

Article

Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1567–1642) and His Impact on 17th-Century Buddhism

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Abstract: This paper relies on the dataset “Historical Social Network of Chinese Buddhism” (Ver. 2021-06). The focus is on the period between c. 1570 and 1700 CE. We argue that the actor who was most influential for institutional Buddhism in the 17th century was not one of the “four great monks of the late Ming” but rather Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1566–1642). The network illustrates how Miyun’s Tiantong branch 天童派 of the Linji School became the dominant Chan lineage in China and beyond. The main results of this study are: (1) the data corroborate the assumption that (at least) monastic Buddhism declined between c. 1420 and 1570. (2) The network view de-emphasizes the importance of the ‘four famous late Ming eminent monks’ for the development of 17th-century Buddhist monasticism. (3) The data align well with a suggestion by Jiang Wu to distinguish two different stages in the development of late Ming Buddhism. The first is characterized by the “late Ming revival,” led by figures such as Yunqi Zhuhong, Zibo Zhenke, and Hanshan Deqing; the second phase is the organization of orthopraxy around the Chan lineage discourse dominated by Miyun Yuanwu and his students. (4) For the 17th century, the network data clearly shows the centrality of Miyun Yuanwu and his network.

Keywords: Ming Buddhism; Chinese Buddhism; Miyun Yuanwu; Wanli revival of Buddhism; Tiantong School; Linji School; historical network analysis



Citation: Bingenheimer, Marcus. 2023. Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1567–1642) and His Impact on 17th-Century Buddhism. *Religions* 14: 248. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020248>

Academic Editor: Jeffery D. Long

Received: 29 December 2022

Revised: 24 January 2023

Accepted: 27 January 2023

Published: 13 February 2023



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1. Historical Background

This paper relies on the dataset “Historical Social Network of Chinese Buddhism”.¹ A network view of Chinese Buddhism shows that, in spite of the occasional persecution, the social transmission represented by the main component of the network remained more or less constant. It was only in the early Ming dynasty that Buddhism truly fell on hard times. In the first decades of the Ming, both the Hongwu and the Yongle emperor instituted a rigorous legal framework that strongly impeded the development of monastic Buddhism for more than a century. By restricting ordination and temple construction (and actually enforcing the restrictions), the state subdued institutional Buddhism for several generations. On the cultural level, the Confucian-educated elite lost interest, and officialdom and (to a lesser degree) the court turned away from Chinese Buddhism.² Whereas in the Song and Yuan, scholar-officials often engaged in dialogue with learned Buddhist monks, between c. 1420 and 1550 CE, this equilibrium of mutual respect was often replaced with contempt. With few exceptions, Neo-Confucian scholar-officials in those years were not inclined to see Buddhism in a favorable light.³ This situation started to change when the teachings of Wang Yangming (1472–1529) and his students entered the mainstream of Confucian learning about a generation after his death.⁴ After the death of the Jiajing emperor (r. 1521–1567), whom Dewei Zhang has called a “four decade persecutor” [of Buddhism],⁵ a fragile detente between the court, scholar-officials and Buddhists re-emerged, ushering in the “late Ming revival” of Chinese Buddhism.⁶ The network view strongly suggests that the late Ming revival consists of two distinct stages. First, the Longqing (r. 1667–1672) and Wanli (r. 1572–1620) reigns saw a renewal of literati patronage in Buddhism, the rise of

highly educated monks, as well as a widespread restoration and expansion of Buddhist institutions.⁷ Partially overlapping with this development, but with concerns quite different from those of the Wanli revival, the rise of Miyun Yuanwu and his lineage should be understood as a second phase in this process of revitalization.

In our dataset, the almost 150 years of decline between Yongle and Longqing are clearly visible in Figure 1 as a long, thinned-out network region between the Yuan-Ming transition and the late Ming.⁸ It corresponds roughly to the time between 1420 and 1550 CE.⁹

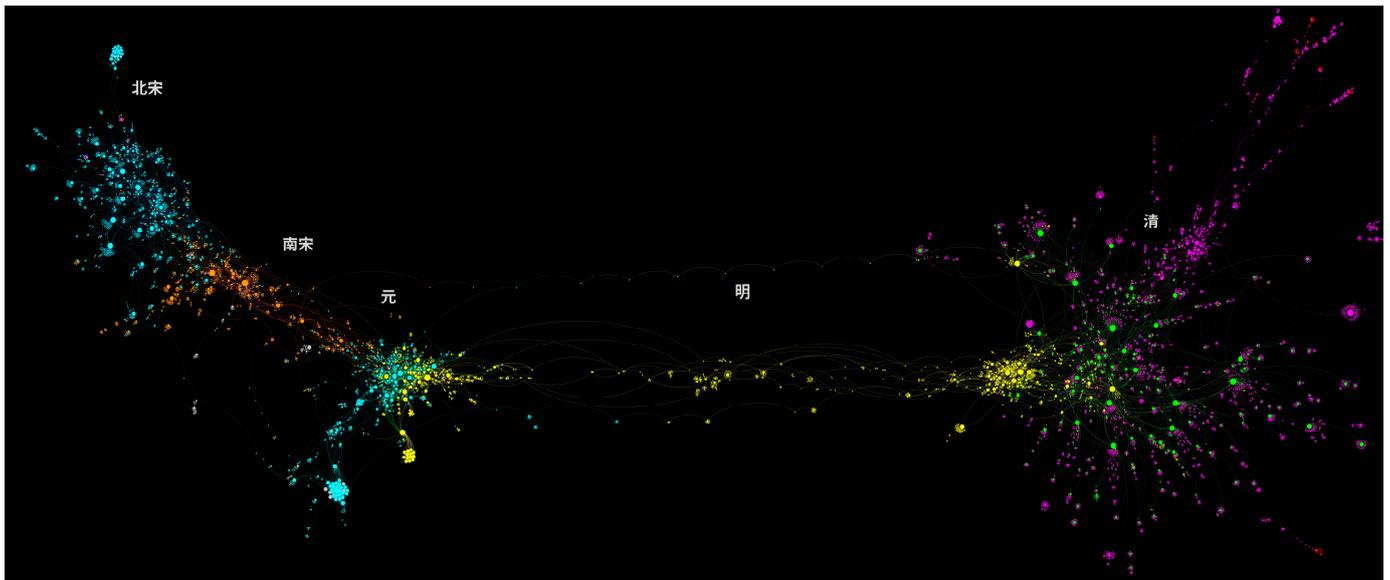


Figure 1. Overview of the part of the network ranging from the Northern Song to the Qing. (Node colors (from left to right): *Blue*: died in the Northern Song; *Orange*: died in the Southern Song; *Cyan*: died in the Yuan; *Yellow*: died in the Ming; *Green*: born in the Ming but died in the Qing; *Purple*: born and died in the Qing).

In the study of late Ming Buddhism, four monks, sometimes grouped as the “Four Great Masters of the Late Ming” 明末四大高僧, have attracted a lot of attention.¹⁰ Over the decades, the field of Buddhist studies has produced a number of monographs concerning Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲祿宏 (1535–1615), Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543–1603), Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623), and Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655).¹¹ As Figure 2 shows, Ouyi is something of an outlier in this group. Almost two generations separate him from Zhuhong, Zibo, and Hanshan, and, as the network shows, his degree of centrality is much lower than that of his better-connected predecessors.¹²

Whoever grouped these four together did, of course, not measure their “greatness” by degree centrality. There are other reasons why Ouyi might be interesting or influential. However, this paper is about the application of network analysis, and the point may be allowed that Ouyi’s relevance for the network as such is relatively small, especially when compared to the degree centrality of monks such as Miaofeng Fudeng 妙峰福登 (1540–1613) or Kongyin Zhencheng 空印鎮澄 (1547–1617), which, in our dataset, are much more densely connected than Ouyi Zhixu.¹³ Both by degree and position in the network, Miaofeng and Kongyin are comparable to the three “stars” — Zhuhong, Zibo, and Hanshan, but their work and influence have not attracted nearly as much attention as Ouyi.

