INTRODUCTION

This is a study of a Chan monk in his institutional, social, and cultural contexts. Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本 (1263–1323) was among the most prominent monks of the Yuan 元 dynasty and an influential figure in Buddhist history. But he was also a significant figure in the cultural life of the empire and a local saint who, during his lifetime, earned the epithet “Old Buddha of the South” (Jiangnan gu Fo 江南古佛). Thus an examination of his life offers new perspectives not only on Buddhism at this time but also on the Yuan dynasty more generally.

In examining what I call the “cultural construction” of Mingben, I mean to address the ways in which Mingben constructed his own identity (with varying levels of intentionality) and also how his identity was constructed for him by outside forces. This process can be divided into two mutually constitutive aspects: the social networks in which Mingben operated and the cultural repertoires he employed. Cultural competencies are defined largely by one’s social milieu, which in turn provide the settings for their performance. However, cultural repertoires also demand historical engagement, and familiarity with past thinkers and writers. Thus Mingben was drawn into virtual networks with figures from the past.

Although all individuals find themselves participating in networks of various sorts, the networks formed as a result of what sociologist Randall Collins terms “interaction rituals” provide a useful way of thinking about how different sorts of intellectual and ritual
networks might function in Mingben’s life. In the introduction to his wide-ranging work *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*, Collins explains that an interaction ritual entails a meeting of people who share the same focus of attention, and that this attention leads to shared affect. Both attention and affect intensify over the course of the interaction, and participants come away with a sense that they are members of a group and that the group is bound by what has been the object of their focus. This object of focus in turn can become a symbol of the group. From such experiences, participants generate “a store of charged symbols” that in turn form the “symbolic repertoire” of each individual, providing them with cultural capital.  

1. This cultural capital is thus produced through social interaction: while knowledge and cultural skills have the potential to be cultural capital, they do not become such capital until they are used and recognized in a group setting and thereby become charged with the enthusiasm of the group. Cultural capital can be generated out of any interaction, but the capital produced out of philosophical and intellectual settings is differentiated by the fact that it necessarily engages in a sort of interaction ritual with those who are not present. That is, an intellectually oriented interaction—a discussion between teacher and student, for example—assumes a community of thinkers from the past, and often the focus of shared attention is past texts. Indeed, intellectual life takes place not just (and perhaps not even primarily) through face-to-face encounters but also through writing and reading. These activities are charged through the emotional effects of interaction rituals so that “reading and thinking are vicarious interaction rituals. . . . Writing is a vicarious participation in the world of symbolic memberships.”

Collins uses the term “repertoire” to refer to symbols that are charged through interaction rituals and thereby become cultural capital. Other scholars have expanded the idea of repertoire from a

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1. Collins borrows the terms “interaction ritual” from the work of Erving Goffman but expands it beyond Goffman’s focus on the psychology of physical meetings to discuss the sociological aspects of intellectual advancement. Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, 22–24, 27.

set of symbols to an inventory of skills to deploy and manipulate those symbols, such as the ability to write within certain genres. Robert Campany and Robert Hymes, in their recent works on Chinese religion, have used the term “repertoire” in this way. Drawing on the work of Ann Swidler, Campany notes that the use of such terms as “tool kit” and “repertoire” allows one to avoid positing religions as “fully integrated systems.” Hymes makes a similar point: not only is there no unified culture, but even those who identify themselves as bearers of a particular culture will not wholly agree on the details and meaning of that culture. Instead of a single culture, there are overlapping cultural practices for which repertoires serve a key mode of differentiation. In his research on how transcendents are created in early medieval China, Campany distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic functions, and argues that repertoires are often employed to distinguish members of one group (in his work, transcendents) from the broader society. People assume different roles within society and think about these roles with reference to their intrinsic qualities and benefits, but also with reference to how they are distinguished from other roles. These roles are created through beliefs, practices, and competencies that form distinct repertoires.

As Ann Swidler describes it, the idea of repertoire is performative and entails both smaller and larger elements: “Cultured capacities may exist both as discrete skills, habits, and orientations and, in larger assemblages, like the pieces a musician has mastered or the plays an actor has performed.” Likewise, in his discussion of the term “repertoire” Hymes notes the way in which it highlights individuals as “cultural actors” who have at their disposal “a lumpy

3. Campany’s nuanced discussion of these issues as they relate to the representation of religion is found in his “On the Very Idea of Religions,” 317.


5. Campany, Making Transcendents, 40–58, esp. 41–45.

6. Swidler, Talk of Love, 25. Swidler analyzes how contemporary Americans speak about love and marriage, and notes the ways people draw on divergent views in this process.
and varied historical accumulation of models, systems, rules, and other symbolic resources.”7 Frequently these models and symbolic resources will have primarily practical ends—maintaining one’s social position, or achieving a certain goal—but the performance of a repertoire can, in some circumstances, be its own end, to augment or perfect the repertoire itself. Although having access to resources, social as well as material, is necessary for the successful establishment of intellectual networks, the networks thrive through communal commitments to certain symbolic repertoires, which may be performed not for what they do, but for the emotional rewards gained through shared attention. Further, as Collins points out, every individual participates in multiple networks, and such participation forms the social backbone of a person’s life. Our cultural biography is a history of our interaction rituals, both with living networks and with those networks of the past that form the background of contemporary intellectual communities.

