In the aftermath of An Lushan’s 安禄山 (d. 757) rebellion—that almost brought the imposing Tang 唐 empire (618–907) to its knees—the middle part of the dynastic epoch was marked by momentous and multifaceted changes with major impacts on the political and economic landscapes, as well as significant ramifications in the intellectual and religious arenas. This was an initially precarious period of realignment in the distribution of power and the relationship between the imperial center at the capital and the local administrations in the provinces, refocusing of the empire’s foreign policy, notable demographic changes, restructuring of the economy and the tax system, and emergence of new sociopolitical elites. That was accompanied by the development of novel intellectual orientations and cultural paradigms—exemplified for
instance by the *guwen* 古文 (ancient literature) movement in Confucian scholarship—outbursts of artistic and literary creativity, and varied manifestations of religious fervor and innovative spirit that infused the empire’s cultural and religious milieus.

Against this backdrop, the Chan school continued its growth, evolving its identity in relation to the canonical tradition and the rest of Buddhism, and solidifying its position as a major tradition of elite Chinese Buddhism, albeit not without occasional tensions and outbursts of sectarian squabbles. The mid-Tang era can be seen as a transitional period in Chan history, as the manifold schools and lineages of early Chan were replaced by an inclusive orthodoxy centered on the so-called Southern school, which largely came to be identified with the Hongzhou school 洪州宗 of Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709–788) and his numerous disciples. As by the end of the eight century early Chan factions such as the Northern, Niutou 牛頭 (Ox-head), and Baotang 保唐 (Protecting the Tang) met their demise, the disciples of Mazu established the first empire-wide Chan tradition that by the second decade of the ninth century had strongholds in both capitals and throughout the provinces, with broad-based support from the imperial circle, the regional elites, and the local populace.¹

Even though Mazu and his disciples did not stress the close relationship between Chan and the Vinaya (monastic code of discipline) as much as some of the prominent representatives of the Northern school—which dominated the Chan scene before the rebellion, especially in the areas of the two capitals, Chang’an 長安 and Luoyang 洛陽—their teachings were primarily directed towards their monastic followers. Their sermons and conversations, as evidenced in the earliest extant sources, were concerned with explicating a course of religious practice that supposedly led to the realization of spiritual awakening and liberation. They were meant to inspire their students and strengthen their faith, demarcate the goals of religious life and clarify the attitudes conducive to their realization, and instruct about the proper methods of spiritual cultivation. While in theory Chan training was open to all, in actual practice it presupposed a disciplined religious lifestyle. In light of that, it is not surprising that the main audience for Chan teachings were monks who had abandoned the entanglements of secular life and had committed themselves to the pursuit of arcane truths (or at least were supposed to have done so). In light of

¹ For more on the Hongzhou school and Chan during the mid-Tang period, see Mario Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism.*
these considerations, and keeping in mind the overall institutional context of Chinese Buddhism at the time, we cannot separate the doctrines and practices articulated and disseminated by the Hongzhou school from the religious mores and institutional ethos of Tang monasticism.

On the other hand, monks associated with the Chan movement, like monks outside of it, interacted with the larger society and their monasteries were integrated into the broader cultural matrix of Tang China. The points of contact and patterns of interaction with the secular world beyond the monastic enclaves were especially evident at the elite level, as many literati and officials were deeply involved with Chan teachings and had close ties with noted Chan teachers, many of whom originally came from local gentry families. The keen interest in Chan doctrines and methods of cultivation among the cultural and political elites was among the notable features of the religious milieu of mid-Tang China, although of course there was also attraction to other Buddhist traditions that flourished at the time. Along with the imperial family and the court, the officials and literati were also a key source of political and economic patronage for the burgeoning Chan movement. Therefore, in our ongoing historical reassessment of Chan during the mid-Tang period (and beyond), we must keep in mind both audiences, monastic and lay, and pay attention to their mutual interactions and influences.

While a monastic ethos remained at the core of the Chan school’s identity—which was also the case before and after the mid-Tang period, albeit with minor differences in emphasis that need not concern us here—during this period we can also discern the emergence of a distinct, even if closely related, style of lay practice. This paper tentatively explores the model of lay Chan practitioner that arose from the Tang literati’s engagement with Chan doctrine and practice, especially as manifested in their poetry. It focuses on the expressions of a new lay Chan paradigm in the literary output of two famous poets, Bo Juyi 白居易 (772–846) and Pang Yun 龐蕴 (d. 808?), representing only a preliminary foray into this rich and multifaceted topic.

Bo’s extensive engagement with Buddhism, a central part of which were his encounters with noted Chan monks and their teachings, led him to eventually adopt a semi-monastic lifestyle during the final years of his life. However, his autobiographical poems reveal a sense of conflict between his religious commitments and his literary pursuits. In contrast, Pang is traditionally presented as a paradigmatic model of an enlightened Chan layman, a lonely lay presence amidst a pantheon of Chan worthies that is almost entirely populated by monks. Yet, his poems also express a sense of compromise between the monastic and secular worlds, and his
life followed a pattern that resembled the lives of exemplary monks. Both examples thus point to established monastic mores and ideals as the main templates for constructing the religious identities of lay Chan practitioners. For that reason, before making a plunge into the religious worlds and creative undertakings of the two poets, I will briefly sketch the broad historical and religious frameworks, beginning with a survey of the monastic ideals and mores that shaped their embrace of a lay model of Chan practice.

**Monastic Ideals**

Clear embracement of monastic observances and practices, including commitment to the keeping of monastic discipline, are evident among most groups that comprised the early Chan movement. The earliest Chan communities identified with the Dongshan (East Mountain) tradition were basically secluded monastic congregations with pronounced contemplative interests, led by two charismatic meditation teachers, Daoxin 道信 (580–651) and Hongren 弘忍 (601–674), who subsequently came to be recognized as the fourth and fifth Chan patriarchs. The close relationship between Chan and the Vinaya (lü 律) is especially evident in the historical records of the Northern school, which under the leadership of Shenxiu 神秀 (606?–706) and his disciples came to be perceived as the main inheritor of the teachings and legacy of the Dongshan tradition. Important monks associated with the Northern school were noted for their expertise in the Vinaya; accordingly, in texts associated with their tradition there is ample evidence of an emphasis on strict observance of the precepts.

“The two teachings of Chan and the Vinaya are like two wings (of a bird),” wrote the famous poet Li Hua 李華 (c. 715–774) in a stele inscription he composed for Fashen (or Huairen, 660–751), a renowned Vinaya master. This statement highlights a sense of complementarity between these two key groupings or orientations within Tang Buddhism that was prevalent at the time. Such attitudes come as no surprise when we consider that many Northern school monks

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2 This section is by and large based on my previous publications, especially the book on the Hongzhou school and the article on Guishan’s text on monastic discipline cited below.


4 QTW 320.1434c; quoted in Faure, The Will to Orthodoxy, p. 108.
resided at monasteries that were well known as centers for the study and observance of the monastic precepts. These tendencies can be noted readily in the life of Shenxiu, who after his ordination and entry into the monastic order studied the Vinaya and for over two decades resided at Yuquan (Jade Spring) monastery 玉泉寺 in Jingzhou 荊州, an important center of Vinaya—as well as Tiantai and Pure Land—studies. Puji 普寂 (651–739), Shenxiu’s best-known disciple who joined the community in Jingzhou, was also a student of the Vinaya. In addition, there was a considerable overlap between some the Vinaya lineages and the genealogy of the Northern school.

A fairly conventional approach towards the Vinaya was a predominant orientation within the nascent Chan movement during the early Tang period, although there were some exceptions to this pattern. One of the marginal groups that adopted strikingly different attitude towards traditional monastic mores and observances was the Baotang school in Sichuan. Following the teachings of its leader Wuzhu 無住 (714–774), members of this group cultivated a radical form of detachment, which included abandonment of convention Buddhist practices and rituals, including those that governed monastic ordinations and daily demeanor. As is well known, that prompted critiques from more traditionally-minded monks such as Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780–841), the famous Chan historian and Huayan “patriarch,” who was disturbed by what he saw as a dangerously antinomian approach to Chan practice. On the other hand, it is probably fair to say that Wuzhu was engaged in a creative (even if perhaps somewhat irresponsible) restructuring of monastic life and reorienting of its priorities, albeit along unconventional lines that subverted established monastic institutions, rather than in initiating a movement that tried to completely do away with monasticism.

