This book is about a set of crucial developments that took place within Chinese Buddhism in the Song dynasty (960–1279) that had a defining impact on the evolution of Zen Buddhism in all of East Asia and that came to permanently shape conceptions about the nature of Zen and the issues it is concerned with. It is entitled *How Zen Became Zen*, because although Zen (in Chinese pronounced “Chan”) existed earlier, it was not until this period that it fully developed the characteristics that we now associate with it.¹

By the Song dynasty, Chinese Buddhism was already ancient. Having arrived in China more than eight centuries earlier, Buddhism had become thoroughly domesticated: Buddhist monasteries and pagodas had become integral features of the landscape all over the Chinese heartland, and monks and nuns were part of the street scene in all of the bustling towns and cities that emerged in the Song.² Just as the Song dynasty in many ways ushered in a new age that was fundamentally different from what had come before, however, the Buddhism that developed in the Song was also significantly different from the Buddhism that had characterized the Tang (618–907) and earlier periods.

Two developments in Song Buddhism are especially well known. The first is the growth of Chan Buddhism, which became the dominant form of elite monastic Buddhism in the Song. The other is the sectarian dispute that took place between the Linji and Caodong traditions of Chan in the twelfth century, involving competing approaches to enlightenment and practice known as “silent illumination” (mozhao) and *kanhua* Chan (literally, Chan of observing the word). Neither of these developments is wholly understood, and the questions of why the Chan school prospered under the Song and why a sectarian schism in Chan happened when it did have not been fully addressed by scholars. In this book, I argue that we cannot understand the second development if we do not understand the first, and that to do either, we must place both developments in the context of a complex web of secular political, social, and economic forces. Together with internal dynamics within Chan, the impact of these forces gave rise to the Chan school as we now know it, with its distinct institution, ideology, and literature.

In the Song, the majority of the great monasteries of the realm came to
be designated as Chan monasteries, and they became centers of learning and culture where sometimes as many as several thousand monks would be enrolled, high-ranking officials would visit, and well-known poets and philosophers would gather. Famous Chan monasteries themselves were seen as sources of great and positive power; the presence of such a monastery could make evil spirits go away, bring prosperity to an area, and even improve the climate. The elite Chan clergy who were in charge of the grand monasteries were famous monastics of illustrious lineages who carried with them an enormous charisma and who were recognized as a kind of living Buddhas. Such Buddhist masters were considered to be national treasures who generated significant supernatural benefits for the empire and for the local communities in which they dwelled. The Song Chan school also produced distinct forms of religious literature that became highly valued and widely read by the secular educated elite, and Chan philosophy and rhetoric deeply influenced the intellectual climate and had a substantial impact on developments in Song-dynasty Confucianism.

The beginnings of Chan Buddhism can be traced back to the early Tang, but only in the Song did Chan become the dominant form of elite monastic Buddhism. Although it has long been noted by scholars that Chan Buddhism was highly successful in the Song, there is still a widespread perception that Chan, together with all of Chinese Buddhism, lost its true spirit after the Tang dynasty and that Chan in particular had its “golden age” in the eighth and ninth centuries, surviving in later ages only on wistful memories of the great masters of the past. In this view, syncretism became the prevailing trend after the Tang, rote scripture learning and mimicking of the earlier masters came to be valued, and Buddhism was infused with popular beliefs and practices. At the same time, the story goes, monks became involved with politics and began to pander to powerful patrons. This perceived decline seemed to make Song Buddhism unworthy of serious study. Recent research on Song-dynasty Buddhism carried out in Japan as well as the West reveals a very different picture, however. It is now becoming accepted that Chan and other traditions of Buddhism showed great vitality throughout the Song and that developments in Buddhist doctrine, practice, and monastic organization in the Song all had a lasting impact on the entire landscape of Chinese Buddhism. Furthermore, scholars have become increasingly aware that very little material from the “golden age” of Tang Chan has come down to us directly; almost all that is known about the famous Tang Chan masters and their teachings is found in texts that date to the Song and later. I believe they must therefore be seen as an expression of the needs and interests of the Chan school in the Song and subsequent periods.