The concept of repertoires and the networks formed through them is especially useful in discussing Buddhism in imperial China. First of all, it bears repeating that “religion” as such (zongjiao 宗教) did not exist in the Yuan dynasty; instead there were traditions (zong 宗) and teachings (jiao 教), often understood as “paths” (dao 道).8 That is, acting as a Buddhist did not require a special sort of belief different from other intellectual commitments. Indeed, intellectual and cultural networks shared an understanding that there were authentic ways of viewing the world, and that it was possible to cultivate that authentic vision, even if their ideas of authenticity differed. We can see this through the work of Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), who advocated writing as a means to progress toward the Way (Dao), and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), who proposed a program of reading that would allow men of his time to apprehend the Way of the sages.9

9. For intellectual trends in the eleventh century, see Bol, “This Culture of Ours,” chap. 6; on Su Shi, see Egan, Word, Image, and Deed; Gardner, Learning to Be a Sage, 35–57, discusses Zhu Xi’s practice of reading.
For the Chan school of Buddhism, awakening (wu 仏) signaled the transformation to more authentic modes of experience. Thus the cultural and intellectual networks of the Song and Yuan dynasties interacted with each other and would have held in common some key values, even though these were expressed through different symbolic repertoires. As these shared aspects are often not made explicit by the authors themselves, teasing them out remains somewhat tentative, although I will suggest many of them in the chapters that follow.

In the case of an elite monk in the Song dynasty, his repertoire might include, for example, skill in composing poetry and the ability to retell and respond to certain gongan (public cases) as longer set pieces. As has often been noted, secular elites of this period shifted between Confucian (Ru 道) and Buddhist modes without apparent contradiction, easily able to engage in Daoist discourse as well, or to write in a way that might be termed localist. Hymes’s research on how people relate to gods shows they drew on both bureaucratic and personal models. These shifts in perspective and rhetoric can be understood as the use of different repertoires in different settings, as individuals move through various networks and interaction rituals. A repertoire thus includes different skills and performances to be used in different settings, and different areas of the repertoire may be more or less practiced.

It bears noting that the use of the term “rituals” in Collins’s description of the functioning of social networks adds a physical and material dimension to intellectual and cultural encounters. When speaking of historical repertoires such as those of Yuan China, it is important to recognize that while what has been transmitted is almost entirely in written form, many of these texts had a social or performative aspect at the time that they were written and first circulated. This dimension may not emerge clearly in the written

10. In a similar vein, Campany writes, “A repertoire may contain different and indeed contradictory models of certain areas or aspects of life because these models answer different sets of questions.” Campany, “On the Very Idea of Religions,” 318.
historical record, but it is important to keep in mind that intellectual exchanges gained their emotional thrust through personal interactions, and that these personal interactions entailed specific modes of behavior and ways of being. Personal interactions were ritualized, and this was reflected in material culture when such interaction rituals were carried out through the exchange of letters and other writings. Intellectual networks entail social connections as well as the circulation of material goods. Written texts must be read, then, with attention to how they might have been instantiated in social encounters.

The concepts of cultural repertoires and networks formed through interaction rituals help us answer questions about figures, such as Mingben, who are successful and influential without being innovators. When we see society as a mesh of networks formed through interaction rituals, which in turn are opportunities for the refinement of shared repertoires, then an individual's success derives from moving effectively through those networks. Repertoires vary with the networks, so that participating in a range of networks entails mastery of different skills and symbolic resources. Not only is mastery of each repertoire dependent on the individual, but so is the choice of which repertoire to use and how to use it. Further, the repertoire of skills and symbols used by the individual are endowed with meaning when their performance is recognized by a social network. An individual's success or renown depends on demonstrated competency in the relevant repertoires and also on the reception of one's works by others. It is this recognition that creates the person's social image, transmitted to us in biographies and anecdotes. Mingben's prominence both in Chan circles and in cultural networks derived from his ability to master a wide range of repertoires and perform them appropriately and creatively. This ability led to his further participation in various other networks, thereby expanding his renown. The chapters that follow will explore Mingben's use of different repertoires and his participation in social networks, but it is necessary here to say something of the wider context in which Mingben lived.
Jiangnan in the Yuan Dynasty

Considered in terms of social and political institutions, the Yuan dynasty was a period of broad continuities with the Southern Song, as well as one of significant change. It is impossible to deny the impact of Mongol rule, but many patterns established in the Song dynasty continued to hold true in the Yuan, especially in southern China. In terms of continuities, the Jiangnan region suffered little population loss during the Mongol conquest, leaving long-term demographic patterns in place. Trends that began in the Song and persisted into the Yuan include the development of market towns, the increase in book publishers, and the integration of the Daoxue 學 (Learning of the Way) movement to revitalize the Confucian tradition into elite institutions and interests. The number of men educated for official positions had begun to outstrip the number of available government appointments during the Song dynasty, prompting elites to turn to other intellectual pursuits, primarily education, as acceptable careers. The suspension of the examination system in the early Yuan, coupled with a reluctance on the part of many among the newly displaced literati to serve the new dynasty, encouraged this development. For those elites for whom government service was not possible, the arts often figured prominently in their identity. While allegiance to the Song was notable in writings of the elite class of the literati in the early Yuan, as was the writers’ related practice of eremitism, over time literati found ways