Another prominent figure was Xuelang Hong’en 雪浪洪恩 (1545–1608). Indeed, in one of the earliest attempts to group late Ming Buddhists by their (literary) importance, the famous poet and critic Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) counted not Ouyi but Xuelang among his four “eminent monks” 高僧 of the Wanli period.¹⁴ Qian did so mainly on account of Xuelang’s poetry and school affiliation, but in Figure 2, we do find Xuelang nes-

tled between Zhuhong and Hanshan, which indicates that he moved in similar circles, thus corroborating Qian’s observation.¹⁵

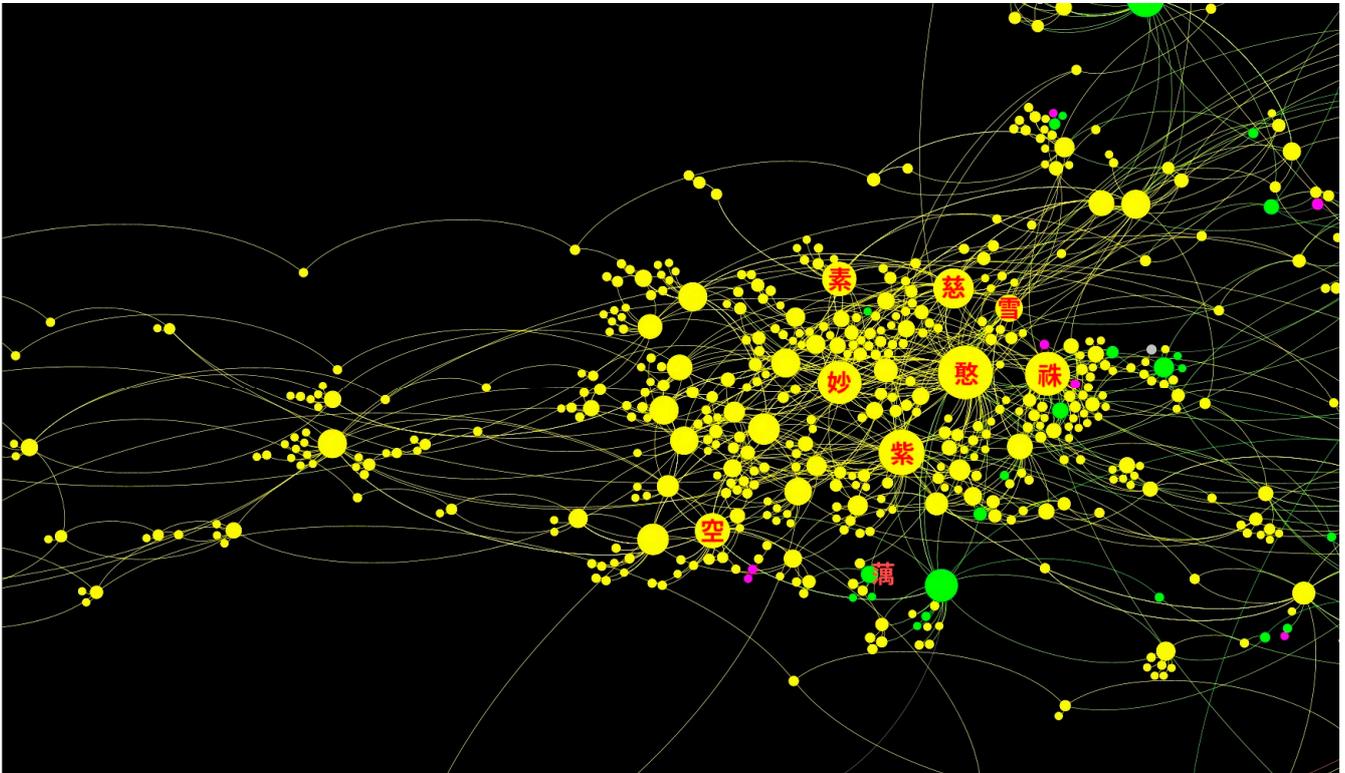


Figure 2. The “Wanli Revival” stage: a dense cluster of famous “great monks” (慈山德清 Hanshan Deqing (A001681¹⁶), 雲棲祿宏 Yunqi Zhuhong (A001394), 紫柏真可 Zibo Zhenke (A000944), 滿益智旭 Ouyi Zhixu (A001257), 妙峰福登 Miaofeng Fudeng (A007760), 素庵真節 Su’an Zhenjie (A008316), 雪浪洪恩 Xuelang Hong’en (A004672), 空印鎮澄 Kongyin Zhencheng (A001889)), and an important patron (慈聖太后 the Empress Dowager Cisheng (A007207)).

The focus on Zhuhong, Zibo, and Hanshan as representatives of the late Ming revival is understandable, but it somewhat obscures an important development within institutional Buddhism. For all their relevance in the networks of their day, the influence of these three masters on the development of monastic Buddhism in the 17th century was limited.

Instead, as Figure 3 illustrates, what stands out in the network is the prominent position of Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1567–1642) and his network of students for the history of Buddhism in the 17th century. Miyun’s “stick and shout” (*banghe* 棒喝) approach to Chan teaching embodied a very different sensibility than the Buddhism of the learned “great masters” of the Wanli period.¹⁷ Zhuhong, Zibo, and Hanshan stood for a relatively open, inclusivist Buddhism.¹⁸ Their teachings were approachable for lay people, and their syncretism extended to different forms of Buddhist practice (Pure Land, Chan, scholastic practice etc.). They respected and engaged with Confucianism and, to a lesser degree, Daoism.¹⁹ On the other hand, Miyun’s Tiantong lineage within Linji Chan, was relatively “conservative” in its insistence on lineage, doctrinal orthodoxy, and monastic practice. It was, by and large, much less interested in the wider cultural environment than the Wanli masters had been a generation earlier. Miyun’s style was of a certain combativeness. Next to the famous split with his dharma heir Hanyue Fazang, he exchanged polemic essays with other Chan monks on various doctrinal and historical questions. Even in the late-Ming polemics against Christianity, there is a difference in tone between the more cautious approach of Zhuhong and his followers and the vehement defense of Buddhism by Miyun and his disciples.²⁰

Aspects of Miyun's importance have been recognized before by scholars such as Ishii Shudō, Noguchi Yoshitaka, Xu Yizhi, and Jiang Wu.²¹ The network perspective corroborates these intuitions by demonstrating Miyun's pivotal role in 17th-century East Asian Buddhism. Especially relevant in this context is Wu's suggestion that we ought to distinguish *different stages* in late Ming Buddhism and that "after the three masters (Zhuhong, Zibo, and Hanshan) died, the Buddhist revival entered a new phase in which Chan masters, such as Miyun Yuanwu, rose to prominence and dominated the Buddhist world" (Wu 2008, pp. 4–5).²² This is exactly what this view of the network illustrates:

