

# *The* RECORD *of* EMPTY HALL

ONE HUNDRED  
CLASSIC KOANS

*Translated with commentary by* Dosho Port





# The Record *of* EMPTY HALL

*One Hundred Classic Koans*

Xutang Zhiyu

TRANSLATED WITH COMMENTARY BY

Dosho Port



SHAMBHALA



Shambhala Publications, Inc.  
4720 Walnut Street  
Boulder, Colorado 80301  
[www.shambhala.com](http://www.shambhala.com)

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Frontispiece: Mu (無) calligraphy (English: absence, non, without, no) by Harada  
Tangen Roshi (1924–2018)

Cover art: Kim Knoll  
Cover design: Daniel Urban-Brown  
Interior design: Greta D. Sibley

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Shambhala Publications is distributed worldwide by Penguin Random House, Inc., and its subsidiaries.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Zhiyu, 1185–1269, author. | Port, Dosho, translator, writer of added commentary.

Title: The record of empty hall: one hundred classic koans / Xutang Zhiyu; translated with commentary by Dosho Port.

Other titles: Xutang he shang yu lu. English

Description: First edition. | Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala, [2020] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020018874 | ISBN 9781611808919 (trade paperback) Subjects: LCSH: Koan.

Classification: LCC BQ9289.5 .C4713 2020 | DDC 294.3/927—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020018874>

eISBN 9780834843486

a\_prh\_5.6.1\_co\_ro

Eighty-five years  
Not knowing buddhas and ancestors  
Walking casually with arms swinging  
Extinguishing great emptiness.

—Death poem of Xutang Zhiyu

# Contents

Foreword by

Melissa Myozen Blacker Roshi

Acknowledgments

Introduction

CASE 1

The World-Honored One

Breaks Through Inside and Outside

CASE 2

The World-Honored One Cares for Each and Goes

CASE 3

The World-Honored One Finally Pays Attention

CASE 4

Fu Daishi Explains a Sutra

CASE 5

The National Teacher Zhong's Single Wisp of Cloud

CASE 6

Nanquan's Debt of Gratitude

CASE\_7

Magu's Bodacious Presentation

CASE\_8

The National Teacher Cultivates Practice

CASE\_9

Fenggan's Old Mirror

CASE\_10

Budai's True Name

CASE\_11

Manjusri Counts the Saints

CASE\_12

Manjusri Dreams a Dream of You

CASE\_13

Nanquan Sells His Body

CASE\_14

Nanquan Offers New Tightly-Whities

CASE\_15

Huangbo's Teachers of Zen

CASE\_16

Zhaozhou and Nanquan Are Saved

CASE\_17

Xitang's Donkey Brays



CASE 18

Guizong's Song of Himself

CASE 19

Pang's "Mixed and Broken Bits"

CASE 20

Zhaozhou Leans His Staff

CASE 21

Dongshan Dies Counting

CASE 22

Shishi Rejoices Grinding a Cup and Tray

CASE 23

Zhangjing and the Disappearing Circle

CASE 24

Xuefeng Is Set Straight

CASE 25

Dongshan's "No-Knowing Face"

CASE 26

Xuefeng Seals What

CASE 27

Lingyuan's Slipper

CASE 28

Changqing's Great Assembly Bows

CASE 29

Lingshu Breaks an Alms Bowl

CASE 30

Yunju's Gift Pants

CASE 31

Yunmen's Got Words

CASE 32

Yunmen's "Same or Different?"

CASE 33

Yunmen's "Joke Is on Me"

CASE 34

Shexian's Body Enters Hell

CASE 35

Shexian's Slap and Shout

CASE 36

Hanwen Gong's "Change or No Change?"

CASE 37

Luopu's "Not Meeting the Founder"

CASE 38

Baoying's "Immediately Entering Hell"

CASE 39

Guizong's "Plain Rice"

CASE\_40

Shishuang's "Little Problem"

CASE\_41

Open Heart's "One Person"

CASE\_42

Helin Su's "Place for No You"

CASE\_43

Wuzhou's Attendant

CASE\_44

A Venerable Lay Elder's "Meaning of the Sutra"

CASE\_45

Youqi's "Who Rang the Bell?"

CASE\_46

An Itinerant Monk Spits

CASE\_47

Cuiyan's Stupid Place

CASE\_48

Guanyin Does Not Go to Korea

CASE\_49

High Seat Ming in Your Hands

CASE\_50

Dog Bites Monk

CASE 51

A Benefactor Asks about Manjusri's Seniority

CASE 52

Xiangzhou Zhe's "His Realization Is Deficient"

CASE 53

Turning Your Back on Buddha

CASE 54

Danxia's "Lucky Guy and It Sucks to Be You"

CASE 55

Xitang Zang Delivers a Letter

CASE 56

Mazu's One Stroke

CASE 57

Zhaozhou Bows and Withdraws

CASE 58

Guizong's Roughness

CASE 59

Linji's "Great Compassion"

CASE 60

Xitang's "More"

CASE 61

Baizhang's "One Person"

CASE 62

Sanjueyin's "Crossing Over"

CASE 63

Luzu's "Only This Way"

CASE 64

Cizhou's "Knowing Yet Not Knowing"

CASE 65

All-Together Peak's "How Many?"

CASE 66

Iron Grindstone Liu Visits Guishan

CASE 67

Iron Grindstone Liu's "Upside Down"

CASE 68

Guishan's Centered, Harmonious Functioning

CASE 69

Hongzhou Miling's "Nothing Can Surpass This"

CASE 70

Fengxue's "You Passed Through Too"

CASE 71

Ciming's "Four Awe-Inspiring Manners"

CASE 72

Daowu's "Fellow Traveler"

CASE\_73

Jinfeng's Pillow

CASE\_74

Dongshan's Tea Party

CASE\_75

Xuansha's "One Bright Pearl"

CASE\_76

Xuansha's "No Relationship"

CASE\_77

Xuansha's "Gate Is Closed"

CASE\_78

Guishan's "Directly Expressing the Matter"

CASE\_79

Changqing's "Almost Let Him Slip By"

CASE\_80

Xuefeng's "Open the Gate and Direct Realization Comes"

CASE\_81

Dongshan Cong's "Sign for Later Generations"

CASE\_82

Guishan's "Way's Inner Pattern"

CASE\_83

Xuefeng's "Go Go"

CASE 84

Deshan's Beating People

CASE 85

Daochang's "Hear and See"

CASE 86

Nanquan's "Windy Night"

CASE 87

Manjusri's "Kill and Give Life"

CASE 88

Xuefeng's "Then Don't"

CASE 89

Shiti's "Without Deception"

CASE 90

Rirong's Dance

CASE 91

Baizhang's "Difficult Haul"

CASE 92

Nanyuan's Razor

CASE 93

Huayan's Defeat and Deficiency

CASE 94

Yaoshan's Arrow

CASE\_95

Changzi Kuang's "What Is His Name?"

CASE\_96

Dongshan's "Not Arrive"

CASE\_97

Yunju's "Secret Word"

CASE\_98

National Teacher Shao's "True Eye"

CASE\_99

Longce Investigates a Young Boy

CASE 100

Yantou Doesn't Agree

Afterword by James Myoun Ford Roshi

Appendix 1

Biographical Notes

Appendix 2

Koan Collections and Sources

Appendix 3

Notes on Translations

Notes



# Foreword

According to the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, who started this whole mess we call Buddhism 2,600 years ago, good friends (*kalyana mitta*) are the whole of practice. In the *Upaddha Sutta*, the Buddha says, “Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life.”

I count Dosho Port Roshi as an admirable companion on the Great Way of Zen. Our friendship is a very particular one. Mostly, we enjoy a mutual love for Zen koan practice, and in my view, Dosho is a master of koan teaching. Someone who is adept in this field of study and practice has to remain open and deeply curious about the meaning of life as transmitted from our Zen ancestors in China, Japan, and Korea to Zen practitioners in the present moment. This transmission is complex and mysterious.

Most koans used today are translations many times over, from Chinese to Japanese to nineteenth-century English to twentieth-century English. Dosho’s bright mind looks to original Chinese and Japanese sources to help explore the multiplicity of meaning that is at the heart of koan inquiry. I have personally enjoyed and used his fresh translations in my writing, teaching, and personal practice. Our conversations often revolve around koan study. And we have found that there is no end to delving deeply into this mystery.

Xutang’s 100 koans appeared in an English translation by Yoel Hoffman in 1977, with “answers” that are really commentaries from the lineage of eighteenth-century Japanese Zen master Hakuin Ekaku. To my knowledge, there has been no other attempt to render this collection into English, and no published modern interpretations.

Dosho has filled the gap in transmission to the English-speaking Zen world with his clear, warm, and emotionally intelligent writing. He has managed to comment on each koan from the stance of the awakened heart, without sacrificing relatability to our modern life of joys and sorrows. We get to know his wife and teaching partner, Tetsugan, his dog Bodhi, and some of his many sangha friends from the Nebraska Zen Center where he lives and teaches.

Two other skills that Dosho brings to these commentaries are his immense love for our thirteenth-century Japanese ancestor Eihei Dogen, transmitted to him from his first teacher, Dainin Katagiri Roshi. Added to that is his fascination with the history of koan practice and all of the many characters who come to life in the koans. Making these connections is a joy to witness. I am not a scholar myself, but I find his weaving together of these different elements personally inspiring. After all, the point of studying koans is to live the awakened life, not to turn into a scholar. Dosho always leads us back to this moment, where everything we need is spread before us.

The particular lens offered by koan practice helps us to live more deeply and more compassionately. And we get the great good luck of finding intimate friends, including the teachers and students who populate these stories. Dipping into this book for even a few pages will benefit anyone who is intrigued by koan practice and its history, and/or who is doing koan study with a teacher. If this describes you, enjoy your good fortune. Your view of what it means to be a human being is about to be vastly expanded.

—Melissa Myozen Blacker  
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# Acknowledgments

There are many people who contributed to this work. First, I think of my maternal grandfather, Harry Andrews, and parents, Jean and Bob Port, who all instilled a love for learning and a determination to follow through for which I am deeply grateful.

Dainin Katagiri Roshi initiated me into the world of Dogen, Soto koan study, and the buddhadharma in its marvelous depth and breadth. His upright sitting inspires me still, thirty years after his death. Tōmoe Katagiri, my dharma mother, gave me permission not to be the best student. Harada Tangen Roshi welcomed me into his home, Bukkokuji, and gave open access to his awakened heart, while opening the door for *mu* practice. Daido Looi Roshi offered a path to continue this work, and I finally found a way through with James Myoun Ford Roshi, Melissa Myozen Blacker Roshi, and David Dae An Rynick Roshi. Much love and gratitude to you all.

I've also been gifted with two incredible children, who are now "hiding in the world," as Leonard Cohen said. Further, I've also been gifted with sincere, capable, and determined students from whom I learn a great deal, and for whom I feel an abiding debt of gratitude.

I got my first taste of translation work with Katagiri Roshi and the Soto gathas for daily practice, continued intermittently with my late brother, Ken Port, with selected passages from Dogen's *Shobogenzo*. I so miss the afternoons we spent going over possible renderings of Dogen.

It was the insightful Simon Dojo Askelöf, however, that first challenged me to try my hand at translating koans from the classical Chinese. Simon went on to work with me co-translating much of the Harada-Yasutani koan curriculum for our in-house use. Thank you!

All of the works cited in the notes as our translations or my own are unpublished.

Also, deep thanks to my dear friends, Melissa Myozen Blacker Roshi, who also wrote the foreword, Simon Dojo Askelöf, and James Myoun Ford Roshi, who also wrote the afterword, for reviewing the manuscript and giving valuable feedback.

Finally, I want to express my huge debt of gratitude for my dear wife, closest friend, and intimate dharma companion, Tetsugan Zummach Osho, who also reviewed the manuscript with her usual superb attention to detail, and throughout the project provided pithy input for how to proceed through the various barriers. Our rolling conversation about all things, especially about the buddhadharma, has been such an incredible and ongoing joy in my life for twenty years. Thank you!

Now, let's get to the fun part, cultivating awakening, with some of the great teachers of all time, from Shakyamuni (in Case 1) to Yantou (in Case 100), selected and with sayings added by one of the great teachers of all time, Xutang, and with comments by yours truly, doing his best in august company.

# Introduction

## *Raising a Single Stick of Incense*

As I write this, I'm in my forty-third year of practicing Zen. I grew up in and among the swamps, bars, and gas stations of northeastern Minnesota, then had the dumb luck of stumbling into one of the first Soto Zen teachers in America, Katagiri Roshi, in Minneapolis in 1977. I went on to train with him and received dharma transmission in 1989, just before he died in 1990.

After Katagiri Roshi's death, I first practiced monastically in Japan for a year under the guidance of Harada Tangen Roshi. Unbeknownst to me until years later, when I left Japan I would embark on an "intermittent pilgrimage" (visiting teachers, doing intensive retreats, and inquiring about the dharma whenever my other responsibilities allowed) while teaching Zen, working as a special educator and administrator, and raising two children. Since Katagiri Roshi died, I've had the opportunity to study with about twenty Zen teachers in Japan, the United States, and Europe. Well, really just one in Europe—Thich Nhat Hanh. Finally, I connected with James Myoun Ford Roshi and Melissa Myozen Blacker Roshi. Then in January 2015, after having completed formal koan training, I received *inka shomei* (literally, "document of succession") from Ford Roshi in the Aitken-Tarrant line of the Harada-Yasutani-Yamada lineage.

Katagiri Roshi taught me that there are three elements to Zen: zazen, study, and engagement. So after completing the Harada-Yasutani koan curriculum, I turned my study practice to one of the creative geniuses behind the system I'd worked through, the

eighteenth-century Japanese Zen master, Hakuin. I felt determined to continue refining my understanding so that I might be better able to practice awakening.

Hakuin had such high regard for the author of *The Record of Empty Hall*, Xutang, that he chose this text as the subject for his first large teaching gathering. Although I'd already been practicing and studying Zen for decades, I didn't know anything about Xutang, so I began digging. I soon felt like a little kid discovering a cache of golden pennies right in my own sandbox! One thing led to another, and I began translating and then commenting on volume 6 of *The Record of Empty Hall*—one hundred koans with alternate sayings by Xutang—with the hope of sharing these goodies with you.

Indeed, the very nature and purpose of koans is to be shared, to be practiced in relationship. Each case of *The Record of Empty Hall* (as is standard in all the major collections) begins with this ideogram: 舉. Pronounced *ju* in Chinese, it means “to lift,” “to uphold,” or “to cite.” In this translation, I've rendered it as “raised,” and included it in each case, just like in the original. Think of “raised” at the beginning of each koan like an offering of a stick of incense, embodying the undivided heart. You might take my advice—what the heck?—and raise that heart again and again as you work through this *Record*.

Before we get to the *The Record of Empty Hall*, though, I think it would help if we took some time setting the stage. You must have questions, like “Who was Xutang?” “What is *The Record of Empty Hall*?” “How can studying this help me and others?” These are questions that I will now address in turn.

## *Who Was Xutang?*

Xutang Zhiyu (1185–1269) was ordained as a monk at sixteen and years later became a successor of Yun'an Puyan (1156–1226), an important teacher in the Linji Zen lineage.<sup>1</sup> Xutang served as abbot of ten monasteries, including Wanshousi, which was the first of the Five Mountains and represented the height of the official Chinese

monastic system. In addition, two emperors, Lizong and Duzong, regarded him as their teacher. Xutang also had a thriving community of practitioners who were dedicated to waking up and to expressing their awakening, often through verse, to benefit all living beings.

*The Record of Empty Hall* was divided into ten volumes, each one representing teachings from one of the ten monasteries where Xutang served as abbot. Commenting on this record, Hakuin wrote,

[Xutang's] ten records are regrettably like a broken coin string,  
One coin counting as two—like a coin string without its full  
quota.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, inexplicable and utterly useless. Such is the highest praise in Zen.

Speaking of inexplicable and utterly useless, Xutang (虛堂) means “empty (or vacant) hall,” and Zhiyu (智愚) means “wisdom stupid.” Inexplicably, though, he signed his final entry in *The Record of Empty Hall* as Zhiyu (知愚) Qifu (啟復). In this signature the ideogram for Zhiyu, although pronounced the same, means “knowing stupid,” while Qifu means “awakened returning.”

In a similar vein, Katagiri Roshi reported that his last thought, the thought that triggered his awakening, was “How stupid I am!” So there is a lot of stupid to go around in Zen, and we’re all in such good company.

Xutang happened upon his teacher, Yun’an Puyan, by following good company to Yun’an’s monastery. He was assigned a koan, “Yantou’s Old Sail,” that goes like this:

A monk asked Yantou, “What about when the sail has yet to be hoisted?”

Yantou replied, “A small fish swallows a large fish.”

The monk said, “How about after it’s been hoisted?”

Yantou said, “A donkey grazes in the back garden.”<sup>3</sup>

The koan invites the practitioner to make a direct expression of how it is before and after awakening, of that which has no before and no after. What can be said? Xutang apparently had some ideas. However, whenever he would attempt to present his understanding, but before he could utter a word, Yun'an would say, "Take it easy, just remain mindless and unfettered by words."

This drove Xutang buggy. He couldn't understand why the old teacher was messing with his head, so he determined to burst into his room and immediately present the koan. But when he tried to do so, before he had even asked, "What about when the sail has yet to be hoisted?" Yun'an said, "Why can't you just keep your mouth shut and find a quiet place to reflect privately on your own self? Spending day after day debating in your mind the pros and cons of the old teachers—where is that going to get you?"

Xutang crawled out, sail unhoisted, and returned to his room quite agitated. Then suddenly he saw it. The next day, when it was time for face-to-face teaching, Xutang again entered Yun'an's room.

One glance at me told him that something had changed, so he didn't mention ["Yantou's Old Sail"]. He asked instead about the story of Nanquan killing the cat. I offered the capping words, "Even the great earth cannot hold it." He lowered his head with a faint smile.

Sometimes a faint smile from the old teacher is all a poor Zen student gets for a nice *kensho*, and even that might be too much. Sure enough, after about six months, his nice *kensho* had faded, his ego had reconstituted, and Xutang was back to his old ways of suffering. To his great credit, though, he continued to assiduously apply himself and finally had a happy ending to his travails. He reported,

One day, in a state of no-mind, I suddenly grasped the meaning of the old Buddha of Ta-ling's emitting a shaft of light, and I entered a state of totally unrestricted freedom. From that time on, I was never deceived by others. When I took up koans I had



previously penetrated and examined them again, I realized at once that my understanding was now completely different. I also knew with certainty that the great matter was something that had nothing to do with words or letters.<sup>4</sup>

After his enlightenment and acknowledgment as a dharma heir of Yun'an, a twenty-seventh generation successor in China, Xutang went traveling to further refine his awakening. One stop along the way was at Tiantong Rujing's place. Rujing (1162–1228), the teacher of Eihei Dogen (1200–1253), became the last ancestor in the Caodong lineage, which became the Japanese Soto lineage that continues to this day in Japan and in other countries. In the same way, Xutang, teacher of the Japanese monk Daio Kokushi, turned out to be the last Chinese ancestor in what became the Japanese Rinzai lineage. Little did either know what a generative intersection their relationship would turn out to be.

The connections between Xutang and Dogen went beyond their mutual participation in parallel processes of international transmission between China and Japan. Toward the end of Xutang's life, he wrote a preface to the collected works of Dogen. Not only that, but a student of Dogen, Tetsu Gikai, may have been the person who introduced Daio to Xutang.

But back to Rujing. Twenty-three years Xutang's senior, the old buddha did not go easy on the youngster. Hakuin told the story like this:

When Zen master Xutang met Head Priest of Ch'ing-tz'u temple, Rujing said, "Your parents' bodies are rotting away in a thicket of razor-sharp thorns. Did you know that?"

"It is wonderful," Xutang replied, "but it's not something to act rashly about." Rujing gave Xutang a slap. Xutang extended his arms, saying, "Let's take it slow and easy."<sup>5</sup>

Rujing's challenge to the young Xutang was about his dharma ancestors' bodies, those hard-to-pass-through koans, that according

to Rujing were lying rotting, unvivified by Xutang's ongoing practice. It was no small rebuke. Xutang's response reverberated with the saying of Yun'an's that had previously so annoyed him: "Take it easy, just remain mindless and unfettered by words." Even Rujing's slap didn't cause him to turn his head.

Hakuin commented on this encounter, saying,

The means employed by these two old veterans are exceedingly subtle and mysterious. Scrutinize them carefully and you will find that Rujing's question is as awesome as the great serpent that devours elephants whole and excretes their dry bones three years later. Xutang's reply has the vehement purpose of the evil P'o-ching bird, which seeks to devour its mother as soon as it is born.<sup>6</sup>

Setting aside snakes pooping out the remains of their thoroughly digested noble practice, and an unfilial student that eats its own teacher immediately after awakening, the question for us today is this: How can we get to the rotting bodies of our dharma ancestors so that we might thoroughly embody the truth of Zen before our parents were born?

And then give the corpses a decent burial.

In his teaching career, Xutang rose to Rujing's challenge. According to Hakuin,

Most virulent among [Xutang's] teachings is the poison in his "Three Turning Words." Their lethal fumes snarl fiercely up into the farthest reaches of the heavens. When the gigantic whales that rule the sea set their teeth into these impenetrable koans from [Xutang's] Dharma cave, they emit great roars that are as horrendous as those made by p'u-lao dragons when they are seized and crushed in the orca's jaws."<sup>7</sup>

Zen students of the Harada-Yasutani koan curriculum today are still fiercely working with the snarling lethal fumes of "Xutang's Three Turning Words."

Why does one whose eye is not yet clear wear emptiness like a pair of trousers?

Why is one who marks a circle on the ground and calls it a prison unable to cross this line?

Why does one who enters the sea and counts the sand stand tiptoe on the point of a needle?<sup>8</sup>

Xutang used the phrase “verse samadhi” to describe his practice. Verse samadhi involves entering one-pointedness and opening awareness to the playful field of words, often in the form of old koans, or the turning phrase within a given koan. Dr. Steven Heine describes this practice as follows:

Xutang also taught an appreciation for the intimate relation between poetry and meditation directly to numerous pilgrims.... The approach formed by Xutang was exemplified by the inspired use of capping phrases and other metaphorical or allusive remarks that were contained in the Chinese mentor’s collection of recorded sayings. That text, brought back to Japan by Daiō in the late 1260s, was studied enthusiastically for many centuries by followers of Xutang’s lineage.<sup>9</sup>

Dogen beautifully describes verse samadhi like this:

Mind is the moment of actualizing the fundamental point; words are the moment of going beyond, unlocking the barrier. Arriving is the moment of casting off the body; not-arriving is the moment of being one with just this, while being free from just this. In this way you must endeavor to actualize the time being.<sup>10</sup>

Daio, as mentioned above, traveled to the continent, studied with Xutang for nine years, passed through “Yantou’s Old Sail,” and then returned to Japan. He eventually transmitted to Daito, through whom the legacy really got going. Heine summarizes Daio’s contribution as follows:

After coming home, Daio stayed on Kyushu for three decades, thus contributing to the growth of Zen in the Hakata area, before eventually being called to lead a temple in Kyoto in the early 1300s.... [H]e became the teacher of Daito, who thirty years later established Daitokuji temple with strong government backing. This monastery has long served as the main site of one of the most important Rinzai lineages, along with Myōshinji temple, which was founded in Kyoto by Daito's main disciple, Kanzan. This line, based on the multigenerational teacher-student relations involving masters Daio, Daitō, and Kanzan, is still known as O-To-Kan. It has left the sturdiest legacy affecting subsequent centuries of Rinzai followers. The large group of eminent monks from this lineage includes Hakuin, the most important Zen reformer of the Tokugawa era, in addition to the twentieth-century abbot Yamada Mumon, among dozens of other important figures.<sup>11</sup>

Before Daio left China, though, Xutang gave him a poem with a prophecy, still widely known among Rinzai practitioners today.

To knock on the door and search with care,  
To walk broad streets and search the more:  
Old [Xutang] taught so clear and bright,  
And many are the grandchildren on the eastern sea who received  
[this teaching].<sup>12</sup>

Hakuin saw and those in his lineage continue to see themselves as continuing the unbroken legacy of the buddha ancestors as transmitted through Xutang. Indeed, in a preface to Hakuin's *Record*, his disciple Zeigan wrote, "It can truly be said that the clouds Zen master Xutang raised in the Sung dynasty fell as Dharma rain on Ryūtaku-ji."<sup>13</sup>

In summary, Xutang was one of the most important figures in the period of transmission of Zen to Japan. His influence was powerful and widespread in China during his lifetime, and even more so in

Japan after his death. Xutang's legacy continues today in the Japanese Rinzai school, where *The Record of Empty Hall* is still taken up in advanced koan training, especially in the Takuju sub-lineage. And, yet, despite his importance to the lineage of practice, and to our practice today, his contributions largely lay hidden, although not rotting. More like a helping hand extending from the grave.