11. In her discussion of the continuities between the Southern Song and the Yuan, Jennifer Jay cites studies by Meng Siming, Robert Hymes (on Fuzhou), John Langlois, Yao Congwu, and Li Zefen. She also notes that mainland scholars have become eager to see the Mongols in a positive light, as part of China’s self-representation as a multiethnic state. Jay, A Change in Dynasties, 3–4.
12. These patterns are discussed in Smith and von Glahn, The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition. See especially Smith’s introduction to this volume.
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to accommodate themselves to political realities while remaining loyal to Song culture.  

Yet the Mongol conquest was a significant shock, and Mongol rule brought tremendous changes. Spatially, the borders of the Yuan grew considerably as the Mongols conquered new lands. This territory incorporated new ethnic groups as well, and the Mongol rulers constructed a ranking system based on conquest order, which placed southerners in the lowest position. In government office, those Han Chinese fortunate enough to find positions found themselves working under the supervision of Mongol administrators. Mongol customs differed markedly from those of the Chinese, and the confrontation between the two could have far-reaching effects: Bettine Birge has argued that Mongol attitudes toward property and women significantly altered Chinese marriage and family customs, for example.  

Social disruptions could also take more physical forms. Especially at the beginning and end of the dynasty, displaced populations fostered corruption, violence, and violations of community ethics. Moreover, the effects of Mongol rule were not necessarily equally distributed; wealth and social standing could mute their impact. The situation in the south was also very different from that in the north. Although southern elites were displaced from official positions, much of social, economic, and cultural life in the region was significantly continuous with that of the Southern Song. There was little change in population during the Song-Yuan transition, including in the major cities, such as Hangzhou. Most arable

14. Jay, “Memoirs and Official Accounts”; see also Jay, A Change in Dynasties. The situation was less favorable for literati in the north, many of whom ended up as prisoners or slaves in the early part of the Mongol conquest. The Mongols used a system of household registrations, primarily based on occupations. The “Confucian household” registration category treated educated men as specialists akin to the Buddhist and Daoist clergy, and provided their families with protection and benefits. For a brief explanation of household registrations, see Mote, Imperial China, 495–96. See also Makino, “Transformation of the Shih-jén”; also Xiao, Yuandai shi xin tan, 1–58.


16. Paul Jakov Smith provides many examples of social breakdown in his “Fear of Gynarchy.”
land had already been brought under cultivation by the end of the Southern Song. Although the size of farms decreased somewhat, family size in Jiangnan was generally stable. Agricultural improvements suggest the Yuan was part of “a continuous process of development.”17 In short, life in Jiangnan suffered little in the way of actual, long-lasting adjustment, even though the psychic disruption may have been keenly felt.

Literati identity was shaped by a variety of forces. According to the work of Chen Wenyi, elites in the south saw themselves as part of both a “local tradition” and a “dynastic tradition,” and each “served as a conceptual framework, which located individuals in a specific cultural context and provided others with important referents for understanding their position and achievements.”18 This localist turn in the Yuan was connected to the elites’ “status crisis,” brought about because the state did not offer a means to confirm their status through the examinations and government service. Therefore other sorts of networks grew up that could confirm their standing in various communities. For many places in the south, chief among these was the network formed between the teachers and students of a given place. Local identity had other dimensions too, often tied in with family and extended kin groups, and it provided the background for shared cultural memory.19 At the same time, the “dynastic tradition” was created by a national group centered at the capital, but it was not based on state institutions. Rather, it was formed through cultural practices shared across time, thereby defining membership temporally, not spatially. As Chen notes, these two kinds of tradition are not contradictory but reflect the fact that elites participated in multiple networks and saw their identities as constructed in different dimensions.20 Writing, especially

17. Li Bozhong, “Was There a Fourteenth-Century Turning Point?,” 175; Haar, “Buddhist-Inspired Options.”
18. Chen Wenyi, “Networks, Communities, and Identities,” 3; see also her “Wu Wu wenxian zhi yi,” which takes Wuzhou 萬州 as a case study to explore the formation of regional identity in the Yuan.
in those genres separate from official life, was a way to establish and reaffirm membership in various traditions.\textsuperscript{21}

It should be apparent that this fits well with the description of networks formed through interaction rituals and that produce repertoires based on cultural practices such as the composition of prefaces. Chen’s research is important not only for offering a more robust picture of relations among the literati in the Yuan but also for the way in which she describes the intersection of networks and cultural practices. Indeed, Chen’s findings parallel much of what we see in the formation of elite identity for Mingben: he too participates in regional and national networks, and derives his identity from multiple sources. At many points these networks and identities intersect with those of Jiangnan elites, but some networks remain distinctly Buddhist.