In the Song, powerful processes of religious change led to the development of what we might call the “mature” Chan school of the later Song dynasty. I will show that government policies and social forces in the Song dynasty dramatically reshaped monastic Buddhism in ways that favored the
Chan lineage, giving an established framework to a “Chan school” and profoundly affecting doctrinal and sectarian developments within Chan Buddhism. Thus, it was in the Song that the Chan school acquired an institutional base, defined its crucial lineages, and developed its own distinctive literature. Later in the Song, in what in many ways marks a culmination in the development of mature Chan, the crucial distinction between silent illumination and kanhua Chan arose within the Chan school—an event that had a far-reaching impact not only on the Chan but on all of Chinese Buddhism and even on Confucian and Daoist thought, and that also created the framework for subsequent developments within Japanese Zen and Korean Sŏn. The mature Chan school’s self-representation came to permanently shape an understanding of what Zen is in all of later East Asian Buddhism, creating an image that defines even modern conceptions of Chan, Zen, and Sŏn. Thus, if we wish to understand how Zen became Zen as we now perceive it, it is necessary that we investigate the formation of the mature Chan school in the Song.

The factional split that took place in the twelfth century between the silent illumination of the Caodong (Jpn. Sōtō) tradition of Chan and the kanhua Chan of the Linji (Jpn. Rinzai) tradition was a momentous and defining event in the history of Chan, and the ultimate objective of the present study is to arrive at a more complete and nuanced understanding of the split itself and the causes and conditions surrounding it. Silent illumination is associated with a quiet meditation in which the inherent Buddha-nature that all sentient beings possess naturally shines forth, while kanhua Chan is associated with an intense focus on the punch line of a gongan (Jpn. kōan) that is meant to lead to a dramatic breakthrough experience of original enlightenment. The split between the two may be the most monumental event in the history of Chan doctrinal development, because for the first time it brought out into the open an internal conundrum that had existed in Chan almost from the beginning: how to go about becoming enlightened when the most fundamental teaching of Chan is that we are already originally enlightened. This crucial concept of original, or inherent, enlightenment was grounded in the Mahāyāna Buddhist tathāgatagarbha (Ch. rulaizang: “womb” or “embryo” of Buddhahood) doctrine as it had come to be understood by almost all of Chinese Buddhism. In China, tathāgatagarbha was equated with the notion of “Buddha-nature” (foxing), according to which all sentient beings are already originally and fully enlightened as they exist in this world. The problem was (and is) that we sentient beings have great difficulty in truly seeing that this is so. Our deluded minds cannot recognize our own Buddha-nature, and this makes us appear as utterly unenlightened beings. The Tang-dynasty monk Guifeng Zongmi (780–841) expressed it lucidly: “The [highest] teaching of the one vehicle that reveals the nature holds that all sentient beings without exception have the intrinsically enlightened true mind. From [time] without beginning, it is permanently abiding and immaculate. It is shining, unobscured, clear and bright
ever-present awareness. It is also called Buddha-nature, and it is also called
tathāgatagarbha. From time without beginning, deluded thoughts cover it,
and [sentient beings] by themselves are not aware of it.”⁸

The problem was, as it confronted Chan ideology, that since sentient
beings are intrinsically enlightened, it is only the deluded and dualistic
mind that sees a difference between enlightenment and delusion. So what
is someone who aspires to enlightenment to do? This usually unspoken issue
had created a kind of fecund tension running through Chan, and different
trends arose in dealing with it, most fundamentally between those who ac-
knowledged that such things as study and meditative practices were nec-
essary at some level and those who seemed to repudiate any kind of effort
toward gaining enlightenment as dualistic and only furthering delusion.
Most Chan masters would seem to have been caught somewhere in the
middle, unable to deny that most beings are far from enlightened but also
reluctant to discuss practical steps to be taken to bring an end to delusion
and usher in enlightenment.