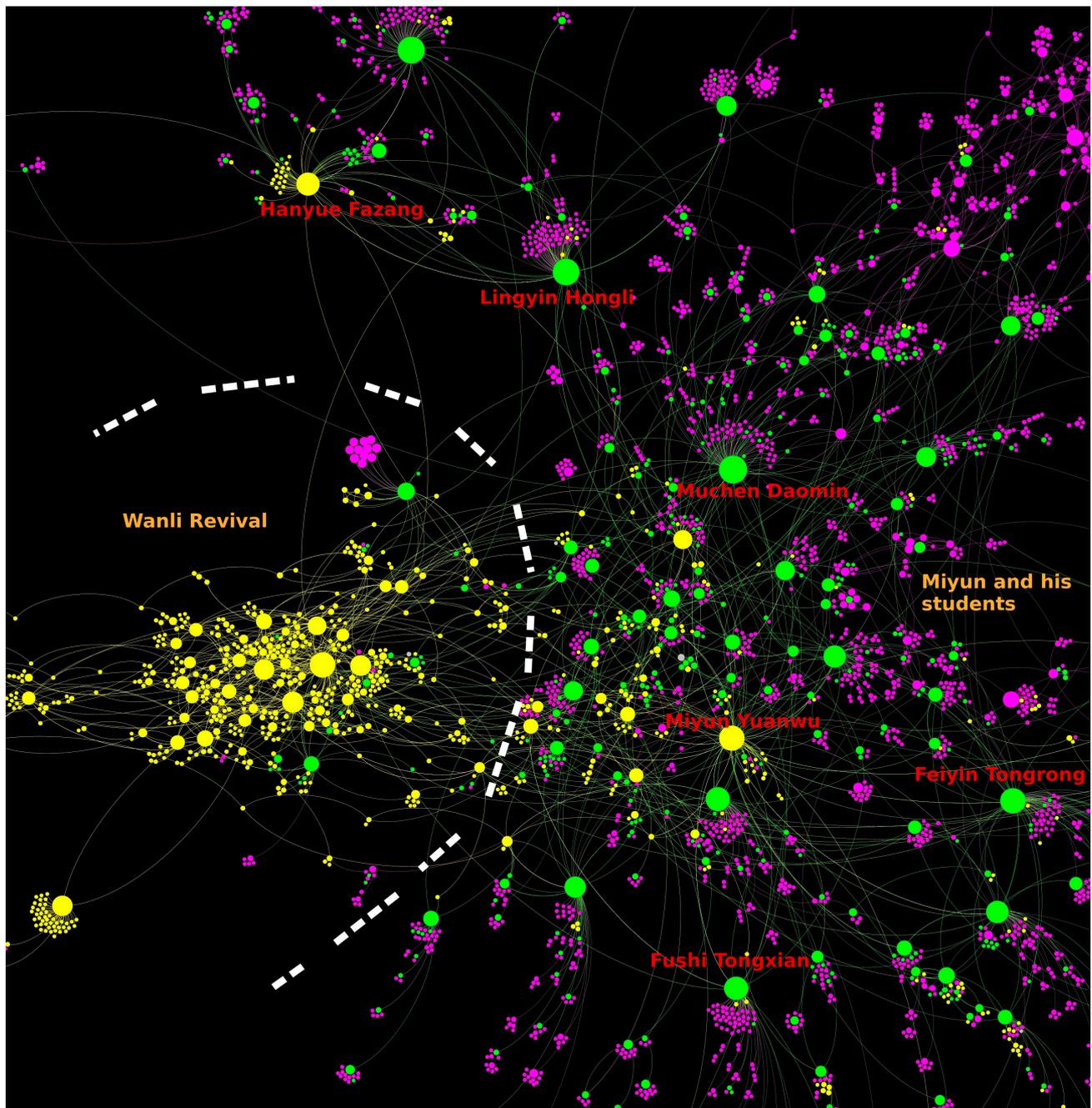


Figure 3. Two stages in the late Ming revival: the Wanli revival and Miyun's lineage. Yellow nodes: actors born and died in the Ming. Green nodes: born in the Ming and died in the Qing. Magenta nodes: born and died in the Qing.

In Figure 3, we see on the left the “great monks” of the Wanli period forming a relatively tightly knit cluster. In this visualization, a somewhat thinned-out region, almost similar to a synaptic gap, separates them from the next stage, in which Miyun and his students are central. This disconnect visualizes an important historical development within late Ming Buddhism: the transition from the syncretic and inclusivist Buddhism of the Wanli masters to the lineage-discourse-oriented, monastic Chan of Miyun’s school.

Could the disconnect between Miyun’s lineage and the Wanli revival be geographic? Is it possible that the two network regions represent actors from different geographic regions? This does not seem to be the case. Although Zibo and Miaofeng, while their life dates overlapped with those of Miyun, were mainly active in the north, Zhuhong and Xuelang stayed in the south, and in general, most of the Wanli monks traveled widely, especially Hanshan and Miaofeng. Miyun, apart from a short stay in Beijing at the beginning of his career, spent most of his life in the south, in Zhejiang, Jiangxi, and Fujian. There was thus ample opportunity for Miyun to seek out the famous Hanshan or Zhuhong. While the absence of a link does not imply they never met at all, such a meeting would have likely been recorded in Miyun’s chronicles. Thus, the disconnect between the network regions, rather than representing a geographic divide, indicates distinct communities that had little contact in person.

In spite of Miyun’s importance for the “reinvention of Chan Buddhism” (Wu 2008), it is hard to find an account of his life in English that is longer than a short dictionary entry.²³ This is in part due to the complex landscape of sources surrounding Miyun’s life, which do not lend themselves to easy analysis. His “Collected Sayings” (*yulu* 語錄) have been compiled twice, once by Muchen Daomin 木陳道忞 (1596–1674) and a second time by a larger team of his students under the leadership of Feiyin Tongrong 費隱通容 (1593–1661), whose relationship with Muchen was fraught.²⁴ Research on Miyun is usually concerned with his role in the various controversies that arose within the Chan school regarding its history and doctrine and usually provides only minimal biographic information.²⁵ As our dataset asserts his central position for the development of 17th-century monastic Buddhism, the next section will provide a short biographic outline.²⁶

2. Biographical Sketch

Miyun was born in Yixing, a mid-sized town on the shores of Lake Taihu. He was the youngest son of a man called Jiang Xi 蔣曦 and his wife *née* Pan. His parents gave him up for adoption in the following year to a different surname clan (Zhang 張). Contrary to most standard accounts of eminent monks, but in line with the, at times, anti-intellectual attitude of his school, the sources do not claim Miyun was a bright student. On the contrary, he does not seem to have enjoyed school and dropped out after only two years. The Zhangs had him herd cattle in the marshes around Taihu, and he learned to read and write with little formal instruction. At fifteen, he was married to the daughter of a merchant from close-by Xin’an. Three years later, his foster father Zhang had a natural son, and Miyun returned (or had to return) to his original family. At twenty-five, Miyun read the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch and was first inspired to become a monk. A few years later, in 1595, at around twenty-eight, Miyun left his wife (and perhaps children) and became a disciple of Huanyou Zhengchuan 幻有正傳 (1549–1614), who, by all accounts, played a crucial role in Miyun’s formation and understanding of Buddhism.²⁷ He was fully ordained under Huanyou three years later in 1598, and in the following year, entered a three-year meditation retreat at the Yumen Chanyuan 禹門禪院, near his birthplace Yixing.

Earlier accounts usually include only minimal information about the life of an eminent monk before his ordination, but for the Ming and Qing, more biographic detail is often available. In this case, we learn that Miyun entered monkhood relatively late; he had experienced two families, was married, and perhaps had children. A late ordination was not unusual for the 16th century; the famous Zhuhong, too, was ordained only in his early thirties. Miyun’s annals and other sources also reveal that he was literate but not educated and probably of modest means—if his family had had money, they would not

have given him away, and he could have afforded better schooling. This is in contrast to, for example, his contemporaries Zhuhong and Zhenqing, who received an excellent education, and even attained the first ranks in the imperial examination system, but also to Hanshan and Zibo, who were ordained relatively early and were well educated within the monastic system.²⁸

After Miyun emerged from his three-year retreat of 1599–1601, he was first entrusted with positions in the monastery of his master. After another retreat from 1604 to 1605, he followed Huanyou to the capital, Beijing. He arrived there in the winter of 1605, only about two years after Zibo Zhenke had died in prison.²⁹ It seems that during his stay in Beijing, he was introduced to lay patrons and learned how to interact with them. After his return south in 1607, Miyun cultivated relationships with influential lay Buddhists such as Zhou Rudeng 周汝登 (1547–1629) and Zhou's disciples Tao Wangling 陶望齡 (1562–1609) and Tao Shiling 陶奭齡 (1571–1640). Zhou and the Tao brothers played a central role in the Zhejiang literary as well as Buddhist circles. They were deeply involved with both the first generation of Wanli masters, as well as Chan leaders such as Miyun and the Caodong master Zhanran Yuancheng 湛然圓澄 (1561–1626), who came to dominate the post-Wanli Buddhist discourse.³⁰ Miyun's many interactions with lay followers are well attested in his *nianpu* 年譜 annals.³¹

In 1611, Miyun took on his first leadership position at the Yumen Chanyuan, where he himself had spent his long retreat. He seems to have been truly close to Huanyou, who did not grant his dharma seal lightly. When Huanyou in 1613 decided to confirm Miyun as his dharma heir, Miyun at first declined, saying that he would accept the duty of a lineage holder only after serving Huanyou's stupa for three years. The following year Huanyou died, and Miyun was able to keep his promise.

After he emerged from his three-year wake in the spring of 1617, Miyun, now fifty-three and the abbot of Yumen Chanyuan, started his first building project. Building new and renovating old temples was an important mark of distinction for abbots in the late Ming. It proved their talent for organization and fund-raising and seemed to have attracted monastic and lay disciples alike.

For 1618 his *nianpu* mentions that he went to see his dying father. The Yumen Chanyuan was close to Yixing. This was not a long trip, but it shows that he was in communication with his birth family.³²

In 1623, Miyun became abbot of the Tongxuan Temple and, from there on, served as abbot at various temples in Zhejiang and Fujian.³³ Most of his tenures were rather short, but wherever he went, he seemed to have gathered an ever larger number of new students. In 1625, the number of his followers surpassed 500; only three years later, there were more than 1000.³⁴

At the height of his success, in 1631, he accepted the abbotship at the famous Tiantong Temple, which had been destroyed by a major flood earlier that year. Miyun's reputation enabled him to organize the rebuilding of this major temple, which for the next decade served as his base and training ground. The time at Tiantong was extremely successful overall, and after his death, Miyun's school became known as the Tiantong branch of the Linji School.³⁵ Miyun died in August 1642, one year after receiving the purple robe, one of the highest distinctions the court gave to monastics.

3. The Dominance of Miyun's Lineage

Figure 4 illustrates how central Miyun's lineage was in the network of seventeenth-century Buddhism. Miyun and all nodes directly connected to him, i.e., his first-degree ego network (numbers identify some of the more prominent actors in the list of Miyun's dharma heirs below), are shown in red. Note how Miyun's first-degree ego network is largely disconnected from the protagonists of the Wanli revival. Hanshan and Miyun are connected only in their second-degree ego networks (not visualized). In our dataset, Hanshan's second-degree ego network (Nodes: 463, Edges: 897) is considerably smaller than Miyun's (Nodes: 935, Edges: 1373), another indicator of Miyun's reach.