My hope is that this volume will make a contribution to appreciating the gifts of dharma that flow to us through this great ancestor. We will now turn to the *The Record of Empty Hall* itself and consider its particular qualities.

## *What Is The Record of Empty Hall?*

Like most notable teachers from his era, Xutang created a collection of koans that he used in his teaching of both monastics and laypeople. We can learn quite a lot about the flavor of Xutang's teaching by digging into where he selected the cases from, which cases he chose, and how the results compare to what one finds in other collections. Xutang gathered the koans in *The Record of Empty Hall*, volume 6—the volume translated here—largely from what is called the “lamp collections.” In this regard he was in good company with the likes of Xuedou Chongxian (1105–1192), Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091–1157), and Wumen Huikai (1183–1260), the last a contemporary of Xutang. Of the handful of lamp collections available to him, Xutang selected most of the cases from “The Essential Collection of the Lamplight Connections within the [Chan] Tradition” (forty-two cases), and *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* (thirty-four cases).<sup>14</sup> Unlike the “Tiansheng Extensive Record of Lamps,” which is regarded as a Linji polemic, both collections Xutang relied on contain a wide range of koans from all the major lineages.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, Xutang showed little preference even for his own Linji lineage, selecting only nine cases that included teachers in the line from Linji to himself, sixteen generations later, and only one case

with Linji himself. Twenty-five cases involve Mazu (709–788), his direct descendants, or nearly direct descendants. In all, thirty-nine cases include as the main protagonists teachers who were descendants of the Sixth Ancestor, Dajian Huineng (638–713), and his successor, Nanyue Huairang (677–744).

Another successor of the Sixth Ancestor, *the* other whose lineage has continued until today, was Qingyuan Xingsi (d. 740). His lineage flourished through Shitou Xiqian (700–790) into the Fayan, Yunmen, and Caodong (Japanese, Soto) lines, the last of which continues in Japan and the West. Xutang included thirty-five old cases from this side of the family. Twenty-six cases in *The Record of Empty Hall* feature teachers from the lineages that led to or became the Fayan and Yunmen lines. This interest in the Fayan and Yunmen lines might be due to the koan that Xutang first broke through, “Yantou’s Old Sail,” and its relationship to this lineage.

To sum up, thirty-eight cases are from the Nanyue line and thirty-five from the Qingyuan line. Six cases involve figures from both. One case, Case 42, “Helin Su’s ‘Place for No You,’” has a rare example in koan collections of a teacher descended from the Fourth Ancestor, Dayi Daoxin (580–651) of the Oxhead school. Five cases feature the national teacher, Nanyang Huizhong (675–775), a direct descendant of the Sixth Ancestor (Cases 5, 6, 7, 8, and 55). Eight cases involve figures from folklore, including Manjusri, Hanshan, and Hotei. Finally, seven cases remain in the cold file, with lineages of untraceable ancestry.

Although the *The Blue Cliff Record* and the *The Book of Serenity*, two of the important collections in the Harada-Yasutani curriculum, share more than one-third of the same cases, only five cases from *The Record of Empty Hall* (Cases 4, 11, 15, 66, and 94) are from *The Blue Cliff Record*,<sup>16</sup> and only one (Case 84) occurs in the *The Book of Serenity*.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the *The Blue Cliff Record*, *The Book of Serenity*, and *The Gateless Barrier*, a third major collection in the Harada-Yasutani curriculum, share many koans, and they also share from the same set of teachers.<sup>18</sup> *The Record of Empty Hall* stands out both for sharing few cases with what are now the most well-



known koan texts, and also for a selection of unusual teachers from the lamp collections—Shishi, Zhangjing, Sanjueyin, and Shexian, to name a few. I’m betting that even old Zen hands don’t recognize any names in that crew.

I’ve included three appendices to help you deepen your appreciation of the text. Appendix 1, Biographical Notes, contains about fifty entries with basic information about the various figures within the dense narrative of koan literature. Appendix 2, Koan Collections and Sources, presents background on the seven koan collections referenced here, as well as various translations, and sometimes different English titles for the same Chinese texts. Appendix 3, Notes on Translations, points you to other English versions of the cases in the text so that you can compare them with the version included here. I’ve found other translations for fifty-six of the one hundred cases.

One of the most salient features of *The Record of Empty Hall* is that Xutang offers a distinctive style of commentary that makes Yuanwu in *Blue Cliff Record* and Wansong in *Book of Serenity* appear to have been verifiable gasbags. Even the terse comments by Wumen in the *Gateless Barrier* seem quite wordy in comparison. In contrast, Xutang followed a style created by Yunmen of answering for another, and always in a few words. For example, the complete comment for Case 79, “Changqing’s ‘Almost Let Him Slip By,’” is this: “Grasping the flame, traveling at night.”

Indeed, this style of brief commentary, or “capping phrases” (Japanese, *jakugo*), is one of the important living legacies of Xutang and *The Record of Empty Hall*. It is still used by some koan teachers to refine their students’ understandings of a koan. Originally this style of koan commentary was devised by Fenyang Shanzhao in the eleventh century.<sup>19</sup> Xutang used two different types of capping phrases in *The Record of Empty Hall*: substitute phrases (代云, Japanese, *daigo*) and alternate phrases (別云, Japanese, *betsugo*). The difference between these types of capping phrases is subtle. I’ve rendered the former, “On behalf of others, Xutang said...,” and the latter, “Xutang’s alternate saying....”

An example of a substitute phrase is found in Case 19, “Pang’s ‘Mixed and Broken Bits.’” “On behalf of others, Xutang said, ‘They come out equally.’” And an example of an alternate phrase is given above in Case 79, “Grasping the flame, traveling at night.” One way to appreciate the distinction is this: With substitute phrases, Xutang was saying it *could* also be like this. With alternate phrases, Xutang was saying it *should* be like this.

Xutang is considered a master of entering a koan and then speaking up by either saying, “Yes, and...” (mostly in the first half of the *Record*) or “No, but...” (mostly in the second half). In the first half, eleven of the fifty-four cases with substitute sayings (“Yes, and...”), he specifies who he’s offering a substitute saying for just eleven times. In the remaining forty-six cases with alternate sayings (“No, but...”), he is specific about who he’s offering an alternate saying for thirty times. Twenty of those thirty alternate sayings are offered for the student in the case, and ten are for the teacher.

What’s striking here is that Xutang offered a “No, but...” for some of the brightest lights of the tradition, including Dongshan, Xuedou, and Nanquan. And in the present-day practice of capping phrases, the koan student is also invited to step up and say or do what goes beyond the ancient masters.

As I’ve shared drafts of *The Record of Empty Hall* with teachers and practitioners fluent in the koan way, one common response to Xutang’s capping phrases is “Perfect!” Indeed, I was motivated to undertake this project largely due to these perfect capping phrases.

Now a word about what *The Record of Empty Hall* is not. It is not a record of diversity and inclusion. Almost all of the cases occurred within the cloistered settings of elite, male, monastic communities, even the cases that are likely folklore, like Case 1, “The World-Honored One Breaks Through Inside and Outside.” Eleven of the cases involve a layperson, like Layman Pang in Case 19, “Pang’s ‘Mixed and Broken Bits,’” but usually the laypeople are high government ministers or emperors, not common folk. In addition, only three of the cases include women. These are both nuns, one unnamed (Case 29, “Lingshu Breaks an Alms Bowl”), and in two



cases (66 and 67), the great Iron Grindstone Liu. Clearly, as we bring this incredible practice of koan introspection into our global culture, koan cases that involve a much wider range of people will be essential. Joan Sutherland's *Acequias & Gates* is one such outstanding effort.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, a few details about the translation. First, I've done my best to stay true to the ideograms while presenting the cases in readable English, although the former has been my priority. Second, I've used the Pinyin romanization system throughout, even if a cited passage used Wade-Giles. Third, Yoel Hoffman's *rendition of The Record of Empty Hall in his Every End Exposed: The 100 Perfect Koans of Master Kido* (1977) has been my constant companion throughout this project. I'm indebted to Mr. Hoffman for his work. And fourth, Xutang's original is a list of cases without number or title. I've added these. For readers interested in consulting the text in Chinese, please visit: [http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/zh-cn/T47n2000\\_006](http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/zh-cn/T47n2000_006).

The comments that I've added to each case are intended to give some context so as to assist the reader in more fully appreciating the koan's point, to clarify the question of the key point of the koan, or to reframe the key point in a way that modern readers might more fully access the issue involved.

So what? How might working with this text help you? In the next section I will address this issue.

## *How Can Studying This Help Me and Others?*

I imagine that readers are approaching this book from several different starting places. Some readers will have already entered the koan way, gotten a taste of awakening, and know experientially that the work of this life is already complete. What is here for you? Xutang selected an odd bunch of koans, koans that I hope might help fill in some blind spots for you the way they have for me. This book is for you.

You also may be an honored member of a group with a more general interest in spirituality, looking for something to enhance

your private life of deep reflection. And in our overly busy world, that is no small thing. I welcome you here. I had you in mind too as I crafted the translations and wrote the case comments. Zen literature is a rich field offering many discoveries and is not only for the expert. However, I caution you to go slowly, reading differently than you normally would. Find a way to read that leads to reflection on a case throughout the day. As you enter your office, for example, you might find National Teacher Zhong asking you, “Where are you coming from?”<sup>[21](#)</sup>

Or you might be a member of another group of readers who have taken up dharma practice intent on freeing your heart-mind, so that you can share this one free heart-mind with others. That is exactly what the Buddha and Zen ancestors have been up to for the last 2,500 years or so. So this book is for you as well.

Let me say a few things directly to help with your process.

First, it’ll be necessary to discover how calm the heart-mind already is. A student recently shared how he’d been at the airport, and suddenly he discovered that when he stopped, it all stopped. This discovery is very close for you too. Right now. And a rigorous practice of sitting down and shutting up (also known as *zazen*) is the best way to invite this discovery.

Second, it’ll be necessary to appreciate that stopping isn’t enough. “Grasping it is original confusion/Inner-pattern accordance is also not enlightenment,” said great ancestor Shitou Xiqian (700–790).<sup>[22](#)</sup> Freeing your heart-mind and benefiting others isn’t about any particular state of heart-mind, be it stopped or busy.

What is it about? It is about an abrupt non-dual embodiment (also known as *kensho*), or seeing true nature. This intimate realization of your own true nature will probably require some years of devoted, compassionate *zazen*, participation with a dharma community, ethical investigation, and close work with a teacher who has not only *kenshoed* but also worked through numerous post-*kensho* barriers, including completing a rigorous course of koan introspection.

Working with a teacher offers the possibility of inquiring of our teacher (e.g., the practitioner on the teacher's seat) to learn about samadhi and subtle realization. We place our self in the care and under the guidance of someone who has direct experience through their own process with their teacher(s). We allow our teacher to see where we are at on this journey, and make adjustments to our practice as prescribed. This relational aspect of practice is an essential skill very different from the self-diagnosis of both samadhi and kensho that seem to be raging on the Internet now, especially in Facebook forums. The possibilities of samadhi and kensho do not function apart from the teacher-student and community relationships. These are essential for the full functioning of awakening, carrying all beings across. Completing such a course of koan immersion usually takes at least ten years.

Why koans? A koan is an encounter dialogue with a truth-happening place embedded in it. Koans are a wonderful aspect of our inheritance from spiritual geniuses that lived, in most cases, about twelve hundred years ago. This book contains one hundred such encounter dialogues. Even a single koan has the power to open the treasure store of non-dual wisdom and unrivaled joy.

The truth-happening point, the koan of the matter at hand, is happening all the time, though. The koan's primary virtue is in disrupting our normal, habitual way of dividing the world. Koans are like banana peels all over the floor—they maximize the possibility of slipping through dualism and seeing true nature. Most likely, when you are ready, a koan teacher will give you the *mu* koan and directions for how to work with it.<sup>23</sup> For you, the koans in this book might serve as pointers to the non-dual experience.

That concludes my introductory comments about Xutang, *The Record of Empty Hall*, volume 6, and the benefits for you and others for undertaking this work. May we together with all beings delight in the dance of the dharma.

## CASE 1

# The World-Honored One Breaks Through Inside and Outside



One day, the World-Honored One saw Manjusri\* outside the gate and immediately said, “Manjusri, Manjusri, why not come around and enter through the gate?”

Manjusri said, “I don’t see a single dharma outside the gate. Where are you coming from, telling me to enter through the gate?”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “I am greatly awakened.”

—

We begin with an invitation to break through inside and outside. And then break through that. Like koan teacher Shin'ichi Hisamatsu said, “The true inside of the inside is not having inside or outside.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Mahayana sutras, the Buddha is usually quiet until asked to unfold the dharma. Here, we find the Buddha sitting inside the temple gate as we might expect, but then one day he steps outside his role and speaks, inviting Manjusri, the bodhisattva of non-dual wisdom, to turn around and come inside. What is the Buddha asking Manjusri to do?

Manjusri has already turned himself around. He has ventured outside the gate and realized that there is no outside dharma. Indeed, Manjusri doesn't see a single thing—no eyes, no ears, no nose. So no inside and no outside.

By going outside the gate of the tradition, Manjusri has realized the emptiness of being inside and found his true home: the non-locatable. Where, then, is the Buddha coming from when he calls for Manjusri to come back inside the gate? Does the Buddha want to squeeze Manjusri back into the conventional orthodoxy? Or is there more for Manjusri to realize beyond not seeing a single dharma, a single thing? If there is no inside or outside, what is real?

Xutang's comment, “I am greatly awakened,” really steps in it. Inquire with your whole heart, and Xutang's words, spoken boldly for the Buddha, might turn into light: “*I am greatly awakened.*”

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Note: An asterisk appears next to the first occurrence of a figure who appears in Appendix 1 (see [this page](#)).

## CASE 2

The World-Honored One Cares for  
Each and Goes<sup>†</sup>



An outsider asked the World-Honored One, “Yesterday, what dharma did you express?”

The World-Honored One said, “Settled dharma.”

The outsider again asked, “Today, what dharma did you express?”

The World-Honored One said, “Unsettled dharma.”

The outsider said, “Yesterday, settled. Today, why unsettled?”



The World-Honored One said, “Yesterday, settled. Today, unsettled.”

On behalf of the outsider, Xutang said, “Caring for each and going.”



Two nights ago, at midnight, three loud gunshots woke us. Bodhi, our old dog who sleeps at the foot of our bed, has considerable anxiety issues that are triggered by thunderstorms, fireworks, and gunshots. He immediately began pacing, trembling, and drooling, so Tetsugan and I took turns comforting him.

Then, just as we were getting back to sleep, the three young women who live across the street came home, presumably, from the bar. They laughed and shouted for a half hour, repeatedly honking their car horn.

But this past night, we all went to bed early, slept through the night, and woke refreshed. With a spring in our step, we were off to morning zazen.

Yesterday was unsettled. Today is settled. We’re all going, kicking or screaming or not. Might as well care for each thing as we go.

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Note: A † symbol appears next to the title of each case that has an entry in Appendix 3 (see [this page](#)).

## CASE 3

# The World-Honored One Finally Pays Attention



When the World-Honored One was about to enter nirvana, Manjusri asked him to turn the dharma wheel once again. The World-Honored One said, “Goodness! I’ve lived in this world for forty-nine years and haven’t ever spoken a word. You ask me to turn the dharma wheel *again*. Have I *ever* turned the dharma wheel?”

On behalf of Manjusri, Xutang said, “Finally, the World-Honored One is paying attention.”

---

Fundamentally, what is the difference between words and silence? What is the difference between acting in confusion and turning the dharma wheel?

The whole thing begins and ends with us, and we are like the artist who paints a lifelike tiger, puts it away for a few months, then opens the door where the painting is stored and is frightened by what we see. We think the world carries the charge, but all emotional investment comes from us, the artist. When the projection is believed, we extend the painting forward and fear other animals that might also be lurking in the closet.<sup>2</sup>

A student, a self-employed writer in his early fifties who has been practicing for about a decade, told me recently about an experience he had with his lifelike tigers. He is the primary support for four people, and the vicissitudes of self-employment sometimes stress him to the breaking point. He had been stuck in his stress for several months when one morning, after zazen, the above passage from Rodney Smith came to mind and he suddenly realized, “I don’t have to keep doing this!” Then the glaciers calved, as he put it, and he felt profound relief and bliss.

It had been a couple of weeks since the experience when we met. I noticed that he seemed much more relaxed and that his voice was strong and clear. After he told me about his experience, he noted that he still felt friendly with everything and everyone. “Even people in the grocery store meet me now with more friendliness,” he said. “It’s amazing!”

When the glaciers calve and we realize the words in silence, the silence in the words, then turning the dharma wheel and not turning the dharma wheel are dreams from another life. Commenting on this

case, Hakuin said, “Like the lion’s roar—fear not a thing.”<sup>3</sup> This is the lion’s roar of the buddhadharma—there is really nothing to fear.

A student looking at this case remarked, “Oh, shit! A tiger!”

Did the Buddha ever turn the dharma wheel?

## CASE 4

# Fu Daishi Explains a Sutra<sup>†</sup>



Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty asked Fu Daishi\* to explain a sutra. Fu Daishi suddenly rose from his seat and struck the table once. The emperor was stunned. Zhigong then asked, “Your majesty, do you understand?”

The emperor said, “Not at all.”

Zhigong said, “Indeed, Daishi explained the sutra.”

On behalf of the emperor, Xutang said, “Truly rare to hear.”

---

Outrageously crashing through decorum, Hakuin suggests the emperor retreat three steps and bow!<sup>4</sup> In-the-moment living Zen! Wonderful.

We have here the same Emperor Wu, the Buddha Heart Ruler, that didn’t meet Bodhidharma.<sup>5</sup> Fu Daishi, cut from the same cloth as Bodhidharma, was even more direct. Without even a “don’t know,” he just struck the table once and not again. Xutang, speaking for the emperor, acknowledges that just this sound of fist on table is rare to hear. Each thing—once and not again.

If the emperor had understood, where would we be today?

It is said that all the buddhas and the buddhadharma arises from this sutra. What is this sutra?



## CASE 5

# The National Teacher Zhong's Single Wisp of Cloud<sup>†</sup>



Emperor Suzhong asked National Teacher Zhong,\* “What did you get at Caoxi?”\*

The teacher said, “Your majesty, see the single cloud wisp in the sky?”

The emperor said, “Yes.”

The teacher said, “Is it fixed or hanging without foundation?”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Where is Caoxi?”

---

This is the first in a series of four cases that involve the national teacher Zhong, so named because he taught three emperors, two of whom are listed among his successors. He appears again in Case 55, “Xitang Zang Delivers a Letter.” So let’s take a moment to get to know Zhong a bit.

Zhong didn’t speak or cross a bridge out of his native village until he was sixteen. Then he saw a Zen monk on the other side, crossed the bridge, and engaged him in fluent dialogue about wanting to be ordained. The unknown monk referred him to his teacher, Caoxi, also known as Huineng,\* or the Sixth Ancestor.

Zhong immediately left and traveled with zeal to Caoxi, but he found that Caoxi too was reluctant to ordain him. Zhong pleaded, “An enlightened teacher is difficult to encounter, and the true dharma is hard to hear.”

Hearing this, Caoxi relented. After Zhong completed his training and was acknowledged as a successor of the Sixth Ancestor, he went to White Cliff Mountain and practiced there, deepening his awakening for forty years. Later, he moved to the capital, living at the Temple of Ten Thousand Blessings and Abode of Light Temple.

Because Zhong met Caoxi when Zhong was young and Caoxi was old, and because Zhong lived until 100, Zhong ended up as Caoxi’s last surviving successor. Also thanks to his long life, Zhong witnessed the blooming of the Zen buddhadharma in China. As we will see in Cases 6–8 and again in Case 55, he became a destination for pilgrims intent on testing their realization in light of Zhong’s ancient way.

We still encounter Zhong in the Harada-Yasutani koan curriculum. In Case 18 of *The Blue Cliff Record*—the source of the koan, “What is the sound of the single hand?”—this same emperor asks, “In a hundred years, what memorial should there be [for you]?”

“Make a no-seam pagoda for this old monk,” says Zhong.<sup>6</sup>

The conversation with Emperor Suzhong continued, and later in *The Blue Cliff Record*, Zhong tells him, “No one knows their own pure and clear dharma body.”<sup>7</sup>

And the teacher-student thread also runs through Case 17 in *The No Gate Barrier* “National Teacher Zhong’s Three Calls”:

The national teacher called his attendant three times. Three times the attendant answered. The national teacher said, “Calling you, I thought I was letting you down. Turns out, the fact is that you were letting me down.”<sup>8</sup>

In the present case, we hook back to find the emperor inquiring about the mysterious Sixth Ancestor, “What did you get at Caoxi?”

You, too, have traveled far for the true dharma. What might your question for Zhong be?

I think back to my own first teacher, Katagiri Roshi. What did I receive? The old boy could sit zazen, but did I receive that from him? He really knew the teaching of Dogen Zenji, but what trace did that leave? Just before he died, he said, “When the time comes, shake out your sleeves and just leave.”

But what’s left?

A single wisp of cloud in the sky above the vast great plains.

Although it can’t be nailed down, the single wisp of cloud is dependent on moisture, air movement, gravity, and heat from the sun. Although I can’t grasp the truth of my old teacher, neither can I say it’s nothing.

Xutang asked, “Where is Caoxi?”

## CASE 6

# Nanquan's Debt of Gratitude<sup>†</sup>



National Teacher Zhong asked Nanquan,\* “Where are you coming from?”

Quan said, “Jiangxi.”\*

The [national] teacher said, “Would your desire to repay Great Master Ma get him to come or not?”

Quan said, “It’s only this.”

The national teacher said, “The spirit’s got your backside.”

Quan ceased and left.

On behalf of Nanquan, Xutang said, “I’d scrape it off my shoe and walk away.”



Jiangxi and Great Master Ma both refer to the important teacher, Mazu Daoyi.\*

There is something in this case that is not often talked about in Western Zen: How are we to repay our debt of gratitude to our teachers? What do we owe the dead?

In the Soto Zen personal morning service for priests, though, we acknowledge this debt every day. After chanting “Dogen’s Inspiring Vow,” bowing to the floor, we say:

May the merit from this repay  
our debt of gratitude for their compassion  
For they nurture us with the milk of dharma.<sup>9</sup>

So we pray. And yet it is not a matter of discussion, because this debt is unrequitable. And yet must be repaid.

Dogen, reflecting on his debt of gratitude said, “Blood and tears filling my chest, to whom can I speak?”

Then, after going on a bit more about the student’s debt of gratitude for their teacher, and implicitly his own debt to Rujing, “Dogen threw his staff down before the platform, and descended from his seat.”<sup>10</sup>

In this case, Nanquan, having studied intimately with Mazu, went on pilgrimage to visit the national teacher.<sup>11</sup> Zhong asked Nanquan, does your teacher show up when you express your heartfelt aspiration to repay your debt of gratitude? Nanquan opened his heart, “It’s only this,” but comes up short, explaining rather than actualizing.

How might you repay your debt of gratitude with the living truth?

Zhong, deeply knowing the unrequitability of his own debt to Huineng, sees Mazu right there riding Nanquan's back, supporting and bedeviling him. Years later, this issue would still be haunting Nanquan. When the young Dongshan\* was on pilgrimage, he stopped to see Nanquan, who happened to be conducting a memorial service in remembrance of Mazu. While preparing the vegetarian feast, Nanquan let fall the following question to the monks, "A vegetarian feast is arranged for Mazu tomorrow, but what is not yet known—will he turn up or not?" Among the assembled, no one had a reply, so [Dongshan] came out with "He is waiting for the right companion, then will come."<sup>12</sup>

After all these years, the great teacher is still waiting.

Fortunately, Xutang smells dog shit, cuts through the melancholy, and saves the day, "[I'll] wipe it off my shoe and walk away."

Even though Xutang's teacher clearly did his job, a subtle scent remains. What do you smell?



## CASE 7

# Magu's Bodacious Presentation<sup>†</sup>



Magu\* went to National Teacher Zhong, shook his staff once, and stood brilliantly still. The teacher said, “You are already thus. What use is meeting me?”

Gu again gave his staff a single shake.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “The offspring meets me intimately.”

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A brilliant, bodacious dharma presentation! The staff that Magu was carrying would probably have had six metal rings on top, representing the six realms of existence.<sup>13</sup> When he met the old teacher Zhong, Magu shook the six realms with wholehearted one-doing.

He seems to have done a lot of that one-doing—he showed up at both Zhangjing’s\* and Nanquan’s monasteries and shook the same staff.<sup>14</sup> Zhangjing gave him a hearty, “Right, right.” But Nanquan gave him a hearty, “Wrong, wrong.”

Right or wrong, how do you do it?

