

Master Huineng's Standpoint on 'Sudden' and 'Gradual' and its Relevance to Early Buddhism

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Sudden and gradual are two of the most captivating themes in the southern and northern Buddhism in China, which was later disseminated to Theravada and Mahayana. Existing general understanding is that sudden realization is superior to that of gradual realization which is incomplete. As master Huineng states, Dharma is a single seed, but seeing it can happen fast or slowly. To rephrase, Dharma does not necessarily comprise sudden and gradual aspects, yet people are of diverse mental capacities ranging from clever to ignorant. In light of that assertion, it is problematic as to why Chan Buddhism is interpreted as the way of sudden realization. Therefore, this paper is centered on the concepts of sudden and gradual as mentioned in the Chapter 8 of *Platform Sutra* - the master piece of the sixth patriarch, master Huineng (638-713 CE). He represented the Chan School, an indigenous form of Chinese Buddhism. Since the discussion is based on the Platform Sutra and early Buddhist discourses and compare the explorations of master Huineng with the early Buddhist teachings depicted in the Pali Sutta Pitaka, a qualitative research methodology was adopted to conduct this research. Early Buddhist discourses state

that both methods of realization – sudden and gradual – fall under two terms *hippābhiññā* and *dandhābhiññā* correspondingly. Therefore, Chan expression on sudden realization is not a distinctive position of Chinese Buddhism, but a more propagated matter among Chan Buddhists that is based on the sixth patriarch's story. According to Chinese Buddhist master, Huineng is the 'homegrown' Buddha. Sudden realization stories were more attractive and well-merged with indigenous religious views on enlightenment, which thereby challenged the deferment of the enlightenment to the next life. Later, the notion was supported to refute the *arahantship* which was highly associated with gradual realization in Theravada tradition.

Keywords: *sudden realization, gradual realization, Huineng, Cha'n Buddhism*