\textit{Religion in the Yuan Dynasty}

Religion under the Yuan dynasty was characterized by the emergence of new traditions alongside the continuation and strengthening of trends seen during the Song. At the beginning of the Mongol conquest the Daoist Qiu Chuji 丘處機 (1148–1227), also known as Changchun 長春 (“Eternal Spring”), came to the attention of Chinggis Khan (d. 1227), who was interested in pursuing immortality. Qiu Chuji and later Quanzhen 全真 Daoists gained a good deal of power from this association, and they pressed their advantage in the subsequent decades, eventually taking over hundreds of Buddhist monasteries and

\textsuperscript{21} Chen shows that the presentation preface (\textit{xu} 呈), in particular, served to establish connections and build personal reputations. Prefaces were received as gifts by traveling literati, and their authors assumed they would be read by others, in this way serving as personal introductions to new networks. The composition and circulation of presentation prefaces thus improved the reputation of both author and recipient—the former through having his words read by others, and the latter through what was said about him. Chen Wenyi, “Networks, Communities, Identities,” 339–87, 397.
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temples and desecrating Buddhist images. Furthermore, the Daoists promoted two texts, the Huahu jing (Conversion of the barbarians), and Bashiyi hua tu (Illustration of eighty-one manifestations), both viewed by Buddhists as slighting their tradition. The former text asserted that Laozi had gone west to India, thereby implying that all Buddhism was derivative of Daoism. The latter text, Bashiyi hua tu, provided illustrations of Laozi’s eighty-one manifestations, with the Buddha as one among them. The animosity between Buddhists and Daoists grew to a point where some resolution seemed warranted, and Qubilai Khan (1215–94) summoned both sides for a debate at Karakorum in 1258. The historicity of the assertions in Huahu jing was successfully challenged, and the eminent Tibetan cleric ‘Phags-pa further pointed out that Buddhism was an international religion, while Daoism was limited solely to China. Although the Buddhists gained the upper hand in this meeting, they had to wait until 1281 for the satisfaction of burning the spurious Daoist texts, an act ordered in an edict of that year. How-

22. Quanzhen was a new Daoist movement that emerged in north China during the late twelfth century. Its founder was Wang Chongyang (1113–70), and Qiu was one of his principal disciples.

23. On the history of Bashiyi hua tu, see Ch’en, “Buddhist-Taoist Mixtures.”

24. The Buddhist side of the thirteenth-century conflict between the two schools is recorded in Bian wei lun (Record of disputing the false), written by Xiangmai in 1291 at the order of the emperor. See also Jaqchid, “Chinese Buddhism and Taoism,” and Thiel, “Der Streit der Buddhisten und Taoisten.”

25. The Mongol rulers continued to patronize Daoism, however, as doing so allowed them another avenue by which to influence society in the south. There, Celestial Masters Daoism flourished, and proved compatible with Mongolian religious beliefs such as shamanism, fortune-telling, and divination. Qubilai Khan summoned the leader of Celestial Masters Daoism, Zhang Zongyan (1244–91), to the court in 1276; Zhang’s disciple Zhang Liusun (1248–1321) later remained at court as the representative of the Celestial Masters. In 1278, Qubilai honored Zhang Liusun with the title “Master of the Lineage of the Subtle Teachings” (Xuanjiao zongshi), and this position made him the chief leader of Daoism in the south. See K. Sun, “Yü Chi and Southern Taoism.”
ever, Chinese Buddhists also found themselves defending their tradition to the Mongol ruler and his Tibetan teacher. In 1272 Conglun 徙倫 (n.d.), a disciple of the prominent Chan master Wansong Xingxiu 萬松行秀 (1166–1246), was called to court to explain his tradition. He did so, and was met with challenges both from the emperor and from 'Phags-pa, the latter debating the Chinese monk on the meaning of anecdotes from the Chan tradition.26 Such disputation continued: Yunfeng Miaogao 雲峰妙髙 (1219–93) was a Chan monk residing at Jingshan 徑山 in Hangzhou when he was summoned to the capital by Qubilai Khan in 1280 for the purpose of debating monks from other schools of Buddhism.27

By the early years of the Yuan dynasty, the Chan tradition was well established and even dominant among Buddhist schools. Of the five lineages of Chan identified in the late Tang, the Guiyang 道仰, Fayan 法眼, and Yunmen 雲門 schools were already in decline, leaving the Caodong 曹洞 and Linji 臨濟 lines with the greatest influence. For the Yuan dynasty, it has generally been asserted that Caodong was more prominent in the north while Linji monks were the majority in the south. Several Chan monks had prominent roles in the capital. Wansong Xingxiu was honored by the Jin 金 emperor Zhangzong 嘉宗 (r. 1189–1208), and after the change in dynasties he received the protection of Chinggis Khan.28 His importance in the history of the Caodong school is due in large part to his authorship of Congrong lu 從容錄 (Record of being at ease) and Qingyi lu 請益錄 (Record of asking for teachings), which collect the enlightenment experiences of Caodong masters and provide a narrative of the