Old teacher Dogen saw it just this way:

“Right now, practitioners, is there someone who has attained it?”

At that time a monk arose and made prostrations. The teacher Dogen said: “This is what it is, only it’s not yet there.”

The monk asked, “What is there to attain?”

The teacher Dogen said: “Truly I know that you have not attained it.”

Then the teacher Dogen said: “How is the person who has attained?”

After a pause Dogen said: “Body and mind are upright and direct, the voice is strong.”<sup>15</sup>

Upright, direct, strong.

Dogen was not convinced that his student had tasted realization. Zhong seems to have been convinced that Magu had realized it, but wondered about his functioning, about Magu putting this realization to work.

After zazen today, in our leadership roles, Tetsugan and I met with Pam, the garden coordinator, to check in about how she was doing.

We then debriefed with Tom, an outgoing board member, and came home and walked Bodhi the dog.

Magu shook his staff and again brilliantly stood, oh, so still.

This, too, is Zen. Intimate meeting, full and complete, lacking nothing, right before our eyes. Bodacious!

## CASE 8

# The National Teacher Cultivates Practice<sup>†</sup>



Military official Yu Junrong asked National Teacher Zhong, “When the teacher lived on White Cliff Mountain, how did you cultivate practice?”

The teacher called a boy, then rubbed the top of his head, saying, “Calm, calm. Just say, ‘Calm, calm.’ Passing through, passing

through. Just say, ‘Passing through, passing through.’ Afterward, do not deceive people.”

Junrong had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Disciples go like this. No more worshipping Buddha.”



In the last case, Magu presented as brilliantly bodacious. But that’s not the only way to cultivate practice. The National Teacher left Caoxi and trained for forty years on White Cliff Mountain. After he became the National Teacher, a military man was curious about how he had spent his time, maybe hoping for some audaciously arduous tales to tell, like not lying down to sleep, eating a single grain of rice, of wearing out dozens of meditation cushions.

“What kind of discipline did you engage in for those forty years?”

The National Teacher’s response is tender and soothing, as if stroking the head of his younger self and saying, “There, there, now, it’s okay. And remember, no bullshit.”

This is the affinity that we develop for ourselves and others through rigorous and loving training. It’s all just going, passing through, so calm, calm...and there is simply no ceremony that can save you.

## CASE 9

# Fenggan's Old Mirror<sup>†</sup>





Hanshan\* asked Fenggan,\* “The old mirror isn’t polished. How can it reflect a candle?”

Gan said, “A jar of ice has no shadow. A monkey gropes for the moon in the water.”

Shan said, “This is *not* reflecting the candle! Now please explain!”

Gan said, “The ten thousand goodnesses are not in the future. What teaching can I express?”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Because I’ve got it.”

---

Hanshan, a cultural icon also known as “Cold Mountain,” meets his old friend and teacher Fenggan, also known as “Big Stick,” and asks about the old mirror. Like an uncarved block or unbleached silk, the old mirror is the original mind. It is said to precede words, cultivation, or calculation.

Hakuin said, “All sentient beings born in one of the four ways possess an old mirror that reflects unerringly the five colors and always reflects the myriad things in their true suchness. The hills and streams, the entire earth in all its endless shapes and forms.”<sup>16</sup>

The candle is this little guy. Does the old mirror reflect that too? Hanshan here is of much the same mind as the monk who asked, “This little dog has the buddha nature too, no?”

Fenggan offers two images. A jar of ice that light passes through so that no shadow is left. And a monkey mistaking the moon for the reflection in the water and grasping for the image of perfection.

Are these images to the same point or contrasting points? How do you see it?

Hanshan sees through the images—“Hey, Big Stick, I asked whether this little dog had the buddha-nature!”

Fenggan reassures his little buddy, “I am just this, you are just this.”

Xutang said, “Because I’ve got it.” What does he have? What do you have?

Commenting on this case, Hakuin: “It works like the snaring of a tiger.”<sup>17</sup>

How are you going to snare this tiger?

## CASE 10

# Budai's True Name<sup>†</sup>



The venerable monk Budai\* always carried a sack and a worn-out straw mat, going back and forth through the streets. Invariably, inside the sack there would be his alms bowl, basin, clogs, fish, rice, vegetables, meat, roof tiles, and bricks. In a crowded place, he would scatter the objects around and say, “Look at each thing one by one.”

Then Budai would pick one up and ask, “What is this called?”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “An ugly woman frowns.”

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You know this buddha. Budai, also known as Hotei, is the fat and happy one that populates Chinese restaurants in the United States. He may be based on a historical figure who always carried a hemp sack. Budai means “hemp sack,” and his name in Chinese sounds like “great buddha.”

The monk, Hemp Sack, carried a hemp sack. Makes one wonder who is what and what is in the hemp sack? His alms bowl, of course, and then a basin, clogs, potato chips, a diet Pepsi, a Toyota Prius, and the whole wide world. Hakuin liked to portray Hotei coming out of the sack. This skin bag contains the multitudes.

Hemp Sack, intent on awakening the village folks, liked to dump out the contents of this life amid the hustle and bustle and then invite everyone to gaze at each splendid thing with amazement. Standing around near the hemp sack is that which we don’t include in the sack—an ugly man or woman frowning, a painful memory, a screaming child pulled from her mother’s breast at the border.

“Look! Wow! This thing! Hey, what do you call it?”

The name, which is not the thing (or not *not* the thing), has a way of obscuring the simple intensity of the thing. And yet if we don’t call it anything, we obscure our humanity. Beyond good or bad, right or wrong, is it “coffee cup,” or “hemp sack,” or “fellow human?”

Commenting on this case, Hakuin said, “Fling it into the river.”<sup>18</sup>

So you might pick it up and throw it into the river, but Hakuin’s already taken that response. Hakuin might get thrown in the river as well. So, with your whole hemp-sack-like skin bag, and without attachment to a word or hiding in a withered silence, step forward.

What is this called?

And what are you going to do about it?

## CASE 11

# Manjusri Counts the Saints<sup>†</sup>



Wuzhuo went to Taishan, and Manjusri asked, “Where are you coming from?”

“The South.”

“How is the buddhadharma taken care of in the South?”

“In this last age of the dharma, few monks respect the Vinaya.”<sup>19</sup>

“How many?”

“Maybe three hundred, maybe five hundred.”

Wuzhuo then asked, “Venerable, how’s it going here?”

“The ordinary and the holy live together, snakes and dragons mix.”

“How many?”

“Front three three, back three three.”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “A few less than this.”



Here we enter the mythical realm with real life and the dream world mixed up. Manjusri, embodiment of non-dual wisdom, appears in the universe wherever a buddha appears to test and delight in their awakening. Wuzhuo may have been a historical figure, but for the purposes of this investigation, it makes no difference if he was historical or mythical. He is every one of us. The two characters for his name could literally be rendered, “No Clothes.” So the dream continues.

Taishan is one of the five holy mountains in northeastern China, thought to be the abode of Manjusri. Many pilgrims through the ages have reported encounters with him there, and a few of their reports have made it into our koan literature.

“The last age” is always now.

In the case, Wuzhuo reports coming from the southern region of China, the hotbed of the Zen movement in those days. It was a journey of eight hundred miles or more, which he would have made on foot wearing straw sandals. He was ready to see something special and scored an apparition of Manjusri. Not non-dual wisdom, but something to write home about, for sure.

And in the face of the marvelous, Wuzhuo wound up just complaining about those other practitioners in the South who didn’t even follow the rules, presenting his basic humanity. Not to disappoint, Manjusri presents the one truth in two parts. First, “The ordinary and the holy live together, snakes and dragons mix.” Dreams and awakening, pure and impure practitioners, right and



wrong, success and failure—all mixed up. If you want one, you get the other. Notably, in Xutang's telling of this story, he doesn't always indicate who is speaking, suggesting the mixing of snakes and dragons in the very form the story takes.

Why? Hakuin said, "The false and the true are one suchness, the real and the illusory are one monolith; there is no boundary between them."<sup>20</sup>

Katagiri Roshi said, "The sound of chanting and the sound of farting are one suchness. And they have their own virtuous qualities."

Second, for Manjusri there are three three in front and three three in back. The saints go marching in just like that. "Oh, a dragon!" "Oh, a snake!" "Oh, a dragon head and a snake tail."

Hakuin said, "If you want to know [how many], refer to the number of last night's stars, and the number of this morning's raindrops."<sup>21</sup>

That's a bit too much for Xutang.

How many is this?

## CASE 12

# Manjusri Dreams a Dream of You<sup>†</sup>



While on Taishan, Wuzhuo encountered Manjusri, then had tea. Manjusri raised the glass cup and asked, “In the South, is there also this?”

“No.”

Manjusri said, “What do you usually use to drink tea?”

Zhuo had no reply.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “In that case, rise and bow.”

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The dream continues here from Case 11, “Manjusri Counts the Saints.” After tea, Manjusri asked a servant boy to escort Wuzhuo to the temple gate. When they got to the gate, Wuzhuo, testing his newfound koan chops, asked the boy, “Earlier he said, ‘Front three three, back three three.’ How many is this?”

The boy said, “Venerable?”

Wuzhuo said, “Yes.”

The boy said, “How many is this?”

Wuzhuo, confused again, tried to gain his bearings by asking, “What’s the name of this temple?”

The boy pointed back to where Manjusri had been, and when Wuzhuo turned his head to look, the temple, the boy, and the gate had all become an empty valley. Later, when Wuzhuo worked as a monastery cook, visions of Manjusri continued to appear, now in the steam from his rice pot. Each time the apparition would appear, Wuzhuo would grab his rice stirrer and slash the steam with it.

But in the present case, we’re having tea, and still enamored with the hallucination of Manjusri. A real mixer for dragons and snakes. The teacups are pretty special—glass or maybe crystal, it’s a little hard to tell. For sure, they are luminous. Manjusri holds his cup up, green tea sloshing around, and toasts, “To the buddhadharma!” and takes a sip.

“Aah! Clouds and Mist tea, oh, one of my favorites. Do you have this in the South?”

“No.”

Manjusri focuses the conversation: “No eyes, no ears, no mouth, no tongue, no cups? Then what do you drink tea with?”

In our Zen way, like in this case, ordinary and extraordinary tend to get all mixed up. This cup, what is it? This taste of Clouds and Mist, what is it?

If you say it's everything, you defile the simplicity of our conversation. If you say it's nothing, you defile the great open sky. If you say it's simply tea, you confuse the name for the real and miss the gravity of this ephemeral opportunity. What is it?

With or without ceremony, just get up and go on with your story.

## CASE 13

# Nanquan Sells His Body<sup>†</sup>



Nanquan publicly presented: “If Master Wang were to sell his body would there be someone to purchase him?”

At that time, a monk came forward and said, “Someone would purchase Quan.”

“Without paying too much or too little, what would you pay?”

The monk had no reply.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “If someone had taken care of it, I’d also have no words.”

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The Chinese ideographs for “sell his body” can also be read “prostitute himself” or “sell himself into slavery.” And yet many of the great teachers have had something to say about this old case. Why?

Hakuin said, “If you want to penetrate this deep and fundamental source, you must investigate it in secret with your whole body.”<sup>22</sup>

Nanquan, who liked to refer to himself as “Master Wang” (in our cultural idioms it would be something like “Zen Master Smith”), raised the fundamental issue here in terms of dharma transmission in a way that still might make you squirm. How much will you give me for *this* body? Any offers?

Quirky, isn’t it, and yet, that’s just what Zen teachers do—give our bodily lives to people interested, we hope, in practicing. Importantly, Nanquan nails it from the start—the sale must be from a clear and steady sense of sovereignty. Completely given. We must choose to do it.

People in other walks of life also give their bodies, of course, but for children, work, and nice things. How do you give your body? Are you interested in practicing so thoroughly that you have the clarity, kindness, and power to share it with the next generation?

How about this body, sixty-four years old and counting, the result of forty-some years of training? Well, I wish that younger Dosho had taken better care. Nevertheless, is there anyone who’ll do what’s necessary to continue sitting and walking together like this body has? What’ll you give me for it?

It must be just right. Too little, and later on your resentment will be intense while your descendants will be few. Too much, and my descendants will be even fewer.

What’s just the right offer?



The ancient teacher Jinling said,

I am liberated and roam freely. Whatever direction it may be I offer a good deal for this graceful lifestyle. Who will give rise to the intent to buy it and become free of sorrow like me?<sup>23</sup>

What would you give for that body?

Dogen said, “Before the price for the body was agreed upon, it was purchased on the cheap. Pity the person who was ripped off in the marketplace.”<sup>24</sup>

That is, transmission happens before you can even imagine, so you are already cheated.

Nanquan’s availability makes him—and us—so exposed. One of his successors, Zhaozhou,\* said, “Next year, I will make a cotton robe for the master.”

That is, you are so hanging out there, master, that I’ll let you hang for a while more. But, really, cover that thing up!

The Korean master Gag’un said, “Since what Nanquan said is bare-nakedly pure and immaculately exposed he cannot but wear a robe.”<sup>25</sup>

Another old teacher, Foyan Qingyuan, said,

Understand me and I am a companion of the Way; not understand me and I am your adversary. Is there anyone here who can clarify the meaning of this?<sup>26</sup>

When this body was thirty-three, I met with my old teacher, Katagiri Roshi, at the Fairview-Riverside Hospital in Minneapolis. He had just been diagnosed with cancer and so was wrapping up some loose ends, especially the training of his priests. Katagiri Roshi asked me if I would receive dharma transmission from him. “Yes,” I said, “but only if you live and train me for twenty more years.”

“I’ll always be there with you,” he said.

## CASE 14

# Nanquan Offers New Tightly-Whities<sup>†</sup>



Nanquan publicly presented: “The dharma body has four elements. If someone can give the reason, they will get a [new] pair of underwear.”

Daowu [Yuanzhi]\* came forward and said, “Innate qualities are not empty. Emptiness is not innate qualities. This is the earth element. The other three elements are also thus.”

Quan didn't go against his offer and gave [Daowu] a new pair of underwear.

On behalf of Daowu, Xutang said, "Teeth knocking, exaggerating a private matter."

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Nanquan was not normal. Not only did he sell his body in Case 13, elsewhere he is reputed to have killed a cat, and here he offers a pair of undies in exchange for a correct answer to a dharma question, a dharma question that requires some unpacking. Underwear, by the way, is a hot commodity in the monastic communities I've practiced in, and is a common gift from the laity.

The question begins, "The dharma body has four elements." The dharma body, along with the enjoyment body and transformation body, make up the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of Buddhism. The dharma body is the essential and fundamental body of a buddha. Throughout the Zen tradition, practitioners have often raised the question, "What is the dharma body?" Meaning, what is the most profound, non-dual truth of this empty, embodied life?

The four elements (Sanskrit, *mahābhūta*) refer to earth, water, air, and fire. In traditional Buddhism, these four elements are the constituents of the first of the five aggregates (Sanskrit, *skandhas*). So, to paraphrase Nanquan's question, if the truth is one, explain how the body of the non-dual (not-two) truth could have four (count 'em) elements?

Daowu, who studied for twenty years with Nanquan's teacher, Baizhang,\* and later became a successor of Yaoshan,\* stepped forward and explained the matter with aplomb. Since, clearly, the nature of all things is empty, therefore, it is called "non-empty."

Since it has been made clear that the essence of all things is empty, i.e., devoid of illusions, the true Mind is eternal, permanent, immutable, pure, and self-sufficient; therefore it is called "nonempty."<sup>27</sup>

That is, because all things are empty, we say “earth,” “water,” “air,” “fire,” “cat,” and “underwear.”

Thus the Buddha said,

Blinded by defilement and ignorance, they create misconceptions in the form of inversions in their thinking: what is self they reckon as nonself, what is constant or permanent they reckon as impermanent, what is pure they reckon as impure, and what is joyful they reckon as painful. Because [living beings] are deluded by the defilements, even if they recognize these [as errors] they still do not comprehend what this means, just like that intoxicated person who perceived something to be spinning when it was not.<sup>28</sup>

Daowu gets the emptiness of emptiness and so explains, “Innate qualities are not empty. Emptiness is not innate qualities.”

Although Daowu offered a fitting buddha-logical explanation and got his new underwear, I’m not satisfied with his response. I’d say, “Good explanation, friend, but what about the four elements of the living dharma body?”

Xutang also seemed not to approve. He would have Daowu join in the Nanquan’s levity, saying, “Teeth knocking, exaggerating a private matter.” In other words, “Old boy, your teeth are rattling, and thank you very much, but I’d rather take care of my own underwear.”

Still, why does the dharma body have categories?

## CASE 15

# Huangbo's Teachers of Zen<sup>†</sup>



Huangbo\* addressed the assembly, saying, “You people have gorged yourselves full of distiller’s dregs. Wandering by foot like this, where is today? You should know that in all of China, there are no Zen teachers!”

A monk then came forward and asked, “What about all those who in many places lead followers, what do they do?”

Bo said, “I didn’t say no Zen, only no teachers.”

Speaking on behalf of the monk, Xutang said, “You’ve succeeded in stripping me of my dark burden.”

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Huangbo (d. 850), like Nanquan and Daowu, studied with the great teacher, Baizhang (720–814). Huangbo slapped his teacher and then later got slapped by the likes of the crazy person, Linji,\* whose lineage continues to this day.

In this case, Huangbo makes quite a mess of the buddhadharma by trying to have it both ways, while at the same time having the nerve to call us bottom feeders of some nasty distiller’s dregs that made *us* drunk. The nerve!

Talk about the whereabouts of today! Now who looks drunk?

From the perspective of the truly empty, there must be no Zen *and* no Zen teachers. “From the beginning it...is free from all marks of individual distinctions of things.”<sup>29</sup>

Or, as the *Heart Sutra* says, “No eyes, no ears, no nose, no body, no mind.”

From the perspective of the truly non-empty,<sup>30</sup> there is Zen *and* Zen teachers. As well as watermelon and cherry pie. Not only that, Huangbo gave fuel here to those who misunderstand the meaning of “no teachers,” as in there are really no teachers of Zen—so do your own thing, baby. In the Heart Sutra context, they would understand “no eyes” as there being no eyes, making the whole world blind.

The turning point here is this—why did Huangbo speak this way?

Xutang expresses his relief from a dark burden, carrying the responsibility to transmit this no-dharma. Commenting on this case, Hakuin says: “I was fortunate in meeting my master and receiving his instruction.”<sup>31</sup>

His big heart stirs in gratitude for his teacher.

I’d just mumble, “Takes one to know one,” and stagger back to my room.



## CASE 16

Zhaozhou and Nanquan Are Saved<sup>†</sup>



When at Nanquan's place, Zhaozhou sat atop a well. Seeing Quan go by, he dangled a foot and said, "Save us both, save us both."

Quan climbed up the ladder, struck him, and said, "One, two, three, four, five."

Later, Zhou, with talent and awe-inspiring manners, went up to the abbot's quarters and said, "I came just now to thank you,

Venerable, for saving us both.”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Venerable monk, already, no need.”



These two offer up one dharma sideshow after another. Save us all! Save us all!

Zhaozhou asked his teacher, Nanquan, to save them both. Instead, Quan climbs the ladder, putting them both in danger, and then strikes Zhou as he counts the blows.

We’re all in just this precarious state, although the well may be running dry. Kick out a leg and make a show of it, why don’t you?

Xutang, holding up one chopstick, claims there’s no need to save anybody. Commenting on this case, Hakuin said: “I feel ashamed. I feel ashamed.”<sup>32</sup>

So he’s no help either, just hanging his head and returning to his room. Zhou, talent wasted, awe-inspiring manners for naught, thanks Quan for his efforts.

How is it that anybody here was saved?

Work this one out and you’ve saved us all.

## CASE 17

# Xitang's Donkey Brays



On the road, Xitang\* by chance met an emissary of the emperor who offered an alms meal. As it happened, a donkey brayed and the emissary said, “Wandering monk.”

Tang lifted his head, and the emissary pointed at the donkey. Tang pointed at the emissary. The emissary had no reply.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “The official is guilty.”

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What's happening here? What it is ain't exactly clear. A bray and a couple of points—is that it? So that's the first task of this case—clarify what's happening.

The donkey, as has been firmly established, brayed, the emissary calls to Xitang, “Wandering monk.” More literally, the emissary said, “Dhūtaṅga.” This refers to a specific set of thirteen ascetic practices that the Buddha authorized monks to adopt voluntarily for the purposes of cultivating contentment with few desires and detachment, energy, and moderation.

The emissary then pointed to the guilty party. Xitang pointed to the emissary.

In a similar situation, Jingqing (known in Case 99 as Longce\*) said, “Living beings are upside down and lose themselves chasing after things.”<sup>33</sup>

Later, Xutang, speaking for others, pointed to the emissary and found him guilty as charged. What was his crime?

And what of the donkey?

Hee haw!

## CASE 18

# Guizong's Song of Himself<sup>†</sup>



Libo asked Guizong,\* “I don’t doubt that Mount Sumeru contains a mustard seed. But a mustard seed containing Mount Sumeru—there are none who don’t find this absurd.”

Zong said, “People say that you have read ten thousand scrolls of the history of the ancient rulers. Is this the case? The body is as big as a coconut. Where did you put those ten thousand scrolls?”



Libo could only bow his head.

On behalf of Libo, Xutang said, “No one can say.”



Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

—Walt Whitman in *Song of Myself*

It seems that Libo<sup>34</sup> had been reading the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra*:

The bodhisattva who lives in the inconceivable liberation can put the king of mountains, Sumeru, which is so high, so great, so noble, and so vast, into a mustard seed. They can perform this feat without enlarging the mustard seed and without shrinking Mount Sumeru.<sup>35</sup>

A similar teaching is found in the Huayan School, based on the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (*Flower-Garland Sutra*) that taught that in the ultimate mode of reality, there is realization of the complete merging and perfect harmony of all phenomena. This is expressed by the jeweled net of Indra, wherein each node of this universe-encompassing net is a jewel that reflects all the other jewels.

The liberating point isn’t so much about coconuts, jewels hung in space, or whether Mount Sumeru, “so high, so great, so noble, and so vast,” is contained in a mustard seed. It’s much closer to home than that.

“What is the self?”

And not just any self, but this very self.

Perhaps Libo was struck dumb, because of the metaphor of the body being as big as a coconut, and was thinking, “Where Guizong comes from there must be some big-assed coconuts, or little-assed people!”

Guizong's comment about the books and the body might be glossed over as a typical dismissal of the intellect, but upon closer examination, he seems to be giving Libo an example of how one thing is contained in another, just like the mountain in the mustard seed, just the issue that Libo had raised. Guizong in this way is asking, "Who are you?"

"I contain multitudes," he might have said.

Yet, Xutang sees no one who can explain the living truth of it.

All those books we've read, all the experiences of love and loss, joy and sorrow are somehow held in this little body—Mount Sumeru in a mustard seed, indeed! The Great Mystery.

Cultivating verification of this truth requires active embodiment. In other words, demonstrate it!

Does Libo hanging his head reach it or not?

How about you?

## CASE 19

Pang's "Mixed and Broken Bits"<sup>†</sup>



Lay Adept Pang\* asked Damei,\* “I’ve long heard about Great Plum. I’ve not yet examined if the plum is ripe!”

Plum said, “Where would you like to take a bite?”

Pang said, “All the mixed and broken bits.”

Plum said, “Give me back my seed.”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “They come out equally.”

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With this, and the last couple of cases, Xutang has led us through several successors of Mazu meeting lay practitioners for dharma inquiry. In the present case, we find the great Lay Adept Pang and the great monk Damei, whose name means “Great Plum,” playing with the dharma mud ball.

Damei realized awakening when he heard Mazu say, “This mind is Buddha.”

When Mazu later changed his tune to “No mind, no Buddha,” Damei’s “This mind is Buddha” was unwavering, so Mazu declared that the Great Plum was ripe.

Lay Adept Pang also realized awakening with Mazu. He’d asked, “What about someone who has no connection with the ten thousand dharmas?”

Mazu replied, “I will tell you after you have drunk down the waters of the West River in one gulp.”

In this case, Lay Adept Pang appears to have had his doubts about Damei’s maturity, but Damei steps up and offers himself for inspection—“You can take a bite outta me anywhere.”

Pang wants to sink his teeth into those parts that are crushed, mixed, and broken, drinking down the West River in one gulp. Mixed and broken bits are the maturity of Damei’s Zen. And Damei affirms Pang for realizing the wholeness of Great Plum is the brokenness itself.

Commenting on this case, Hakuin says: “It has been swallowed.”<sup>36</sup>

For Hakuin the seed, mixed and broken, is also the whole thing.

Xutang cleverly comments, “They come out equally,” reflecting the broken bits, the seed, and to the two adepts—mixed and broken bits.

If someone appeared to test your maturity, what would you offer?