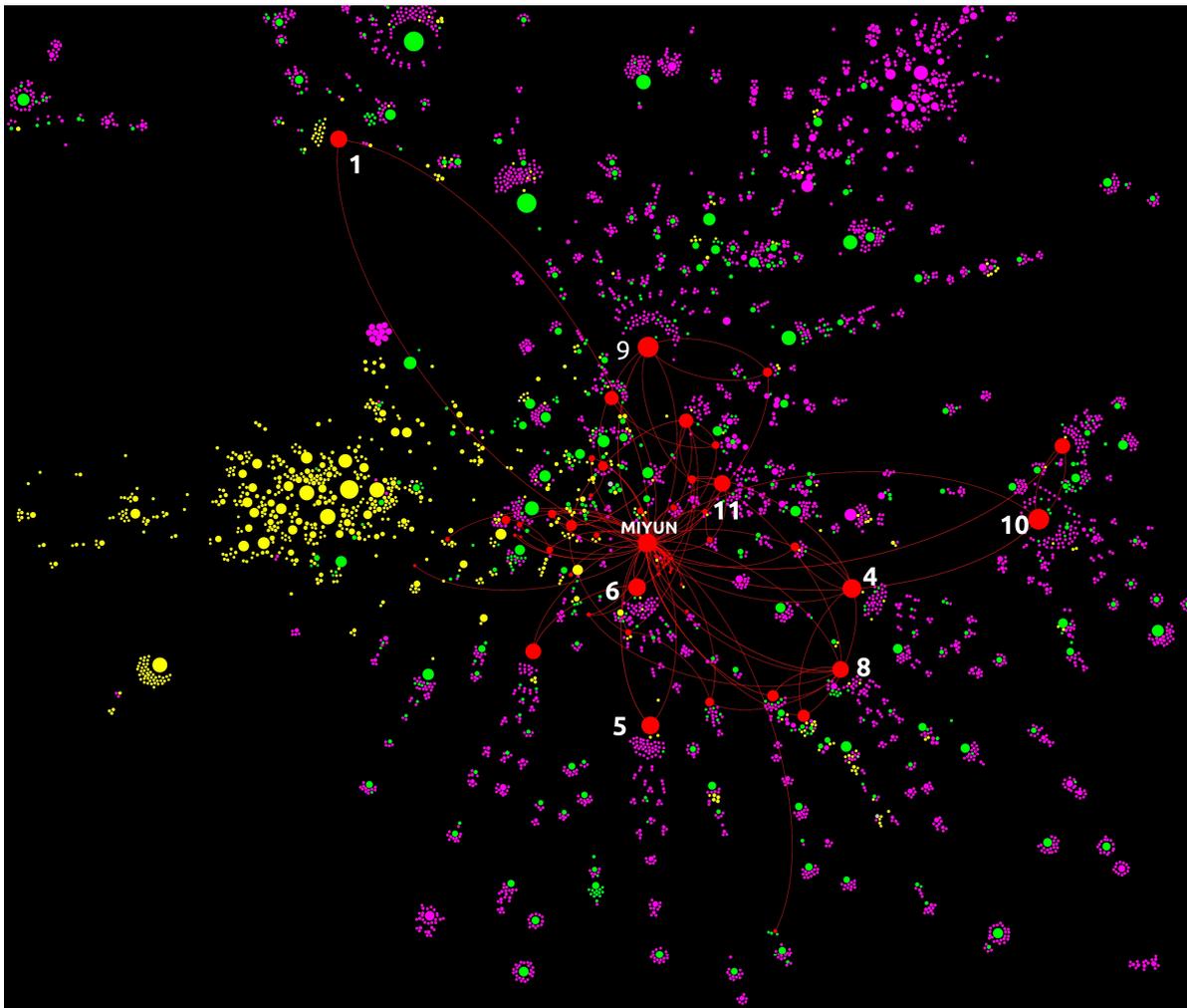


Figure 4. Red nodes: 1st degree ego-network of Miyun. Numbered are (some of) his main students (numbers refer to Table 1 below). Yellow nodes: actors born and died in the Ming. Green nodes: born in the Ming and died in the Qing. Magenta nodes: born and died in the Qing.

Miyun confirmed twelve monks as dharma heirs, a relatively large number.³⁶ However, this must be seen in the context of the size of the communities he led, which were at times several thousand strong.³⁷ By becoming part of Miyun's lineage, a student gained considerable prestige in the monastic world and was immediately considered eligible for an abbotship at a larger monastery. The following overview table is sorted by date of birth.

As Figure 4 and Table 1 show, not all dharma heirs were equally successful, but quite a few attracted a large number of students themselves. In total, just based on the above table of dharma heirs, Miyun had 519 second-generation students, an impressive number. Moreover, Miyun's circle of students, of course, extended beyond his dharma heirs.

Table 1. Miyun’s twelve dharma heirs (marked with a * are the four branches the Tiantong Temple website considers most successful³⁸).

No. in Figure 4	Name[fn ³⁹] (ID)	Dates	No. of Notable Students ⁴⁰
1	Hanyue Fazang 漢月法藏 (A003668)	1573–1635	49 *
	Wufeng Ruxue 五峰如學 (A003855)	1585–1633	1
	Shiche Tongsheng 石車通乘 (A016036)	1593–1638	3
4	Feiyin Tongrong 費隱通容 (A001150)	1593–1661	65 *
5	Fushi Tongxian 浮石通賢 (A012052)	1593–1667	59
6	Wanru Tongwei 萬如通微 (A012040)	1594–1657	54
	Shiji Tongyun 石奇通雲 (A014742)	1594–1663	15
8	Linye Tongji 林野通奇 (A012053)	1596–1652	43
9	Muchen Daomin 木陳道忞 (A001513)	1596–1674	86 *
10	Poshan Haiming 破山海明 (A009652)	1597–1666	90 *
11	Muyun Tongmen 牧雲通門 (A001148)	1599–1671	49
	Chaozong Tongren 朝宗通忍 (A016164)	1604–1648	2

The number and success of Miyun’s students were considerable compared to the other Chan masters of his generation, who defined themselves in terms of a lineage system. The Caodong master Zhanran Yuancheng had six dharma heirs, only three of which, in turn, had more than ten “notable students” (as defined above).⁴¹ According to this measure, Zhanran had 93 second-generation students against Miyun’s 519.

One question network data alone cannot answer is *why* the Chan lineage system—first conceived during the late Tang and matured during the Song—was revived and became so successfully pervasive in late Ming Buddhism at all. What were the advantages? Here, I again agree with Wu’s (2008, pp. 275–76) suggestion that at least one motivation for the rise or “re-invention” of the Chan lineage system in the late Ming should be seen in the need to manage trans-regional institutional structures, most of which had been destroyed in the early Ming and had been only partially rebuilt during the Wanli revival. Although monasteries are local institutions that, at first glance, have little reason to connect to larger networks, Chinese temples are known to have formed associations and networks on a local, regional, national, and transnational scale (Dean and Zheng 2010, vol. 1, p. 229 ff). This could happen for internal, self-directed reasons or under outside pressure. Sometimes institutional networks were even sponsored and/or proscribed by the state, such as the Kaiyuan 開元 era national temples or the “five mountains and ten monasteries” (*wushan shisha* 五山十剎) system of the Southern Song.⁴² However, the temples and national monastic offices instituted by the central government that existed in various forms since the fifth century were neither strong nor independent enough to serve as a trans-regional communication network for the monastic community. Support from the gentry was not reliable, based as it was on personal relationships, and local or, at best, regional. Thus, although the lineage network at first glance appears mainly as a legitimization strategy to assign influence within the monastic community, the networks of legitimization also enabled Buddhists to maintain lines of communication that were independent of both local and state patronage. The lineage system was government-proof in the sense that the state could not (or at least did not) interfere with the selection of dharma heirs by any single Chan master. It was thus able to form hierarchies that were independent of both the state and the local level of secular government and that could organize the establishment, maintenance and administration of monastic sites throughout the empire. At the same time, lineage facilitated another important element in the training of Chan monks: long-distance pilgrimage. Monks related by lineage could generally count on being welcomed to stay longer in temples led by abbots from the same lineage. Thus the (re-)development of lineage networks as an organizational principle made sense at the time and had a lasting influence on Chinese Buddhist monasticism.