The records of Mazu and his disciples address monastic ideals and institutions rarely and mostly indirectly; the notable exception to that pattern is Guishan jingce 洩山警策 (Guishan’s Admonitions), where the main topic under discussion is the observance of monastic discipline (or possibly the lack thereof) in congregations led by Chan teachers (see below). In comparison with the Northern school, in the Hongzhou school’s records there is noticeably less stress on

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drawing explicit attention to the close links between Chan and the Vinaya. The monastic context is simply taken for granted, therefore needing no special elaboration. Nonetheless, in the extant records there are scattered passages that elucidate the monastic ideals and the notions of sanctity that were prevalent among Mazu’s disciples. For instance, in this selection from the record of Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (749–814), one of Mazu’s foremost disciples, he briefly describes essential values and aspirations that shape the monastic vocation.

夫學道人，若遇種種苦樂，稱意不稱意事，心無退屈。不念一切名聞利養衣食，不貪一切功德利益，不為世間諸法之所滯礙。無親無愛，苦樂平懷。麤衣遮寒，糲食活命。兀兀如愚，如聾如啞相似，稍有相應分。若於心中廣學知解，求福求智，皆是生死，於理為益。却被知解境風之所飄溺，還歸生死海裏。  
When a person who studies the Way (i.e. Buddhist monk) encounters all kinds of painful or pleasant, agreeable or disagreeable situations, his mind does not recoil. Not thinking about fame and profit, robes and food, and not being greedy for any merit and blessings, he is not obstructed by anything in the world. With nothing dear, free from love, he can equally accept pain and pleasure. He uses a coarse robe to protect himself from the cold and simple food to support his body. Letting go, he is like a fool, like a deaf, like a dumb person. It is only then that one gains some understanding. If one uses one’s mind to engage broadly in intellectual study, seeking merit and wisdom, then all of that is just birth and death, and it does not serve any purpose as far as reality is concerned. Blown by the wind of knowledge, such person is drowned in the ocean of birth and death.  

Here we are confronted with an image of religious ascetics that evokes familiar representations found in a broad spectrum of Buddhist monastic literature. Baizhang’s depiction of a genuine Chan adept resonates with cherished monastic ideals that are at the core of Buddhist conceptions of sanctity, infused with canonical authority and long-standing institutional legitimacy. The monastic paradigm propounded by Baizhang is linked with hallowed and canonically-sanctioned traditions, and its tenor echoes principles embraced by monks belonging to other contemplative traditions. In essence, Baizhang’s image of an exemplary Chan adept point to a religious orientation that is grounded in established monastic mores and ideals.

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7 Baizhang guanglu 百丈廣錄 (Sijia yulu ed.), XZJ 119.411b; translation adapted from Cheng-chien, Sun-Face Buddha, pp. 103–04; also quoted in Poceski, Ordinary Mind as the Way, pp. 131–32.
The monastic ethos evoked by Baizhang encompasses readily recognizable themes and elements, such as renunciation of the pursuit of personal fame and acquisition of material things, as well as disengagement from everyday emotions such as love and attachment to things and people. Baizhang calls for an ascetic lifestyle that is conducive to the cultivation of equanimity, detachment, and wisdom, symbolized in the above passage by the coarse robes worn by Buddhist renunciants and the plain food they consume to sustain their bodies, a trope that is often found in monastic literature.

By perfecting increasingly subtle levels of mental detachment and transcendence, the exemplary monk that follows the Chan path goes beyond the imperfect realm of saṃsāra and realizes authentic spiritual freedom. This rather traditional and conventional conception of the monastic ideal, which valorizes an image of the otherworldly ascetic unconcerned with mundane affairs as a paradigmatic model of exemplary religious behavior, is evoked in the sermons of other monks associated with the Hongzhou school. Let me give a couple of additional examples. The first one comes from the record of Fenzhou Wuye 汾州無業 (760–821), another disciple of Mazu, who urges his disciples to pattern their monastic life and Chan practice on the examples set by the noble monks of an idealized past, who adopted austere and eremitic lifestyles, unwilling to compromise their lofty principles and bend to the demands of the worldly realm beyond their mountain abodes.

The way of our Chan school (chanzong 禪宗) is different. After the ancient worthy people of the Way (i.e. monks) attained realization, they went to live in thatched huts and stone houses. They used old cauldrons with broken legs to cook their food, and passed twenty or thirty years in that way. Unconcerned about fame and wealth, they never thought of money and riches. Completely forgetting about human affairs, they concealed their traces among rocks and thickets. When summoned by the monarch, they would not respond; when invited by the princes, they would not go. How can they be same as those who, greedy for fame and desirous for wealth, sink into the worldly ways? That is like a peddler who by seeking small profit loses great gain. If the sages of
the ten stages have not realized the principle of the Buddhas, then are they not like ordinary people of the broad earth? There is no such thing really.\(^8\)

The second example comes from *Guishan jingce*, a text composed by Baizhang’s noted student Guishan Lingyou 泫山靈祐 (771–853) around the time of the Huichang 會昌 era persecution of Buddhism (845). This text is the main source of information about the attitudes towards the Vinaya within Chan circles during the mid-Tang period.\(^9\) This text presents a fairly conventional understanding of monastic observances and practices, painting a picture of the Hongzhou school as a movement that accepted normative institutions and mainstream ideas about the monastic ethos. Such attitude stands in contrast to later well-entrenched images of the Hongzhou school as an iconoclastic movement that abandoned traditional observances and practices, but it fits well into the overall patter of the traditions’ historical growth, as described in my recent study of the Hongzhou school.\(^10\) Guishan’s exhortations to his students to follow a disciplined way of life, dedicated to single-minded study and practice of the Buddhist teachings, shows how leading Chan figures at the time continued to place emphasis on hallowed monastic ideals, which were essentially conceived in traditional terms, even if they were integrated into a distinctive soteriological paradigm that was peculiar to their tradition. Here is a representative passage from Guishan’s text.

父母不供甘旨。六親固以棄離。不能安國治邦。家業頓捐繼嗣。緬離鄉黨剃髪稟師。內勤刳念之功。外弘不諍之德。迥脫塵世冀期出離。

[Monks] do not supply their parents with tasty foods, and they steadfastly leave behind the six relations.\(^11\) They cannot pacify their country and govern the state. They promptly give up their family’s property and do not continue the family line [by their failure to produce a male heir].

\(^8\) CDL 28, T 51.444c; Cheng-chien, *Sun-Face Buddha*, pp. 128–29; also quoted in Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*, p. 133.

\(^9\) There are four versions of *Guishan jingce*: QTW 919.4243b–44b; T 48.1042b–43c; XZJ 111.142c–48d; and *Dunhuang baozang* 敦煌寶藏 134.91–92. The last one is from among the manuscripts recovered in Dunhuang. For a more information on this text and an analysis of its contents, see Mario Poceski, “*Guishan jingce* and the Ethical Foundations of Chan Practice.”

\(^10\) See Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*.

\(^11\) The six relations: mother, father, elder brothers (or siblings if one wants to be more inclusive), younger brothers (or siblings), wife, and children.
They leave far away their local communities, and they shave their hair and follow [religious] teachers. Inwardly they strive to conquer their thoughts, while outwardly they spread the virtue of non-contention. Abandoning the defiled world, they endeavor to transcend [the mundane realm of birth and death].

Guishan tried to bridge a gap—presumably more apparent than real—between the monastic precepts on one hand, and Chan’s often abstract and rarefied soteriological program on another hand, by proposing a path of practice and realization that encompassed two closely linked and integrated levels. At the higher level of the path we find the lofty ideal of Chan transcendence, which involves a direct, non-conceptual realization of reality. But when observed from a conventional perspective, below it we encounter time-honored monastic practices and observances, which form a stable foundation for Chan practice and function as stepping stones for the ineffable realization of ultimate reality.