27. On this debate see Jan, “Yuandai Chanseng yu Xizang Lama bianlun kao.”
28. I will discuss only the Chan tradition here; for the activities of the Faxiang 法相, or Cien 慈恩, school and the Huayan tradition during the Yuan, see Chikusa, Sō Gen Bukkyō bunkashi kenkyū. On the popular level, the White Lotus tradition flourished; see Haar, The White Lotus Teachings, 72–113. For a lengthier discussion of Xingxiu’s activities in the Jin, see Yao, “Buddhism and Taoism,” 148–51. Both Xingxiu and Yinjian are discussed in Jan, “Chinese Buddhism in Ta-tu.”
school's transmission.\textsuperscript{29} One of his lay disciples was Yelü Chucai (1190–1243), the prominent early-Yuan statesman; Yelü authored a preface to Xingxiu’s *Congrong lu*, and he was also instrumental in protecting and promoting Buddhism at the early Yuan court, successfully dissuading Chinggis Khan from conscripting Buddhist monks.\textsuperscript{30} Another of Xingxiu’s lay disciples was Li Chunfu 李純甫 (1185–1231). He wrote *Mingdao jishuo* 嗐道集說 (Collected explanations proclaiming the Way), an important rejoinder to Neo-Confucian attacks on Buddhism. Three monks were particularly important among Wansong Xingxiu’s followers: Conglun, Zhiwen 至溫 (1217–67), and Fuyu 福裕 (1203–75). All three figured in the dispute with the Daoists and were prominent Chan teachers of the time.\textsuperscript{31}

As for Linji monks in the capital, Haiyun Yinjian 海雲印簡 (1202–57) was an important defender of Buddhism at the early Yuan court.\textsuperscript{32} In particular he argued against the reintroduction of examinations for the clergy, to be required in order for them to maintain tax-exempt status.\textsuperscript{33} He lectured on Buddhism to Qubilai Khan, and was teacher to Liu Bingzhong 劉秉忠 (1216–74); his connection to both ruler and official facilitated Liu’s service to the Yuan.\textsuperscript{34} Haiyun was honored in his later years, attaining the post of registrar of Buddhist clergy as well as honorary titles. According to Jan Yün-hua, Haiyun’s death marked a turning point for Han Buddhists at the Yuan court, and thereafter Tibetan Buddhists exercised a controlling influence over religious affairs even as Confucian literati played larger roles within the government.\textsuperscript{35}

30. On Yelü Chucai, his career, and Buddhist beliefs, see Rachewiltz, “Yeh-lü Ch’u-t’s’ai.”
32. For discussions of Haiyun Yinjian’s career see Jan, “Chinese Buddhism in Ta-tu,” and Abe, Zenshū shakai to shinkō, 248–83.
33. The section of Haiyun’s biography in *Fozu lidai zongzai* concerning the issue of illiterate monks and the examination system is translated in Jagchid, “Chinese Buddhism and Taoism,” 73–74.
34. Hong, *Zhongguo Fojiao wenhua lichen*, 313.
Although the discourse at court was characterized by intellectual division, there were also distinct differences among Buddhist social practices in northern and southern China during the Yuan. Having been governed by the Jurchen Jin dynasty prior to the Mongol conquest, Buddhists in the north may have been more inclined to develop new institutional and ideological strategies based on Mongol interests and interventions. For example, many monks used their position to assist their kin to likewise attain places in the Buddhist administration or the local bureaucracy. As for the south, the evidence generally supports Barend ter Haar’s view that the period from the Southern Song to the late Yuan (1100–1340) is a “coherent unit of time,” based on the expansion of regional cults into national ones and the growth of Buddhist lay movements, among other developments. 

Chan Contexts

Mingben was a Jiangnan monk and a gifted writer and calligrapher, but it is through his affiliation with the Chan tradition that he is best known. By the time of the Yuan, Chan was a mature school that dominated the intellectual and social landscape of Buddhism. 

37. Haar, “Buddhist-Inspired Options,” 96. Iiyama Tomoyasu also concludes that “the majority of temples that granted honors and titles in the Northern Song also continued to maintain their influence in local society in the Jin and Yuan.”
38. The old model of Buddhism’s trajectory in China that identified phases of acculturation, flourishing, and decline has been discredited to the point that it does not need to be addressed again here. The essays in Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz, *Buddhism in the Sung*, attest to Buddhism’s continued importance and innovation during this period. At least in the case of Chan, the apex of its flourishing—if it even makes sense to talk of such a thing—certainly came in the Song dynasty, not the Tang. The notion that the Buddhism of late imperial China was debased or in a state of decline is not useful for understanding the tradition of this period. While Buddhists themselves made statements to this effect, it is a position taken by Buddhists in all periods.
This was, however, a relatively recent development, as Chan truly came into its own as a school during the Song dynasty. It did so by claiming a teaching lineage that linked contemporary Chan masters to the eminent teachers of the Tang dynasty and, through them, to Indian patriarchs and the historical Buddha. This genealogy of teachers legitimated contemporary masters and the Chan approach to practice and transmission, which emphasized the words of the teacher and personal instruction. Those words, in the form of sermons and recorded conversations, would become a key part of a distinctly Chan literature. Thus lineage building was tied to the development of the Chan textual corpus and rhetoric.