## CASE 20

# Zhaozhou Leans His Staff<sup>†</sup>



Zhaozhou went up to Zhuyu's\* dharma hall, peered to the east, and peered to the west.

Yu said, "What are you doing?"

"Searching for water."

"Inside, I don't have a single drop! *What* are you searching for?"

Zhou leaned his staff against the wall and went out.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Do not say there are none who get the expedient.”



The wanderings of the mind may disappear, but is there any depth of insight here?

Zhaozhou “peered to the east, and peered to the west,” just looking for water.

Zhuyu, a student of Nanquan like Zhaozhou, has nothing at all. Empty through and through. Can you explain, without falling into dharma babble, why Zhaozhou leans his staff against the wall and then goes out?

It helps a bit to know that the characters rendered as “staff” here are 主丈, literally, “host’s measure.”

If you can see this point, and make it alive, there’ll be another one who isn’t lacking in expedients.



## CASE 21

# Dongshan Dies Counting<sup>†</sup>



A monk asked Dongshan, “Among the three bodies [of buddha], which body doesn’t fall into counting?”

Shan said, “I am always close to this.”

Later the monk asked Caoshan,\* “Dongshan said, ‘I am always close to this.’ What was his meaning?”

Cao said, “If you want my head, chop it off and go.”

The monk then asked Xuefeng.\* Feng hit [the monk] in the mouth with his staff and said, “I also went to Dongshan.”

The monk had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Being pressed by anger, killing.”



Dongshan and Caoshan were great teachers whose first names were used for the lineage they continued, the Caodong (Japanese, Soto), one of the five petals of the Ch’an flower. Xuefeng, a great teacher in a related lineage, was the source of two of the other petals.

And the monk, ah, the monk. He seemed to have a point but ended with no words. If Buddha is one, what’s the deal with the three bodies? The three bodies of the Buddha are the *dharmakaya* (truth body), the *sambhogakaya* (the enjoyment body), and the *nirmanakaya* (the form body).

Yes, this is quite the same as Case 14, “Nanquan Offers New Tightly-Whities,” only Caoshan’s head is at stake rather than a pair of underwear.

Which one of the three bodies does not count? The monk traipsed all over China to get an answer, got three good ones, but none seemed to have opened his heart. Isn’t life just like that sometimes?

Dongshan, knowing that his days were numbered, gave a response that was so close that it could have cut through one, two, and three. The old horse was willing to die from the heat or the cold, and we get a sense of that here.

Xutang penetrated the gravity of the situation. Hard-pressed into a corner where you cannot move an inch, your resentment will become intense. Even to the point of killing. Or dying completely so that you might live fully. Curiously, Wansong Yelao (1166–1246), a contemporary of Xutang, but in the Caodong lineage and living in northern China, included the first part of this case in his *Record of Going Easy*, and used the very same capping phrase that Xutang

used, “Being pressed by anger, killing.”<sup>37</sup> I am unaware of any other example of this.

Picking up the matter later, Caoshan, who started out as Dongshan’s main successor, but whose lineage died out after a grand but brief run (life is like that too sometimes), so the main and subsidiary lines got transposed. He was willing to give his head for the truth, though, and that’s saying something.

Xuefeng, when serving as a young monastery cook, climbed Dongshan nine times, or so they say, but in the end made a mess of the rice, and so Dongshan sent him packing.<sup>38</sup> He doesn’t add anything more to Dongshan’s saying here but gives the monk a stick in the mouth for his troubles.

Right now, where is Dongshan’s place?

And which body—mine, yours, or ours—doesn’t fall into counting?

## CASE 22

# Shishi Rejoices Grinding a Cup and Tray<sup>†</sup>



Xingshan and Shishi were in a stone mill. When they met, Xingshan said, “Being a wandering mendicant is not easy.”

Shi said, “What isn’t easy? Rejoice. This cup holds the future. Remove the whole tray, nothing is concealed.”

Xìng had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Under the Dragon Gate.”

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An unusual encounter, bumping into another practitioner in the mill, like a dream. According to the *The Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, Shishi had a great enlightenment experience with Shitou Xiqian (700–790), an early and central figure in what became the Caodong lineage. As a result, he then had a falling out with his previous teacher and became a wanderer.<sup>39</sup>

It is certainly not unusual for practitioners, even in our easygoing householding days, to complain and think we have it rough. Shishi had a story of blame and could have laid it out there. “I had this great enlightenment, you see, and then my former teacher, blind as an old dog, seemed to resent my freedom and so kicked my ass out. And here I am, rummaging around in the mill. Damn.”

Instead, usually when he encountered a monk, Shishi would hold up his staff and say, “The three worlds are all Buddha and all come from this.”

In this case, however, he doesn’t go there. Shishi just welcomes the moment with Xingshan, “Dude. How sweet. Right here we meet.”

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a cup and a tray appear. Perhaps they were having tea, served on a tray. Seems strange in a mill, but this, after all, is like a dream. And in this dream life, what isn’t easy to do? Wake up in the morning, use the toilet, have some coffee, sit down, and breathe. Not so bad, really. Rejoice!

Oh, and that cup of coffee, right there is the slightly smarter you of the next moment. Shishi then lays us all out with empty form, “Remove the whole tray, nothing is concealed.”

When is the last time you ran into a monk in a mill who laid it out so straightforwardly? It seems that in order to appeal to the widest number of people, we’ve constricted the contemporary dharma narrative to a narrow, limited range of vocabulary and story, addressing existential psychological issues from a well-educated, therapy-savvy perspective, disconnected from the rich fabric of the Zen tradition, and too embarrassed to address enlightenment. Not good, old Shishi!

Nor old, old Xutang. “The Dragon Gate” refers to the mythical place where carp swim upstream, leap over the gate, and become dragons—true humans of the Way. The text, as it often does, just says that Xutang is speaking on behalf of others, but clearly it applies to Xingshan and his silence. Rather than leaping and sparkling in rainbow light as he flies over the Dragon Gate, Xingshan crashed and can be found lying way below.

Still, the question hovers in midair. “What isn’t easy to do?”

It’s up to you.



## CASE 23

# Zhangjing and the Disappearing Circle<sup>†</sup>



A novice returned from pilgrimage. Zhangjing asked, “How many years have you been away?”

“I left the venerable eight short years ago.”

Jìng said, “What single thing did you distinguish?”

The novice drew a circle on the ground.

Jìng said, “You’re just this? Do you have anything further?”

The novice destroyed the circle, bowed, and withdrew.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “If the home has no ambassador, you’ll be unable to be a person of character.”



Zhangjing, understandably, asks what has been clarified through eight years of pilgrimage. The novice steps up and draws a circle. Nice Zen theater, but is it real?

When pressed, the novice erases the circle and withdraws. Bravo! And yet, with the circle erased, what can be shared with the many wandering-in-circles beings? Dogen referred to this as “leaping through the one and the many” and “making manifest the great earth’s goldenness.”<sup>[40](#)</sup>

In the same spirit, Xutang points out the need not only for realization, the empty circle, but for communicating, being an ambassador for the buddhadharma. It is through our expression in the world that our character is developed and displayed.

So there you are.

You’re just this? Do you have anything further?

## CASE 24

Xuefeng Is Set Straight<sup>†</sup>



Xuefeng asked a departing monk, “Where will you go?”

The monk said, “I will go and bow to Venerable Jingshan.”

Feng said, “If Jingshan suddenly asked you about the buddhadharma in this place, what would you say?”

The monk said, “I’ll wait until he asks, then respond at once.”

Feng then hit him.

Later, Feng returned to this and asked Jingqing,<sup>41</sup> “What did the monk do to suffer the stick?”

Qing said, “To pass through the trap, ask Jingshan.”

Feng said, “Jingshan is in Zhejiang. How could I ask him to pass through the trap?”

Qing said, “Haven’t you heard the principle, ‘Asking is distant. Answering is close.’ ”

Feng let the matter rest.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Crass like a carpenter’s chalk line.”



Xuefeng used the stick like his teacher, Deshan,<sup>\*42</sup> which says a lot about the buddhadharma in his place. About this business of beating people, Tongxuan once asked: “Deshan was a descendant of buddha ancestors. If buddhas came around, they too would be beaten. If ancestors came around, they too would be beaten.”

Wansong replied: “Not daring to slight [them].”<sup>43</sup>

Like his teacher, Xuefeng didn’t slight this monk either.

But what about his question. The ancients often raised this very point. How about the buddhadharma here and now? Is it the same or different than at Xuefeng’s?

The monk got what he deserved whether he deserved it or not—although cute, deferring to the future is a dodge. Xuefeng’s nonslighting stick shouted, “I’m not asking about ‘if,’ I’m asking about ‘now.’ ”

For Xuefeng, the “now” apparently included the past and the future, so later he reflected on the event with his student, Jingqing, who promptly referred the issue to Jingshan, who happened to be his old teacher. Is this deftly meeting the situation head-on, or also a dodge? What does Jingshan know about the buddhadharma at Xuefeng’s place?

The answer, dear Xuefeng, is so close.

Xuefeng let the matter rest. Thank God.

But not Xutang who offered the image of a working person, a carpenter, who would snap a chalk line to determine the way—utterly and crudely clear and distinct. The line has been truly and correctly drawn.

Where do you come down?

## CASE 25

Dongshan's "No-Knowing Face"<sup>†</sup>





Xuefeng was about to leave Dongshan. Shan said, “Where are you going?”

“Returning to the mountains.”

“When you came here, what road did you take?”

“From Flying-Ape Mountains.”

“Today, toward what road will you go?”

“Flying-Ape Mountains.”

“There is a single person not going to Flying-Ape Mountains. Son, do you know him?”

“No knowing.”

“Why ‘no knowing’?”

“They have no face.”

“Son, already there’s ‘no knowing.’ How do you know ‘no face’?”

Feng had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “No use seeing with one’s eyes.”



Xutang, in his selection of this koan, discloses his personal issues with Xuefeng and Dongshan, so we return to this duo again. We are along for the ride while Xutang works through his business.

Like in the previous case, somebody thinks they’re going off somewhere, to see the wizard even, like to the Flying-Ape Mountains. So sweet old Dongshan spoke kindly to the young monk, Xuefeng, calling him “son.” Perhaps because Xuefeng kept showing up at Dongshan’s place, even though he did not have quite enough affinity with Dongshan to realize the truth about the family jewel, the business of the one person’s no-going.

Xuefeng, however, does no-knowing, but could not yet live no-facing. So he had no words—what’s left?

Xutang takes up the real business of the Dongshan succession. “Water birds, tree groves, all without exception recite the Buddha’s name, recite the dharma.” How amazing!

How marvelous! How marvelous!

The Dharma expounded by nonsentient beings is inconceivable.

Listening with your ears, no sound.

Hearing with your eyes, you directly understand.<sup>44</sup>

A no-knowing, no-facing person hears the buddhadharma with the eye.

## CASE 26

Xuefeng Seals What<sup>†</sup>



Gushan came to attend to Xuefeng. As soon as he entered the door, Feng grabbed him and said, “What is it!?”

Shan accorded with awakening then raised his hands and danced.

Feng said, “A little feeling for the Way’s inner pattern!”

Shan said, “The Way’s inner pattern is what.”

Feng sealed it.

On behalf of Gushan, Xutang said, “In the end, the venerable did not deceive this young fellow.”

---

What is it!?

Let’s raise our hands and dance along with Gushan!

This remarkably simple and direct pointer—“What is it!?”—has catalyzed the awakening of many a practitioner, ancient and modern. It probably helped that Xuefeng was willing to bring Gushan up close and personal. The Chinese ideograms could also be rendered, “Feng plucked and stopped him.”

It wasn’t the first time the Xuefeng tried this direct pointing:

When Xuefeng was living in a hermitage, two monks came and prostrated themselves. Feng saw them coming, and pushing open the hermitage gate with his hand got out and said, “What is it?”

One of the monks also said, “What is it?”

Feng hung his head and went back inside the temple.<sup>45</sup>

Xuefeng brought them to full stop, a precursor for awakening, but Gushan got it and the monks didn’t. The ideograms offer more nuance for awakening experience too. What I’ve translated as “Shan accorded with awakening,” with 契 as “accord,” could also be “contracted,” “bonded,” or “engraved” awakening. The idea is of a mutual integration of the inner pattern of what.

Hinton says this about 理 or “inner pattern”:

The philosophical meaning of inner-pattern, which originally referred to the veins and markings in a precious piece of jade, is something akin to what we call “natural law.” It is the system of principles or patterns that governs the unfolding of tzu-jan [self-ablaze], or the manifestations of origin-ch’i [a single breath-force surging through its perpetual transformations] as it takes on the forms of the ten thousand things. Inner-pattern therefore weaves Absence and Presence into a single boundless tissue.<sup>46</sup>

Xuefeng investigates the fellow dancing and waving his arms, calling what he experienced a little intimation of the inner pattern of the great Way.

Clearly, Gushan dances with self-ablaze, breath-force surging.

No little intimation at all. The Way's inner pattern is what. Xuefeng seals the deal with dharma transmission.

Later on, as a teacher, Gushan was asked,

“What does it mean to get transmission?”

Gushan said, “A dungeon without air—the disciples have to toil to open their hands.”

“But how?”

“Blunders,” said Gushan.

Again the monk asked, “And when the student inherits the transmission?”

“What happened when inheriting it?” replied Gushan.<sup>47</sup>

Another wonderfully complete blunder of what!

## CASE 27

# Lingyuan's Slipper





Lingyuan\* asked a monk, “Where are you going?”

The monk said, “Going to Xuefeng.”

“I have a message for Xuefeng.”

Yuan then took off his slipper and threw it at the monk. The monk then left.

[Later] Feng asked, “Where are you coming from?”

“Lingyuan”

“Is the venerable not in good health?”

“There is a message.”

Saying so, the monk removed his slipper and threw it at Feng. Feng let the matter rest.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Remembering that you came from afar.”



Lingyuan (no dates) was a successor of Guishan\* (771–853), famously awakened upon seeing peach blossoms. Dogen tells the story like this:

One spring day, after practicing for thirty years, Lingyuan, who would later become Zen Master Zhiqin, walked into the mountains. While resting he saw peach blossoms in full bloom in a distant village and was suddenly awakened. He wrote this poem, which he presented to Guishan:

For thirty years I have looked for a sword master.  
Many times leaves fell, new ones sprouted.  
One glimpse of peach blossoms—  
now no more doubts, just this.

Guishan said, “One who enters with ripened conditions will never leave.” He approved Lingyuan in this way.<sup>48</sup>

Such a lovely awakening. Commenting on this case, Hakuin said, “When you come once again, it is for no other reason than the misty rain of Ro Mountain and the tide of the Sekko River.”<sup>49</sup>

So lovely! And so it’s disappointing that all Lingyuan had as a message for Xuefeng was throwing slippers. Come on! Where, oh where is your debt of gratitude for the milk of dharma?<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps my exasperation with Lingyuan comes from my Soto Zen training that focuses on dignified bearing. I recall this from Dogen's "Instructions for the Zen Cook":

Clean the chopsticks, ladles, and all other utensils; handle them with equal care and awareness, putting everything back where it naturally belongs. Keep your mind on your work and do not throw things around carelessly.<sup>51</sup>

Sincerity might well extend to slippers as well. Don't throw them around carelessly! In this case, though, I might make an exception. I don't have a slipper handy, but I've got a shoe here for Lingyuan, and if I could throw it over the Ro Mountain and through the tides of the Sekko River, it would zing him right in the peach blossoms.

On the other hand, we've all come from so far away. Let's just let this matter rest. I'm going now to talk with my wife who has spent the day preparing for tomorrow's dharma talk at the Nebraska Zen Center.

Thank you and good night.

## CASE 28

# Changqing's Great Assembly Bows<sup>†</sup>



One day Changqing\* ascended the main hall, pulled a monk out in front, and said, “Great Assembly, bow to this monk.”

Then Qing said, “What are this monk’s strong points that made the Great Assembly bow?”

The assembly had no reply.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “That’s it. That’s it. That’s it.”

---

We're moving quickly now, from throwing shoes in the previous case to bowing to an ordinary monk in this one. Changqing, like a lot of teaching rascals tend to do, discloses an incongruity that is always present in community practice, as if to say, "It's all one Buddha truth, people, so what's this about bowing to me and/or the Buddha on the altar, but not to this normal monk?"

Poor monk, standing there receiving the bows from the Great Assembly one moment, and then having his virtue investigated in the next. "Oh, geez!"

No one stepped forward to say, "Oh, the way the guy sweeps the sidewalk, wow, now that is one inspiring normal monk!"

Hung out to dry, the case ends.

Xutang, though, comes through postmortem: "That's it. That's it. That's it."

One for each of the three bows the Great Assembly made. Right there are the strong points of this monk. And the community bowing to itself.

To put the whole thing in context, Hakuin brings up the Buddha of non-attainment from *The No Gate Barrier* as the Every-Person Practitioner in this case:

A monk asked Rang of Xingyang, "The Buddha of Supremely Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom sat for ten kalpas in the meditation hall, but the buddha dharma did not appear for him and he did not attain buddhahood, why is that?" Rang said, "Your question is exactly the point." The monk said, "But sitting in the meditation hall, why couldn't he attain Buddhahood?" Rang said, "Because he couldn't become a Buddha."<sup>52</sup>

That's it!

Similarly, the old Caodong text, "The Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi," also raises this issue:

If you want to follow in the ancient tracks, please observe the sages of the past. One on the verge of realizing the buddha way, contemplated a tree for ten kalpas.<sup>53</sup>

That's it!

The true person of nonattainment seems to merit some bowing. And how about you? Who don't you bow to?

That's it!

## CASE 29

# Lingshu Breaks an Alms Bowl<sup>†</sup>





A nun brought Lingshu a porcelain alms bowl. Shu held up the bowl and asked, “This comes from what place?”

The nun said, “From Dingzhou.”

Shu then threw the alms bowl, breaking it. The nun had no reply.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “It is unlikely that anyone will get the venerable’s meaning.”

---

A nun brought a beautiful gift for Lingshu and he broke it.

Once someone asked the great twentieth-century forest monk Ajahn Cha how Cha was different from a normal person. Cha pointed to a cup and said, “For me, that cup is already broken.” Cha sent the message without actually breaking the cup. It isn’t known if either party, Cha’s questioner or the above nun, got the meaning.

I heard Katagiri Roshi tell a story about when he assisted Suzuki Roshi at the San Francisco Zen Center. It was in the late sixties, and the center of the hippie world was just down the street at Haight-Ashbury. One day, a person Katagiri described as “Hippie Man” came to a talk given by Suzuki. During the tea following the talk, Hippie Man asked, “What is universal truth?”

Suzuki said, “Look in your cup.”

Hippie Man threw the cup on the floor and it shattered. Looking at the pieces of the cup, with a calm, soft voice, Suzuki said, “Poor cup.”

In this case, we have “poor porcelain alms bowl,” broken by Hippie Man Lingshu. Perhaps for him unbroken and broken were one dharma. Perhaps he didn’t think an alms bowl should be all that fancy, and made a dramatic gesture of nonattachment. No gold-brocade *kesa* robe with inlaid parasol print for that guy either!

Like Xutang, though, I suspect that there won’t be anyone who gets the meaning.

So much for the broken alms bowl.

What about the meaning of this broken life?

## CASE 30

# Yunju's Gift Pants



Yunju\* received a senior monk who told him that there was a monk living in a hut down the mountain. He ordered his attendant to bring this monk a pair of pants.

The monk said, “I have the pants born from my mother.”

Unexpectedly, he did not accept them.

Again, Yunju ordered his attendant to go and ask the monk, “What did you wear before your mother was born?”

The monk had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Only dare to appear in the dark.”



Yunju and his lineage were once considered the subsidiary line of the Dongshan succession. But the main line, the Caoshan line, vanished, and Yunju’s name appears on bloodline after bloodline through today.

As in “Case 14, “Nanquan Offers New Tightly-Whities,” we again have “pants” that probably refer to whatever undergarment a monk would wear under their robes. Given, as mentioned above, that underwear is a great gift for a monastic, it is quite striking that this hermit monk didn’t accept Yunju’s kind gesture, perhaps, to say, “I’m perfect and complete, lacking nothing, so you can take that underwear back to where you came from.”

Sometimes hermits are hermits because they lack social skills.

Yunju, though, isn’t ready to let the matter rest, and so messes with his attendant and with the hermit for at least one more round. “What did you wear before your mother was born?”

This is reminiscent of the more common, “What was your true face before your parents were born?”

Cut one, cut all.

Xutang seems to be making a little joke about appearing naked—better not be in broad daylight! As if to say, “Dude, you are not ready for prime time.”

This is reminiscent of the exchange between Zhaozhou and Touzi:

“When someone has died the Great Death and yet lives, how is it?”

Touzi said, “Walking in the dark of night is not allowed. Trust the moonlight.”<sup>54</sup>

Be that as it may, what did you wear before your mother was born?

## CASE 31

# Yunmen's Got Words<sup>†</sup>



Yunmen\* once raised this: “Great Master Mazu said, ‘All words and speech is the Kanadeva school. Put this single, primary reliance to use.’ ”

Then Yunmen said, “Good speech, but nobody asks me about it.”  
At that time, a monk asked, “What is the Kanadeva school?”



Men said, “In the Western Paradise there are ninety-six types. You are the lowest type.”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Bow and withdraw.”

---

Many contemporary Zennists say things like “Words cannot reach it.” “Words can only point to it.” Or “It’s so hard to talk about the truth of the buddhadharma.”

When the mind is divided, everything, including words, feelings, the truth of the buddhadharma, and the song of the bird is divided. When the divided mind is healed, words too are the primary reliance.

The ancients were very interested in what the buddhadharma was like for the *really* ancients. In this case, Yunmen (864–949) raises the memory of Mazu (709–788) raising a memory from about six hundred years before of the great Indian monk, Kanadeva (170–270),<sup>55</sup> the main successor of the really, really great Indian monk, Nagarjuna (no dates, but who is said to have lived for a really long time).

The phrase “Kanadeva school” implicates the lineage of Nagarjuna and suggests the truth before the buddhadharma came to China, the truth before Mazu’s mother wore underwear. In this context, Yunmen took up the issue of the nature of the ancient Way, the Kanadeva school, even testing the monk Balíng with the question, “What is the Kanadeva school?”

Baling answered, “Snow in a silver bowl.”

A far cry from “In the Western Paradise there are ninety-six types. You are the lowest type.”<sup>56</sup>

Hakuin’s comment on this case, “A white horse among reed flowers,” then, is double-storied.<sup>57</sup> He refers to the present case while also offering a more vigorous expression of sameness and difference. A white horse and reed flowers replace the more static snow and silver bowl.

With Baling, Yunmen followed up “What is the Kanadeva school?” with more questions: “What is the Way?” and “What is the blown-hair sword?” We’ll look into these questions in the next case.

Mazu, through Nagarjuna, and then about a hundred and fifty years later, through Yunmen, said something extraordinary. Contrary to the contemporary understanding mentioned above, “Words cannot reach it,” the teaching here is that all words and speech *are* the ancient Way. Use this essential reliance!

All words and speech? You mean the school of the ancients is right here as I write these words? Right here as you read?

Then Yunmen goes and tosses a big rat turd in the stew, saying, “Cool story, friend. How come none of you sad-assed homeleavers standing before me has raised the issue?”

Thankfully, in this case, somebody’s got words, and so comes forward and asks, “What is the ancient Way?”

A fair enough question. So why does Yunmen offer these bitter words in return? “In the Western Paradise<sup>58</sup> there are ninety-six types. You are the lowest type.”

Using words to chase words, you are the dumbest of the dumb. Just pick up your mat and go. A white horse among white reed flowers.

How can you put words to use as the primary reliance of ancient Way now?

## CASE 32

Yunmen's "Same or Different?"



Yunmen asked the head-seat monk, “The mountains, rivers, and great earth, together with you yourself—are they the same or different?”

“Same.”

Men said, “Everything inanimate and animate, moths, weevils, ants together with you yourself—are they the same or different?”

“Same.”

Men said, “Why treat things as weapons?”

On behalf of the head seat, Xutang said, “Stand to one side and spit out your tongue.”



How intimate are you with the sounds of the crickets, the light of the moon, the snore of the dog, or the vague sense of unease about your child? Are those things the same as you yourself or different from you yourself? The same or different?—a simple and penetrating inquiry.

The head seat declares his identity with the self and things of the world. “Same.”

In the same way, the name that Katagiri Roshi gave me, Dosho, means “Same Life.”

It seems that the “same” monk knows the Way. Reminiscent of Yunmen asking Baling, “What is the Way?”

Baling said, “A clear-eyed person falls into a well.”

And just so, this head seat went head-over-heels into the well.

It took Yunmen to see the subtle weapon at play in the head seat’s “same.” It lacks the aliveness of a white horse in reed flowers. It weaponizes non-duality. If you were the head seat, what would you say?