In light of these contexts and considerations, we need to keep in mind the centrality of the monastic ideal when trying to make sense of the doctrines and practices propounded by Mazu, Baizhang, and other Chan teachers active during the mid-Tang period. As we refocus our attention to the ideals and practices adopted by lay followers of the Chan movement, we will trace the ways in which they responded to these monastic principles and perspectives. When the Tang literati engaged with the Chan tradition at the level of their cultural productions and in their personal lives, they appropriated and adapted elements of a religious ethos that originated and was anchored in a monastic context. The Chan paradigm was premised on an entrenched notion of transcendence of the mundane realm in which the literati performed their public duties, wrote their poetry, and engaged in other cultural practices such as painting and calligraphy.

**Tang Literati and Chan**

Notwithstanding the Chan movement’s ostensibly monastic orientation, as was already noted the religious charisma and the teachings propounded by noted Chan masters also resonated with

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13 For more on the relationship between Chan and monasticism during this period, see my two articles: “Guishan jingce and the Ethical Foundations of Chan Practice,” and “Xuefeng’s Code and the Chan School’s Participation in the Development of Monastic Regulations.”
significant lay audiences. On the whole, Chan teachers were successful in presenting their doctrines and traditions in ways that appealed to the spiritual predilections and horizons of expectation of elite segments of Tang society. Cultivated literati and officials of the imperial bureaucracy—including many of the leading figures in the Tang’s intellectual, literary, and political spheres—were key supporters of various Chan teachers and the monastic groups associated with them, as well as main recipients of their teachings in their oral and textual forms. The need to reach out to and communicate with this important audience was undoubtedly a contributing factor to the manner in which Chan monks conveyed their personal insights and formulated their ideas about diverse facets of the Buddhist path. Moreover, the literati were also actively involved in the recording of Chan history, as they typically wrote the stele inscriptions that became main sources of information about the lives of individual Chan teachers. Some of them were also involved in the compilation and editing of particular records of Chan teachings; a good example of that is Pei Xui’s 裴休 (787?–860) compilation of the two records of Huangbo Xiyun’s 黃檗希運 (d. 850?) sermons and discussions of Chan doctrine, commonly referred by the title Chuanxin fayao 傳心法要 (Essential Teachings of Mind Transmission), are among the most popular records of Chan teachings from the Tang era.

The multifaceted patterns of interaction between Chan teachers and officials/literati involved delicate distinctions and varying degrees of distancing, which were imbedded in different types of power relations. Sometimes the relationship between the two assumed a traditional form of a lay disciple studying Buddhist doctrine and practice under a sagacious Chan teacher. Another image conveyed by the early sources is that of a powerful lay patron offering financial backing and other forms of support to a monastic community led by a Chan teacher. At times, the relationship might be based on personal bonds of friendship and mutual admiration between a particular monk and an official, typically assigned to provincial duty in the area where the monk’s monastery was located, perhaps reinforced by common interest in poetry. The interactions between members of the two groups assumed a more formal quality when the official dealt with the local monastic community and its Chan abbot in official capacity as a local governor or magistrate. More offend than not, the associations and interactions between Chan teachers and literati involved more than one of these elements, perhaps even most of them.

The levels of interest in Chan doctrine and the personal commitments to spiritual cultivation, as evidenced in the biographical sources and writings of noted Tang literati and
officials, varied from person to person. In keeping with prevalent cultural sentiments and an established socioreligious ethos, the literati who associated with Chan monks typically did not construct their religious identities in terms of exclusivist linkages or narrow identifications with a single tradition. Most of them shared strong pro-Buddhist sentiments, but they were also stepped in Confucian writings and traditions. Often they also had knowledge and appreciation of Daoist classics such as *Daode jing* 道德經 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and perhaps even some interest in the practices of religious Daoism. An ecumenical spirit and an embrace of pluralism shaped prevalent attitudes towards the three teachings of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism; typically, they were seen as complimentary rather than antithetical to each other.

Notwithstanding the rise of somewhat rigid and exclusivist Confucian sentiments during the mid-Tang period, evident in the writings of proponents of the *guwen* movement such as Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), that was still a period when mainstream notions and prevalent attitudes towards religion were characterized by broadmindedness and tolerance, and the vast majority of literati were enthusiastic in their embrace of diverse traditions and perspectives.

Similar sentiments were also evident in the general patterns of the literati’s engagement with different schools and traditions within Buddhism, which usually were seen as alternative approaches to timeless truths, sources of inspiring ideals and rarefied visions of reality, and repositories of rich artistic and religious lore. Therefore, we can hardly place the label of “Chan Buddhist” to most of the literati associated with the Hongzhou school or other Chan groups, even though some of them developed close ties with Mazu or his disciples and were deeply touched by their teachings. An example of that pattern is observable in the religious life of Bo Juyi. As we will see in the next section, he was close to a few of Mazu’s disciples and studied Chan with them, but he was also interested in the Pure Land tradition and interacted with other monks not associated with either the Chan or Pure Land traditions. He was also appreciative of Daoist texts and teachings, especially those attributed to Laozi and Zhuangzi (although also somewhat skeptical of alchemy and the search for immortality), and steeped in the Confucian classics, which shaped his ideas about the function of poetry as a vehicle for exposing social ills and improving the plight of those who suffer injustice and privation.\(^\text{14}\) The same kind of

\[^{14}\text{For examples of what we might call socially-engaged poems, which are infused with feelings of compassion for the underprivileged and indignation over social ills and official corruption, see these examples:}\]
ecumenicalism applies to other noted poets with explicit Buddhist associations and affinities, such as Wang Wei 王維 (701–761).

In light of Buddhism’s pervasive presence and impact on Tang society and culture, it comes as no surprise that Tang literature, especially poetry—the Tang era being commonly acknowledged as the golden age of Chinese poetry—is replete with references and allusions to Buddhism. The same can be said of other forms of artistic expression. The profuse infusion of Buddhist vocabulary and imagery in much of the period’s literary works was often employed to intimate poetic sentiments or evoke certain moods and feelings, while Buddhist metaphors of illusoriness, transience, emptiness, and luminosity were used to indicate poets’ perceptions and awareness of reality. Buddhist monasteries are a frequent fixture in scenes and landscapes described by Tang poets and writers, whilst Buddhist ideas about mind and reality influence esthetic sensibilities and shape emotional response to peculiar predicaments. Often Buddhist imagery and allusions appear as passing references or attractive backdrops for the central themes, parts of the settings for the actions and thoughts of the main characters. But in many instances they come to the forefront and function as central elements of the narration, so we can talk about the Buddhist poems of famous poets such as Bo Juyi and Wang Wei as discrete subsets of their poetic corpus. A number of poems also feature eminent Buddhist clerics, including noted Chan teachers, or are dedicated to them.

With the growing popularity of Chan during the Tang era, we see an increase in its presence and influence on Tang poetry and literature. Fairly extensive and serious engagement with Chan is already evident during the pre-rebellion period, for instance in the poetry of Wang Wei, one of the greatest poets of the High Tang period, who was well-known for his multifaceted artistic talents, which in addition to poetry also included music, painting, and calligraphy. Throughout his life Wang was involved with Buddhism, including Chan, on a deep personal

新豐折臂翁, Bo Juyi ji 3, pp. 61–62, which by telling the story of an old man who broke his own arm to avoid the military draft serves as an indictment of militarism and the waging of unnecessary wars; 上陽白髮人, Bo Juyi ji 3, p. 59, which takes on the plight of women by describing the distress of the old, lonely palace ladies in Luoyang; the denunciation of poverty and exploitation evidenced in 繚绫, Bo Juyi ji 4, p.79, which recounts the toil of poor female silk weavers, whose expensive silk robes are worn by court ladies in the capital; and 燒炭翁, Bo Juyi ji 4, pp.79–80, which conveys the plight of an old charcoal seller as a way of attacking official’s misconduct and their harassment of the small person.
level. A Buddhist spirit of quietist withdrawal and composed transcendence infuses most of Wang’s poetry. His poems also often encompass a tension, as societal norm and personal circumstances force the individual to come to terms and mediate between two worlds: the official’s mundane realm with its bureaucratic duties and worldly affairs on one hand, and the recluse’s recondite realm of cultivated detachment and spiritual transcendence on another hand.