What proponents of Chan saw as distinct and definitive about it is best summed up in the four expressions that were attributed to Chan’s founder, Bodhidharma: that the Chan school was “a separate transmission outside the teachings” (*jiaowai biechuan* 教外別傳); that it “did not set up words and letters” (*buli wenzi* 不立文字) but was instead “directly pointing at men’s minds” (*zhizhi renxin* 直指人心) so that they might “see their nature and become Buddhas” (*jianxing cheng Fo* 見性成佛). These phrases were first brought together as a kind of Chan mission statement in the early twelfth century.39 Likewise, the *yulu* 語錄 (“record of words”), *denglu* 燈錄 (“lamp transmission records”), and collections of *gongan* were all products of the Song dynasty. This literature was also tied to developments in forms of practice unique to the Chan school. Meditation was fundamental to all Buddhists, although Chan claimed its tradition better grasped meditation’s objectives. In the Song dynasty, the meditation tradition included Hongzhi Zhengjue 宏智正覺 (1091–1157) and other advocates of seated meditation, and Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163), who recommended the use of a short, pithy phrase (“critical phrases,” or *huatou* 話頭) drawn from encounter literature as a focus for contemplation. And while Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (720–814) is said to have written “rules of purity” (*qinggui* 清規) to govern Chan monastic institutions, as identified by imperial placards, no such separate institutions ex-
isted until the Song dynasty. Even then they shared much with other monasteries.40

From the perspective of Mingben and his lineage, gongan literature and kanhua ("contemplation of the critical phrase") made up the most important Chan repertoire they had to master. The symbols and skills in Mingben’s own repertoire will be examined in more detail later, but as gongan and huatou are terms that appear frequently, they necessitate some preliminary discussion here. Gong-an literature emerged out of “encounter dialogues” and recorded sayings of the masters.41 Chan authors took conversations between a teacher and a student as their pedagogical ideal: in the literature and self-representation of the school, students learn best by asking questions and being tested by their teachers. Students might travel from teacher to teacher, seeking one who could drive them forward on their path. The goal of this path was enlightenment or awakening (often expressed as wu or jue) to one’s original, awakened state. According to Chan doctrine all people are possessed of an innate, awakened nature, yet most operate as if unaware of this nature. A sophisticated discourse treated this problem in detail, examining how the unenlightened state related to original awakening, and the process of cultivating insight into one’s original nature. This led to the distinction between sudden and gradual forms of cultivation, with the Chan school generally speaking of awakening in terms that emphasize the sudden, immediate nature of the experience.42

Accounts of individual moments of awakening and dialogues between students of Chan were recorded by disciples or imagined by later authors. These episodes were transmitted in biographical literature and in recorded sayings (yulu) literature. The latter category included sermons and conversations about Chan, often in lan-

41. See John R. McRae’s definition of encounter dialogue in Seeing through Zen, 77–78.
language that reflected speech of the times. These recorded sayings, especially those of earlier Chan masters, continued to be revised and elaborated well after their initial compilation.⁴³ In the Song dynasty, Chan masters anthologized these episodes, based on their own intellectual and sectarian predilections, and added to them commentaries in both prose and verse. These gongan collections, such as Wumen guan 無門關 (Gateless barrier) and Biyan lu 碧巖錄 (Blue cliff record), were at the core of Chan study. Gongan collections are a literary tradition akin to secular literary traditions: adepts of Chan learning were expected to master a core repertoire of texts, and they displayed their mastery of these texts by being able to refer to them—through quotation and allusion—and by writing commentaries on them.⁴⁴ The sermons of Chan masters often “raise” (ju 舉) a case for discussion and analysis, and students also refer to specific questions when asking questions. In this way, gongan provided opportunities for thinking like earlier figures within the Chan tradition. Engaging with Chan cases through prose and verse commentary was an exercise that often took place during monastic assemblies or rituals, as part of the sermons. It was also a form of public discourse in the sense that it relied on a shared body of texts and a reading community.

Gongan literature was used in individual cultivation as well. Students could be told to contemplate (can 参 or kan 看) a story or a sentence from a Chan encounter, or to develop a response to a question posed in a gongan. Yuanwu Keqin 湛覺克勤 (1063–1135) recommended this kind of practice, and was one of many teachers to suggest using gongan as part of the Chan curriculum.⁴⁵ Yuanwu taught students to investigate the words (ju 言) and to avoid becoming entangled in the meaning (yi 意); such investigation engaged

⁴³. One of the most important collections of recorded sayings (yulu) is that of Linji. Welter covers its history from episodes in lamp transmission collections through the various versions of the yulu; see Welter, The Linji lu and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy, 109–26.

⁴⁴. Ding-hwa Hsieh states that these collections were “literati literature,” accessible only to “people with substantial literary credentials.” Hsieh, “Yuan-wu K’o-ch’in’s Teaching of Ch’an,” 66.