The development of the silent illumination and kanhua Chan ap-
proaches to practice and enlightenment highlighted the uneasiness sur-
rounding the doctrine of inherent enlightenment with forceful clarity:
silent illumination emphasized the wonderful world of inherent enlighten-
ment that is present as soon as we sit down in nondualistic meditation and
become aware of it, while kanhua Chan insisted that until we have seen our
own enlightened nature in a shattering breakthrough event, all talk of in-
herent enlightenment is just empty words. These were very real differences,
and the impact of the debate is still reverberating in the world of East Asian Zen. In Japan, silent illumination inspired the teachings of the famous Japa-
nese Sōtō Zen founder Dōgen Kigen (1200–1253), while kanhua Chan was
systematized and codified by Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768) and his disciples,
becoming the foundation for the modern Japanese Rinzai Zen school. In
Korea, kanhua Chan quickly took root through the efforts of the famous
Sŏn master Chinul (1158–1210) and his disciple Hyesim (1178–1234), and it
remains the standard form of Sŏn meditation. Silent illumination never had
any real impact in Korea.

This study seeks to unwrap the intricacies surrounding the split between
silent illumination and kanhua Chan and to place this development in its
wider social, economic, and political context. To understand how silent illu-
mination and kanhua Chan developed, a number of disparate issues must be
explored, and questions of Chan ideology and soteriology must be brought
together with an understanding of their institutional and political setting
in the Song. It is also crucial for us to gain insight into the larger social
and cultural milieu in which Chan functioned and into the social changes
that took place in the Song within the class of the educated elite, which
affected patterns of religious patronage. This study therefore draws upon a
wide range of primary sources, including government manuals, official his-
tories, commemorative inscriptions for monasteries, funerary inscriptions
for Chan masters, essay collections, travel descriptions, and private letters, as well as many different kinds of Buddhist sources.

It should be noted that a study such as the present one is focused on aspects of Buddhism that especially concerned the elite. To most people in the Song, questions of correct lineages, teachings of meditation and enlightenment, and interpretations of Buddhist doctrine were of little interest. The Song Chinese, like most people throughout human history, were mainly concerned with how supernatural powers could help them, their families, and their communities in their daily struggles. The most common way to enlist these powers was to appeal to gods at local temples. Each community had its own gods, although some gods gained regional and even national importance, and temples to them dotted the landscape everywhere. Worship of popular gods did not require any formal clergy or written texts; they could be appealed to directly, sometimes through mediums who would be possessed by them.⁹ Under special circumstances, religious specialists were called in, such as Daoist or Buddhist priests, who in some situations were thought to be able to command powers that were greater than those of the local gods. In this way, Buddhism quite seamlessly fit into the larger religious universe of the Song. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were approached in much the same way as local gods and often beseeched for similar reasons. Buddhist notions such as karmic requital in this and subsequent lives and punishment in hells after death were part of the common religious assumptions shared by almost all of Song society (their Buddhist origins often forgotten or ignored).