In some of his poems Wang wrote about monasteries and Chan monks he associated with, and he also composed memorial inscriptions for notable Chan teachers such as Jingjue 淨覺 (683–750?), the author of Lengqie shizi ji 楞伽師資記 (Record of the Teachers and Students of the Laṅkāvatāra), and Huineng 慧能 (638–713), the famous “sixth patriarch.”

Notwithstanding the pervasive influence of Buddhism in general and Chan in particular on Wang’s life and the traces of that in his poetry, there is a palpable sense of ambiguity in his poetic engagement with them, and his subjective voice is by and large absent in his treatment of Buddhist themes, tropes, and images. For more textured descriptions of private Buddhist beliefs and clearer images of lay Chan practice, written from a personal perspective and indicative of firsthand knowledge and experience, we have to move to the mid-Tang period and the poetry of Bo Juyi.

As we focus our attention on the mid-Tang period, the list of poets and literati with connections to the Hongzhou school and the Chan movement in general reads like a who is who of the cultural and political elites of the time. Besides Bo Juyi and the emperors who ruled during this period—namely Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–779), Dezong 德宗 (r. 779–805), Shunzong 順宗 (r. 805), and Xianzong 憲宗 (r. 805–820)—the list also includes numerous noted literati and officials such as Quan Deyu 權德輿 (759–818), Li Bo 李渤 (773–831), Li Hua 李華 (c. 715–774), Lu Sigong 路嗣恭 (711–781), Li Jian 李兼 (764–821), and Pei Xiu, to name a few. Even ardent Confucian devotees such as Li Ao 李翱 (772–841) are featured prominently in the historical accounts of encounters between literati and Chan monks. In Li Ao’s case, there are
records of his conversations with a number of noted Chan teachers, such as Yaoshan Weiyan 藥山惟儼 (745–828), Xitang Zhizang 西堂智藏 (735–817), and Ehu Dayi 鵝湖大義 (746–818), all of them disciples of Mazu. Even Han Yu, the most partisan of the Tang Confucians—celebrated for his nativist sentiments and public displays of anti-Buddhist prejudice during the Song period (960–1279), although in those respects he was fairly atypical of the Tang literati—maintained cordial contacts with Chan teachers and was interested in learning about Chan doctrine; he even wrote in a favorable light about some of the Chan monks who impressed him.

**Bo Juyi’s Involvement with Chan**

The poems and other writings of Bo Juyi (often rendered as Bai Juyi; also known as Letian 樂天 and Xiangshan jushi 香山居士, the Layman of Xiangshan), one of the best liked and universally esteemed poets of the Tang era, are full of references and reflections on Buddhism. They are also among the most valuable sources of information about lay Chan practice from that period. A good deal has been written about Bo’s poetry and his relationship with Buddhism, so here there is no need to go into the details. For our present purposes, it will suffice to point to some of the key issues that characterized his engagement with Chan teachings and practices, with an eye on

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17. See Charles Hartman, *Han Yü and the T’ang Search for Unity*, pp. 60, 93–100

elements that shed light on the general patterns that characterized the literati’s involvement with this significant tradition of Tang Buddhism.

For most of his life Bo was involved with Buddhism and in many of his poems he wrote about Buddhist beliefs, attitudes, and practices. The personal tone pervading much of his work that touches upon Chan themes and ideas—characteristic of his poetry as a whole—contrasts with formulaic descriptions of Chan doctrines and practices found in much of traditional Chan literature. Bo’s poems and writings on the subject, while generally impressionistic and fragmented, are infused with his participatory subjectivity and display an astute capacity for observation and self-reflection, with an occasional touch of humor. They provide us with panoramic vistas and intimate accounts of poets’ personal involvements with Chan monks and teachings, free from dictates imposed by sectarian affiliation or narrowly constructed religious identity.

During his long career as a government official Bo was intermittingly stationed at posts in the two capitals and at different provinces, in both northern and southern China. At these different places he visited various monasteries and became acquainted with numerous monks. His writings and other relevant sources provide the names of over hundred monks with whom he had contacts. Those monks include Zongmi, to whom he dedicated a poem written in 833, and Niaoke 鳥窠 (Bird Nest), an eccentric Chan monk whom he met during the 822–824 period when he was posted in Hangzhou. Bo’s involvement with Buddhism was complex and multifaceted, but his main interests by and large converged on Chan doctrine and practice. His main Chan teachers were Xingshan Weikuan 興善惟寬 (755–817) and Foguang Ruman 佛光如滿 (752–842?), both of them prominent disciples of Mazu. He also became acquainted with Guizong Zhichang 歸宗知常, another noted disciple of Mazu, during his posting as a local

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19 Sun Changwu, Chansi yu shiqing, p. 180.
20 贈草堂宗密上人, in Bo Juyi ji 31 (v.2), p. 698, and Boshi changqing ji 64.7b; see also Peter Gregory, Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism, p. 78, and Ch’en, The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism, p. 220.
magistrate in Jiangzhou 江州 (815–818), Jiangxi, which was in the vicinity of Lushan 嵩山, the famous scenic mountain where Guizong’s monastery was located.22

Bo first met with Weikuan in 814, after his return to Chang’an following the end of the traditional three-year mourning period for his deceased mother. At the time, Weikuan was a popular Chan teacher and leading religious figure in the capital, with many disciples and supporters among the officials and literati. Weikuan had already preached at the Linde Hall 麟德殿 in the imperial palace at the invitation of Emperor Xianzong. Along with his dharma-brother Zhangjing Huaihui 章敬懷暉 (756–815), he was the main representative of the Hongzhou school in the empire’s capital and was influential in its rise as a widely recognized standard-bearer of Chan orthodoxy.23

Bo went to Xingshan monastery 興善寺, where the aged monk resided, to request instructions about the teachings of the Chan school; at the time he recorded some of their conversations. The four questions and responses presented below touch upon the status and role of the “Chan teacher” and related aspects of spiritual practice. Note the somber undertone of Weikuan’s fairly conventional responses, which point to his position as a representative of the monastic mainstream, rather than a Chan iconoclast fashioned along the familiar formula found in standard Chan lore.

第一問云。既曰禪師何以說法。師曰。無上菩提者。被於身為律。說於口為法。行於心為禪。應用有三。其實一也。如江湖河漢。在處立名。名雖不一。水性無二。律即是法。法不離禪。云何於中。妄起分別。

Bo’s first question: “Since you are called a Chan teacher (chanshi), why do you explain the dharma (fa)?”

Weikuan’s answer: “When the unsurpassed bodhi (awakening) is expressed with the body, it is the Vinaya (lü, rules of discipline); when it is explained with the mouth, it is the dharma; when it is practiced with the mind, it is Chan. Though there are these three applications, in reality they are the same. It is like different names given to rivers and lakes; though their names are not the same, the nature of the water is the same everywhere. Vinaya is Dharma, and

23 For more on Weikuan, see Poceski, Ordinary Mind as the Way, pp. 64–67.
Dharma is not separated from Chan. How could one falsely create any distinctions among the three?"

第二問云。既無分別。何以修心。師云。心本無損傷。云何要修理。無論垢與淨。一切勿起念。

Bo’s second question: “Since there are no distinctions, why should one engage in mental cultivation?”

Weikuan’s answer: "The mind is fundamentally without defects, so how can one try to improve it through cultivation? One must not give rise to any thoughts, regardless of their defilement or purity.” 24

第三問云。垢即不可念。淨無念可乎。師曰。如人眼睛上。一物不可住。金屑雖珍寶。在眼亦為病。

Bo’s third question: “Since one should not think about defilements, is it that one should [also] not think about purity?”

