

HYPOTHESIS: Shen-hui 神会 was not acquainted with Hui-neng 惠能

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The Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng is supposed to be the Founder of the Southern School: that is to say, he is actually the Founder of the Zen (Ch'an) sect.

So, we are going to consider how the Biography of the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng and his thoughts in the Platform Sutra, were compiled.

Presently, we only know Hui-neng's thoughts through Shen-hui's (670-762). And we know of the ¹⁾*Neng ch'an-shih pei* 能禪師碑 (Zen monk Neng's Epitaph) written by Wang Wei 王維 (701-761) and the ²⁾*Kuang-hsiao ssu i-fa t'a-chi* 光孝寺瘞髮塔記 (Monument of Hui-neng's hair relic) and other texts.

Probably Hui-neng's Epitaph written by Wang Wei is the first mention ever made about details of Hui-neng's career.

To begin with, I think the life history of Shen-hui and Wang Wei has to be studied.

Wang Wei, who was a poet, the founder of the Southern School of Chinese painting, and a high government official, was also the author of Hui-neng's Epitaph. Before writing Hui-neng's Epitaph, he had written the epitaph for Ching-chüeh 淨覺, who was the editor of the ³⁾*Leng-chia shih-tzu chi* 楞伽師資記 (Record of the Masters of the Lañkāvatāra School).

According to Hu Shih's 胡適 (1871~1962) *Shen-hui Ho-sheng i-chi* 神会和尚遺集 (Surviving works of Master Shen-hui), and the *Jinne goroku* 神會語錄 (Recorded Sayings of Shen-hui), Wang Wei was a law officer who went to meet Shen-hui and Hui-ch'eng at Lin-t'uan Station 臨湍驛.

Wang Wei was a law officer in the Royal House towards the end of the

1) Wang Yu-ch'eng chi chien-chu 王右丞集箋注, pp. 446~49.

2) Ch'üan T'ang wen 全唐文, ch. 912.

3) T. (Taishō sinshū Daizō-kyō) 85, pp. 1283~91.

HYPOTHESIS: Shen-hui 神会 was not acquainted with (T. Nagashima) (43) K'ai-yüan era (-741). During this period Shen-hui was residing in Nan-yan (720-745). Wang Wei was mischievously accused of complicity in the rebellion of An Lu-shan 安祿山 (755), but was later reinstated on the intervention of his younger brother, Wang Chih 王縉 (-781). Later, he was third in rank in the cabinet during the reign of Emperor Su-tsung (reigned 756-762).

We could therefore assume that Wang Wei resumed his association with Shen-hui after the revolt. Shen-hui's fame had spread because of his capacity for political manipulation after the rebellion of An Lu-shan. His power at the Imperial Palace was acquired by the generous contributions of money and gifts, that he collected, by way of charging fees, from those who sought entry into the monastery.

According to the Biography of Hui-neng in the *Recorded Sayings of Shen-hui*, Hui-neng's prophecies were as Follows:

A man will emerge about forty years after Hui-neng's death and it is he who will establish this Sect.

This text was written after Shen-hui's death. It is probably true that Wang Wei wrote the Epitaph on Shen-hui's request as revealed in the following statements in the Epitaph:

Hui-neng's disciple Shen-hui states that he met his master Hui-neng in his old age while Shen-hui was in his middle age. Shen-hui was preached to at this stage.

And we are also able to find the following statement in the Epitaph:

Shen-hui said, "He knows the truth so he has given the Buddha verses to me with trust."

Next, as for the vagueness about Hui-neng's country of origin, there is the following reference in the Epitaph:

Hui-neng's native country is not known.....At one stage, he went to sit at the feet of a great master, Hung-jen.

The Chinese words for Mou-chun mou-hsien 某郡某県 (a certain place) are sometimes used when the place is known, but this is not important. However, we can presume that Shen-hui and Wang Wei wished to know Hui-neng's native country. If they had known it, they could have stated it in the Epitaph.

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In the section that refers to Hui-neng's prophecy of his death, it is stated as follows:

The date when Hui-neng said to his disciples (as a prophecy) that he would die soon, was not known.