Although the educated elite is often portrayed as aloof from the common people, the worldview of those who associated themselves with elite religious concerns was in fact deeply embedded in the fundamental assumptions of popular religion. The notion that the worlds of gods (including Buddhas and Bodhisattvas), ghosts, and deceased ancestors were in constant interaction with the world of living humans was taken for granted by virtually everyone. Thus, government officials were charged with carrying out rituals at temples of state-approved gods that the court had honored by granting them imposing titles, which were meant to make the gods exert themselves on behalf of the well-being of the empire.¹⁰ Officials also frequently had to deal with infestations of ghosts and demonic forces and to preside over various rites of exorcism.¹¹ Even literati who were deeply invested in Buddhist doctrine and soteriology typically saw no problem with turning to local gods or non-Buddhist religious specialists to solve specific problems in their own lives or those of their families or communities. There are also many stories of famous Chan masters meeting and subduing ghosts or enlisting the help of gods. On occasion, Chan masters actively participated in popular religion by performing rituals for purposes such as bringing rain or warding off pests on behalf of the local community. The elite Chan monks who resided in the grand monasteries were by no means irrelevant to the communities in which they were situated. Although no uneducated commoner could hope
to approach such a Buddhist master, he could visit his monastery and benefit from the powerful positive forces the master embodied and perhaps, on certain occasions, even catch a glimpse of the Chan master performing rituals or dharma talks. Local elites would donate money, rice, and land to prestigious area monasteries, while artisans and others with few material resources could donate their labor, thereby gaining potent merit that could help them in this life and the next. There are also a number of examples of Chan masters’ directly influencing the lives of the people living around their monasteries by, for example, exhorting them to give up fishing as a trade or organizing large-scale community projects, such as the drainage of a lake to gain arable land.¹²

Though their contributions are too frequently ignored and cannot be systematically addressed here, women could and did participate actively in Song Buddhism, both as monastics and in the role of patrons.¹³ One source indicates that in 1021, of almost 460,000 monastics, over 13 percent were nuns.¹⁴ Furthermore, just like monks, a number of nuns came from families of the educated elite, indicating that at least some elite families considered it socially acceptable for their girls to enter the Buddhist order. Nuns also become members of the Chan lineage and held positions as Chan masters (in convents) in the Song, but compared to the number of known male Chan masters, their numbers are miniscule.¹⁵

Due to advancements in printing techniques and the availability of cheaper paper in the latter part of the Song, a large number of books on a variety of topics were printed in this period by both government printers and private commercial printing houses. Printed texts included collections of government documents and ambitious works on history, technical works and books on medicine, collections of poetry, and the private jottings of various scholars.¹⁶ At the same time, the earlier practice of hand-copying texts continued in the Song (although printed texts were more likely to survive). Thus, Song culture and society is better documented than any earlier period in Chinese history. In addition, many works written in earlier periods were first printed and circulated widely in the Song.

This book seeks to understand developments in Chan Buddhism by interrogating a plethora of voices in Song literature from across the spectrum of Song elite society. Far from being a closed system that was internally motivated, Buddhism in China can only be understood when we appreciate it in terms of how it functioned in, and interacted with, secular society. To this end, I combine close readings of official government documents and a broad range of literati writings with an examination of texts produced within, and across, Buddhism and the Chan tradition itself. This rich material offers rewarding glimpses of many aspects of politics, society, and religion in the Song. But things are not always what they seem. While government edicts and regulations, as one would expect, represent an extreme outsider perspective, literati texts often deliberately seem to adopt the perspective of an outsider even as the texts themselves, by their very nature,
sometimes may become insider accounts, as when their records of monastic construction projects or the lives of famous Chan masters became part of the institutional memory. Likewise, texts produced by members of the Chan school frequently disclose tensions within the Chan tradition—and sometimes criticisms and even satirical accounts of it—in ways that seem to situate their authors as outsiders to it. The distinction between insider and outsider is therefore not always clear-cut, and we have to approach all source materials cautiously and with an open mind. Furthermore, government sources, such as edicts, laws, and other regulations, must be seen as expressions of how the central administration envisioned local governance, which was not always reflected in actual policies carried out by local officials.