In a similar vein, Yunmen asked Baling, “What is the blown-hair sword?”

Baling said, “Each branch of coral upholds the moon.”<sup>59</sup>

To test the sharpness of a sword, one blows a hair across the blade, and if the blade splits the hair effortlessly, you have a blown-hair sword. In Zen, this refers to testing the subtle awakened mind. This mind holds up the moon like the tips of grass in your yard.

Is the blown-hair sword and the head seat’s response the same or different?

## CASE 33

### Yunmen's "Joke Is On Me"



Yunmen asked a monk, “Where are you coming from?”

“Visiting memorial stupas.”

Men said, “The joke is on me.”

The monk said, “I truly come from performing stupa rites.”

Men said, “You also don’t uphold the five precepts.”

The monk had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Someone suddenly entered the Way.”



It is easy to get distracted by a tradition’s smells and bells, what we in Zen call the “forms” of practice. It is as true in Zen as in anything. That is probably why the Buddha listed it on the list of three fetters, three chains that tie us to stupidity:

1. belief in a self
2. [skeptical] doubt
3. attachment to rites and rituals

When Yunmen learned that the monk was wandering about visiting memorial stupas, his words were strong: “The joke’s on me.” Reminiscent of “In the Western Paradise there are ninety-six types. You are the lowest type.”

Had the Cowboy Junkies been around in Yunmen’s day, he might have burst into song:

And I’m searching all the windows for a last-minute present  
To prove to you what I said was real  
For something small and frail and plastic baby  
’Cause cheap is how I feel.[60](#)

In other words, “When I see how you’re wasting your life, tourist monk on a magical mystery tour, cheap is how I feel.”

The joke is on us all. And when the monk insisted that he really truly was performing the rites, Yunmen calls him a killer, a stealer, a fornicator, a liar, and a drunk.

As if to say, “You say you’re requiting your debt of compassion to the buddhas and ancestors, but you simply aren’t. That ain’t how it’s done. So you’re a killer, a stealer, a fornicator, a liar, and a drunk.”



Ouch! Ouch!

And, yet, Xutang sees some redemption here. “Someone suddenly entered the Way.”

Is it you? If so, what’s the next stop on the tour?

## CASE 34

# Shexian's Body Enters Hell



Shexian,\* examining a seasoned monk, asked, “At sunset, you sought refuge in the forest. In the morning, where will you go?”

“I haven’t yet practiced Zen.”

Xian said, “Your living body enters hell.”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Who would not accept mercy?”

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Shexian Guisheng was a late tenth-, early eleventh-century master in the Linji line. The first documented occurrence of the phrase, “a special transmission outside scriptures,” was first heard from him (and attributed to Bodhidharma).

In the present case, we have this chance, fleeting like the time between sunset and sunrise, to practice, awaken, and live accordingly. After you complete your training, where will you go?

The seasoned monk here, referred to with the common term for “senior monk” or “preceptor,” softly objects. “Where was that ‘just-right’ zafu? I’m still trying to find my seat. I haven’t passed through the *mu* koan yet.”

Shexian offers the monk the highest praise. Like Jizo Bodhisattva, he sees in this monk someone who would throw his living body into hell for the sake of all living beings, and particularly for those with the intense suffering of hell.

Recently, a student told me about returning home to care for his sick father only to find his parents’ home in disrepair, infested by mice, and their depression and mental illness vividly apparent in their hoarding. Ready to enter this very hell?

It reminds me of Dogen’s death poem:

Fifty-four years lighting up the sky  
A quivering leap smashes a billion worlds  
Hah!  
Entire body looks for nothing.  
Living, I plunge into [hell.]<sup>61</sup>

Are you ready?

With the climate crisis threatening doom for many species, and pandemics for the large-brain primate type, our little-dumpling planet may also be moving toward sunset. Ready to enter that hell?

Here’s Roy Scranton in *We’re Doomed. Now What?*

It's almost certain that I will spend my life failing at the most important things I can imagine doing—failing my friends, my family, my society, and myself. And then I'll die. The question I face, the question we all face, the ethical question at the heart of human life and the ethical question Buddhism helps us see at the heart of any possible response to the global climate crisis, is not whether we will succeed or fail, but rather: how will we choose to live out our inevitable failure? Bad Buddhist, bad environmentalist, flawed person, struggling, mortal, confused human ape—now what?<sup>62</sup>

Ready to enter that hell?

A story in Zen lore attributed to Soen Nakagawa Roshi goes like this: A Zen teacher once instructed his students: “The one who hasn't had kensho at the end of sesshin will be buried alive.” There were about six or eight students, and one by one they experienced realization, until there was only one left and the sesshin was ending. So, they dug a pit and took that fellow out and swung him—One, two, threeee!—and as he was in midair he suddenly yelled, “I got it! I got it!”

Like many of us, are you deadline-driven as well?

Ready?

One!

Two!

Threeeeeee!!!

## CASE 35

# Shexian's Slap and Shout



Shexian asked a monk, “Where are you coming from?”

“Xiangzhou country.”

Shexian hauled up a boy, slapped him once, and shouted loudly,  
“Get out!”

The monk had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “A person skilled at entering the water.”



Before Shexian grabbed the boy, shout, “STOP!”

Or if too slow, grab a nearby Buddha statue and say, “Let go of the boy or this Buddha is bits and pieces!”

After everybody calms down, refer Shexian to Case 8, “The National Teacher Cultivates Practice.”

Instead of slapping you might rub the boy’s head and say, “Calm, calm. Just say, ‘Calm, calm.’ Passing through, passing through. Just say, ‘Passing through, passing through.’ Afterward, do not deceive people.”

Such a response would show the skill of entering the water.



## CASE 36

# Hanwen Gong's “Change or No Change?”



Hanwen Gong asked a monk, “Don’t you give well-known lectures on *Zhao’s Treatise*, by Sengzhao?”

The monk said, “Yes.”

Gong said, “In the text, it says that there are four things that don’t change, right?”

The monk said, “Yes.”

Gong picked up a cup, then threw it down, breaking it. “Is this change or no change?”

The monk had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Wisdom only comes with experience. ‘No forever’ is the one wisdom.”



*Zhao's Treatise* is a compilation of four texts by Sengzhao (374–414), who was among the great translator Kumarajiva's (344–413) main disciples. The lecturing monk in this case appears to have specialized in “On the Immutability of Things,” where Sengzhao argues that there are four things that do not change:

1. Things do not change;
2. There is no real emptiness;
3. Great wisdom is ignorance;
4. Nirvana has no position.

For the purpose of this case, let's just focus on the first thing, that things don't change. The person who came up with this, Sengzhao, was a forerunner of the Chinese branch of the Madhyamaka school, founded in India by Nagarjuna. Their perspective goes like this: If something were to change, that thing would need to have an essence, for if a thing lacked an essence it wouldn't even be a thing, so what would we be talking about? However, if a thing had an essence, something apart from the conditioned world, then for that thing, change would be impossible.

You might recall that Case 14, “Nanquan Offers New Tightly-Whities” works through a very a similar issue. Indeed, our koan way is an iterative process. We pick up a point, drop it, and pick it up again.

Back to this case. To say that things change is a provisional teaching. What's the real deal?

The victorious ones have said  
That emptiness is the relinquishing of all views.  
For whomever emptiness is a view,  
That one will accomplish nothing.<sup>63</sup>

And there's the point—relinquish all views.

Gong tries to free the lecturing monk by breaking a cup. Relinquishing views, did *this* cup change or not? In one moment, a provisionally speaking cup. In the next moment, provisionally speaking shards of porcelain. Is this change or not? To say it is change ignores the fact that in a single dharma position, it was just a cup, and then it was in the singular dharma position of not-a-cup. To say it does not change ignores the fact that a moment ago there was a cup, and in this moment there is no cup.

Despite Venerable Gong's apparent dismissal, *Zhao's Treatise* seems to have been important in the early years of the Ch'an transmission. Shitou, for example, experienced a revelation when he read in that text, "The one who realizes that the myriad things are one's own self is no different from all the sages." He went on to have a dream of himself and the Sixth Ancestor riding on the back of a giant turtle, swimming in the great ocean.<sup>64</sup>

Xutang caps the case by noting that the one wisdom is no forever. However, when all dharmas are the single truth, there is nothing outside. Is this forever or no forever?

Whether the cup changed or not is one thing. This is more importantly about the self. Do you change or not? Is the "you" who started reading this sentence the same or different from the "you" that has now completed it?

Commenting on this case, Hakuin said, "Go out with raised fist."<sup>65</sup>

With sense of self challenged, are you like him, stomping off with raised fist?

## CASE 37

Luopu's "Not Meeting the Founder"<sup>†</sup>



One day Luopu's\* attendant said, "The sutra master Zhao's opinions are extremely marvelous."

Pu said, "Honorable Zhao is extremely marvelous. Yet, vitally, he didn't meet the Founder."

The monk had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Beating the grass, frightening the snake.”



Words mirror the mind. Luopu’s attendant admired a slick, intellectual presentation. Meeting the Founder refers to hearing with the same ears and seeing with the same eyes as Bodhidharma and all the ancestors: showing up with half a face or the entire body, whatever feelings we may be having, whether we think we are the same or different, that others are like us or not.

Luopu began his training with Linji, eventually becoming his attendant, but later he succeeded Jianshan. Meeting the Founder is meeting a teacher, meeting the rain falling lightly on the deck while sipping morning coffee, and meeting the person you are at the moment of sipping coffee. We seek the dharma for the sake of ourselves and let go of ourselves for the sake of the dharma. Meeting the Founder is meeting and practicing the self.

Luopu saw that the sutra master Zhao, the same old one from the previous case, lacked access to the eye of non-duality. He died before Bodhidharma came to China, so Luopu rudely claims that Zhao hadn’t met the Founder or any real teacher; he hadn’t met himself. Who is it that has met the Founder?

Meet the ancestral teachers, be familiar with their instruction,  
Bind grasses to build a hut, and don’t give up.  
Let go of hundreds of years and relax completely.  
Open your hands and walk, innocent.  
Thousands of words, myriad interpretations,  
Are only to free you from obstruction.  
If you want to know the undying person in the hut,  
Don’t separate from this skin bag here and now.<sup>66</sup>

## CASE 38

# Baoying's "Immediately Entering Hell"





A monk asked the solemn Venerable Baoying,\* “All the sages have passed through to what place?”

Ying said, “Not going up to god realms. Immediately entering hell.”

The monk said, “Anyway, Venerable, how about you?”

Ying said, “This old man returns awake to Baoying.”

Ying then picked up his whisk and brushed the monk in the mouth. Then he called, “Come close. Speak! You are going together with them.”

Then Ying brushed him again with his whisk.

Recommending a way for the monk to deal with this, Xutang said, “Accordingly, the eye sees; accordingly, the finger points.”



Looking at the mess we call the human world, it's long been asked, “Where have all the sages gone?”

The monk asked not only about the Buddha and Zen ancestors, but about all the sages. Where are they when we need them? Commenting on this case, Hakuin said, “Yu District is still all right. It is the people south of the river who suffer the most.”<sup>67</sup> The old boy felt the pain of the people fighting on the other side of the river.

Baoying doesn't blink. The sages have not gone to paradise. Sages go to hell—just take a look around. The monk then made it personal and direct, as if to say, “Okay, forget about all the dead sages, where are you going, master?”

Baoying is both this old teacher's name and the area that he lives in, reflecting an important point in the ancients' world view—the Zen master and the environment are not two things. Baoying is going to Baoying.

Where are you going?

Baoying then brushed the monk's mouth with his whisk. The whisk is one of the implements of the old time Zen masters, and we still have them today, mostly for ceremonial use. Mine is in a closet at Zen Center. They are composed of a handle and a couple feet of horsehair. So, getting hit in the mouth with a whisk (unless it's by the handle, which would be odd) would be a very sensual experience, distinct from getting beaten by a staff.

Baoying then offered a great teaching to the monk, as if to say, “More intimate! And you'll discover that you are not the sages. You

are the sages going together.”

Xutang points out that it is just in looking and raising a finger.  
Awesome *and* no big deal.

In this we rely. How can it be proven?

## CASE 39

# Guizong's "Plain Rice"



When Zhen Dianxiong was serving as head seat in Venerable Guizong's\* assembly, Guizong asked, "Serving as head seat, don't you, for the sake of others, always bring up the woman who was ordered out of samadhi."

Zhen said, "No."

Zong said, “Excessive but not temperate or temperate but not excessive? Why do you say ‘no?’ ”

Zhen said, “A Kesa-wearing monk’s duty is not to lack sauce or salt.”

Zong called his attendant and said, “Tell the *tenzo*, ‘In the future, just cook plain rice.’ ”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Do not lend money to an ungrateful person.”



An odd situation, so odd it seems like it might have happened.

The person functioning as the head seat, the head junior, seemed to use the “Woman Coming Out of Concentration” koan to guide people. It goes like this:

In former times, the World-Honored One caused Manjusri to reach the place that all buddhas gather. As it happened, all buddhas were still in this place. Only one woman, sitting near Buddha, entered into samadhi. Thereupon, Manjusri asked Buddha, “How can this woman get near the Buddha seat and I cannot?” Buddha said, “Manjusri, you awaken this woman. You order her yourself.” Manjusri circumambulated the woman three times, snapped his fingers once, and carried her to Brahma. He exhausted his spiritual power and yet she did not come out. The World-Honored One said, “Even if 100,000 Manjusris tried to bring her out, this woman would not lose concentration. Below, past the number of lands as the sand in twelve million Ganges Rivers, there is the Bodhisattva of Deceptive Brilliance who can arouse this concentrated woman.” In a flash, great teacher Deceptive Brilliance bubbled up from the earth and bowed to the World-Honored One. The World-Honored One ordered Deceptive Brilliance, “Go stand before the woman. Snap your fingers once.” The woman then arose from concentration.<sup>[68](#)</sup>

The gist of this koan is that although Manjusri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, is unable to get a young woman out of samadhi, the bodhisattva Deceptive Brilliance is able to snap her out. Why?

The monk denies that he uses this koan to guide people. Guizong saw that in the monk's apparent absence, he's full of presence, hiding in the dharma masquerade. A kesa-wearing monk's duty is to practice with austerity, moderation, and restraint, so his comment about extravagance cuts to the heart of the monk's claim, "Just doing my job, boss."

Are you excessive but not temperate or temperate but not excessive?

How is it to eat your rice without sauce or salt?

## CASE 40

# Shishuang's “Little Problem”





When a monk was about to take his leave, Zen master Shishuang\* asked, “Going by boat or going by land?”

The monk said, “If encountering a boat, then by boat. If encountering land, then by land.”

Shuang said, “In between, you’ll have a little problem.”

The monk had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Hurried and destitute, don’t forget to pay the bill.”



The check has arrived and there is no escape. Whether you are crazy busy or ugly poor, it can’t be avoided. In our present case, CO<sub>2</sub> blankets our little planet. The check must be paid.

When meeting the water—take a boat. When the phone rings—answer it. When encountering the land—walk. When an email arrives—open it. You, indeed, are functioning freely in whatever circumstance you find yourself in.

But, hey, between the water and the shore, in the place that is neither water nor land, in the place where there are no boats and no land rovers, in the place between the wet and the hard place, how will you go?

## CASE 41

Open Heart's "One Person"<sup>†</sup>



Mingzhou\* went to Quanzhou, where elder monk Open Heart lived. Open Heart said, “To participate in study, you must go to the place where One Person lives. You must also go to where Half Person lives.”

Zhou then asked, “Disregarding drawing near to the place where One Person lives, how is it where Half Person lives?”

Open Heart had no words.

Afterward, however, a young monk asked about this. Zhou said, “So you want to know Half Person? You are also just a person playing with a mud ball.”

On behalf of the elder monk, Open Heart, Xutang said, “Yet, I ought to bow to you in thanks.”



Hakuin said,

How sad that among the groves of Zen today so many people lack this One Person. If you can encounter this One Person, at that instant you ascend into marvelous awakening. Lacking this encounter, you remain forever among the ignorant and ordinary.<sup>69</sup>

Of course, Mingzhou had a keen eye to go right for the Half Person. If you want to meet the One Person, you have to go to the place where the One Person lives. It cannot be disregarded. So, don't do violence to the fact that Open Heart<sup>70</sup> had no words. Next, go through the One Person and meet the Half Person!

Buddha-logically, you might think that the One Person is the fundamental and the Half Person is differentiation, like emptiness and form, the first and second rank, or the eighth and ninth oxherding picture.

If so, you too are just a person playing with a mud ball.

A true Half Person.

## CASE 42

Helin Su's "Place for No You"<sup>†</sup>



A monk knocked on the door of Zen master Helin Su. Lin asked, “Who is it?”

“A monk.”

Lin said, “Not only a monk, but even the Buddha is not needed here.”

The monk said, “If the Buddha came, why wouldn’t he be needed?”

Lin say, “This is only a place for no-you to stop.”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Selling is not in vain, yet the cloth is singular.”

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Helin Su (668–752) was sixth generation of the Fourth Ancestor Daoxin in the Oxhead school, a lineage of Zen that split off from the main branch that ran through another sixth ancestor, known as the Sixth Ancestor, Huineng. All surviving lineages go through Huineng.

The Oxhead school flourished in China alongside the successors of Huineng until at least the late eighth century, and seems to have emphasized *A Dialogue of Contemplation-Extinguished*, reputed to be a dialogue between Bodhidharma and one of his students. Buddhist scholars Robert Buswell and Donald Lopez summarize the text as follows:

In this dialogue, Entrance-into-Principle continuously negates the premises that underlie the questions his student Conditionality raises about the mind and its pacification, the nature of enlightenment, as well as other matters related to practice, meditation, and attainment. For example, in the opening dialogue, Conditionality asks, “What is the mind? How do we pacify it?” Master Entrance-into-Principle replies, “Neither positing ‘mind’ nor trying to ‘pacify’ it—this is pacifying it.” By rejecting the dualistic perspectives inherent in Conditionality’s questions, the Master finally opens his student to an experience of the pure wisdom that transcends all dualities.<sup>71</sup>

Historians note the similarities between this approach and the Middle Way school of Nagarjuna, which has had a long and powerful effect on the Zen school.<sup>72</sup> We get a taste of this approach here with Helin’s “Not only a monk, but even the Buddha is not needed here.”



Helin's appearance in this record is unusual. It is a rare occurrence in the koan collections for a Zen teacher to appear who is not descended from the Sixth Ancestor. And it is fitting that the emphasis of this case is that we're all cut from a singular cloth—monk, householder, someone from another lineage, Buddha, and even the guy with a garbage-pail mind. And yet we encounter one another. Wonderful! How can that be?

When the opportunity arrives, don't look away. Knock on the door, and ask, "Anybody else cut from the singular cloth here?"

Even if a monk arrives, a monk is not needed, and when the Buddha arrives, the Buddha is not needed. There is no need for any one. Indeed, the singular cloth stretches for ten thousand miles.

Only the no-me, no-you can find an anchor.

Who is it?

## CASE 43

# Wuzhou's Attendant



All his life, the venerable Wuzhou Xinjian did not have novice monks serving as his attendants. A scholar said, “Venerable, you are aged and respected, why not invite a novice to serve you?”

“If there is someone who is blind, deaf, and dumb, invite them for me.”

The scholar had no reply.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Someone could respectfully offer to sweep up this mess.”



What did Wuzhou have going on that he would want an attendant that's blind, deaf, and dumb?

I can imagine the online posting:

Wanted to attend Zen master!

Someone who is blind, deaf, and dumb. Someone who isn't making use of things, including their blindness. Willingness to clean up messes is essential.

Let's just follow Xutang, grab a broom, and in our blindness, do our best to clean up. Then bow and move on.

## CASE 44

# A Venerable Lay Elder's "Meaning of the Sutra"



In former times, a venerable lay elder asked a scholar, “How do the *Shu* and the *Chao* explain the general meaning [of the *Avatamsakasutra*]?”

The scholar said, “Chao explains the Shu. Shu explains the sutra.”

The elder said, “What does the sutra explain?”

The scholar had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Investigate the division.”

---

*The Avatamsakasutra (Flower-Garland Sutra)* is a big, broad, roving, ranging, brilliant beast of a sutra, said to have been preached after the Buddha’s enlightenment. About 1,500 pages in one English translation. He sure had a lot of just-awake words!

Then scholars came along and wrote commentaries and then commentaries on the commentaries. The *Shu* and the *Chao* are two such examples.

Xutang directs us to look at how the sutra, or any sutra, or anything, really, is divided. One pioneer of scholarship in China was Dao’an (312–385). He came up with the threefold division:

1. The prefatory setting, which specifies the time and place where the sutra was delivered;
2. The text proper, the main body of the sutra, which relates the doctrines and practices that were the subject of the discourse; and
3. The “dissemination section,” which describes the confidence and insight the scripture inspired in its audience.<sup>73</sup>

It is tragically easy, however, to lose the forest for the trees. Commenting on this case, Hakuin, bringing us back to the now, said, “The sun rises in the east and at night sets in the west.”<sup>74</sup>

That’s pretty simple. What does this sutra explain?

## CASE 45

Youqi's "Who Rang the Bell?"





One day the bell rang, calling the assembly to the main hall. The venerable Tiantai Youqi then asked, “Who rang the bell?”

A monk said, “The rector.”

“Come close.”

The monk came close.

Qi slapped him, then returned to the abbot’s room.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “I’m afraid Venerable Qi just doesn’t have the strength.”

---

Qi surely couldn’t ring the bell or stop a distant temple bell either. Nor could the monk who gave an unaware response. Nor could the rector who was rumored to have rung the bell. “Rector,” by the way, *weinuo* in Chinese, and *ino* in Japanese, is an effort to translate the name of the position in Zen monasteries that is responsible for ringing bells and making announcements, among other things.

The rector person who is an enduring self doesn’t have the strength to do shit. What about the no-you?

The question here, obscured by the slap, is “Who rang the bell?”

Implicit are its companions: “Who is singing that song?” And “Who is so dang flat?”

## CASE 46

# An Itinerant Monk Spits



In former times, an itinerant monk followed a sutra master into the Buddha Hall. The itinerant monk suddenly stopped and spat at the Buddha, then said, “Where there is no Buddha, spit on somebody.”

The sutra master had no reply.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “A turtle-nosed snake.”

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A turtle-nosed snake is a frightful thing, like seeing someone spit at a Buddha statue. Xutang is thinking about this koan:

Xuefeng said to the assembly, “There is a long turtle-nosed snake on South Mountain. You must all go and have a good look at it.” Changqing said, “Today in this hall, many will lose self, lose life.” Yunmen threw his staff down before Xuefeng and made a gesture of fright.<sup>75</sup>

Doing the spitting is easy and irreverent. Some people like being bad in that way. The adrenaline rush is so delicious...and bitter. In our day, you don’t have to sneak into the Buddha Hall, but just open up your favorite social media site and spit away from the safety of your very own living room.

When Buddhas are getting spit upon right and left, I find Buddha-spitting more than tiresome.

Too bad the sutra master had no words. At least he also had no spit.

I’d say to the monk, “You have a point—who can you spit on that is not a Buddha? And yet, how does spitting uplift the Buddha?”

“How else might you show that each one of us is the buddha-nature?”

## CASE 47

# Cuiyan's Stupid Place<sup>[76](#)</sup>



In former times, a monk went to meet Cuiyan. As it happened, Cuiyan was away. Instead, he met the monastery director. The director said, “Have you not paid respect to the venerable Cuiyan yet?”

“Not yet.”

The director then pointed to a little dog and said, “You want to go up and meet Venerable Cuiyan. Just bow to this little dog.”

The monk had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “You will see that Cuiyan is a stupid place.”



As if to follow up from the last case with its Buddha spitting, here a monk comes to bow to the great teacher. Yet, have you even met this little dog? If you cannot bow to the dog, you cannot bow to the teacher. If you can bow to the lowly little dog, you’ve already met the venerable Cuiyan.

“Like a fool, like an idiot.”<sup>77</sup>

This is truly a stupid place.

One more thing—the great teacher, of course, is a person of great practice, but does even a little dog practice the Way?



## CASE 48

Guanyin Does Not Go to Korea<sup>†</sup>



In former times, some Koreans came to China to have a figure of Guanyin carved. When the time came to be hoisted onto the ship, unexpectedly, it could not be moved. It was then sent to Mingzhou and offered to the Kaiyuan temple.

This event sets up the deeper question, “There is no temple, and Guanyin makes no appearance. Why did the Guanyin figure not go to

Korea?”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Familiar places are unforgettable.”

---

Much like our European ancestors and the Virgin Mary, our East Asian ancestors told many stories about miraculous intercessions by Guanyin when the faithful mindfully invoked her. In the present case, though, it appears that Guanyin, the bodhisattva of compassion, has issues too.

As a folk story, it reflects ethnic prejudice with the suggestion that Guanyin didn’t like Korea so much. The Zen tradition, however, took this folk story and its ethnic judgment and transmuted it into a koan.