“live words” (*huojü* 活句), while searching for meaning would leave one bound by “dead words” (*siju* 死句). 46

Yuanwu’s student Dahui Zonggao further refined contemplation of *gongan* by telling students to focus just on a critical phrase (*huatou*) drawn from key episodes in the Chan tradition. This approach was usually termed “contemplation of the critical phrase” (*kanhua*). Not all *gongan* supplied phrases that could be used in this way: especially appropriate were those encounters that pivoted on a short, simple phrase, such as Zhaozhou’s *wu* 無 (“no” or “nonexistent”) in answer to the question of whether a dog has buddha-nature. The purpose of focusing on these phrases was not to achieve intellectual understanding but to reach an intuitive apprehension. That goal was best served by the state of doubt or uncertainty (*yi* 疑) generated when the student holds the *huatou* in mind without attempting to reason through it. 47 Doubt, defined this way, is not the opposite of faith but an intense uncertainty about one’s habits of mental discrimination. Focus on the critical phrase is the primary way, in *kanhua* Chan, to disrupt these habits. Thus teachers like Dahui and Gaofeng Yuanmiao (1238–95) emphasized that students should have faith (*xin* 信) in their own inherent awakened state or buddha-nature but should also generate a state of mental tension from the limits of conceptualization, in order to understand the critical phrase.

As we know from the work of Miriam Levering and Morten Schlütter, *kanhua* Chan was closely connected with lay Buddhist practice from the time of its inception in Dahui’s teachings; indeed, Yuanwu’s approach to *gongan* was developed in part to address the needs of the literati. 48 Levering has demonstrated Dahui’s strong interest in lay cultivation, arguing that he adapted the public sermon (*pushuo* 廣說) specifically to address their needs. The death of a family member was often the event that triggered a layperson to solicit such a sermon, and Dahui tries to use reflection on death to prompt spiritual development. Levering concludes that these sermons show...
the importance Dahui placed on achieving awakening in daily life, a theme that took on greater importance given the growing numbers of lay Chan practitioners in the Song. The desire to appeal to a lay audience also played into debates about the nature of Chan practice. Morten Schlütter has demonstrated that Dahui’s attacks on the “silent illumination” (mozhao 默照) practice of the Caodong school stem from his concern about patronage. Schlütter notes that Dahui began to argue against silent-illumination Chan and teach kanhua only after 1134, when he became acquainted with a number of scholar officials who had been taught silent illumination. Dahui saw the practice of quiet sitting, “with its emphasis on inherent Buddha-nature and its de-emphasis on the need for a great effort to achieve a breakthrough enlightenment,” as particularly seductive for lay Buddhists. Indeed, monks did not always demand rigor from their lay followers, who were often overly confident of their own insights.

Although Dahui Zonggao and kanhua practice were dominant influences in the Yuan, the lineage of Huqiu Shaolong 虎丘師隆 (1077–1136), another heir of Yuanwu Keqin, was also influential among monks of the Yuan dynasty. Among Huqiu monks, there are several who shared with Mingben some or all of the following key characteristics: they retreated into the mountains instead of serving at a large monastery, engaged in ascetic practices appropriate to such withdrawal from the world, emphasized discipline and vinaya, attempted to reconcile Chan with Pure Land Buddhism, and critiqued gongan collections alongside a continuation of Dahui Zonggao’s use of huatou. This group of monks shared a belief in the inherent purity of mind as the essential characteristic of Chan. While this was certainly nothing new, the popularity of these monks represented a movement

within Chan that was conservative in essence, seeking as it did to safeguard what the monks saw as the fundamentals of the tradition.

Overview

For Mingben and his circle, the Chan tradition consisted of several different, interrelated repertoires: gongan literature, teachings on the contemplation of the critical phrase, monastic codes, and other genres of Buddhist literature. Chan monks also mastered secular traditions, or traditions that spanned both secular and religious worlds. Just as their lay peers did, the monks wrote letters and poetry, and were measured by their skill in the literary arts. All elite men knew what made a good painting and how to interpret its symbols, and had mastered the use of the brush. Both monks and the literati formed their identity through membership in lineages and through participation in local networks. Each of the following chapters examines a specific network in which Mingben participated, or a repertoire that he mastered. The portrait that emerges is one of a monk who achieved his eminent status in the early fourteenth century through social adroitness and cultural fluency.