As a group, Song literati were prolific writers. It was a universal expectation that educated males would be able to produce poetry, descriptive prose, and essays on government. Literati would also frequently be called upon to write various types of inscriptions for Buddhist monasteries, Daoist temples, and shrines for local gods. The commercialization of printing in the Song facilitated and inspired literary production and gave rise to an unprecedented book culture, wherein many members of the educated elite became enthusiastic readers and book collectors, and even published writers themselves. Literati of some (at least local) distinction would often have their writings compiled and circulated, sometimes in printed form. Writings of several thousand members of the Song literati are still extant, and many times that number must have had their writings published. Especially the informal genres of Song literati literature represent rich sources for understanding many aspects of Song society, including Buddhism. Another very important genre are the surviving local gazetteers produced by officials and other literati in many locales of the Song, which often contain information about Buddhism and Buddhist establishments not found in any other type of document. Among the Buddhist inscriptions many literati were persuaded to write, funerary inscriptions or epitaphs (taming) for Chan masters have been especially important for this study. Such inscriptions widely circulated in the Song and were no doubt read eagerly by monastics and lay Chan enthusiasts alike. Funerary inscriptions often contain detailed biographies and give interesting information not typically found in other Buddhist sources. The text of an inscription would normally be carved in stone and erected at the monastery of its subject, although, due to a lack of funds and other obstacles, that may not always have happened. In a few cases, the actual stone still exists, but most extant epitaphs are known from various epigraphic collections into which they have been transcribed. Funerary inscriptions that Song writers composed would also often be included in their collected works. The Song elite, furthermore, frequently wrote inscriptions for Buddhist monasteries to celebrate completed construction projects, conversion to public status, or the bestowal of name plaques. Such inscriptions can tell us much about how Buddhism was organized in the Song and
about literati attitudes toward it. Fortunately, the vast amount of extant Song literature has recently become much more accessible to scholarly inquiry though several ambitious digitizing projects.

A wealth of Chinese Buddhist writing from the Song also survives. By the Song, Chinese Buddhism had truly come into its own and was no longer looking toward India for explanation and inspiration. All the major sūtras and śāstras of Indian Buddhism had been translated, and contact with India and the Central Asian Buddhist states had become rare, partly because China was cut off by hostile neighbors. Song Buddhism created a large body of literature, much of which came to have as much authority as the translated scriptures. The Chan school was by far the most prolific school of Song Buddhism, and part of the considerable body of texts it created is still extant. The volume of literature produced by the Chan school far outweighs anything produced by any other groups of Buddhism in the Song. The irony of the Song Chan school’s claim to embody “a separate transmission outside the teachings, not setting up words” was not lost on contemporaries, including the bibliophile Chen Zhensun (ca. 1190–after 1249), who pointed out that four of the Chan transmission histories together consisted of 120 fascicles comprising several tens of millions of characters, and who mockingly twisted the Chan school’s self-description as “not relying on words” (bu li wenzi) to read as its homophonic “never separated from words.”

Print culture in particular made it possible for Chan masters to create close ties with the educated elite. Collections entitled “recorded sayings of Chan master so-and-so” were often published during a Chan master’s own lifetime. The term “recorded sayings” (yulu) signified that these collections were records of a master’s oral teachings, such as dialogues from his encounters with students and other masters, as well as sermons that he had given. But the typical recorded sayings of a Song Chan master also often included poems, letters, and other texts written by him. The recorded sayings collections of over a hundred different Song Chan masters survive in some form, and at least as many are known to have existed but are no longer extant. Although these works were no doubt perused by monastic Chan students, their main audience was the educated elite, and the reception of a Chan master’s recorded sayings could have a large impact on his career.