Weikuan’s answer: "There should be nothing inside men’s eye. Though gold dust is precious, it merely becomes a source of trouble when it enters the eye.”

第四問云。無修無念。亦何異於凡夫耶。師曰。凡夫無明。二乘執著。離此二病。是名真修。真修者不得動。不得忘。動即近執著。忘即落無明。其心要云爾。

Bo’s fourth question: “When there is no cultivation and no thought, how does one differ from an ordinary person?”

Weikuan’s answer: “Ordinary people are ignorant, while the followers of the two vehicles are prone to attachments. The forsaking of these two defects is called true cultivation. As to true cultivation, one should not move, nor should one forget things. Moving leads to attachment, while forgetting leads to sinking into a state of oblivious ignorance. These are the essential principles of mind [cultivation].” 26

24 The same idea is expressed in one of Mazu’s sermons. See Cheng-chien, Sun-Face Buddha, p. 63.

25 Some versions have qin 勤 (diligent) instead of dong 動 (movement or to move) in this and the next sentence.

26 Bo Juyi ji 41, p. 912; Boshi changqing ji 24, p. 13a-b; translation adapted in part from Cheng-chien, Sun-Face Buddha, pp. 36–37, and Kenneth Ch’en, The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism, pp. 199–200. Also quoted in Poceski, Ordinary Mind as the Way, p. 65. This comes from the memorial inscription Bo wrote for Weikuan soon after the latter’s death in 817, Xijing xingshansi chuanfatang bei 西京興善寺傳法堂碑,
Bo’s association and personal links with Ruman were even closer. The two established close bonds during the last decade of Ruman’s life (from the mid-830s through proximately 842), when the poet and the monk both lived the final years of their lives quietly in the Luoyang area. Ruman was stationed at Xiangshan (Fragrant Hill) monastery 香山寺, scenically located above the Yi river in the famous Longmen 龍門 grottoes area, which still remains a place of exquisite charm and beauty, visited by tourists and devotees alike. Longmen was south of the city of Luoyang, where Bo lived in his mansion, at first a leisurely life of semi-retirement, and in 841 he became officially retired with the title of minister of the Ministry of Justice. During these years Bo frequented Xiangshan monastery and established close connections with its monks, which inspired him to write many poems about it and his experiences there.

In 842 Bo and Ruman founded the “Incense Fellowship,” a Buddhist association that included other monks and literati. During this period Bo’s religious fervor reached its apogee. He spent much of his time cavorting with monastic fiends or engaging in religious activities, including the practice of meditation. He even dressed himself in the white robes of a Buddhist layman, thereby becoming known as the “Layman from Xiangshan.” Bo’s close relationship with Ruman and Xiangshan monastery is underscored by the fact that after his death in 846 he was buried next to Ruman’s memorial pagoda, in accord with his last wishes. Bo’s burial mound is still at its original location, set amidst a lovely memorial park just outside of the monastery, and his links with Xiangshan are also commemorated at the monastery’s grounds.

Bo’s attraction to Buddhism went back to his formative years, although his commitment to a spiritually-inspired way of life was wavering and his religious persona took some time to develop and mature. His early interest in Chan teachings and practices is indicated in a poem available in three other editions: (1) QTW 678.3069c–70a; (2) Boshi wenji 白氏文集 41.11a–14a (Sibu congkan ed.); (3) Wenyuan yinghua 文苑英華 866.4570b–71b. See also CTL 7, T 51.255a-b, for a different version, and Waley, The Life and Times of Po Chü-i, p. 99

For more on Ruman, see Poceski, Ordinary Mind as the Way, pp. 68–69. See also his stele inscription, composed by Bo Juyi, Foguang heshang zhenzan bingxu 佛光和尚真讚並序, QTW 677.3054c.

For examples of poems and prose pieces written by Bo about Xiangshan monastery, see Bo Juyi ji 22, p. 495; 31, p. 700; 31, p. 705; 33, p. 745; 35, p. 803; 36, p.824; 68, p.1441; and 71, p.1498.

titled “Zeng Shao Zhi” 贈杓直, written for his literati friend Li Jian. He wrote this poem in 815, around the time of his encounters with Weikuan and Guizong; this is among the earlier explicit mentions of the Chan school in his poetry.

近歲將心地, 回向南宗禪.
外順世間法, 內脫區中緣.
進不厭朝市, 退不戀人寰.
自吾得此心, 投足無不安.

In recent years I have directed my mind
Towards the Chan of the Southern school.
Outwardly, I follow the customs of the world,
Within, I put aside the entanglements of my immediate circle.
When going outside, I do not dislike the court and public places,
Returning home, I do not crave the company of man.
Ever since I obtained this frame of mind,
Wherever I go, I am at peace.  

Bo expressed his increasing interest in an inwardly oriented way of life infused with Buddhist values, along with his strengthened commitment to spiritual cultivation, in a poem composed in 827, when he was living in semi-retirement in Chang’an, following the end of his tenure as the governor of Suzhou. The poem, “Idly Chanting upon Getting up Early on a Winter Day” (Dongri zaoqi xianyong 冬日早起閑詠), includes these lines with a description of his practice of meditation and chanting:

晚坐拂琴塵，秋思彈一遍。
此外更無事，開尊時自勸。

At night I seat in meditation,
Affected by the autumn atmosphere I chant.
Thus leisurely, other than these two things,
My mind does not dwell on anything else.  

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30 Bo Juyi ji 6 (v. 1), p. 125–26; Boshi changqing ji 6, p. 21a-b; English translation adapted from Ch’en, The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism, p. 198.
Here the term Chan can be interpreted as pointing both to the Chan school’s specific contemplative practices and to its general meaning of meditation. At the time when this poem was written, Bo was in his late fifties and was in the process of gradually extricating himself from public life and an active pursuit of governmental service. That was accompanied by deepening of his religious interests and a rekindled dedication to Buddhist values and principles, along with intensification of his practice of meditation. In a poem written during the following year (828), titled 和知非, Bo highlights the superiority of Chan over Confucian ritual and the Daoist practices of nourishing the spirit (even as he also affirms that drunkenness comes as the second best), and offers a profuse praise of meditation:

不如學禪定，中有甚深味。
曠廓了如空，澄凝勝於睡。
屏除默默念，銷盡悠悠思。
春無傷春心，秋無感秋淚。
坐成真諦樂，如受空王賜。
既得脫塵勞，兼應離慚愧。

There is nothing like the practice of meditation,
For there is profound meaning in it.
In its vastness and wideness it is like space,
The clarity of its awareness is superior to sleep,
It obliterates all dark thoughts,
And puts to end fretful longings.
In spring nothing can wound the heart,
In autumn there is no melancholy to cause tears.
Sitting, I achieve the joy of supreme truth,
As if the prince of emptiness has bestowed it on me.
Since I escaped from the toils of the world,
I am no longer subject to a sense of remorse.32

31 Bo Juyi ji 25 (v. 2), p. 558; Boshi changqing ji 55, p. 4b; translation adapted from Ch’en, The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism, p. 213.
Although we already noted Bo’s interest in Chan teachings and his close connections with teachers, in the last two poems the references to the practice of Chan can be read as simply meaning the practice of sitting mediation (zuochan 坐禪), without implying an exclusive connection with the Chan tradition or the Hongzhou school.\(^{33}\) In a number of poems, however, Bo explicitly mentions the “Chan of the Southern school” (Nanzong chan 南宗禪)\(^ {34}\) or the synonymous Chan of Caoxi (曹溪禪, from the name of the place where Huineng’s monastery was located),\(^ {35}\) of which at the time the Hongzhou school was the main representative; he also makes mention of “Bodhidharma’s mind transmission,”\(^ {36}\) and writes of the Platform Scripture of the Sixth Patriarch (Liuzu tanjing 六祖壇經) as a text that explicates the Buddha mind.\(^ {37}\) It is clear that Bo understood Chan as a distinct tradition within Buddhism and felt a special affinity with it.