The secular and religious traditions used biography as a means of capturing and transmitting values, and thus the biographies of Mingben are a natural starting point. Chapter 1 considers how the image of Mingben was constructed biographically by one of his disciples and by secular elites, and how Mingben’s own autobiographical statements complicated the models for narrating the life of a Chan monk. Chapter 2 focuses on Mount Tianmu 天目, the place with which Mingben was most closely associated, and the patronage networks that formed in widening circles around this mountain. An examination of a gazetteer of the mountain shows that multiple geographies were in play, as the natural environment was imbued with religious significance even in Mingben’s time. The establishment of Chan temples on Mount Tianmu created another layer of meaning, one that was made possible by lay donations and support. Yet the
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site's proximity to Hangzhou also facilitated Mingben's introduction to national networks, which were maintained and expanded through the exchange of writings, in the form of poems, letters, and written sermons. As Mingben's prominence grew, he also became associated with a virtual place, referred to as “Illusory Abiding,” the name he used for the cloisters he established in various locations. In this way, as Mingben progressed from locally eminent monk to a person of national stature, he maintained his own “place” in addition to his association with Mount Tianmu. Chapter 3 looks at what lay behind Mingben's frequent movements and this invention of place—namely, the practices of reclusion and asceticism. Reclusion could be undertaken for religious reasons, but it was also a culturally charged choice. It could easily become a pose adopted as a way of distinguishing oneself, and Mingben's writings on the subject engage this problem. He discourages others from reclusion, even as he practices it, and uses poetry to advocate for reclusion as a specific form of nonattachment. Chapter 4 turns from the imaginary of Mingben's monastic life to its institutional presence in the world as reflected in the code he authored for his cloisters. A comparison of this code with other Chan “rules of purity” (qinggui 淨規) of the time suggests what these smaller Buddhist establishments might have been like, and how Mingben's emphasis on the contemplative life might have fit within a broader cultural discourse on the purpose of institutions of learning. Chapters 5 and 6 look at Mingben's engagement with the Chan tradition, through his writings on Chan literary sources and his advice on practice. Chapter 5 considers Mingben's understanding of the Chan lineage as expressed in genealogical forms and literary collections of Chan cases. Mingben's commentary on the Chan literary tradition is most fully expressed in the third fascicle of his collected writings, comprising “Raising Old Cases” (niangu 招古) and “Lauding Old Cases” (songgu 詫古). Chapter 6 turns to Mingben's advice to his followers, both lay and ordained, on the use of huatou and how to integrate different types of practice. Such practical instruction was not Mingben's only means of engaging lay disciples, and Chapter 7 examines his use of poetry, in particular his literary relationship with Feng Zizhen 馮子振 (d. 1348). This chapter also considers Ming-
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Mingben’s use of poems to imagine dialogues and to engage with the past, as in the long poem cycle written in imitation of Hanshan 寒山. Chapter 8 discusses painting inscriptions written by Mingben, and the symbolic resources artists used in portraits of the monk himself. Here I return to issues of representation raised in the first chapter, now seen through the choices the artists made in depicting Mingben in roles that range from senior cleric to portly recluse. Mingben’s inscriptions on these and other images demonstrate how the exchange of images was a means of developing personal networks, and how Mingben could critique the use of his image even while facilitating its circulation. The conclusion returns to the notion of cultural construction and how Mingben understood his work within cultural repertoires, and finally to a consideration of how the figure of Mingben was incorporated into later Buddhist traditions.

A Note on Editions of Tianmu Zhongfeng heshang guanglu

The primary collection of Mingben’s writings, Tianmu Zhongfeng heshang guanglu 天目中峰和尚廣錄 (The expansive record of the monk Tianmu Zhongfeng; abbreviated GL in the footnotes), appears in Zhonghua Dazang jing 中華大藏經, vol. 74 ([Taipei]: Xiuding Zhonghua Dazang jing hui, 1965). It is also found in Nihon kōtei Daizōkyō 日本校訂大蔵経, vol. 298–99 (Kyoto: Zōkyō Shoin, 1902–5), commonly known as the “Manji Zōkyō.” In Zhonghua Dazang jing the text is reproduced as found in the Qisha 磬砂 canon, compiled in 1335, and replaces the missing portion of the text with that from the Hongwu Nanzang 洪武南藏 edition, compiled in 1387. This text also includes Mingben’s “record of conduct” (xinglu 行錄), using the Chan term for biography, and stūpa inscriptions, which were not originally part of the thirty fascicles, or scroll bundles, of the

54. On Yuan editions of the Buddhist canon, see also Chikusa, Sō Gen Bukkyō bunkashi kenkyū, 337–60.
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Guanglu. The National Central Library of Taiwan holds a woodblock edition, with fourteen lines per page, printed in the late Yuan dynasty or early Ming. This edition is available in microfilm form, making it convenient to compare it with other editions. The National Library in Beijing also holds a copy of this printing, and these are the oldest extant versions, dated by Shiina Kōyū to between 1340 and 1370. I have worked from the text as included in Zhonghua Dazang jing and the National Central Library imprint, and in the passages I have compared, the instances in which the texts differ are remarkably few. As included in the Jiaxing canon, each fascicle concludes with “notes on errors” (jiaoe 校讞) and “pronunciation” (yinshi 音釋), and an appended record of the solicitation for donations.

It bears pointing out that Mingben’s writings made it into print and into the canon within decades of his death and within the lifetimes of his disciples. The compilation of the Guanglu is said to have been the work of Mingben’s disciple Ciji 慈寂, but as he is not mentioned elsewhere, his contribution may have more to do with getting the text recognized by the imperial court and thus included in the canon. Yu Ji’s stūpa inscription lists eleven titles authored by Mingben and notes that these were already widely available.57 These texts appear to be equivalent to the contents of Guanglu, thus suggesting that something very close to what we have today was circulating by 1329.

Two other works by Mingben in the Buddhist canon supplement this primary collection: his regulations for his cloister communities, Huanzhu an qinggui 幻住庵清規 (Rules of purity for the Cloister of Illusory Abiding), and three fascicles of additional writings under the title Tianmu Mingben Chanshi zalu 天目明本禪師雑録 (Miscellaneous records of Chan master Tianmu Mingben). The latter contains a number of instructions addressed to Japanese disciples, and while the details of its compilation are unclear, it seems likely that it was put together in Japan.59
MAP 1. Key locations in Mingben's biography. Created by Lujing Ma.