis covers the historical development of Chan meditation and its relationship to mainstream Buddhist thought during the Tang era, including the treatment of meditative theory and praxis in the records of Bodhidharma (菩提達摩) and his followers, the East Mountain Tradition (Dongshan famen 東山法門) of Daoxin 道信 (580–651) and Hongren 弘忍 (601–674), the Niutou School (牛頭宗), the Northern School (Bei zong 北宗) of Shenxiu神秀 (606?–706) and his disciples, the Baotang school (保唐宗) of Wuzhu 無住 (714–774), the Heze school (荷澤宗) of Shenhui 神會 (684–758), and the Hongzhou school (洪州宗) of Mazu 馬祖 (709–788). In the conclusion there is also an attempt to relate these classical paradigms to the conceptualization and deployment of meditative practice within contemporary Buddhism.

# Keywords

Chan; meditation; Tiantai; East Mountain Tradition; Niutou School; Northern School; Mazu Daoyi.

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