In the section concerning his death, it is stated:

On a day that was not known, his memorial plaque was moved to Ts'ao-ch'i 曹溪, but the exact place where it was put is also not known.

According to the afore-mentioned references, no information is available regarding Hui-neng's native country, his dates of birth, and death. Thus it can be established that while Wang Wei wrote the Epitaph on Shen-hui's behest, Shen-hui was not aware of the details of Hui-neng's life. Even if he had been ignorant of his master's date of birth, he should have known the day, the year and also the age at which his master died. It must be presumed that he was nowhere near the place of Hui-neng's death. Therefore it goes without saying that Shen-hui had no contact whatsoever with Hui-neng, nor did he hear of him.

It could also be said that Shen-hui might have been aware of Hui-neng's reputation, but he had no clear picture of him as a person, as revealed in the following statement in the Epitaph:

I met my master in his old age while I was in my middle age.

As he had initiated the move for an Epitaph for his master, he should have had a strong impression of Hui-neng, which ought to include knowledge of details of his birth and death. That is to say, the statement about Hui-neng's old age and Shen-hui's middle age are very vague.

That which spurs one into an enquiry of this nature is the availability of historical clues of the following nature.

Shen-hui gets his hint that Hui-neng was one of the ten great disciples of Hung-jen at Shao-chou from the *Leng-chia shih-tzu chi*. The hint is in the four Chinese words, *Hui-neng of Shao-chou* 韶州惠能.

Next, let us consider the evolution of the Hui-neng legend from the version given in the *Zen monk Neng's Epitaph*.

It is presumed that Shen-hui's followers began in earnest to write Hui-neng's

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He was not born into a noble and rich family. 不生族姓之家。

He associated himself with sericulture workers and farmers. 臭味於耕桑之侶。

Further, the Epitaph states:

Hui-neng went to see a Great master called Hung-jen and became his disciple. Hui-neng worked hard with all his might for his master and he was satisfied with kitchen-work at the temple and finally attained enlightenment by ungrudgingly engaging in the practical matters of everyday life.

From the above references in the Epitaph, it can be presumed the editor of the *Platform Sutra* must have conceived of the idea 'service in the temple kitchen' for the Chinese character 'ching-chiu' 井臼 means only 'a well 井 and mortar 臼'.

If we refer to these words in the Chinese and Japanese dictionaries, we find the following definition:

They performed their household tasks by using fire-wood and water (Hsin-shui 薪水).

There is also the following reference in the Epitaph:

Hui-neng worked with farmers and merchants for a period of sixteen years. 混農商於勞侶。如此積十六載。

The Epitaph merely refers to events after Hui-neng's meeting of Hung-jen, but the biographer, who gets his information from the Epitaph, writes of Hui-neng as having been a brush seller or fire-wood seller in his early life.

The biographer also refers to Hui-neng being a 'rice-cleaner', and this fabrication could be traced to the following references in the Epitaph.

Firstly, 'He worked hard with all his might for his master.' Secondly, 'the word *mortar* in the phrase *well and mortar*'.

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It is in this manner that the editor of the *Platform Sutra* composes the biography of Hui-neng as follows:

An ascetic happens to be there. He takes Hui-neng to the cottage meant for rice-pounding, where Hui-neng operates the pestle for more than eight months.

Here, the editor is not recording the events that occurred in Hui-neng's life. Rather, he is projecting the situation as it existed during the age of the Tun-huang text, i. e. when the *Platform Sutra* was written, which was approximately one hundred years after the period of Hui-neng as stated in his biography. During this period Pai-chang 百丈 (720-814) had already built a Zen temple and his disciples were working in the temple and the field.

Next, concerning the etymology of the words, 'a well and mortar', we can find two old historical books. One of them is the *Hou Han-shu* 後漢書: It states:

All women and children managed to handle the well and mortar for themselves.

And other is the *Nan-shih* 南史: It states:

The wives and children also performed their works by the well and mortar.

The above two texts also state:

The men have died or are no longer at home.

Perhaps the editor of the *Platform Sutra* gets his hint from the above sources to fill the gap in knowledge about Hui-neng when his father died in his childhood.