



## **Colloquial Chinese and the problem of the accurate transmission of Chan Buddhism into Korea, Japan and Vietnam**

John Jorgenson - Griffith University

Unlike other East Asian Buddhists, Chan monks used much colloquial Chinese to represent dialogues between masters and pupils. These dialogues came to be used to spark enlightenment in readers. But as time passed even Chinese Chan monks often failed to understand the colloquial, slang and dialect of earlier times. Yet the need for accurate representation became more crucial as gong'an and huatou were made core techniques in Chan. However, attempts were made to standardise the language in the Chan koine of the Song dynasty with the editing of the *Jingde chuandenglou* by a court academician in 1104.

The dominance of *kanhua* Chan of Dahui Zonggao (1089-1163) and its use of the *huatou* created even more stress on exact soteriological or "live language." This dominance occurred around the time Chan was introduced into Japan and Vietnam, posing even greater difficulties for non-native speakers of Chinese. Chan was introduced earlier into Korea, but there were few traces of the Chan colloquial there until the time of Chinul, who adopted *kanhua* Chan after he read Zonggao's works in 1197. While the records for Vietnam are sparse, it seems imitations of incidents in the *Jingde chuandenglou* began almost immediately after 1104, and *kanhua* Chan was first introduced in the 13th century. Early attempts to introduce Chan into Japan were abortive, partly because Japanese could not read the colloquial. Eisai (1141-1215) and Dogen (1200-1235), the Chan founders in Japan, also used the Chinese colloquial sparingly. It was only after many Japanese monks studied Chan in China and Chinese masters came to Japan that the colloquial was widely used, but even then many problems emerged.

Study of this colloquial, rather than just lineages and thought, tells us much about the differences and commonalities of Chan in China, Korea, Vietnam and Japan.