The single most important genre of Chan Buddhist texts in the Song, however, were transmission histories. This genre helped to spark and sustain the interest of the educated elite in the Chan school, and its works also served as documents of self-definition for the Chan lineages. Transmission histories came to be known as denglu, or “lamp records,” so named because they often have the word “lamp” in their titles. The work that first gave the genre its name was the Jingde chuandeng lu (Record of the transmission of the lamp from the Jingde [1004–1008] era; hereafter Chuandeng lu), an extremely influential book that in many ways came to define Song Chan. The “transmission of the lamp” is a reference to the transmission of the dharma from master to disciple, as one lamp lights another. The Chan transmission
histories were organized into entries on individual Chan masters, which may include pieces of sermons, dialogues with disciples, and poetry, sometimes supplemented with biographical notes. The records in the transmission histories were meant to be inspiring and educational, giving the reader a glimpse of the mind of an enlightened master and perhaps inducing the reader to pursue a similar path or even triggering an enlightenment experience. But the transmission histories were also ordered in a pattern that strictly followed the genealogical lines of master-disciple relationships, and they contained tables of contents that also included the names of monks whose records were not included in the work, in effect constituting genealogical lists. This was perhaps the most important function of the transmission histories—to serve as a kind of who's who of Chan masters—and anyone in the Song interested in Chan would have been very familiar with these lists. The transmission histories provide important material for the understanding of Chan in the Song, but it is crucial to remember that they are religious and didactic works and that they cannot be used as simple records of the past. Other works that were important to the Song Chan school, and today to the historian of Chan, include a number of collections of anecdotes about Chan masters, Chan monastic rules, collections of notes and miscellaneous writings by Chan masters, as well as Buddhist histories and other Buddhist writings produced outside the Chan school. Most of the Chinese Buddhist canon has now been digitized and made freely available by the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association.

Perhaps because of Chan's own seductive rhetoric and dramatic pseudo-historical narratives, much about the Chan tradition is still commonly misunderstood. In the first chapter of this book, which provides background information on the Chan school in the Song, I address several still-prevalent misconceptions about the Chan school and its sociocultural setting. Thus, I argue that the notion of five “houses,” or “families,” of Chan that are often understood to represent distinct approaches to Chan practice is a construct that had surprisingly little relevance to the Song Chan school, at least prior to the conflict between silent illumination and kanhua Chan. I also argue against the common view that the educated elite consisted of “Confucians” who as a group saw Buddhism as a foreign and heterodox religion.

I turn in the second chapter to an examination of the circumstances that led to Chan's becoming the leading form of elite monastic Buddhism, which I connect to the early Song court's promotion of a certain kind of monastery, known as a “public” (shifang) monastery. Public monasteries were especially associated with the Chan school, and because the Song government in various ways encouraged the establishment of such monasteries, it indirectly came to strongly favor the growth of the Chan school. It is doubtful that there could have been a Chan school as we know it without this development.

While the policies of the Song government had a decisive impact on the development of monastic Buddhism, and of Chan in particular, the patron-
age of the educated elite was also critically important to the success of the Chan school and its individual lineages, as I argue in the third chapter. In the Song, support from members of the literati was crucial to the personal ambitions of a Chan master, and to the fate of particular Chan lineages, because of the elite’s economic power and its power to influence appointments to the abbacies of public monasteries. Chan lineages can be understood as “transmission families,” and procreation was a major concern of these lineages, as it is of all families. Only as an abbot at a public monastery could a Chan master give transmission to his students, and Chan masters were very aware that they required the support of officials and local literati if they wished to obtain abbacies and continue their lineages. Appealing to the interests of the educated elite thus became an important subtext in the Chan school, and the very real influence of elite laypeople²⁶ ultimately contributed in significant ways to the shaping of Chan ideology and factional, or sectarian, consciousness.

With support from the state and from many members of the educated elite, the Chan school prospered and expanded during the first centuries of the Song. But toward the end of this period, it began to experience serious competition from other newly revived schools of Buddhism that had successfully patterned their own organization on the Chan school. Furthermore, in the twelfth century, monastic Buddhism in general came under some pressure from less-than-sympathetic state policies, and the state seems to have become less active at the local level. At this time, the nature of the literati as a class underwent some profound changes, as it became harder for members of the educated elite to obtain appointment to government office. Social historians have argued that the elite, in response, turned its attention away from the national level toward the local level, filling in the vacuum left by the state. All of these changes had the effect of making literati support even more crucial to the success of Chan masters and their lineages.