In a number of his poems Bo offered positive testimony to the value and potency of Buddhist practices, especially Chan meditation. He felt that his spiritual practice gave him a measure of mental equilibrium and a sense of emotional balance, thus helping him deal with stress arising from his professional engagements and other events in his life. Those pragmatic benefits were accompanied with a subtle feeling of detachment and a sense of spiritual insight into reality. In a poem entitled “Sitting Quietly, Intoning Idly” (Yanzuo xianming 晏坐閑吟) he states:

願學禪門非想定，千愁萬念一時空。

Willfully I studied the Chan school’s meditation of no-thinking,
Thousand cares and myriad concerns become empty in an instant.\(^ {38}\)

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\(^{33}\) For additional references to sitting meditation, see Bo Juyi ji 6, p. 120; 25, p. 558; 29, p. 662; 31, p. 712; 35, p. 802; 35, p. 804; 36, p. 827.

\(^{34}\) For example, see Bo Juyi ji 6 (v. 1), p. 125; 45 (v. 3), p. 968.

\(^{35}\) See the poem titled 春眠, Bo Juyi ji 6 (v. 1), p. 110.

\(^{36}\) Bo Juyi ji 31 (v. 2), p. 711.

\(^{37}\) See the poem titled 味道, Bo Juyi ji 23 (v. 2), p. 517.

However, in other poems Bo is more ambiguous about the religious aspects of his life, and he readily acknowledges his failure to fully actualize the transformative potential of Chan practice. In a poem with the title “Thoughts on a Rainy Night” 雨夜有念, which is infused with subtle melancholic overtones, he forthrightly confronts his shortcomings, confessing in a somewhat humorous tone to the fires of love and affection that still burn within him. He also points out that the problem is not with the effectiveness of the religious teachings themselves, but with the manner in which he employs them and above all with his own personal limitations.

Since I turned to the Way,
Six or seven years have passed.
I have refined and perfected the non-dual nature,
And have obliterated the myriad entanglements.
There are only the fires of love and affection,
Still at times causing me trouble.
It is not that the medicine is ineffective,
But I have so many ills that it is hard to cure them all! 39

Bo was realistic in his self-assessment, keenly aware of his imperfect spiritual attainments and inadequate progress in the practice of Chan. Such frankness and humility is refreshing and comes across rather charmingly, especially when we take into account all the brash boasts and bombastic assessments of supreme spiritual accomplishment found in traditional Chan literature (and the situation gets hardly any better in contemporary Zen writings). The two main problems he faced were his addiction to the drinking of wine and his compulsive writing of poetry. In his poems Bo often alludes to his love for drinking and admits of an occasional drunkenness. Such behavior was fairly typical within the context of Tang literati culture, in which drinking wine with one’s friends was a common social practice, as can be seen

from the numerous references to it in the period’s literature. However, that kind of dissolute behavior conflicted with Bo’s spiritual values and aspirations because, as he states in one of his poems, “Chan monks teach abstention from alcohol” (禪僧教斷酒). In a poem from 835, describing the ending of religious retreat during which he observed the eight Buddhist precepts (one of which is abstention from alcoholic drinks), he writes, “When the meditation monks leave, the drinking companions arrive.”

Towards the end of his life, as his interest in religion and devotion to Buddhism reached their peak, Bo changed his lifestyle and made efforts to deal with his fondness for wine. He was apparently able to bring his drinking under control, but fortunately—from the perspective of poetry aficionados everywhere, that is—he never gave up the writing of poetry. In a poem sent in his final years to the monks of the two monasteries at Lushan, which he had visited during earlier tours of duty in the South, Bo writes:

漸伏酒魔休放醉，猶殘口業未拋詩。
Gradually I conquered the wine devil, having given up drunkenness,
But I continue making karma with my mouth, not yet having given up poetry.

Even though for all practical purposes he could be regarded as a pious Buddhist, Bo described himself as a captive of the “demon of poetry” and felt that because of his attachment to literature he could never become a monk. Bo was apparently aware that as long as he remains entangled in worldly affair he would be unable to go very far along the Chan path of practice and realization. He felt that in order to achieve full spiritual realization, he had to become a monk and continue his religious practice in a future life. In a poem written at Xiangshan monastery, we find the poet quietly sitting under the moonlight on a stone at the edge of the pond. Inspired

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40 洛下寓居, Bo Juyi ji 23.517. Bo was apparently given the same advice to give up drinking by his doctors. See Bo Juyi ji 24.546.


42 寄題庐山旧草堂兼呈二林寺道侣, Bo Juyi ji 35 (v. 3), p. 804; translation adapted from Watson, “Buddhism in the Poetry of Po Chü-i,” p. 14. See also the expression of a similar idea in the poem titled 齋戒, Bo Juyi ji 35 (v. 3), p.793.

43 Ch’en, The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism, p. 225.

by the auspicious setting and influenced by brooding thoughts regarding the afterlife, Bo is moved to proclaim his wish to be reborn as a monk and return again at the same sublime place:

且共雲泉結緣境，他生當作此山僧。

Together with the clouds and the springs I form karmic bonds,

In another life I will be a monk at this mountain.45

Bo apparently accepted the monastic vocation as the most authentic form of a religious way of life. Such attitude was not exceptional within the context of his time, or even more broadly within the annals of Chinese Buddhism. During the Tang era it was common for committed layman to model their religious lives and personas on those of sagely monks whom they regarded as their spiritual mentors. On the whole, Buddhism was seen as a religion that preached renunciation and detachment, symbolized by the pure lives and impassive aloofness displayed by genuine monastics. The Chan tradition pretty much fitted into this model, in the process adding some elements that were emblematic of its religious ethos and soteriological orientation.

Towards the end of his life, as Bo’s religious commitments and devotion were intensifying and he was practicing Chan seriously, he found himself moving closer to a monastic lifestyle. Such shift is evident in a poem titled “Homeless, at Home” (Zaijia chujia 在家出家). This poem was composed in 840, a year before Bo’s official retirement, when he was living a tranquil life in Luoyang and was spending a good deal of his time at Xiangshan. The title refers to a layman who observes religious rules and practices, even though he still remains his home, retaining his family ties since he is not a formal member of the monastic order. Here we find the poet locating himself in-between two families, his real family on one side, and the community of Buddhist monks on the other side.

衣食支吾婚嫁畢，從今家事不相仍。
夜眠身是投林鳥，朝飯心同乞食僧。
清唳數聲松下鶴，寒光一點竹間燈。
中宵入定跏趺坐，女喚妻呼多不應。

Comfortably fixed for clothing and food, children married off,

From now on I am not concerned with family matters.
During rest at night, I am like a bird that has found its way to the forest;
At morning meals, I am one at heart with monks going for alms.
Clear cries, several voices, cranes under the pines;
A spot of cold light, the lamp among the bamboo.
Late at night, seated in the lotus position, I practice meditation;
When my daughter calls or my wife cries out, I do not answer either of them.  

The title of the poem utilizes a term commonly used to refer to a normative model of committed layman dedicated to the pursuit of the Buddhist path. The same idiomatic expression can be found in other texts from the Tang period, such as Daoxuan’s 道宣 (596-667) Fayuan zhulin 法苑珠林 (Grove of Pearls from the Dharma Garden). The poem’s title and its contents express the betwixt-and-between nature of Bo’s religious life during that period. They affirm the basic notion, embraced by Bo and his contemporaries, that successful Chan practice presupposes firm personal commitment and disciplined lifestyle, thereby shedding light on the manner in which the monastic ideal functioned as a key reference point for the construction of distinctive Buddhist or Chan ideals embraced by the Tang literati.

**Pang Yun as a Model Chan Layman**

Notwithstanding Bo’s studious involvement with Chan doctrine and practice, he was still an outsider in terms of his position within the Chan tradition in general and the Hongzhou school in particular. The same can be said of the other mid-Tang literati and officials who were associated with the Hongzhou school, including Lu Sigong, Quan Deyu, Li Jian, Li Bo, and Pei Xiu. The only layman to whom the role of a consummate insider is readily ascribed by Chan adherents and scholars alike is Pang Yun. Among the layman who studied under Mazu, Pang

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47 For examples, see T 53.592c, T 53.605b, T 53.644c, and T 53.1005b.