The large house of Miyun was not exactly one big happy family. Different readings of lineage history or doctrinal questions often led to vehement exchanges, e.g., between

Feiyin Tongrong and Chaozong Tongren (Wu 2008, p. 130). After Miyun's death, there was significant competition about who the future leader was to be, especially between Muchen Daomin and Feiyin Tongrong.⁴³

However, it was especially the split between Miyun and the Hanyue Fazang that created a major rift within Miyun's school.⁴⁴ Hanyue's confirmation as Miyun's dharma heir had always been somewhat of a compromise. For institutional reasons, Hanyue needed to become part of a Chan lineage, while Miyun was impressed with the well-educated Hanyue, who already had a following of his own. After their first meeting, it took three years to formalize their relationship and Hanyue accepted Miyun's offer to enter the Linji lineage as Miyun's student. When later, however, Hanyue published his own ideas about Chan history and practice, a battle of words ensued that did not abate even after the passing of Hanyue and Miyun.⁴⁵ Their first- and second-generation students continued the argument. The bickering ended only a hundred years later when the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1722–1735) felt compelled to adjudicate the matter in favor of Miyun's position.

The network view illustrates the competition within Miyun's school extremely well. The two camps of Hanyue and Miyun are situated in different regions of the network (Figure 5).

It is somewhat surprising how well, in Figure 5, the layout algorithm reflects the historical situation of the debate without manual intervention. Miyun and Hanyue faced off, just as their main students did. Tanji Hongren 潭吉弘忍 (1599–1638) played an important role in the early phases of the Hanyue-Miyun polemics and bore the brunt of Miyun's anger. His node is small because he died before he was able to attract students. Both Muchen Daomin and Muiyun Tongmen exchanged polemics with Jiqi Hongchu 繼起弘儲 (1605–1672)⁴⁶ and, to a lesser extent, Lingyin Hongli 靈隱弘禮 (1600–1667).

The Yongzheng emperor is positioned right between the camps further "down in time" (the timeline here is moving towards the upper right), which fits his role as arbiter in the debate. Yongzheng, both as a Buddhist and a politician, had a number of reasons to decide the smoldering debate between the two strands of the lineage and took a firm stance against Hanyue's Sanfeng 三峰 school. The main reason for his intervention was perhaps that Hanyue's lineage came to include a number of Ming loyalists.⁴⁷ From the network, however, one could hypothesize how the connection between Muchen and the Shunzhi emperor (r. 1643–1661) had already tilted the network towards "team Miyun" by aligning them with the Manchu emperors.⁴⁸ Figure 5 also shows again how Hanyue's team was outnumbered. Only two of his students, Lingyin Hongli and Jiqi Hongchu, had more than a few students of their own, whereas, on Miyun's side, there were many other successful successors. Moreover, these dharma heirs felt they were Hanyue's equal because, technically, they belonged to the same generation in the Linji tradition. Therefore, although Yongzheng was very much his own man and acted in his own interest by siding with Miyun, he merely certified the reigning orthodoxy within the Linji school, which, as the network shows, had aligned itself with his great-grandfather the Shunzhi emperor two generations earlier.

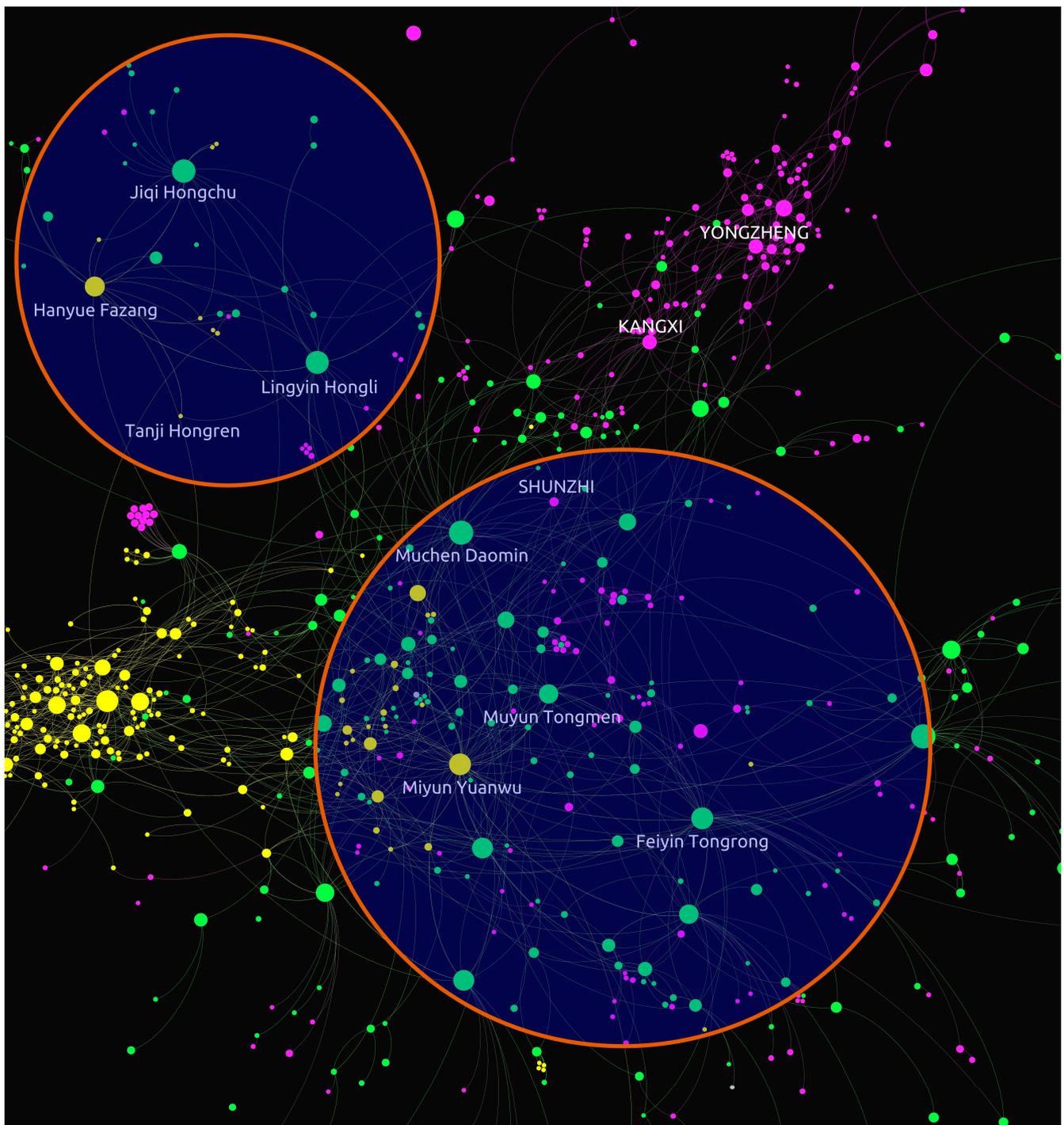


Figure 5. Miyun vs. Hanyue (nodes sized by degree; only nodes with degree > 4 are shown). Yellow nodes: actors born and died in the Ming. Green nodes: born in the Ming and died in the Qing. Magenta nodes: born and died in the Qing.

4. Beyond China

Miyun's lineage not only became a dominant influence in monastic Buddhism but also spread to Japan and Vietnam. Indeed, Miyun first came to the attention of Japanese Buddhist scholarship as the first patriarch of the Ōbaku School, which was introduced to Japan by Yinyuan Longqi 隱元隆琦 (1592–1673), a student of Miyun's dharma heir Feiyin Tongrong 費隱通容 (1593–1661). Yinyuan's story is well studied, and his memory is pre-

served beyond scholarship by the institution he founded—the Ōbaku School still exists in Japan as an independent institution with several hundred temples.⁴⁹

Much less well-known is that Miyun's school was also transmitted to Vietnam. Muchen Daomin's student Kuangyuan Benguo 曠圓本果 (d.u.) was based in the Longshan Temple in Guangdong.⁵⁰ Sometime before 1677, he ordained Yuanshao 元韶 (1648–1728), who in that year went to Vietnam and became a prominent Buddhist leader there. Yuanshao first settled in Ninh Bình 寧平 in the Red River delta. Later he moved to Huế, where he enjoyed the patronage of the Nguyễn Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu 阮福澗 (r. 1691–1725), who ruled over central and southern Vietnam. With his help, Yuanshao founded the Quốc Ân temple 國恩寺 in the 1680s, where he served as abbot until his death (Tan 2007). The Quốc Ân temple still exists today, a reminder of the far reach of Miyun's network. The Nguyễn-Thiệu lineage that began with Yuanshao was successful and is still one of the largest in Vietnamese Chan (Thich 1975, Ch. 6, Table 2).