A little background: Guanyin, according to the *Heart Sutra*, When deeply practicing prajna paramita, clearly saw that all five aggregates are empty and thus relieved all suffering.... Therefore, given emptiness, there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no formation, no consciousness; no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no sight, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no object of mind; no realm of sight...no realm of mind consciousness.<sup>78</sup>

Given emptiness, there is no temple, no appearance of Guanyin, no Korea, and no China. And, yet, Bodhidharma came from the Western Paradise to China. Why, then, wouldn’t Guanyin go to Korea?

This case appears in *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* section dedicated to Changqing. In the *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* version, a monk asked Changqing, “There is no temple and Guanyin makes no appearance. Why did the Guanyin figure not go to Korea?”

And the old venerable answered the monk’s question, saying, “Although an image seems nothing special, it does give rise to subjective reactions in people when they gaze at it.”<sup>79</sup>

In gathering the record, Xutang reframed the circumstances of the question and deleted Changqing's response, curiously leaving an encounter dialogue with no student, no teacher, and no dialogue. Xutang added the phrase "sets up the deeper question" in place of the monk's question. Xutang seems to have been itching to insert himself into the case. He does so with his saying on behalf of others, presumably Guanyin: "Familiar places are unforgettable."

Is the great being Guanyin also subject to sentimental feelings, and in this empty world prefers the familiar ground of China?

When all the stories that make up the self are compassionately realized as having no independent existence, and when here and there are realized as empty, lacking in substance or fixed position, where can compassion not go?

In any case, I often think of my native country, northern Minnesota—family, the short-treed forests, swamps, and, of course, Lake Superior.

What familiar place can you not forget?

## CASE 49

# High Seat Ming in Your Hands



In former times, a monk went to Caoxi to see the robe and bowl. The monk lifted the robe and said, “This is what could not be lifted on the top of Mount Dayu.”

Another monk said, “Why is High Seat Ming in your hands?”

The monk had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “When one who is kind speaks, their kindness is seen.”

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Caoxi, you may recall, is Huineng, the Sixth Ancestor. Both here and in Case 5, “The National Teacher Zhong’s Single Wisp of Cloud,” he appears off stage.

When Huineng was a young lay student, he received the robe and bowl from the Fifth Ancestor, and then fled a dysfunctional community. The Sixth Ancestor was not one of the in-group but received the authorization of the Fifth Ancestor anyway. High Seat Ming pursued him with the intention to return the robe and bowl of the Fifth Ancestor back to the monastery.

The back story for this case is unpacked in *The No Gate Barrier*, Case 23, “Don’t Think Good versus Evil”:

High Seat Ming, because [he pursued] the Sixth Ancestor, took advantage of arriving at Mount Dayu. The Ancestor met Ming, at once tossing the robe and bowl on top a rock, saying, “These clothes are the form of faith. Can [one] fight over them? Sir, you may take [them].” Ming then tried to lift them, [but] they were like an immovable mountain. Hesitating, frightened, and trembling Ming said, “I come seeking the dharma, not because of a robe! Please, itinerant monk, teach [me].” The Ancestor said, “Not thinking ‘good,’ not thinking ‘bad,’ exactly just now, [what] is the original face of High Seat Ming?” Immediately, Ming greatly realized. Sobbing, he bowed and asked, “Arriving at these secret words and secret esoterism—isn’t there something still further to proclaim?” The Ancestor said, “I now do tell you. This is not secret. You seem to have returned and illuminated your own face. Secret, yet, it’s you.” Ming said, “Even though I was at Huangmei and complied with the assembly, [I did] not examine my own true face. Now receiving your instructions, [I] join and dwell with those who know by personal experience.

Now, itinerant monk, you are my teacher!" The Ancestor said, "You seem as if thus. Then you and I together take Huangmei as our teacher. Perfect oneself. Protect and sustain [it]." [80](#)

Some hundreds of years later, we have a monk doing some dharma tourism, wanting to see the robe and bowl. A sad waste of time. I'd ask him, "Why wander off from the zazen seat that exists in your home?"

Does he appreciate the irony of lifting that which could not be lifted? Fortunately, there was another monk present. Really present. He asked a question that might turn the fellow around, "Why is High Seat Ming in your hands?"

As if to say with "The Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi," "You are not it. In truth, it is you." [81](#)

The monk had no words, so Xutang kindly stepped in. "When one who is kind speaks, their kindness is seen."

What I want to know is, are you kind?



## CASE 50

# Dog Bites Monk



In former times, a monk carrying an alms bowl arrived at an old person's home. Coincidentally, he was bitten by a dog. The old person said, "If a dragon has even a single thread draped over its shoulders, a garuda will not devour them. You, of great virtue, have a dharma robe draped over your shoulders. Why did the dog bite you?"

The monk had no words.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “A muskmelon is sweet through to the stem.”

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Trouble, indeed. The poor monk here is just out doing what monks do, but gets bitten by a dog. To add insult to injury, he then has his virtue questioned by an old man, who invokes the myth of the ferocious dharma-protecting garuda who won’t mess with anyone if they have even a single thread from a kesa draped over their shoulders. This monk was apparently wearing the whole robe, and yet even a lowly dog bit him.

To paraphrase the old man, “If you were a person of great practice, crying babies would instantly fall asleep in your arms, wealthy donors would appear when needed, and students would flock to you in droves.”

Rather than no words, the monk might have just said, “Ouch! Ouch!”

Or the monk might have quoted Torei Zenji (1721–1792), even though Torei was from a future time,

That even on having attained the matter of advanced practice, strength and function differ from person to person because of their karmic traces, which is very subtle indeed.<sup>[82](#)</sup>

If I were the monk, I’d have bowed and muttered, “I am not a person of great virtue,” then stumbled on to the next house.

Xutang rubbed in the truth about the limits of our humble efforts to be sweet. “A muskmelon is sweet through to the stem.”

Right at the point of connection, bitterness through and through.  
Why did the dog bite you?

## CASE 51

# A Benefactor Asks about Manjusri's Seniority



In former times, a benefactor came to a monastery, entered the courtyard, and gave to each monk according to how many years they had worn the robe. The director said, “Manjusri, the holy monk at the front of the hall, should also get a share.”

The benefactor said, “How many years has the holy monk worn the robe?”

The director did not have the right number.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Fall down and point to him.”



Even today, in our Zen way, Manjusri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, usually sits on the altar in the meditation hall. We treat the Manjusri on the altar as if they were alive: not rudely crossing in front of them without bowing, ringing bells at the beginning of service to arouse them from samadhi, and, in monastic practice, someone is assigned to be their attendant.

This benefactor is generous, giving to all the monks. And the benefactor is generous in asking, “How old is wisdom?”

You can roll around on the floor and point your fingers at the holy monk (or your own damn self), but what has this to do with it?

There is clearly a right number that the director didn’t comprehend.

Commenting on this case, Hakuin said, “Go ask Manjusri’s attendant.”<sup>83</sup>

Who is the attendant in question?

If you picked up the thankless task, what would you say?

## CASE 52

Xiangzhou Zhe's "His Realization Is  
Deficient"



At Venerable Xiangzhou Zhe's place, a benefactor asked the head seat to open another dharma hall. When the director told Xiangzhou about this, he said, "His realization is deficient for assuming such an office."

When the head seat heard of this, he bundled up his possessions and went to the new hall. Xiangzhou, however, arrived before the



head seat, beat him, and left.

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “The venerable doesn’t bear [his] burden alone.”

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This case is a comment on what defines a Zen teacher, and it raises the dicey issue of questioning the credentials of others. The criterion offered by Xiangzhou, “adequate realization,” is in line with all the classic literature, and sadly out of tune with much of the present dharma scene.

For Xiangzhou, sanctioning someone as a teacher was not a matter of seeing someone’s potential, or of their having mastered a set of ceremonies or doctrines, or of their having logged a certain number of days of sesshin or years of monastic training, or of their shopping around until they find someone to perform the transmission ceremony.

Xiangzhou only cites adequate realization—realizing to some definitive degree the same mind as Buddha—as sufficient to transmit the Buddha mind to the next generation. One could go on from there to include psychological health and an appreciation for ethical inquiry, but adequate realization seems like a good starting point.

Unfortunately, adequate realization is left undefined here. Nevertheless, Xiangzhou knew it when he saw it, and had the clarity (or conceit) to judge the head seat, find him wanting, and even give him a violent beating for trying to slip into the teaching position.

Although I imagine, like most teachers, that I experience Xiangzhou’s conceit from time to time, I don’t do much about it. I justify taking the easy, socially appropriate route of keeping my mouth shut. Still, I wonder if that is really the best course. After all, there have been teachers in the past, like Yasutani Roshi, who didn’t hold back dishing out blows from Xiangzhou’s staff. For example,

It goes without saying that Nishiari Zenji was a priest of great learning and virtue, but even a green priest like me will not

affirm his eye of satori.<sup>84</sup>

And a broader beating for the whole Soto school:

However, these days those in the Soto sect don't know anything about this standpoint of practice and enlightenment. They simply look at things only from the standpoint of the original self and think that this is the whole of the Buddha-dharma, so that standpoint of the original self also becomes phony. Thereby they clutch onto a false Zen without practice or realization, and mistake it for the Buddha-dharma with its original enlightenment and wondrous practice.<sup>85</sup>

That's one side of Xiangzhou's perhaps justifiable conceit. The other is to acknowledge the many ways my own realization is deficient and to devote myself to ongoing practice. We cannot avoid the blows of Xiangzhou's staff by running away.

Or, like Xutang said, none of us, including the head seat, bear this burden alone.

How could we today dare to fail to live up to the ancient standard?

## CASE 53

# Turning Your Back on Buddha



In former times, a Daoist came to a Buddha hall and sat down with his back to the Buddha. A monk said, “Daoist, do not turn your back on Buddha.”

The Daoist said, “The dharma realm of the Great Virtue Buddha Body permeates everywhere. Tell me, where could I sit in order to turn toward?”

On behalf of others, Xutang said, “Forget this person’s heresy.”



Much like the monk who spat at a Buddha statue in Case 46, “An Itinerant Monk Spits,” here we have a Daoist who turns his back on a Buddha statue, and then, shuffling his feet and rubbing his head, does some dharmasplaining to justify his behavior.

As we say in face-to-face koan meetings, “Right answer, wrong koan.”

When you are called out for turning your back on the Buddha, what is a true response?

Xutang suggests we forgive and forget the heresy. What is the heresy the old boy is talking about?

## CASE 54

Danxia's "Lucky Guy and It Sucks to  
Be You"<sup>†</sup>



Cuiwei\* asked the non-learning Zen master Danxia,\* “How is it to be teacher for all the buddhas?”

Xia disapprovingly said, “Lucky guy and it sucks to be you. You must grasp the towel and the broom!”

Wei retreated three steps. Xia said, “Mistake.”

Wei then moved forward. Xia again said, “Mistake.”

Wei then raised one foot, whirled his body one turn, and went out.  
Xia said, “Got it right away. He will be a teacher for all buddhas.”  
Xutang’s alternate saying, “Mistake. Mistake.”

---

This case highlights some of the leading teachers from the Shitou line of Zen, Danxia and Cuiwei, although not the line that led to either Dongshan and the modern Soto school or to the line of Xuefeng (a favorite of Xutang).

As the case begins, Danxia is apparently a mature teacher, a practitioner of no-more-learning. Dogen refers to someone like this as “the revered non-doing, non-learning person who accords with the enlightenment of Buddha after Buddha.”<sup>86</sup>

Cuiwei asks how it is to be like this—a non-learning human that is a teacher for all the Buddhas. How is it?

“Lucky guy and it sucks to be you.”

Or more literally, “Fortunate self, a pitiful birth.”

And, oh, by the way, roll up your sleeves and go to work.

Cuiwei does just that, moving backward, forward, and whirling around, even.

Mistake, mistake, mistake.

Another teacher for all the Buddhas.



## CASE 55

# Xitang Zang Delivers a Letter



Xitang Zang hurriedly presented a letter from Mazu to National Teacher Zhong. The master asked, “Of what dharma does your master speak?”

Zang walked from the west to the east and stood still. The master said, “Only this and nothing more?”

Zang walked from the east to the west and stood still. The master said, “This is Mazu’s dharma. Kindly, what do you say?” Zang said, “I already presented and the venerable seems to clearly understand.”

Xutang’s alternate saying for Xitang, “I was told that when returning, bring back a letter.”



A letter arrives from the great teacher Mazu for National Teacher Zhong. Zhong inquires of the mail carrier, Xitang Zang, what is the message in the unopened letter? How would you express the hidden truth of the unopened message from the old teachers?

Apparently, Mazu was into this kind of thing. At least one other incident is recorded in *The Sayings of Zen Master Mazu Daoyi*:

Mazu sent a monk to deliver a letter to Master Qin of Jingshan. In the letter, he drew a single circle. Master Qin opened the letter, took a brush, and put a dot in the center. Later on, one of the monks related these events to Nanyang Huizhong. Huizhong said, “That Jingshan, he fell for Mazu’s set-up.”<sup>87</sup>

In the first letter, the contents are unknown. And what do you know, in the one sent to Jingshan, just a circle. Both letters involve National Teacher Zhong, aka, Nanyang Huizhong. Without opening the letter, Xitang Zang walked back and forth. Opening the letter, Jingshan put a dot in the middle of the empty circle.

Would returning to Mazu with a letter fall into his trap or not?

## CASE 56

# Mazu's One Stroke



A monk drew four lines in front of Mazu. The top line was long and the bottom three were short. The monk then said, “Without saying one line is long and three lines are short, without wiping out the four lines, and without saying nothing, I invite the teacher to reply.”

Zu then drew one line and said, “Without saying ‘one long line, three short lines,’ I’ve answered you!”

Xutang's alternate way to reply to the request would be to say:  
"The venerable monk was born in a pit."

---

This monk was born in a pit and tried some tricky shit to pull Mazu into it with him. Without saying anything about what's directly before you, without obliterating it, and without saying nothing, speak!

Meanwhile, the leaves turn golden and the Missouri River rushes by.

Mazu shows how really simple it is. Just one stroke. Just one stroke. Just one stroke.

And for you, now, how can you express your free life apart from patterns?

## CASE 57

# Zhaozhou Bows and Withdraws<sup>†</sup>



Nanquan publicly presented, “Jiangxi Mazu said, ‘Mind is buddha.’ Wasn’t this the great teacher’s way? No mind, no Buddha, no thing. This way is the path. Still, what is the crossing?”

At that time, Zhaozhou bowed and withdrew. The high seat said, “You bowed, say what you meant.”

Zhou said, “Venerable, still you ask. Anyway, ask Nanquan.”



Following along, next the high seat asked Nanquan, “What do you say was the meaning?”

Quan said, “Retreating he received my meaning.”

Xutang’s alternate saying: “Face the wall and do zazen.”



What is the meaning of Zhaozhou bowing and withdrawing? Mind is Buddha? No mind, no Buddha, no thing?

What is the meaning of this life?

“There is no meaning,” some might say. “Just sit, untroubled by illusions of the phenomenal world. It’s all passing by and ungraspable, so why worry yourself?”

Untroubled, indeed, but if your practice stops there, you’ll be taking a fleeting attitude for the goal. This is one of many places that a practitioner can get stuck in the great Way. Aitken Roshi mentioned another:

I am reminded of a story that John Wu told his class on Christian mysticism at the University of Hawaii many years ago. Apparently a priest who had a vision of the Virgin Mary at a young age then spent the rest of his life painting, rubbing out, and repainting his vision on the wall of his cell. He treated a sign of promise as its fulfillment, and there he remained. A cautionary tale.<sup>[88](#)</sup>

There are many ways of seeing meaning. We’re conditioned to believe that meaning is out there somewhere and our job in life is to find it. Or that it’s futile and so we might as well just go through the mindless and meaningless motions of life in our culture.

According to David Hinton, the character that I’ve translated as “meaning,”

意 is a capacity that human thought and emotion share with wild landscape and, indeed, the entire Cosmos, a reflection of

the [ancient] Chinese assumption that the human and nonhuman form a single tissue that “thinks” and “wants.” Hence, thought/identity is not a transcendental spirit-realm separate from and looking out on reality, as we assume in the West. Instead, it is woven wholly into the ever-generative ch’i-tissue (or as it might have been expressed in ancient China: they are particular condensations of ch’i-energy), which is to say they are woven wholly into a living “intelligent” Cosmos.<sup>89</sup>

Meaning, then, is not apart from doing. It’s not a general thing floating in the ether, either. For example, in about 1970, when Shunryu Suzuki Roshi first offered the precept ceremony at San Francisco Zen Center, someone asked, “What’s the meaning of this?”

He said, “The meaning is in the doing.”

Once we’ve tasted a bit of untroubled mind, we can dig into a real question, like what is the meaning of Zhaozhou’s bow and withdrawal?

When Zhaozhou bowed and withdrew, how was it that he received Nanquan’s teaching?

## CASE 58

# Guizong's Roughness<sup>†</sup>



Guizong was spading herbs when a scholar came to join him. A snake happened to cross through. Unexpectedly, Zong cut the snake, killing it. The scholar said, “For a long time, I’ve favored Guizong. But actually it turns out that you are one rough-acting Buddhist monk.”

Zong said, “You are rough. I am rough.”

Xutang’s alternate saying: “Kindness is not always repaid.”

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Guizong broke the first precept. Again and again. Like me and you. You are rough. I am rough. What more can be said?

Well, Xutang sees something more here. The kindness of the snake was not only to slither along and trigger a primal fear reaction in large-brained primate monks. It was also doing its snake thing by eating the rodents that eat the herbs. Poor snake. His kindness was not repaid.

The kindness of Guizong was to kill the possibly poisonous snake and protect the scholar. His kindness was not repaid.

The kindness of the scholar was to remind Guizong of the precept “Life is not killed.” His kindness was not repaid.

Hakuin commented on this case saying, “This stupid guy.”<sup>90</sup>  
Where is his kindness?

## CASE 59

Linji's "Great Compassion"<sup>†</sup>



Magu asked Linji, “Great compassion’s thousand-eye hands—how is the true eye?”

Ji said, “Great compassion’s thousand-eye hands—how is the true eye? Speak quickly, speak quickly.”

Gu dragged Ji down from the zazen seat and sat on it himself.

Ji approached and said, “Don’t know.”

Gu tensed up. Ji then shouted loudly and dragged Gu down from the zazen seat and sat on it himself. Gu then went out.

Xutang's alternate saying instead of Linji's "Don't know": "Wild fox spirit, go away!"

---

It is unlikely that this is the same ninth-generation Magu from Case 7, "Magu's Bodacious Presentation," given that he would have been much older than the eleventh-generation Linji. This Magu might have been the successor of the earlier Magu. Apparently, Magu after Magu ranged the ancient Zen world shaking staffs, throwing teachers off their seats, and overturning their seats (as in Case 62, "Sanjueyin's 'Crossing Over'").

The bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara, is sometimes depicted with a thousand hands, each with an eye in the palm. What I've translated as "How is the true eye?" is often rendered "Which is the true eye?"

The practice of the compassion, though, is about function and less about essence. In any case, the Chinese character 那 can also be expressed as "how" like this: How does the eye in the hand of compassion function?

Magu and Linji show us by changing places. Magu boldly sits in the great teacher's seat. Linji picks himself up and says, "Don't know." This is an abbreviation of an ancient, customary greeting for Chinese Buddhist monks, often translated as "How are you?" Kirchner quotes from an ancient history:

It is a threefold act of obeisance. The bowing and the joining of the palms are acts of the body. The greeting itself is an act of speech. As for thought, if there were not reverence in the mind, how could body and mouth move? This is called "inquiry." Thus a [junior] who wishes to inquire about a [senior] will say, "I [don't know] 不審, but have you any illnesses or troubles? Is your daily life proceeding well?"<sup>91</sup>



There is roughness on the surface of the case, but tenderness within. Linji got thrown from his seat, rose, took the junior position, and then asked Magu, “I don’t know,” taking the junior position and asking, “I don’t know how it is for you in my zazen seat. How is it?”

Magu tensed up, hesitated, dithered, got stuck in knowing or thinking about not knowing. Then it was Linji’s turn to throw him out of the seat. How is the true eye? Speak quickly, speak quickly!

Xutang would call out “Wild fox spirit!” then get out of town. Invoking the ancient shapeshifter, he steps through right and wrong, and monks changing zazen seats as if it were musical chairs. Their vigor is enchanting.

How is your health?

## CASE 60

# Xitang's “More”



One day Venerable Xitang Zang responded to a general request [to teach], saying, “Strive, but for what?”

At that time, a monk came forward and held his hands on the earth. Tang said, “What are you doing?”

The monk said, “We save each other.”

Tang said, “A teacher for this great assembly, yet there is still more.”

The monk shook out his sleeves and left.

Tang said, “The worms inside the lion eat lion meat.”

Xutang’s alternate saying for when the monk shakes out his sleeves and leaves: “Nobody sows grain by imprisoning sprouts.”



“Strive, but for what?” What are you aiming for in this one great life? Killing time, saving your own ass, or serving as a bridge for all living beings swirling in this world of suffering?

This monk responded by touching the earth, embodying a connective response. He didn’t tell Xitang, he showed him. He put his body in alignment with how it is. But what was his meaning?

Xitang checked him out, “Don’t show me, tell me!” and the monk responded from the heart, “We save each other.”

More literally, the Chinese could be rendered, “Mutually save, mutually save.”

Metaphorically, he might be saying, “Drumming and dancing begin together.”<sup>92</sup>

Xitang seems to have liked this and gave him some faint praise —“You showed ’em, all right, but that’s just part of it.”

Connecting with the great earth, saving all living beings, what more could there be? And how can it be realized?

Cast the seeds in the soil and let them sprout, says Xutang.

After the monk leaves, Xitang wraps it up with a two-sided colloquial expression. Lowly worms in the great lion’s guts are feasting on top-of-the-food chain nutrients. Actualizing the saying, “We save each other.”

Like Torei said,

Reciting the Four Great Vows, directing them from the mouth outwards, and inwardly ever holding them in the heart, invoking

them as a prayer day by day and continuously pondering them, then just like a wondrous scent or an old strange custom, or like fine mist that yet drenches one's clothes, or as the smell of incense pervades and clings, so the awareness of the Buddha and ancestors will ripen of itself, and, benefiting oneself and others, everything will be accomplished.<sup>93</sup>

Be that as it may, but, strive for what?

## CASE 61

Baizhang's "One Person"<sup>†</sup>



Yunyan\* asked Baizhang, “Everyday, who do you toil for?”

Zhang said, “One Person who requires it.”

Yan said, “Why not tell them to do it themselves?”

Zhang said, “They have no home.”

Xutang’s alternate saying for Baizhang: “Always honorable.”

---

This case is a wonderful play featuring the One Person and the Half Person. You might remember Case 41, “Open Heart’s ‘One Person’ ”:

Open Heart said, “To participate in study, [you] must go to the place where One Person lives. [You] must also go to where Half Person lives.”

Yunyan, teacher of the great Caodong (Japanese, Soto) master Dongshan, plays the Half Person. Before Yunyan’s awakening, he served the great grandfather of the Linji (Japanese, Rinzai) lineage, Baizhang, for twenty years, but famously didn’t meet the One Person even though he was right there.

Dear Yunyan doesn’t hold back on his grumbling human nature: “Why do we have to work so fricking hard at such unrewarding tasks? Everyday!?”

Baizhang just works because One Person requires it. And while Case 41 emphasizes the essence, realizing One Person and Half Person, the present case emphasizes function: “toil,” “requires,” “do it.” And as far as Open Heart’s “place where the One Person lives,” here we find “no home.”

It’s worth quoting Hakuin again, as I did in Case 41, to underscore the importance of One Person:

If you can encounter this One Person, at that instant you ascend into marvelous awakening. Lacking this encounter, you remain forever among the ignorant and ordinary.<sup>94</sup>

Yunyan stays grounded in grumbling: “If One Person requires it, why not let them do it? I just want to take a nap.”

One Person, though, has no home, no eyes or ears, no nose or mouth. They’re always honorable. Hakuin comments on this case, saying, “It is like Fu Daishi.”<sup>95</sup>



You might remember Case 4, “Fu Daishi Explains a Sutra.” One Person is like Fu Daishi, pounding on the table. But don’t get lost in the inter-narrative entanglement.

The essential point here is—who do *you* do it for?

## CASE 62

Sanjueyin's "Crossing Over"<sup>†</sup>



Venerable Sanjueyin\* publicly presented, “Just as when you wink, your other eyebrow is raised, if you theorize this matter, you’ve long past missed crossing over!”

Magu came forward and asked, “Disregarding ‘just as when you wink, your other eyebrow is raised,’ how is this matter?”

Jue said, “You’ve missed crossing over!”