48 An example of attempts made by the later Chan tradition to appropriate the famous poet as a member of the Chan school is the inclusion of Bo Juyi’s biography in CDL 10, T 51.279c-80a; there he is presented as a spiritual heir of Ruman and thus a member of the Hongzhou school’s lineage.
Yun is the only one recognized by the later Chan tradition as Mazu’s spiritual heir and his story is regularly presented as an inspiring model of lay Chan practice.

On the other hand, as we will see shortly Pang was not an ordinary layperson. It might be a bit of a stretch to construe his life story as a model of enlightened lay practice that embraced and integrated religious mores and principles on one hand with the pursuit of a busy secular career and acceptance of prevalent societal norms on the other hand, although that has not prevented Chan/Zen adherents and commentators of reading it that way anyway. His story might perhaps be read more accurately as an indication of deep-seated tensions or even incompatibilities between genuine Chan practice as was understood at the time and the pursuit of secular values and lifestyles.

Little is known about Pang’s early life, and on the whole there are lacuna and question marks about a good deal of his biographical information. While the paucity of reliable sources is unfortunate, within the context of this study it is not as an insurmountable barrier as it may seem at first, since we are more concerned with his image as a paradigmatic exemplar of particular religious ideal, an epitome of an orientation or paradigm within the Chan tradition, rather than with the specific biographical details of his life. Here are some of the things we know about Pang’s life. Born in Hengyang (in present-day Hunan province), he came from a local gentry family with a tradition of government service as provincial officials. From the biographical records we learn that he got married and had two children, a son and a daughter. At some point in his mature life—perhaps at a time that in modern parlance we will identify as a mid-life crisis—he got weary of secular life and decided to devote himself to spiritual pursuits. One text tells how he loaded all his household possessions, amounting in value to several tens of thousands of strings of cash, onto a boat and then sank them in the middle of a river.

We are not told about the wife’s or children’s reactions to Pang’s renunciation of the family’s wealth and status, but later sources describe the members of Pang’s immediate family, especially his daughter Lingzhao 靈照 (Numinous Illumination), as exemplars of Buddhist piety and indicate that they joined him in his religious pursuits. The anonymous writer of the preface

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49 CTL 8, T 51.263b.

50 Iriya Yoshitaka 入谷義高, Hō koji goroku 龐居士語録, p. 3; Ruth Fuller Sasaki, at al., A Man of Zen: The Recorded Sayings of Layman P’ang, p. 40.
to Pang’s recorded sayings relates a poem by Pang that highlights his family’s devotion to Buddhism.

有男不婚，有女不嫁。
大家團團頭，共說無生話。
I have a son who is not married,
I have a daughter who is not wedded.
We all get together for a family reunion,
Together we talk the language of the unborn.\(^{51}\)

Having a son and a daughter who are both unmarried adults was highly unusual within the context of medieval Chinese society, and typically it was not something one would publicize to the rest of the world. The two children’s unusual predicament highlights the wholly unconventional character of the Pang family. The last line of the poem points to the main reason behind the family’s unusualness: they shunned basic social conventions and institutions such as marriage because of their devotion to the Buddhist way, symbolized by their speaking of the peculiar language of the unborn, namely the ultimate reality that is beyond birth and death, existence and nonexistence.

During the 780s, Pang embarked on a period of travel during which he visited monasteries and studied Chan. His first teacher was Shitou, at the time a reclusive Chan teacher, but who was subsequently recognized by the whole Chan tradition as a major patriarchal figure. After his visit to Shitou’s monastery, Pang expressed his newly acquired understanding of Chan in a verse form, which became one of his best-known poems:

日用事無別，唯吾自偶諧。
頭頭非取捨，處處勿張乖。
朱紫誰為號，丘山絕點埃。
神通井妙用，運水及般柴。

My daily activity is not different,
It is only that I am spontaneously in harmony with it;
Not grasping or rejecting anything,

\(^{51}\) XZJ 120.131a; the translation is mine. See also Sasaki, *A Man of Zen*, p. 43, and Iriya, *Hō koji goroku*, p. 4.
Everywhere there is nothing to assert or oppose.
Whose are the titles of [those who wear] vermilion and purple [robes]?\(^5^2\)
The mountain is without a speck of dust.
Supernatural powers and wonderful activity:
Fetching water and carrying firewood.\(^5^3\)

The last two lines of the poem are arguably the most famous statement attributed to Pang; they are often quoted and commented upon in later Chan and Zen literature. They point to the notion that the way of the Buddha is to be sough and perfected within the everyday world of ordinary events and activities, such as collecting firewood for the stove or fetching water to make tea. Such perspective shifts the focus of religious fervor and spiritual cultivation away from the recondite elements and preternatural realms often associated with the perfection of the bodhisattva path, which were focal points of reference to both canonically centered and popular manifestations of Buddhist piety. The two lines—the whole poem in fact—point to the central Hongzhou school teaching of ordinary mind, associated with the famous adage “ordinary mind is the way” (pingchang xin shi dao 平常心是道) that was formulated and propounded by Mazu.

After his meeting with Shitou, Pang traveled to Jiangxi and became Mazu’s disciple. After Mazu’s death, Pang went on to meet a number of noted Chan teachers, including Danxia Tianran 丹霞天然 (739–824) and Damei Fachang 大梅法常 (752–839), two noted disciples of Mazu.\(^5^4\) During his travels and pilgrimages he was accompanied by his daughter Lingzhao. Towards the end of his life Pang and his daughter moved to the area of Xiangzhou and Hangzhou, in the lower Yangzi region, where they led simple peripatetic life.\(^5^5\) During this period Pang presumably continued to dedicate himself to the pursuit of Chan practice and the

\(^5^2\) The somewhat oblique phrase “vermilion and purple” refers to the colors of the robes worn by high government officials during the Tang era.

\(^5^3\) CDL 8, T 51.263b; XZJ 120.28a; Cheng-chien, Sun-Face Buddha, p. 138.

\(^5^4\) Danxia is also considered a disciple of Shitou. Pang’s record of saying also contains a story about his meeting with Yangshan Huiji 仰山慧寂 (807–883). That is obviously a fiction, since Yangshan was merely an infant when Pang died and there is no way the two could have met.

\(^5^5\) The anonymous preface to Pang’s recorded sayings, which appears in the Ming edition of 1637, states that he traveled to Xiangyang at the beginning of Yuanhe period (806–820). See Sasaki, Layman P’ang, pp. 39–41, and CDL 8, T 51.263c.
writing of poetry. At that time he met Yu Di 于頔 (d. 818), the prefect of Xiangyang, who became his friend and admirer. Yu composed Pang’s biography after the latter’s death, and he also compiled Pang’s poems.

Subsequently Pang’s poems came to be admired within Chan circles, although outside of the Buddhist milieu he did not achieve the same recognition as Han Shan 寒山, the famous Buddhist poet and recluse who was also associated with the Chan tradition, whose poems are frequently anthologized in collections of Tang poetry. Virtually all of Pang’s poems explicitly deal with Buddhist themes and ideas. The pious and didactic character of his poetry, along with its uneven literary quality, probably accounts for its relatively limited appeal beyond Buddhist circles, although those same qualities made them into popular poetic recasting of Chan doctrines and perspectives, which still continue to be popular in Chan and Zen circles. Here is another of Pang’s poems that is representative of his poetic corpus.

欲得真成佛，無心於萬物。  
心如境亦如。真智從如出。  
定慧等莊嚴，廣演波羅蜜。  
流通十方界，諸有不能疾。  
報汝學道人，祇麼便成佛。  

If you wish to attain the truth and become a Buddha,  
You should have no mind in regard to the myriad things.  
Your mind should be thus, and external object should also be thus,  
Given that genuine wisdom comes out of thusness.  
The adornments of meditation, wisdom, and the like,  
Extensively expound the perfections (pāramitā).  
Pervading throughout all realms in the ten directions,  
They cannot be diseased by anything existent.  
I announce to all of you people who study the Way:  
If you are like this, you will become a Buddha.  