Around the same time, the Caodong tradition, one of the traditional five houses of Chan, began to undergo a momentous revival, which I examine in chapter 4. Having almost died out, its lineage was resurrected at the end of the eleventh century, and within decades it became one of the most powerful groups of elite monastic Buddhism in Song China. The study of this revival yields important insights into the creative process by which the Caodong tradition was reinvented through the remaking of its lineage, the crafting of suitable hagiographies for its ancestors, and, eventually, the creation of a distinctive style of teaching and practice that came to be known as silent illumination. The success of the Caodong tradition was clearly perceived as a threat by the dominant Linji tradition, whose members attacked the Caodong tradition in various ways, most notably targeting its teachings of “heretical silent illumination Chan,” which were denounced as quietistic and, worse, as not leading to enlightenment. The most vocal opponent of silent illumination was Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163), who insisted on the necessity of a shattering enlightenment experience, and in chapter 5 I analyze
his attacks on silent illumination and discuss the kanhua Chan that he de-
veloped to counter it. Since there has been some discussion of who exactly
Dahui and other members of the Linji tradition were attacking, I present
evidence in the subsequent chapter that Linji masters did indeed mean to
target the entire new Caodong tradition with their criticism of silent illu-
mination, and that they attacked the lineage that the Caodong tradition
claimed for itself as well. Furthermore, I show that the Linji attacks on silent
illumination were especially directed toward instructing members of the
educated elite, many of whom had become interested in the teachings of
the revived Caodong tradition and were patrons of its masters.

A further important question is whether the new Caodong tradition in
fact taught silent illumination of the sort depicted in the attacks by the Linji
masters. In the final chapter, I show that the revived Caodong tradition did
indeed teach an approach to enlightenment and practice that reasonably
can be called “silent illumination” (although the term was very rarely used)
but that the attacks by Dahui and others in many ways distorted it. Although
scholars have tended to see silent illumination as characteristic of the Cao-
dong tradition from its very inception, moreover, I argue that this was not
the case: silent illumination was developed by Furong Daokai (1043–1118)
and his descendants, partly as a teaching that could appeal to educated lay-
people. Although Dahui succeed in discrediting the term “silent illumina-
tion” the Caodong silent illumination was in itself not especially controver-
sial: standard meditation in the Chan school prior to Dahui’s kanhua Chan
was very much like that advocated by the masters in the revived Caodong
tradition.

The sectarian split within Chan only becomes fully understandable
when placed in the context of government policies, economic realities, and
relations with members of the educated elite. In the conclusion, I reiterate
that the sectarianism we see in Dahui and other Linji masters was a new phe-
nomenon. Through the first part of the Song, known as the Northern Song
(Bei Song, 920–1127), the different Chan lineages had coexisted without
challenging the legitimacy of one another, even as they contended among
themselves. However, the apex of the rise of the new Caodong tradition
coincided with a time when the Chan school as a whole had begun to feel
itself under pressure and had become more dependent on support from the
literati. This helps to explain why the reinvented Caodong tradition may not
have been regarded as a welcome addition by the other Chan traditions and
why it may have seen an early need to differentiate itself from the dominant
Linji tradition by shifting to a more sectarian mode and developing a dis-
tinctive teaching that could appeal to literati. The pool of powerful literati
actively interested in Chan was to some extent finite, and, significantly, the
names of the same literati figures often come up in connection with several
different Chan masters from different traditions. Most literati did not differ-
entiate clearly between the various Chan traditions, and it became the task
of twelfth-century Chan masters to make them see a difference. It is telling
that the Linji tradition’s attacks on the Caodong teachings were mainly directed toward members of the literati rather than toward monastics: this and other evidence indicates that the Caodong tradition’s silent illumination approach was successful in attracting lay supporters. In spite of the serious and very real soteriological issues the dispute involved, then, both silent illumination and k'an-hua Chan must also be understood as strategies to attract members of the literati developed at a time when literati support had become more crucial than ever.²⁷