Gu then overturned Jue's zazen seat. Jue then hit him.

Xutang's alternate saying for Magu's first question: "Bite the iron bit. Carry the saddle and go."

---

You can't wink without raising the other eyebrow. You can't theorize without missing it. So Magu asks the obvious question, "How is it?"

By the way, the characters translated here as "how" are a binomial, 如何, that can be rendered as "how" or "what." Western translators, with the Western essentialist proclivity, tend to go for the "what"—what the thing is, rather than how it functions. Another example is from one of the most common questions in the koan literature—"What is Buddha?" Yes, it could also be fairly rendered, "How is Buddha?" In English, a fish of quite a different flavor. That said, "how" or "what" is a translator's conundrum, because even though both meanings are present in the original ideograms, in English you have to choose between "how" or "what."

Disregarding "how" or "what," this Magu is likely the fellow who appeared in Case 7, "Magu's Bodacious Presentation," where he presented as a rough guy, banging his staff at the national teacher's place. Here he flips over the teaching seat. His behavior seems to be escalating.

If this fellow, or someone with his spirit, appeared in the modern American Zen scene, he would certainly get a letter like this:

It is with great respect as well as great sadness that we let you know of the following decision of the Abbots' Group of Zen Center. After deep consideration, we have come to the agreement that you are no longer welcome to attend Zen Center, especially since the relationship you have now with Zen Center seems to be filled with such animosity. You are simply too rough on our teaching staff.

Too bad, because the fellow seemed like one of the few who, without winking an eye and raising an eyebrow, could bite the bit and seamlessly cross over, running like the wind.

Have you missed crossing over or not?

Can you wink without raising the other eyebrow?

## CASE 63

Luzu's "Only This Way"<sup>†</sup>



Dongshan came to Luzu\* and did the customary bows, then stood nearby in attendance. Later, he went out, then returned. Zu said, “Only this way. Only this way. Therefore, this way.”

Dongshan said, “A great many people don’t agree.”

Zu said, “What makes your mouth choose to argue?”

Dongshan then attended Zu for several months.

Xutang's alternate saying for Dongshan's first statement: "I'm not leaving. The road to get here to meet the venerable was dangerous."

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In the last case, Magu, of the pre-Linji Mazu lineage, presented it by flipping over the teacher's seat. Here, Dongshan Liangjie, of the Caodong lineage, presents it by bowing, standing, coming, and going. Because the Linji line is known for rough behavior and the Caodong for quiet, dignified bearing, some might say that these two teachers are characteristic of their respective lineages.

However, Luzu was a direct successor to Mazu, the great grandfather of the Linji line, a dharma brother of Magu. He appears in Case 23 in *The Record of Going Easy*. There it says, "Every time a monk came to meet Luzu, he would sit facing the wall"—no screaming or beating, stereotypic of the Linji line, just quiet sitting.<sup>96</sup> Clearly, there was (and is) more difference within the Linji and Caodong lines than between them. And although it is "only this way," there's also "only this way" too.

Perhaps when Dongshan entered and bowed, Luzu was sitting facing the wall like the *Record of Going Easy* says he did every time a monk came. Then what? Dongshan actualizes the truth to live as just to live, and Luzu confirms it, "Only this way, only this way."

What other way could there be? There could be going out on the road again, but that would be dangerous.

Why abandon your own sitting place, disrespectfully wandering through another country's dust? If you make one mistaken step, you miss the crossing over that is in your face.<sup>97</sup>

Dongshan set down his traveling bag and served Luzu. But what does a person need who just turns and faces the wall?

Like the movement of fire or water—bowing, standing, coming, and going. Is that all there is to it? Many people might disagree and



think that pounding staffs, dragging old teachers off their seats, or flipping over seats is the true way.

“What makes your mouth choose to argue?”

## CASE 64

Cizhou's "Knowing Yet Not  
Knowing"<sup>†</sup>



Venerable Cizhou Matou Fengzang\* publicly presented, saying, “Knowing yet not knowing is not so much not knowing as speaking without knowing.”

[Later,] Nanquan said, “Take part in *what*. Then accord with the teacher’s saying, ‘One only gets half.’”

Xutang's alternate saying for Nanquan: "Six ears each have a different form."

---

Cizhou expresses the way of awakening for those with a conceptual proclivity, and a sense of humor, by humorlessly blocking conception. Knowing and not knowing are playing like a cat chasing its tale.

What is not knowing? That is the question to which Cizhou is publicly presenting. And what a buzzkill his answer is! To paraphrase, "No knowing explains no knowing."

More figuratively put, turning toward and turning away both miss it. If so, then how can we know the Way? The ancient teachers' subtlety shines through on this point.

*The Record of Going Easy*, Case 45, "Four Sections from the Awakening Sutra," says,

The *Complete Awakening Sutra* says, "At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts (not); but do not put to rest or extinguish various deluded minds (not). In the realm of deluded thoughts, do not discriminate (not); in non-discrimination, do not distinguish the real (not)."<sup>98</sup>

The brilliantly waggish commentator Wansong added the "not" after each of the four sentences. Don't think—not. Don't stop thinking—not. Don't discriminate—not. When not thinking, don't see it—not.

Oh, what a pickle we're in! What to do? What to do?

Nanquan throws us a lifeline—only *what*. Only intimate *what*, and then we'll open. And that's just the half of it. Hakuin commented on this case, saying, "Saying yes. Saying no."<sup>99</sup>

And within this "no know" and "yes no," there is a world of difference. No two ears, let alone six, are the same. Only just *what*.

How can you speak of it?

## CASE 65

All-Together Peak's "How Many?"<sup>†</sup>



Honorable Pang asked Venerable All-Together Peak,\* “How far is it to the peak of the peak?”

Peak said, “What place comes and goes?”

The honorable said, “Can kill, harsh and severe—best not to ask!”

Peak said, “How many?”

The honorable said, “One, two, three.”

Peak said, "Four, five, six."

The honorable said, "Why not say seven peaks?"

"If you say 'seven,' then there is eight."

The honorable said, "You've got it, you've got it!"

Peak said, "Add them all if you choose."

The honorable then shouted. Peak also shouted.

Xutang's alternate saying beginning at the shout: "Honorable Pang is always creative."



This case is a celebration of spiritual maturity. Pang and All-Together Peak were wonderful adepts, playing in the mountains together. In Case 19, Pang is referred to as "Lay Adept," while here he is called "honorable," or "gentleman."

Pang asks about the peak of the peak, the summit of the summit, the essence of the essence. If there is any space between you and you, a cold wind blows in the gap, and you aren't there yet.

All-Together Peak is, of course, all together. How many peaks, how many people are there sitting on his seat? How many are there sitting on your seat? In front three three, in back three three. Although in this case, Honorable Pang and All-Together Peak enjoy the play of "One, two, three, four, five, six." Oh, yes, and seven, eight. And that's their business.

"How far is it to the peak of the peak?"

## CASE 66

Iron Grindstone Liu Visits Guishan<sup>†</sup>





Iron Grindstone Liu\* went to Guishan. Shan said, “Old cow, you’ve come!”

Grindstone said, “There’s going to be a great assembly at Mount Tai, you will go, no?”

Guishan lay down.

Grindstone went out.

Xutang's alternate saying for Iron Grindstone Liu: "The karmic reward of human or god realm rebirth is not equal to my teacher."

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Iron Grindstone Liu was a famous Zen nun, a successor of Guishan. She is the only named woman that appears in *The Record of Empty Hall*.

Grindstone and Guishan had hermitages near each other, so we can imagine that this was Grindstone visiting for morning tea. Her nickname, "Iron Grindstone," came from her skill at working with practitioners, encountering them in such a way as to grind away the rough spots, and reveal their radiance.

A turning point in this case lies in Iron Grindstone's inquiry about whether Guishan is going to the party. Mount Tai is far away, and so from the perspective of the divided mind, it's an odd question. If Guishan did try to get to the party in the usual way, it would be months before he arrived.

What is Iron Grindstone asking?

What's the subtle truth that Guishan presents in lying down?

Xutang has Grindstone, with quiet awe, acknowledge the teacher's karmic inheritance, the fruit of wholesome deeds, to be beyond the favorable rebirths of humans or gods.

How would you live this simple, intimate truth?

## CASE 67

# Iron Grindstone Liu's "Upside Down"<sup>†</sup>



Zihu asked Iron Grindstone Liu, “For a long time, I’ve been favorably inclined to ‘Iron Grindstone Liu.’ Is there someone for whom this name would be suitable or not?”

Grindstone said, “I won’t go there.”

Hu said, “Turn left, turn right.”

Grindstone said, “Venerable, is there someone who goes upside down?”

Hu then struck.

Xutang’s alternate saying for Iron Grindstone Liu: “Not knowing, rely on meeting an outsider.”



A couple of wonderful adepts playing with the dharma like it’s hacky sack! Unfortunately, we don’t know much about either of these ninth-century players. We do know that in the *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*, Zihu is listed as a successor of Nanquan. And this story is included in his entry.

Fortunately, Yuanwu, in his commentary in *The Blue Cliff Record*, has this:

Zihu set up a sign on his outside gate; on the sign were words saying, “Zihu has a dog: above, he takes people’s heads; in the middle, he takes people’s loins; below, he takes people’s legs. If you stop to talk to him, you’ll lose your body and life.” Whenever Zihu saw a newcomer, he would immediately shout and say, “Watch out for the dog!” As soon as the monk turned his head, Zihu would immediately return to the abbot’s room. [100](#)

Watch out for the dog! Where’d he go, where’d he go?

Iron Grindstone Liu, as mentioned in the previous case, was a close disciple and successor of Guishan. So the Grindstone and Zihu’s teachers were dharma brothers. Even though she was one of the few women we know of to receive transmission in the golden age, she does not have an entry in the *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*. And despite all the grinding away at the coarse understandings of various (mostly male) practitioners that she reputedly did, the previous case and this one are the sum total of what remains about her. What a pity!

Zihu had heard about her exploits and was favorably inclined, despite their different styles. While he was prone to slip away, the Grindstone ground away. Here, however, there is no mention of his dog-warning sign. He just wonders if she thinks she's a fit person to carry such a name.

As if changing places, Grindstone tries to slip away, being a person of neither yes or no—"I won't go there."

Zihu then grinds the Grindstone, turning to the right, and turning to the left.

The dialogue began with Zihu wondering, "Is there someone who...," and Grindstone now shares her wondering: You can go left and right, but how about going upside down? In other words, are you upside down in this world of upside-down views? So, just to be clear, are you right side up?

Pow.

And that's the story.

Yuanwu, though, uses this as an example of someone raising an interpretation, missing the point, and getting hit. He sees Grindstone's "Venerable, is there someone who goes upside down?" as such an interpretation and even has Hu hitting her before she finished speaking.<sup>[101](#)</sup>

I say, baloney! If Grindstones's words were interpretive, then Zihu too missed the mark. If they're both wrong, then every time words were spoken, a clear-eyed person would just strike. And muttering along as he does, Yuanwu's name is right there, clear as day, on the same indictment.

Xutang sees the point, "Not knowing, rely on meeting an outsider." Like a woman adept in male-dominated Zen. So, although this case is complete, the implications roll on and on.

"Venerable, is there someone who goes upside down?"

## CASE 68

# Guishan's Centered, Harmonious Functioning<sup>†</sup>



A monk lived in a mountain hut beneath Guishan's monastery. Yangshan\* went there and said, "Guishan publicly presented, saying, 'Many people simply receive this great opportunity, yet cannot put it to great use. Only if like a mountain, centered and harmonious, will they be together with it.' Say how you understand this."

The monk said, "Can you raise that again?"



As Yangshan repeated it, the monk kicked him in the chest, and into the railing. Yangshan returned and told Guishan about this. Guishan laughed gently, and then laughed heartily.

Xutang's alternate saying for Yangshan after being kicked by the monk: "Speaking thus, you haven't yet seen 'like a mountain, centered and harmonious.'"

---

What is this "great opportunity"? Of course, realizing kensho and the concomitant bliss. That passes. And then what? How to put it to great use? Many of us fall down in that continually, together with bits and pieces of living congruently with the truth of kensho.

Torei said,

An ancient said, "The heart of nirvana is easy to clarify; knowledge of differentiation is hard to illumine." Don't let undifferentiated knowledge obscure knowledge of differentiation.[102](#)

That's why in our Zen school we emphasize the importance not only of a clear and strong kensho, but also of the work subsequent to kensho. And, as our koan system has developed, we now have hundreds of barriers for the kensho person to pass through, including a thicket of thorns explicitly about daily life. For example, "When you're having a fight with your lover, where is mu?"

And, in addition to koan, we focus on careful attention to the details of everyday life. If you know where mu is when you're having a fight, and yet you pee all over the rim of the toilet and don't wipe it up, this is not the peeing of a mountain, centered and harmonious.

"Only if like a mountain, centered and harmonious, will they be together with it." And if you think you've got it, watch out. Yangshan, one of the greats in the Zen pantheon, seems to have been caught not putting it to use. The clever donkey monk kicked him in the ribs, such that he almost flew off the porch.

Xutang sees through this roughness—not it! Don't be duped by pretense. Just because somebody kicks you off their porch, it's a mistake to assume they were putting the great opportunity to work.

Guishan, perhaps at first attempting to maintain decorum, just laughed a little. And then let the great function roll.

Right now, how does the great function roll?

CASE 69

Hongzhou Miling's "Nothing Can  
Surpass This"<sup>†</sup>



The venerable Hongzhou Miling said, “Nothing can surpass this.”

At that time, a monk asked, “What is not yet examined in ‘Nothing can surpass this?’ ”

Ling said, “Nothing is left out.”

Later, a monk asked Changqing, “Why ‘Nothing is left out?’ ”

Qing said, “What would you have it known as?”

Xutang's alternate saying for Changqing, "The echo obeys its flow."

"Nothing can surpass *this*" is an utterance of the truth body (*dharmakaya*) and points to the same truth as "Just *this*." Unfortunately, "Just this" has become a Zen cliché.

Fortunately, in the case, a monk came forward and asked about *this*. Is *this* a dead end, then? Is there anything that is divided or left out? If not, how would you know? Doesn't it take two to tango or divide and assess?

Miling's truth body, including the two tango-ing, saw nothing coming or going, nothing left out. Dualism thoroughly integrated, included, in his undivided heart. So Xutang said, "The echo obeys its flow."

Miling's "Nothing is left out" put an end to it for the monk, as far as we know. But others were still talking about this encounter a hundred years later. Changqing was asked about it and turned the question back to the monk.

When nothing can surpass this, and nothing is left out, what would you call *this*?

## CASE 70

Fengxue's "You Passed Through Too"



Fengxue\* asked the venerable Guanghui Zhen, “During the Huichang persecution, where did the dharma-protecting benevolent deities go?”

Hui said, “Always within the gated walls of the marketplace. Probably, at the time, no one saw.”

Xue said, “You passed through too!”

Xutang's alternate saying for Fengxue: "Know your power is fragile."

---

The Huichang persecution (843–844) was seared into the memory of all Chinese, especially Buddhists. Clearly, it is on Fengxue's mind in this case, and he wasn't even born until fifty years after the persecution ended.

Economic issues as well as the competition from Confucianism and Daoism were among its causes.

According to Buswell and Lopez,

The illicit buying and selling of ordination certificates in order to avoid taxation may also have been a contributing factor in the restrictions the government imposed on Buddhism.... Over 260,000 monks and nuns were defrocked and returned to lay life.... Hundreds of monasteries were destroyed and much of the wealth confiscated from those temples that escaped destruction.... Schools located in isolated mountain sites in the countryside, such as other strands of the Chan school, were able to survive the persecution and subsequently flourish.<sup>103</sup>

How could such a terrible thing happen?

Dharma practitioners in the ancient world relied on dharma-protecting benevolent deities. Indeed, Buddhist missionaries coming from the West were often successful in the ancient world due to their capacity to convert local malevolent deities into protectors of the dharma, at least as much (and probably more) than due to the power of their zazen and wisdom. Displays of supernatural powers were especially appreciated.

According to Tanya Storch, here is a ranking of monks in ancient China:



Huijiao's classification ranked monks in the following order: (1) translators (*yijing*), (2) exegetes (*yijie*), (3) divine wonders (*shenyi*), (4) practitioners of meditation (*xichan*), (5) elucidators of the regulations (*minglu*), (6) those who sacrificed themselves (*wangshen*), (7) chanters of scriptures (*songjing*), (8) benefactors (*xingfu*), (9) hymnodists (*jingshi*), and (10) proselytizers (*changdao*).<sup>104</sup>

In the face of a malevolent deity, we also might prefer a divine worker to a meditator and certainly to a proselytizer, someone who could give a good talk.

What went wrong? If the dharma-protecting benevolent deities were so hot on the buddhadharma, why were a worldly emperor and his soldiers as successful at closing temples and defrocking monks and nuns as they were during the Huichang persecution? Where did those protecting deities go?

In this case, Fengxue and Guanghai Zhen soberly look at the issue. Hui's comment, "Always within the gated walls of the marketplace," suggests that the guardian deities abandoned the monastic cloisters. Perhaps because dharma teachers got too involved in the marketplace. Indeed, one of the causes of the Huichang persecution, cited above, was the selling of ordination certificates, apparently a common practice at the time.

This koan also reveals a modern-like suspicion of such a belief in the supernatural, especially in Xutang's alternate saying, "Know your power is fragile." Even though the gods favor you, even though you are an awakened practitioner with the power to chase away harmful spirits and summon clouds and rain, you are a human being in the midst of the great universe. Your power is fragile.

Life has a way of showing us our fragility. And yet our sense of entitlement, born of self-importance, can suddenly emerge. Fengxue's "You passed through too!" levels the field.

"My god, my god, why have you forsaken me?"

## CASE 71

# Ciming's “Four Awe-Inspiring Manners”



On winter solstice, the venerable Ciming\* hung a sign with a divination symbol in front of the monk's hall with a note: "If you understand, you won't fail to hit the mark in the four awe-inspiring manners."

As soon as the head seat saw this he said to the assembly, "Venerables, today, let go and participate."

Xutang's alternate saying for the head seat: "Acting on behalf of others, I will visit you in the Life Prolonging Hall."

---

Understanding this one is easy. The real magic is our four awe-inspiring manners—walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Amazing! You can let go and participate in them all day long. Even more so, you can go visit a sick friend, cast a ballot for compassion and good sense, or drive your child home from school.

But if it's imitation—you imitating you doing awe-inspiring stuff—then it lacks the whole-hearted intimacy that's available and you'll be visiting you yourself on life support in the Life Prolonging Hall, the monastery infirmary.

A few words about the context here might help. Katagiri Roshi frequently told a story about Ciming that I also told in *Keep Me In Your Heart a While: The Haunting Zen of Dainin Katagiri*. Ciming was well-known for visiting an old woman who lived near the monastery. I wonder if he resorted to leaving a sign to teach the monks due to his frequent absences. The temple director often asked him, "What is the essence of Zen?"

Every day Ciming said, "You are the temple director. Please take care of temple affairs."

After hearing this the umpteenth time, the director became angry with Ciming. He was already working hard every day, and he didn't need to be told to take care of temple affairs.

Meanwhile, every day Ciming went to visit an old woman who lived near the temple. One rainy day, the monk hid in the bushes and waited to ambush Ciming. Just as Ciming was about to pass, the monk jumped out in front of him. Without thinking, and contrary to the monk's intention, he immediately bowed and stood silently. Ciming asked, "What are you doing on this narrow road?"

The monk grabbed Ciming by the collar and said, "Tell me the true meaning of Zen right now! If you don't, I'll knock you down."

Ciming said, “You are the temple director. Please take care of temple affairs.”

Immediately, the monk knocked Ciming down onto the muddy path. In that moment, the monk had realization. Ciming said, “If you hit the teacher, the other monks will accuse you of wrongdoing. You should not go back to the temple. You should go away.”

In the present case, as I noted, Ciming is absent, with the old woman, encountering the director, or perhaps after getting knocked down into the mud, receiving a visitor in the Life Prolonging Hall—but still hitting the mark of the four awe-inspiring behaviors.

In Ciming and the director’s absence, the head monk steps forward. Awe-inspiring! And gives a delightful practice direction—let go and participate.

Now, how can you hit the mark in the four awe-inspiring manners?

## CASE 72

# Daowu's "Fellow Traveler"



A monk asked [Tianhuang] Daowu,\* “Why is it difficult to find the tracks of a bodhisattva who has no special ability?”

Wu said, “They are known only by a fellow traveler.”

The monk said, “Venerable, are they known by you?”

Wu said, “Not known.”

The monk said, “Why ‘not known?’ ”

Wu said, “Go. You don’t meet my words.”

Xutang’s alternate saying, “Only resemble conditions.”



The great bodhisattvas of the great vehicle trailer park, like Manjusri, Samantabhadra, and Avalokiteshvara, have extraordinary abilities, superpowers, to carry beings from this shore of suffering to the other shore of nirvana. Manjusri has wisdom that cuts through illusion like a diamond sword. Samantabhadra flies around on a white elephant and does what is supremely good. Avalokiteshvara hears and responds to all the suffering in the six realms of existence by taking whatever form is necessary.

What about bodhisattvas with no special abilities, no superpowers, who don’t stand out from the crowd, who can’t be traced, who leave no tracks? After washing their hands, in a public place, like a Zen center, they clean up any water that has splattered around. When they see a plastic bottle in the grass at the park, they pick it up and recycle it. When they sit, they just sit. When they stand, they just stand. Having gone through the bullshit-burning furnace of dharma training, they have no horse in this or any other race.

Such a one can only be known by one who has done the extraordinary work of becoming completely ordinary. Yet, being completely ordinary is not known. Only resemble conditions.

The “Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi” says this: “With practice hidden, function secretly, like a fool, like an idiot. Just to continue in this way is called the host within the host.”<sup>105</sup>

The monk in this case doesn’t seem to have let go yet, either of who he is or of what he knows. So Daowu let *him* go. Xutang, though, raises a barrier that is so high you can’t go over it, so wide you can’t go around it, so low that you can’t go under it: “Only resemble conditions.”

In this tender world that resembles conditions produced by cause-and-effect, what is a bodhisattva without any special abilities to do?



## CASE 73

Jinfeng's “Pillow”<sup>†</sup>



Jinfeng\* picked up a pillow and said, “Everyone calls this a ‘pillow.’ Jinfeng says, ‘Not.’ ”

A monk said, “I haven’t yet examined this, Venerable, what would you call it?”

Feng picked up the pillow and said, “Be together with it, then comply, and go.”

Then Feng said, “What would you call it?”

“Pillow.”

Feng said, “You have fallen into the lining of Jinfeng’s nest.”

Xutang’s alternate saying for the monk, “Throw the pillow right in his face.”



We construct the world through names. Yet names are such arbitrary contrivances. After all, the word is not the thing. What is the thing? Why does it matter?

Easily duped by shortcuts, we call something a pillow and that’s the end of inquiry. However, knowledge of what things are in essence, especially this thing we call “me,” is the dharma door of liberation. In this case, hidden in Jinfeng’s playfulness is compassionate activity, bent on awaking the monk.

Torei said,

What are referred to here as empty and temporal are different names for real nature. The basic substance of real nature is empty and pure; there is nothing to it to name, but the label of emptiness is imposed on it. There is nothing that does not appear in the substance of inherent nature, according to differentiations; the label of temporal is imposed on this.[106](#)

Picking up the pillow, picking up the self, what do you call it?

For the examination of this point, Jinfeng gives specific instructions. First, be together with it. If you want to see what a thing is, you have to be that thing. Indeed, in working with the *mu* koan, the oft-repeated instruction is, “Just be *mu*! If you be *mu*, you see *mu*.”

Second, comply, presumably, with the convention. If you are you, you call yourself by your true name, which, yes, is nothing to name, but in my case, it sounds a lot like “Dosho.”

Third, go. Go on with your story.

The monk seems to comply with Jinfeng's formula and yet does not meet with Jinfeng's approval. Jinfeng says the monk has gotten tangled in the lining of his nest and so has become the nest. Where did the monk go wrong?

Everyone calls it a pillow. What do you call it?

## CASE 74

# Dongshan's Tea Party<sup>†</sup>



Qinshan\* was together with Xuefeng and Yantou\* and sat with Dongshan, who served tea. Qinshan closed his eyes. Dongshan said, “Where have you gone?”

Qinshan said, “Entered fixed arrival.”

Dongshan said, “The fixed source has no gate. Where did you enter?”

Xutang's alternate saying for Qinshan: "Today I am hard-pressed."

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Ah, what a wonderful scene! Four Zen greats having tea together. At this time, according to my grokking of the record, Qinshan was the youngster at about twenty-six years old, Xuefeng was thirty-eight, Yantou, thirty-two, and Dongshan, who had been or would be a teacher for all three younger monks, fifty-three.