There is plenty of space for more research on Yuanshao. In Figure 6, Yuanshao's node (sized for degree) is tiny; however, this is not mainly because of the lack of research, but because his students in Vietnam are not part of the dataset, which is currently focused on Chinese Buddhists.

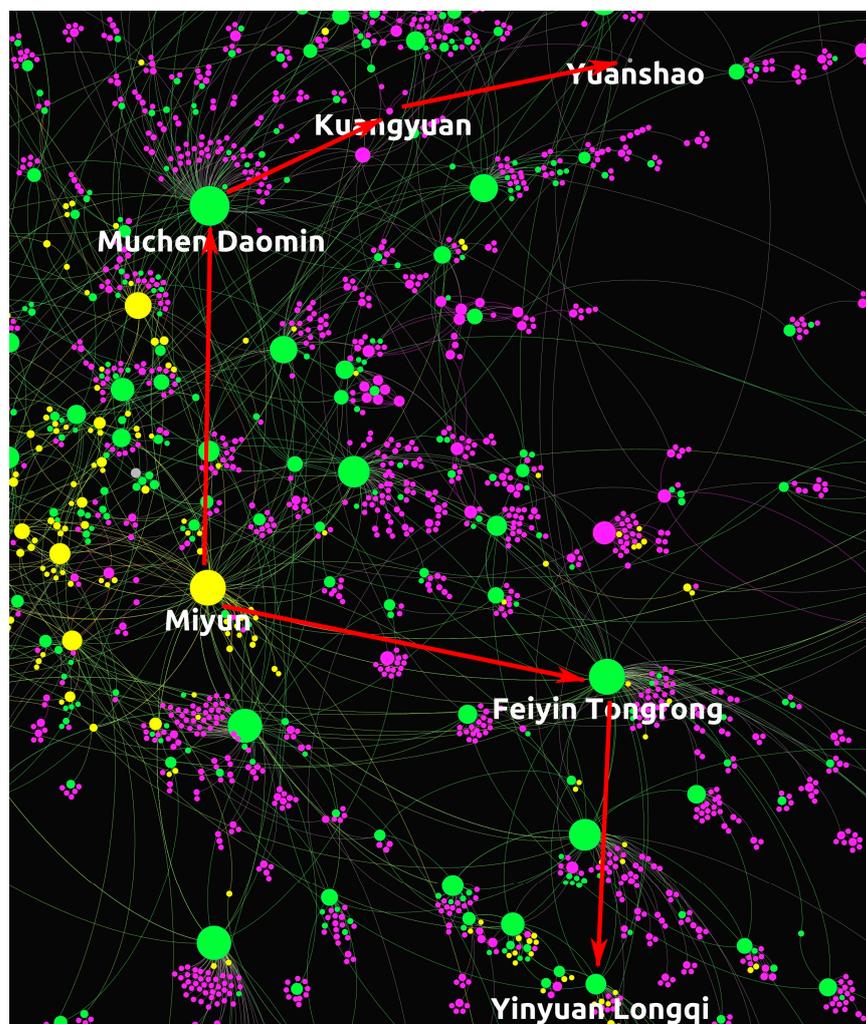


Figure 6. Transmission of Miyun's school to Japan (Feiyin Tongrong → Yinyuan Longqi (A001873)) and Vietnam (Muchen Daomin → Kuangyuan Benguo 曠圓本果 (A021838) → Yuanshao 元韶 (A044921)). Yellow nodes: actors born and died in the Ming. Green nodes: born in the Ming and died in the Qing. Magenta nodes: born and died in the Qing.

One of the advantages of network analysis is that its patterns can help in perceiving what is not there. In this case, the fall of the Ming might have been a factor in the movement of Chinese monks to Japan and Vietnam, but why did no Chinese monks emigrate to Korea? In Joseon-Dynasty Korea, Buddhism suffered an extended period of oppression in spite of the active role played by Buddhists in the fight against the Japanese invasion (1592–1598). As a result, Chinese and Korean Buddhism developed largely isolated from each other from c. 1500 to the 1870s, when Korea reopened its borders (Jorgensen 2007). This exceeds the dataset under discussion, but my experiments with larger datasets that include Korean actors confirm that after the Yuan, there are virtually no connections that connect the Korean lineages to those of China. Korea, different from Japan, appears isolated in the network because its Buddhism was indeed isolated from China in those centuries.

5. Conclusions

The two stages of the late Ming revival of Buddhism differ in many aspects, but especially with regard to the importance they give to the lineage narrative. The Wanli masters were not overly invested in lineage, at least in part because many of them were themselves not attached to a particular Chan lineage. Miyun and his students, however, were deeply concerned with lineage and the legitimization it bestowed. This concern with lineage has, in turn, manifested itself in Buddhist historiography and is therefore visible in the network as a dispersion of different lines of transmission radiating out from Miyun. The characteristic shape of this network region, as compared with network regions that model earlier periods, is, in part, a consequence of the reliance on lineage narratives. Lineage accounts are tree structures, much like the family trees on which they are modeled. The only horizontal relation in lineage accounts are between “dharma siblings,” but these links are not realized in our network data, i.e., we do not assume that all dharma siblings knew each other by default. As a result, “lateral” links that connect different transmission lines are underrepresented. In the data collection, we have tried to counteract this by including data from the *Xinxu gaoseng zhuan*, which offers information that connects actors from different lineages. Although we were able to improve the density for this network region significantly, the Qing network still does not cohere together in the same elongated form as the network regions representing previous dynasties (Bingenheimer 2021).

How should we understand the overall impact of Miyun’s success? Liao (2014, pp. 83–84), who compares Miyun’s network to an “army,” remarks that without him and his lineage, late Ming Buddhism would have been “much quieter,” presumably because the lively debates emanating from Miyun’s circle would not have taken place. Would the development of the non-sectarian, inclusivist Buddhism of Zhuhong and Hanshan have resulted in a more diverse and intellectually interesting Buddhist landscape during the Qing? It seems that, in spite of intense internal debates about lineage and doctrine, Miyun’s school was not able to innovate itself out of the confines of the traditionalism that Miyun (and his teacher Huanyou) had laid down and was unable to reclaim Buddhism’s earlier vitality.⁵¹

Such questions are, of course, out of scope for historians, and neither network analysis nor close reading can answer them. Still, one wonders about the roads not taken by late Ming Buddhists. Miyun’s Buddhism constitutes a retrenchment into an argumentative but, at the same time, curiously anti-intellectual discourse. Authority became invested in tradition *qua* lineage rather than in keeping the Vinaya, engaging in scholarship, or skill in performing esoteric rituals, to mention only a few alternatives which prevailed in other parts of the Buddhist world. Besides the occasional writing of poetry, Miyun’s lineage offered few resources to connect with the Confucian elite. Its lack of a historical consciousness beyond the Chan lineage discourse and its lack of interest in textual criticism must be counted among the reasons for the intellectual irrelevance of Chan Buddhism during the Qing, when the best minds among the literati were excited by *kaozhengxue* 考證學 scholarship, which emphasized historical and textual evidence. Miyun’s lineage tradition of “shouts and beatings” had little to contribute to this, but as the network illustrates so clearly, its success dominated monastic Buddhism in the 17th century.⁵²

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data used in this study are freely available at https://github.com/mbingenheimer/ChineseBuddhism_SNA (accessed on 26 January 2023).

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest..