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56 For Yu Di, see JTS 156.4129-33, and XTS 172.5199-5200.  
57 *Pang jushi yulu* 龐居士語錄 (Recorded Sayings of Layman Pang) 2, XZJ 120.138b; translation is mine.
The popularity of Pang’s poetry undoubtedly contributed to his image as a paradigmatic Chan layman. The fashioning of that image was influenced by the need to have someone who will serve as a model of genuine Chan adept for laypeople. Pang’s prominence and his suitability for that role went together with the lack of other viable candidates, which was due to the aforementioned fact that Chan was an overwhelmingly monastic tradition. In time the representation of Pang as a model layman turned into a classical motif of traditional Chan lore. From the Song period onward that image became a prominent fixture in Chan literature and popular imagination, not only in China but also in Japan and elsewhere, and it is still evoked in various Zen temples and centers throughout the world.

Various Chan texts compare Pang to Vimalakīrti (Weimojie 維摩詰), the legendary hero of the scripture that bear his name, who in that text is described as an enlightened layman whose wisdom and preaching ability surpass that of the Buddha’s famous monastic disciples and the great bodhisattvas. Vimalakīrti was a popular religious figure and potent symbol in Tang China, especially among the literati, as can be seen from the writings of poets such as Bo Juyi and Wang Wei. Wang even fashioned his cognomen, Mojie 摩詰, on the basis of the Chinese transliteration of Vimalakīrti’s name. The Vimalakīrti Scripture was also popular as a doctrinal text within the Chan movement, especially the Hongzhou school; a testimony to that are the numerous quotations and allusions in the records of Mazu and his disciples. Vimalakīrti’s popularity as an archetypal Buddhist saint was largely due to the fact that he exemplified the possibility for lay people to achieve profound realizations of the truths of Buddhism even while leading active lives in society. Pang’s image as an enlightened Chan layman was to some extent fashioned in reference to Vimalakīrti’s model of an enlightened Buddhist sage. As such, it epitomized the promise of making the realization of Chan enlightenment accessible to those who were not members of the monastic order, thereby expanding the cycle of Chan adepts and making place in it for the literati.

Yet, the paradigm of an enlightened Chan layman formed around Pang’s story was a compromise at best, since the lay ideal it espoused was formed and structured in close correspondence to the monastic ideal. The new lay paradigm represented by Pang did not lead to

58 See CDL 8, T 51.263c, and XZJ 120.31b.
59 See Bo Juyi ji 19, p. 427; 31, p. 701; 31, p. 712; see also Sun, Chansi yu shiqing, pp. 202–03.
60 Yu, The Poetry of Wang Wei, pp. 110, 123.
abolition of the monastic versus lay distinction. In important respects, the narrative of Pang’s life followed a pattern that closely resembled the exemplary lives of monks, as described in various collections of monastic biographies and transmitted in popular Buddhist lore. Although during his younger years Pang got married and had children, we are told that after he resolved to study Buddhism he left his home and got rid of all of his material belongings. Pang’s act of giving up his family’s possessions and the attendant social status evokes monks’ renunciation of all worldly things and social ties at the time of their ordination (which, from a conventional perspective, in Pang’s case appears to have been done without sufficient regard of the impact of his pious act on the material wellbeing and security of his wife and children). Such course of action accords with the Buddhist belief that attachment to material things and social status are obstacles to enlightenment, which is at the core of the monastic ideal.

After his initial act of renunciation Pang went on to study with noted Chan teachers, namely Mazu and Shitou, again following a pattern familiar from the biographies of Chan monks. The circumstances and reasoning behind his decision not to become a monk are not clear; he might have been influenced by the fact that he already had a family, in contrast to virtually all Chan teachers who typically entered monastic life in their youth. All the same, Pang adopted a simple lifestyle centered on spiritual pursuits: he spent most of his time visiting monasteries, consorting with monks, and composing religious poetry. That was hardly a compelling model of successful integration of Chan practice into a busy secular lifestyle. In effect, the paradigmatic Chan layman was a pious person who spent much of his time in a religious environment and adopted a semi-monastic lifestyle, quite unlike the lives of ordinary people.

**Concluding Remarks**

Historical studies of Tang Buddhism that take into account the perspectives and involvements of groups or individuals situated outside of the narrow parameters of tradition and orthodoxy delineated by monastic elites are rewarding scholarly endeavors, potentially yielding fresh perspectives and useful data for enhanced understanding of a host of issues related to the history of Buddhism and religion in medieval China. As an additional bonus, they also shed light on prevalent social structures and cultural practices, which within the Tang context cannot be properly understood without placing Buddhism firmly into the larger picture. The intersections of Chan and poetry touched upon in the preceding pages tell us something important about the
Chan tradition and its place in Tang society. They bring into play diverse voices and viewpoints, including those of individuals outside of the circle of dominant patriarchal figures that anchors both traditional and modern narratives of Chan history.

By pointing towards the Chan tradition’s impact on what from the perspective of its monastic core were outer social groups such as the Tang literati, and by tracing the echoes of its tenets and symbolic representations in the expansive fields of cultural production, we are reminded of the broader milieus that shaped the Chan tradition’s historical trajectories and its position within Chinese religion and society. Looked from the other side, the inclusion of Chan and Buddhism in the analysis of the literature and other forms of artistic expression and creativity enhances our appreciation and grasp of the complexity and richness of Tang culture.

Bo Juyi and Pang Yun approached Chan practice from different perspectives, the first basically as an outsider and the second mostly as an insider. Yet, their religious lives intersect inasmuch as they both involve similar search for a compromise between the pull of the monastic ideal and the longing or need to retain ties with the larger world beyond the monastery walls. In a slightly different manner, they both show how the ideal of a devout Chan layman represented an adaptation of the monastic ideal, rather than its rejection or repudiation. Both poets were involved in the pursuits of Chan practice, and they both aspired to realize spiritual awakening, even if the patterns of their engagement with the Chan tradition point to a range of different levels of intensity and commitment. Their case studies show how Chan ideals, symbols, and practices were transposed outside of the pivotal monastic model and made accessible to a wider range of individuals, most notably the Tang literati.

Such accommodating attitude was possible because in principle Chan practice and realization transcended external distinctions, and thus they were accessible to both lay people and monastics. From that point of view, reality was fully manifest at any time and at any place, infusing all things and events, and every person was inherently endowed with the capacity realize that truth in its fullness and resplendent glory. Yet, notwithstanding all pretentious rhetoric about the accessibility and immediacy of Chan enlightenment, there was also a realistic awareness that studious pursuit, not to mention ultimate perfection of the Chan path are easier said than done. Accordingly, the monastic institution continued to be perceived as the best venue for the pursuit of arcane truths and the cultivation of sublime mental states that represented increasingly subtler levels of detachment and transcendence. The introduction of the ideal of
Chan layman therefore did not in any way imply obliteration of the religious and social distinctions between the two groups. The monastic ideal was construed as the primary model of authentic religiosity, while its lay counterpart was derived from it and involved compromise with the ways of the world.

Despite the differences in their personal backgrounds and their approaches to Buddhism and poetry, Bo’s and Pang’s religious lives intersect inasmuch as they involve intricate negotiations between the pull of the monastic ideal as a core element of Buddhism and the longing to retain ties with a larger world beyond the monastery’s walls, shaped by their creative sensibilities. They both show how the lay Chan ideal represented an adaptation of monasticism that involved a compromise with the secular world, but also allowed for broader range of cultural expressions, including the creation of timeless literary works.

\[\text{Abbreviations}\]

CDL Jingde chuandeng lu 景德傳燈錄.
JTS Jiu tangshu 舊唐書.
QTW Quan tang wen 全唐文.
T Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新修大藏經.
XTS Xin tangshu 新唐書.
XZJ Xu zangjing 續藏經 (reprint of Dai Nihon zokuzōkyō 大日本續藏經).

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