Notes

- ¹ Available at https://github.com/mbingenheimer/ChineseBuddhism_SNA. Accessed on 26 January 2023. The dataset has been described in detail in Bingenheimer (2021). In short the complete dataset contains information about c.18,000 actors, which are connected by c. 32,000 links. The main component spans the period from c. 250 CE to 1900 CE. The dataset is a combination of data extracted from collections of biographical literature and the lineage information contained in the Dharma Drum Buddhist Person Authority Database (<https://authority.dila.edu.tw/person/>. Accessed on 26 January 2023). Studies based on earlier versions of the data are Bingenheimer (2018, 2020).
- ² There remained residual interest in Buddhism both Chinese and Tibetan among the eunuch faction and the female members of the court. Neither association, of course, worked in its favor in the eyes of the Confucian elite.
- ³ In the context of Chinese religion as a whole, Vincent Goossaert speaks of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism as a “radicalisation” of Confucianism (Goossaert 2000, pp. 87–103), that shifted the equilibrium between the “three teachings”.
- ⁴ On the influence of Buddhism on Wang Yangming as well on his own impact on syncretistic thinkers in the late Ming see Kubota ([1931] 1986) and the examples in Araki (1972). In English, on the Buddhist influence on Lu-Wang Neo-Confucianism see Chan (1962) and Ivanhoe (2009, pp. 3–14), on Wang Yangming’s impact on late Ming Buddhists see Chu (2010).
- ⁵ Zhang (2020, p. 36). Zhang’s (2010) Ph.D. thesis, on which the book is based, was aptly titled “A Fragile Revival”.
- ⁶ The term “late Ming revival” is widely used in English, e.g., in the standard account of Ming Buddhism by Yü (1998, p. 927). Conceptualizing Buddhist history in terms of decline(s) and revival(s) is common in both emic and etic historiography of Buddhism. Our dataset, in a way, corroborates the standard narrative of a decline in the mid-Ming, but it should be remembered that it focuses on monastic Buddhism and does not well capture the vitality of lay Buddhist movements or the influence of Buddhism on Chinese folk-religion.
- ⁷ In English we have a number of monographs regarding the late Ming—early Qing revival of Confucian interest in Buddhism (e.g., Hsu 1979; Yü 1981; Brook 1993; Eichman 2016; Zhang 2020), in Japanese especially the works of Araki Kengo (e.g., Araki 1995), in Chinese Liao Chaoheng (e.g., Liao 2010, 2014), has contributed important studies.
- ⁸ All network visualizations in this paper were primarily produced in Gephi (0.9.3), with Force Atlas 2 as the basic layout algorithm. The Gephi output was adjusted and annotated with tools including Nomacs, gThumb, and Krita. As a consequence of how links are defined (as contact between contemporaries), many layout algorithms align the nodes in this dataset roughly along a timeline. For all figures in this paper, I have rotated the images for this rough, imaginary timeline to run from left to right.
- ⁹ For this period, Wu (2008, p. 23) speaks of a “lacuna in historical records about Buddhist activities. Few Buddhist histories had been written and official records seldom mentioned Buddhist institutions”. Whereas the network dataset reflects mainly the dearth of biographical information, the decline can also be seen in temple construction and repair (Eberhard 1964). The much smaller thinned out region in the Southern Song is probably due to the fact that much of the country was lost to the Jin and there is less information on (Liao, Tangut, and) Jin Buddhism in the sources of the dataset (biographies and authority database lineage data).
- ¹⁰ E.g., Yü (1998, p. 931), Ren (2009, p. 276), and in the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (e.g., sub voc. Ouyi Zhixu). This particular grouping, also called 晚明四大高僧, seems rather recent. I have yet to find a pre-20th century source for it. The term “three great masters” 三大師, on the other hand, was at times used to group Zhuhong, Zibo, and Hanshan, by 17th century writers such as Juelang Daosheng 覺浪道盛 (1593–1659) (CBETA 2021.Q4, J34, no. B311, p. 714c25), Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) (CBETA 2021.Q4, X13, no. 287, p. 515c12), or Xu Fang 徐芳 (fl. 1670) (CBETA 2021.Q4, X86, no. 1608, p. 614a10-11).
- ¹¹ To mention only the monographic studies: Yü (1981) on Zhuhong; Hsu (1979), Yen (2004), Epstein (2006), Jiang (2006), and Hiu (2014) on Hanshan; Cleary (1985, 1989), Fan (2001), and Gault (2003) on Zibo; Shi (1987) and McGuire (2014) on Ouyi. For the interaction of these leaders with their literati supporters see Eichman (2016).
- ¹² There seems no standard practice in modern academic writing about which name part to use when abbreviating the name of Chan monks. Most writers seem to prefer Zhuhong over Yunqi, but in other cases the tendency is to abbreviate to the alias rather than the dharma name, i.e., Hanshan instead of Deqing (Hiu 2014), Zibo rather than Zhenke (Cleary 1989; Huang 2018), or Ouyi rather than Zhixu (McGuire 2014). It could be argued that the Dharma name is to be preferred as the legal name, which is relatively fixed, compared to several possible aliases. Using an alias, however, conforms better with historical practice, which eschews the use of the dharma name, which in the context of the Chan lineage discourse often functioned as a *de facto* taboo name. Thus, in cases where monastic names are abbreviated to three characters, usually the first character of the Dharma name

is omitted, while the alias is kept intact. In general, the alias is preferred in book titles as well, thus “Miyun” —not “Yuanwu” —in the titles of his “Collected Sayings” (s.b., CBETA/L1640 and CBETA/JA158). Following this argument I generally use the alias for all monks, with the exception of Yunqi Zhuhong, who in Western literature is by now widely known under his Dharma name Zhuhong (instead of the toponym “Yunqi” or the alias “Lianchi” 蓮池).

- 13 Here and below such IDs refer to the Dharma Drum Buddhist Studies Person Authority Database (<https://authority.dila.edu.tw/person/>) (26 January 2023).
- 14 Miaofeng Fudeng’s role has been recognized in recent scholarship only by Zhang (2020, pp. 184–96), who also remarks that Miaofeng “sank into oblivion after death”. Had a network perspective on Buddhist history been available earlier, Miaofeng might not have been forgotten so easily. His prominent position (see Figure 2) is obvious in this approach.
- 15 Qian (Qian [1698] 1983, p. 698). The biographies, originally part of the *Liechao shiji* 列朝詩集 anthology were extracted and published by Qian Lucan 錢陸燦 in 1698. On Qian Qianyi’s views regarding Buddhism and how they influenced the inclusion of poet monks in the *Liechao shiji* see Liao (2019).
- 16 More recently, Chao-heng Liao has identified Hong’en as being underestimated when compared with Zhuhong and the others (Liao 2014, pp. 37, 79). Hong’en and Hanshan were friends, as were Hanshan and Zibo (Eichman 2018, p. 137).
- 17 A short example for how this teaching style looked like in the early 17th century: “A monk entered [his room for personal instruction]. The teacher [Miyun] said: ‘What are you doing here?’ The monk said: ‘I grind [the beans] for Tofu’. The teacher said: ‘Who are you grinding them for?’ The monk said: ‘I am grinding them for you’. The teacher said: ‘You eat your own meals, why [do you say] you are grinding for me?’ The monk said: ‘If I don’t grind for your sake, no one will grind for my sake.’ The master hit him and the monk left the room”. (CBETA 2022.Q1, L154, no. 1640, pp. 478b15–479a3).
- 18 See Noguchi (1985, pp. 57–58) for some references to criticism of Miyun’s style of Chan by Zibo, Hanshan and others.
- 19 For the latter see for instance Hanshan’s exhortation to study the Confucian and Daoist classics (translated in Hiu 2014, p. 379 ff). Their inclusivism did not extend to Christianity, however, against which Zhuhong, Ouyi as well as Miyun and his students wrote polemics (Gernet 1982).
- 20 See the translated texts by Miyun and Feiyin Tongrong in Kern (1992, pp. 93–193) and the discussion of their content by Nishimura (2022).
- 21 Ishii (1975), Noguchi (1986), Xu (2002), Wu (2008). Kern (1992, p. 93) considers Miyun “in his time probably the most famous monk in Fujian and Zhejiang”.
- 22 Wu (2008, pp. 105–7) suggests a development in three different stages: First, the Wanli “late Ming revival” around Zhuhong, Hanshan and Zibo. Second, the dominance of Chan lineages c. 1620–1644. A third phase, Wu suggests ranges from the beginning of the Manchu conquest to about 1733, when the Yongzheng emperor intervened in the long lasting debate between the students of Miyun Yuanwu and Hanyue Fazang. The data presented here reflects the transition of the first two stages relatively clearly, but the Manchu conquest seems to have made little difference for the network. The dominance of Miyun’s school lasted from the 1620s into the 18th century. This agrees with the periodization suggested by Hasebe (1990, p. 89), whose third and fourth phase are what in this paper is defined as the two stages in the late Ming revival (the “Wanli revival” stage and the dominance of Miyun’s school). Hasebe’s third phase, which he calls *tenkan ki* 轉換期 “the period of transformation”, spans the Longqing and Wanli reigns (1567–1620), a fourth phase (*shūha seiritsu hatten ki* 宗派成立発展期 “the period of establishment and growth of lineages”) in the development of Ming and Qing Buddhism lasted, according to Hasebe, from 1621 to the end of the Qianglong reign (1795).
- 23 For instance in the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (sub voc.), or the *Historical Dictionary of Chan Buddhism* (Wang 2017).
- 24 The two competing *yulu* are: Muchen Daomin’s *Miyun chanshi yulu* 密雲禪師語錄 in 10 fascs. (CBETA/L1640), the other by Feiyin Tongrong and others: *Miyun chanshi yulu* 密雲禪師語錄 12 fascs. (CBETA/JA158). Titles vary slightly by edition. A detailed bibliographic study for these is still needed, but see Luo (2009) for a first assessment of the differences. The first three *juan* of Feiyin’s edition contain the notes that different first-hand witnesses took during Miyun’s various postings, making this an immediate source for Miyun’s teachings. For the antagonism between Muchen and Feiyin see Noguchi (1985).
- 25 The first monograph on this is Chen (1962). The major treatment of these controversies in English is Wu (2008), who analyses two of the major debates in depth and gives an overview of others (Wu 2008, p. 297).
- 26 Much work remains to be done. The best article-length treatment of Miyun’s life I found is Xu (2002). Xu includes an annalistic summary, which is based on the *nianpu* 年譜 contained in his two *yulu* (CBETA 2021.Q4, J10, no. A158, p. 75c1, CBETA 2021.Q4, L154, no. 1640, p. 569a1) and other early biographies (listed in Xu 2002, pp. 81–82). There also exists a somewhat helpful MA thesis (Luo 2009). The most comprehensive history of Chinese Buddhism, Lai (2010) ‘s *Zhongguo fojiao tongshi*, which often includes important figures not mentioned elsewhere, does not do justice to the importance of Miyun and his school. In Vol. 12 (Ming Dynasty) Miyun is mentioned several times in passim as part of the (generally negative) assessment of late Ming Chan, but his contribution is never discussed at length.
- 27 For Miyun’s own testimony regarding that transition see CBETA 2021.Q4, J10, no. A158, p. 76b18–27.
- 28 For Zhuhong see Yü (1981, p. 11), for Zhenqing see Bingenheimer (2022), for Hanshan see Hsu (1979, p. 62).
- 29 For the circumstances of Zibo’s death after torture see Zhang (2020, pp. 171–84).

- 30 The “stick and shout” style of instruction was carried over to at least some non-monastics as well. Here is a story involving a guest of Tao Wangling: “When Miyun stayed at Houshan, a man of high rank came to his hut and saw him reading the Analects and Menzius. The gentleman asked: ‘What are you reading?’ Miyun showed him. The gentleman said: ‘I thought that wasn’t your type’s cup of tea.’ The master hit him and the gentleman got angry. Just then Tao Wangling arrived and scolded him saying: ‘The monk gave you a view of the Buddha’s teaching. Why are you angry?’ The gentleman respectfully apologized and left”. (CBETA 2022.Q1, J10, no. A158, p. 78c19-23).
- 31 See [Eichman \(2016, chps. 2 and 7\)](#), [Wu \(2008, p. 73 ff\)](#).
- 32 A certain toughness in Miyun’s attitude appears even here: “When his father lay on his death bed, the teacher went to see him. His father said: ‘May the monk save me.’ The teacher said: ‘When a father and a son climb a mountain, each must do so under their own effort.’ His father said: ‘Because of you I have heard about the great matter, how could there be any regrets for me?’ Two days later he passed away”. (CBETA 2022.Q1, J10, no. A158, p. 80b8-10).
- 33 See the table in [Xu \(2002, p. 66\)](#).
- 34 CBETA 2022.Q1, J10, no. A158, p. 81b21 and 82a26.
- 35 On the rule of Miyun and his successors at Tiantong see [Ishii \(1975\)](#) and [Noguchi \(2011\)](#).
- 36 This list of Miyun’s dharma heirs appears in the second, more inclusive, *yulu* by Feiyin Tongrong (CBETA 2022.Q1, J10, no. A158, p. 71b1-5). A thirteenth dharma heir, the layman Huang Yuqi 黃毓祺 (A003978), is mentioned in other works (e.g., CBETA 2022.Q1, X84, no. 1582, p. 401a16). A relative increase in dharma heirs in the two generations following Miyun was already noticed by [Wu \(2002, pp. 11–12\)](#) when analyzing Hasebe Yūkei’s data. A contemporary Linji Chan master, Yuanhu Miaoyong 駕湖妙用 (1587–1642) had only three dharma heirs. However, one Linji master confirmed even more students: Tiebi Huiji 鐵壁慧機 (1603–1668) had more than twenty dharma heirs (CBETA 2022.Q1, X84, no. 1582, p. 390a21), including at least one nun, and several lay-followers. Most of Tiebi’s dharma heirs, however, did not in turn produce further heirs. The relationship between Tiebi’s and Miyun’s group deserves further study.
- 37 The inscription for the stupa of his robe mentions that Miyun’s community comprised a thousand monks already when he presided over the Jinsu temple, and several thousand in his later years at Tiantong (CBETA 2022.Q1, J10, no. A158, p. 73b18-19). Similar statements in the *nianpu* (82a26, 84b6) corroborate that his monastic community was very large indeed.
- 38 Not surprisingly, Miyun’s lineage is remembered as an important part of Tiantong’s history on the temple’s website (<http://www.nbtcs.org/intro/2.html>: accessed on 26 January 2023).
- 39 Obviously, some of these had various different *hao* and *zi*. IDs according to the Dharma Drum Buddhist Studies Person Authority Database (<https://authority.dila.edu.tw/person/>, accessed on 26 January 2023).
- 40 These are not all dharma heirs, but all people (lay and monastic) which are mentioned in sources as having studied with the person. The count is again derived from the Dharma Drum Buddhist Studies Person Authority Database.
- 39 Obviously, some of these had various different *hao* and *zi*. IDs according to the Dharma Drum Buddhist Studies Person Authority Database (<https://authority.dila.edu.tw/person/>, accessed on 26 January 2023).
- 40 These are not all dharma heirs, but all people (lay and monastic) which are mentioned in sources as having studied with the person. The count is again derived from the Dharma Drum Buddhist Studies Person Authority Database.
- 41 CBETA 2022.Q1, X72, no. 1444, p. 840b21-22. Zhanran’s dharma heirs were Mingxue 明雪 (34 students), Mingyu 明孟 (26 students), Mingfang 明方 (19 students), Mingfu 明馥 (10 students), Minghuai 明懷 (3 students), Mingyou 明有 (1 student). Again “student” here does not equal dharma heir.
- 42 The Kaiyuan temples were established nationwide and existed often for centuries, whereas the “five mountains and ten monasteries” were a rather regional and relatively short-lived formation.
- 43 For an analysis of their competition see [Noguchi \(1985\)](#).
- 44 The story has been told in detail by [Wu \(2008, chps. 4–6\)](#). See also [Lian \(1996\)](#) for the relationship between Hanyue and Miyun, and [Shi \(2000\)](#) for a close examination of Hanyue’s doctrinal ideas regarding Chan, which were the origin of the dispute. [Huang \(2018\)](#) clarifies how important textual learning was for Hanyue.
- 45 Apart from Hanyue’s well known *Wuzong yuan* 五宗原 (1628), it was Hanyue’s teaching of the *Zhizheng zhuan* 智證傳 a commentarial text by Juefan Huihong 覺範慧洪 (1071–1128) that was disliked by Miyun and his dharma brothers. Hanyue’s commentary on the *Zhizheng zhuan* was only recently rediscovered ([Huang 2018](#)). On Hanyue’s Sanfeng school see also [Lian \(1996\)](#).
- 46 On Jiqi Hongchu see the recent study by [Chang \(2022\)](#).
- 47 [Wu \(2008, chp. 6\)](#). See also the remarks by [Liao \(2010, pp. 33, 77 et in passim\)](#).
- 48 Muchen Daomin’s encounter with the Shunzhi emperor was recorded (by Muchen’s student Zhenpu 真樸) in the fascinating *Hongjue Min chanshi beiyou ji* 弘覺志禪師北遊集 (CBETA/JB 180). Muchen stayed at court almost eight months. The *北遊集* is the longest and most intimate record of conversations between a ruler and a Buddhist monk since the Milindapañha, but remains almost completely overlooked. I am not aware of any study of the text. Shunzhi’s encounter with Muchen, was a factor in Shunzhi’s devotion to Chan Buddhism after 1659. This disappointed the Jesuit missionary Adam Schall von Bell (1591–1666)

who had long enjoyed Shunzhi's confidence and had hoped the emperor would eventually convert to Christianity. In that sense, too, Miyun's debate and competition with Christian missionaries continued through his student.

- 49 On Yinyuan see the comprehensive treatment by Wu (2015). Wu's bibliography lists the rich Japanese and Chinese literature on Yinyuan and the Ōbaku School.
- 50 Not much is known about Kuangyuan; his short entry in the Wudeng quanshu 五燈全書 consists mainly of encounter dialog fragments (CBETA 2021.Q4, X82, no. 1571, p. 374b8-c10).
- 51 Chen (2007, p. 18). Noguchi (1986, pp. 165–70) discusses some contemporary criticism to Miyun's over-reliance on "beating and shouting".
- 52 This is not to say that evidential textual scholarship played no role in the debates of the 17th century (see Wu 2008, pp. 194–95). On use of historical evidence by Buddhist historiographers in general see also Kieschnick (2022, esp. chp. 2 and 5).

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