Xuefeng and Yantou, heirs of Deshan, had met Qinshan while the three trained under Deshan. The two older monks recognized Qinshan's potential, so when it also became clear that Deshan's vigorous way of shouting and beating was just not the right dharma milieu for Qinshan to awaken, they went on pilgrimage with him. Turns out that, even in ancient times, shouting and beating was not skillful means for everyone. And it seems to have been a "thing" in the Deshan line for everybody to collude together to wake each other up.

After spending some time with a successor of Nanquan, Zishan Huanzhong, the three headed off to see Dongshan Liangjie, regarded as one of the greatest masters in the Caoshan lineage. There certainly was a lot of cross-fertilization going on in the good old days!

Perhaps, in this case, the three had just arrived at Dongshan and were having their arrival sit-down with the master, probably chatting about the schedule at Huanzhong's place, the condition of the roads between there and Dongshan, and likely some wild stories about Deshan shouting and beating people. In the midst of the conversation, Dongshan noticed that Qinshan looked to be sitting zazen, maybe soaking up the vibe of sweet company.

"Where have you gone?"

"Entered fixed arrival" means that Qinshan was settling into samadhi, much like the Silent Illumination zazen that the Caodong lineage became known for later. I suspect that Xutang had an agenda in selecting this case, showing how one of the lineage's namesakes,

Dongshan, regarded such withering away in samadhi. There's a place for it, sure, but here we're having tea!

Dongshan pressed the youngster hard, but without shouting and beating, "The fixed source has no gate. Where did you enter?"

He showed that for the authentic school of Bodhidharma, opening the eye of wisdom is paramount, and Silent Illumination was (and remains) the near enemy of living, compassionate, responsive Zen.

Qinshan had no reply, but he stayed on to study with Dongshan, looking for the no-gate gate. After he became Dongshan's dharma heir at twenty-seven, he traveled to Mount Qin. Curiously, and just as was the case with Dongshan, his major enlightenment experience happened after he had left his teacher. Although in Qinshan's case, his awakening occurred while giving a talk, the only such occurrence that I'm aware of, and thus secured a place for himself in the *Kensho Book of World Records*:

Qinshan awakened before the great assembly, and said,

"Dongshan asked me, 'Where have you come from?' "

"I said, 'From Mount Great Compassion.' "

"Dongshan said, 'Did you see Great Compassion?' "

"I said, 'I saw it.' "

"Dongshan said, 'Did you see it before form? Or did you see it after form?' "

"I said, 'I saw it neither before nor after form.' "

Dongshan was silent.

Qinshan then [said to the congregation at Mount Qin], "I left the master too soon. I had not yet fully realized Dongshan's meaning."<sup>[107](#)</sup>

Don't you leave your teacher too soon! Although, in this case it all turned out fine, and truly, stay or go, there is no guarantee. The turning point of the koan within the koan is this: "Did you see it before form? Or did you see it after form?"



Qinshan's response is an intellectual dodge, not meeting Dongshan, not entering gate. Not yet.

Where have you gone?

## CASE 75

# Xuansha's "One Bright Pearl"<sup>†</sup>



A monk asked Xuansha, “‘The entire ten-direction world is one bright pearl.’ What study will cultivate not-understanding?”

Sha said, “What use is understanding?”

Xutang’s alternate saying for Xuansha: “Son, assigning a name for *what* is surely a wound to the self.”

---

The monk here begins by quoting an often-used saying of Xuansha. Dogen's "One Bright Pearl," for example, takes up the more common question of a monk: "How can I understand it?"<sup>108</sup> The present case seems to be built on the former.

To paraphrase, the phenomenal, "ten-direction world," and the fundamental, "one bright pearl," are one and the same. Yet, the monk, who seems to have some clarity, acknowledges that when we turn toward seeing the undifferentiated brilliance, we turn away, because turning toward is the function of dividing consciousness. If understanding doesn't reach it, how could one cultivate not understanding?

What do to?

Albert Low said,

When the world is seen in the Way of the Great Perfect Mirror, everything is suspended in knowing. No "knower" is necessary or even possible; no viewpoint exists from which all is seen. The seeing of it is the being of it.<sup>109</sup>

Low's "no viewpoint" is the "not understanding" raised here by the monk. So, the way to see the fundamental is to be the phenomenal. "The seeing of it is the being of it."

The *what* in "What study will cultivate not seeing?" is also a key point that we've touched on earlier. See Case 26, "Xuefeng Seals What," for example. *What* refers to the fundamental in a sideways manner so as not to violate the ancient taboo of speaking the emperor's name (aka, the fundamental's name), because to do so is also an attempt to turn toward, but in effect turns away.

On this point, Xutang said, "Assigning a name for *what* is surely a wound to the self."

That's the pickle, you see. Fortunately, the pickle is also the vinegar! "The entire ten-direction world is one bright pearl."

The monk seems to get this and so sets up the question as a statement, the statement as a question. “The *what*’s study cultivates not-understanding?”

Xuansha’s response, “*What* use is understanding?” is more than a question or a statement, but an utterance of the phenomenal and fundamental arriving together. The *what* uses understanding too.

Dogen also emphasized the paramount importance of becoming a not-understanding person:

Continuing in this way, is this way. The treasure storehouse will open the self and you will enjoy [it] comfortably as you wish. [110](#)

Sounds sweet, but perhaps you’re thinking, “Well, that’s all well and good, but what use is not-understanding?”

## CASE 76

Xuansha's "No Relationship"<sup>†</sup>



Xuansha arrived in the Putian district. He was welcomed with athletic performances. The next day, he asked elder Xiaotang, “Yesterday, a lot of noise. Where did it go?!”

Xiaotang lifted the corner of his kesa.

Sha said, “That misses it. No relationship.”

Xutang's alternate saying for Xiaotang: "I have received your deep compassion."

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A couple of old Zen hands meet and talk softly about old times. Wansong notes with his gentle touch, "The true qualities of people of the Way seeing each other—how do they tell stories?"<sup>111</sup>

Whitfield notes, "Such shows or festivals 百戲 were very popular during Tang and Song times, where such feats as lifting a tripod as a test of strength, climbing poles, fire-walking and the dragon lantern dance were all part of the lively events."<sup>112</sup>

That was yesterday, though. Where have they gone, these true qualities, the way we were? Where have yesterday's joys and sorrows, hopes and fears gone?

So much noise. So much commotion. Now the old black dog just sleeps on the rug. My wife prepares early morning tea for us in the next room, and soon we will be going to the zendo to sit zazen.

Lifting up the corner of this robe, the cotton, the connections within the robe and within the fibers, the farmers, truck drivers, and merchants, the culture of making the robe just so, and, of course, the earth, sun, moon, and stars, the gentle talk we had under the covers, they are all lifted up.

Where did yesterday go? "Right here now," you might say.

Yet Yuanwu said,

Although [you] are straightforwardly this way, bear in mind that there is an established gate of transformation within the skill of raising up, the skill of challenging. Yet this is still a small thing. If true to the primary matter, there is no relationship.<sup>113</sup>

This intimacy is so intimate that there is no relationship left lingering. In terms of the primary matter, the most important thing, yesterday is just yesterday, now gone completely. The ash in the



fireplace is not wood, nor will it ever be again. Today is just today. The dog snores this snore just once, and it's gone forever.

Even subtle melancholy misses it, for there is no relationship. No relationship. This is the deep color of true compassion. This is the place of intimate meeting.

“I have received your deep compassion.”

“This tea,” I say to Tetsugan, “what a delicious blend of oolong and black! Just right.”

How do you tell stories?

## CASE 77

# Xuansha's "Gate Is Closed"



Deep in the night, Dizang\* was with Xuansha in the abbot's room telling stories. Then Xuansha said, "The attendant has closed the mountain gate, how will you get out?"

Dizang said, "What do you call a gate?"

Xutang's alternate saying for Dizang, "We are the same family, father and son."

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Xuansha was about thirty-years Dizang's senior. And here they are telling stories deep in the night. A lovely intimacy for people of the Way. Then it's closing time, and, oh, my, the mountain gate has already been locked, how can you get through?

“What do you call a gate?”

Gates can divide the world and then open to a courtyard, a warm entryway, a path through a garden. They are provisional designations for meeting the other and passing through. When we lie naked together with our lover, the skin especially is gate to gate.

“Gate to gate” comes from an old Zen ditty by Shitou, “The Agreement of Difference and Sameness”:

In the Way—no north-south ancestor  
The source of awareness shines moonlight bright  
The undercurrent pours through branching streams  
Grasping it is original confusion  
Inner-pattern accordance is also not enlightenment  
Every field is gate-to-gate<sup>114</sup>

Teacher-student intimacy, of course, is of a different type, but in this case it is like moonlight, also “gate-to-gate.” Telling stories, Dizang and Xuansha meet completely so that there is no north-south ancestor—no separation, no direction, no before and after.

And the gate at closing time shows us that we are one family. How can we call home?

Gate to gate. But how?

Later, when Dizang became a teacher, a young monk named Xiushan asked him, “How can one help the world?”

Dizang said, “What do you call the world?”<sup>115</sup>

## CASE 78

# Guishan's "Directly Expressing the Matter"



Yangshan was attending Guishan when suddenly they heard a bird warbling. Gui said, “It directly expresses the matter, and yet...”

“Speaking it doesn’t turn people toward it.”

Gui said, “Why?”

“Speaking it is too direct.”

Gui said, “Are dharma gates limited? Silence pushes a child down.”

“Regarding ‘pushes down,’ what do you say?”

Guishan hit the zazen platform three times.

Xutang’s alternate saying for Yangshan after the encounter, “The venerable cannot conceal it.”



The song of the bird, the buzz of the passing car, the sense of appreciation—and the heart that arises together with the song, the buzz, and the appreciation—they all express the matter directly. Why don’t we see it until we do?

Directly calling out to people on the street or online—“IT IS JUST THIS!”—just won’t do. Why? “IT IS JUST THIS!” also expresses it directly. Is direct speech alone not a dharma gate?

Guishan kindly notes that “Silence pushes a child down.”

When I was a young, headstrong Zen practitioner attending to Katagiri Roshi, he was often silent, and sometimes it felt oppressive, pushing me down. It was just what I needed to actually hear something other than my own self-centered defensive narrative. He offered the buzz of the passing car, the zazen seat being struck three times.

Xutang wants Yangshan to add that the venerable Guishan striking the zazen seat is also fully revealed.

Do you hear it?

## CASE 79

# Changqing's “Almost Let Him Slip By”<sup>†</sup>





Venerable Changqing Leng asked a monk, “Where are you coming from?”

The monk said, “Gushan.”

“Gushan has the saying, ‘Don’t straddle the stone gate.’ I’d like to ask, what do you say?”

“Last night I stayed at Announcing Compassion.”

Qing said, "If my stick struck you on the back, what then?"

The monk said, "If the venerable uses his stick, today a person would receive the offering fruitfully."

Qing said, "Almost let him slip by."

Xutang's alternate saying: "Grasping the flame, traveling at night."



Changqing and Gushan were both prominent successors of Xuefeng. When meeting this monk, Changqing pokes around to see whether he's straddling the sill of the stone gate, one foot into the buddhadharma and one foot out.

"Announcing Compassion" seems to be the name of a temple. The monk reports resting in the expression of compassion, so he had that going for him, at least. Changqing continues the inquiry, "Announcing compassion, eh, how about if I gave you a blow? How'd that be for your happy place?"

"Ouch!" I'd say.

The monk, voice strong and clear, has more to say, "If you hit me, it won't be in vain." But it comes down to "Ouch!"

Xutang seems quite impressed and eulogizes the monk, "Grasping the flame, traveling at night." As if to say, "A standard bearer taking a step off the hundred-foot-high pole."

Did Changqing let him slip by or not?

## CASE 80

Xuefeng's "Open the Gate and Direct  
Realization Comes"



Yunmen asked Baling, “Xuefeng said, ‘Open the gate and direct realization comes.’ What is the meaning of this?”

Ling said, “Punching the venerable’s nose.”

Men said, “An asura directed his hatred, grabbed Mount Sumeru, gave it a slap, then leapt to the Brahma heaven and explained the

buddhadharma to the gods. But why did he have to go to Japan to go into hiding?”

Ling said, “There are none whose heart does a good deed this way.”

Men said, “What did you mean when you said ‘punching’?”

Xutang’s alternate for Baling, as the saying goes: “A good time was had by all.”



“Open the gate and direct realization comes.”

What’s the meaning of this? Yunmen quotes his teacher, Xuefeng, directly laying it right out there. What gate is he talking about?

*What?* It’s gotta be around here somewhere.

Given Yunmen’s trippy response, Baling could be talking about the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the Western Paradise. Indeed, Yunmen seems to compare Baling to an asura. Sir, have you no dignity? Perhaps it’s you that should run off to Japan and hide? Yunmen’s intent does seem to need some work, that’s for sure.

In any case, a good time was had by all, and thanks for that, but who benefited from the misdirection?

After all, Xuefeng said, “Open the gate and direct realization comes.”

## CASE 81

# Dongshan Cong's "Sign for Later Generations"



Whenever someone new came to Dongshan Cong's\* place he would ask, "What do you make of Guishan being reborn as a water buffalo?"

All around, each and every one could not agree.

Dongshan then asked Xuedou,\* who said, "Make a sign for later generations."

Shan was about to say something when Dou took a zazen prop, made a sweeping gesture, then started to walk out.

Shan said, “Come sit in a high seat.”

Dou said, “I haven’t yet joined the community.”

Xutang’s alternate saying for when Dongshan was about to say something: “Spirit of a dead water buffalo.”<sup>116</sup>



Dongshan Cong and Xuedou Chongxian were both in the Yunmen lineage, but seem not to have affinity. When offered a high seat, a place for a senior, Xuedou not so graciously declines.

Now, what about the water buffalo? There is a backstory to this case. Guishan is known to have said,

“After I die, go down the mountain to a donor’s house and you’ll find me reborn as a water buffalo. On my left flank five characters will be written, saying, ‘This is the monk Guishan.’ At that time, would it be right to call him ‘The monk Guishan,’ or would it be right to call him ‘water buffalo’?”<sup>117</sup>

Understandably, in this either/or situation—Guishan or water buffalo—some will see it one way and some will see it the other. That disagreement had been going on in the Zen groves for three hundred years from the time that Guishan raised the issue to the time of this encounter between Dongshan Cong and Xuedou. “All around, each and every one could not agree.”

Each choice, you see, limits your options.

How can we be free when on the horns of such a dilemma?

Xuedou knew how to play in the field of yes and no. “Make a sign for later generations.”

What would the sign say?

What does the spirit of a living water buffalo look like?



## CASE 82

# Guishan's "Way's Inner Pattern"



Xiangyan and Yangshan were making cakes when Guishan appeared. Gui said, “My former teacher Baizhang was singularly intimate with the Way’s inner pattern.”<sup>[118](#)</sup>

Yangshan and Xiangyan, looking at each other, said, “What person can reply to these words?”

Gui said, “Someone must reply.”

Yang said, “Who?”

Gui pointed to a water buffalo and said, “Speak! Speak!”

Yang took a bunch of straw and Yan took a bucket of water to the water buffalo who then bowed his head to eat and then drank.

Gui said, “One’s with it! One’s with it! One’s not with it! One’s not with it!”

Yang and Yan bowed together. Gui said, “Sometimes bright. Sometimes dark.”

Xutang’s alternate saying for Guishan’s last words, as the saying goes, “Working hard but not getting much done.”



Here is an example of a sub-genre in the koan literature, “Two People Do the Same Dang Thing Yet One Is Right and One Is Wrong.” Probably the best-known example is Case 26 in *The No Gate Barrier*, “Two Monks Roll Up the Blind:”

Clear Cool Temple’s Great Fayan, before going up to the midday meal, pointed to the blind. Then two monks rolled up the blind together. Yan said, “One gained, one lost.”<sup>119</sup>

In this record, we find another example of this genre in Case 86, “Nanquan’s ‘Windy Night.’” The present case, however, is a more complex than either of these situations.

We begin with two practitioners, Xiangyan and Yangshan, trying to get something done—making cakes, probably rice cakes. Their teacher, Guishan, happens by and gets in the way by bragging about his old teacher, saying, “My former teacher Baizhang was singularly intimate with the Way’s inner pattern.”

What’s a filial student to do? Surpass your teacher’s teacher with your intimacy with the Way’s inner pattern? Such would be lacking in filial piety, and intimacy too. Oh, my buddha, no!

So Xiangyan and Yangshan try to sidestep the challenge. Guishan won’t have it and brings his favorite bovine into the case—the water

buffalo. One monk feeds the water buffalo and one monk waters it. The water buffalo and the monks bow the same. Yet one is with it and one isn't. The water buffalo's bow is not evaluated.

The essential turning point in this koan is this: Is Yangshan or Xiangyan the one with it? If you can see that, you too might be singularly intimate with the Way's inner pattern, eating Baizhang's rice and shitting Baizhang's shit.

## CASE 83

### Xuefeng's “Go Go”



Yongquan went to see Xuefeng off. Feng got on the palanquin and Quan said, “This one is lifted by four people. That one is lifted by how many people?”

Feng lifted his body and said, “Say what?”

Quan again raised the question.

Feng said, “Go. Go. He doesn’t see.”

Xutang's alternate saying in place of Yongquan's raising the question again: "The venerable Xuefeng rides stably in the palanquin."

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To be riding in a palanquin, Xuefeng must have been in the "senior teacher" phase of life. Senior Teacher Hakuin, almost a thousand years later, also rode in palanquins to teaching engagements, and even reports an eight-porter ride. Yongquan asks about this and that. Could be porters, tires, or the number of horses under your hood. In this one empty world, how many here, how many there?

Riding stably, Xuefeng's response discloses the simple truth, the turning point of birth and death. What is it?

Yongquan seems like he didn't get it, but Hakuin, commenting on this case, sure did: "Be careful on your way."[120](#)

## CASE 84

# Deshan's Beating People





Deshan and a monk took a good look at each other, then both acted like they were going to attack. Shan said, “Rude act! Come close and suffer the blows from this mountain monk’s staff.”

The monk shook out his sleeves and started to leave. Shan said, “Thus I spare you! You deserve half.”

The monk turned and shouted. Shan hit him and said, “You only get it when I beat you.”

The monk said, “The discerning eye is everywhere.”

Shan said, “It’s natural to have eyes.”

The monk stretched his eyes wide and said, “Meow,” then left.

Shan said, “Even the Yellow River is clear once every three thousand years.”

Xutang’s alternate saying: “All my life, I’ve been fond of beating people. Today I shouldn’t stop a prisoner from enhancing his wisdom.”



Even a stopped clock is right a lot more often than this monk is clear. Meanwhile, Deshan, with his lifetime fondness for beating people, leaves no prisoners behind. See Case 24, “Xuefeng Is Set Straight” for more beatings.

This case reminds me of two ten-year olds roughhousing in the back bedroom. I want to holler, “Hey, you kids, knock it off immediately or I’ll come back there and knock the Zen off the both a you.”

But where’s the turning word? Don’t be blind and say that it’s in the bit about eyes, cats, and others, being everywhere and natural. That’s all just calling “Wolf!”

In any case, did Deshan spare this monk or not?

If so, which half did he deserve?

If not, how’s the Yellow River looking these days?

## CASE 85

Daochang's "Hear and See"<sup>†</sup>



A monk asked Venerable Daochang Ne,\* “Not following karma, how can I attain the true nature of hearing and seeing?”

“You hear and see.”

The monk bowed.

Chang said, “A deaf person also sings the ‘What?’ family tune, themselves not knowing preferences for pitch.”

The monk said, “The nature of hearing is just like this!”

Chang said, “A rock stands in emptiness. Churning flames burn within water.”

Xutang’s alternate saying for the place the monk says, “The nature of hearing is just like this!”: “Call the monk to come closer. If he hesitates, I propose spitting at him.”



Without being a slave to the painful and numbing fruits of the activities of body, speech, and thought, how can we really hear and see? Is there something here to get hold of? What is the true nature of hearing and seeing?

Daochang does an exceptional job of presenting the essential function of hearing and seeing. We’re all members, he says, of this What? family, and when we get a taste of no ears and no eyes, we sing the family tune, free from likes and dislikes, free from self-consciousness.

Moreover, emptiness and form, essence and function, stand out in relief like a rock in emptiness, in dynamism like a flame in the heart of water, beyond our large-brain primate capacity to make sense of it all.

As for the monk, Xutang seems to suspect that he gets the idea but not the living reality. No worries, life will be the test. When we hesitate, we’re lost in karma and we’ll get spit on by the ten thousand things.

“The nature of hearing is just like this!”

## CASE 86

Nanquan's "Windy Night"<sup>†</sup>



Nanquan asked a monk, “Ever since last night it’s been very windy.”

The monk said, “Ever since last night it’s been very windy.”

Quan said, “A gust broke off a branch from the pine at the front gate.”

The monk said, “A gust broke off a branch from the pine at the front gate.”

Later, Quan asked another monk, “Ever since last night it’s been very windy.”

The monk said, “What is the wind?”

Quan said, “A gust broke off a branch from the pine at the front gate.”

The monk said, “What is a pine?”

Quan said, “One got it, one missed it.”

Xutang’s alternate for Nanquan’s follow-up: “Sigh and say, ‘The Ming emperor was fortunate during the Shu era.’ ”



It was windy all through the night. Nanquan, curious to explore this wind, brought the matter up with a couple of students. The first flavorlessly responds, adding nothing, subtracting nothing. This wind is just as it is. The broken pine branch is just as it is.

The second student challenges the assumptions. What is the wind? What is the pine? And so Nanquan challenges us. One got it, one missed it. Which is which? Without falling into getting or missing, without taking sides in a family squabble, when presented with “A gust broke off a branch from the pine at the front gate,” what do you say?

Xutang sees the situation as sighingly parallel to how “The Ming emperor was fortunate during the Shu era.” The Ming emperor reigned about 2000 B.C.E., and the Shu was one of the Three Kingdoms. For the meaning of this, consult a PhD. in Chinese history. I have no idea.



## CASE 87

# Manjusri's "Kill and Give Life"



Manjusri directed Sudhana to gather medicine, saying, “In the future, gather whatever is medicine.”

Sudhana went all over gathering, finding none that is not medicine, and nevertheless returned to Manjusri and said, “There are none that are not medicine.”

Manjusri said, “Next, gather whatever is medicine.”

Sudhana then picked up one blade of grass and handed it to Manjusri. Manjusri grasped the blade, held it up, and said, “This medicine can kill and also can give life.”

Xutang’s alternate saying for the place Manjusri received the grass: “Take a sniff and return it to Sudhana.”

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Dip into dharma mythology here with *The Flower Ornament Scripture*’s final chapter, “The Gandavyuha.” Even today, among a quirky group of practitioners, it is a hugely popular tale of the spiritual quest. The youth Sudhana is launched on pilgrimage by Manjusri. He travels through one hundred cities and sees over fifty teachers—including men and women, monastics and laypeople, humans and nonhumans.

When Manjusri first meets Sudhana, he instructs him:

It is hard to find beings who set their hearts on supreme enlightenment. It is even harder to find beings who, once they have set their minds on enlightenment, seek the practice of enlightening beings. An enlightening being is to attain certainty through true spiritual friends, spiritual benefactors, for the realization of omniscience. One should indefatigably seek spiritual benefactors and be tireless in seeing spiritual benefactors. One should respectfully follow the appropriate instructions of spiritual benefactors and should carry out the techniques skillfully devised by spiritual benefactors, without interruption.<sup>[121](#)</sup>

Sudhana demonstrates indefatigable following of the instruction of Manjusri, gathering heaps of herbs, finding that in the right hands, each and everything is medicine with the power to kill, the power to give life. This is such a wonderful principle, but what about how we actually function? As old age, sickness, and death come, can we truly receive them as medicine, curing us of the disease of our attachments to youthful capability, to feeling like we want, and to life itself?

Xutang, in a farewell poem to his Japanese successor, Daio, uses the imagery of Sudhana's journey:

A tour of the southern lands ends in a moment;  
After the winds of karma blew fog through one hundred cities.  
Now and everywhere there is no good friend.  
When you release your grip from the precipice, who is most  
important to see?<sup>[122](#)</sup>

Picking up this life that ends in a moment, give it a sniff, and hand it on to the next generation.

## CASE 88

### Xuefeng's “Then Don’t”



When High Seat Fu joined the assembly of Xuefeng, he took his time crossing through the gate to meet with Xuefeng, and instead met with the monastery director. The next day he came back, bowed to Xuefeng and said, “Yesterday my emotions stirred and I wronged the venerable.”

Feng said, “If you know this kind of thing, then don’t.”

Xutang's alternate saying: "Where I live, a thousand come, ten thousand go."

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We don't know what stirred Fu's emotions, or in what way they were stirred. He was a monastic with many summer practice periods under his belt, and still he struggled, apparently, with conflicting feelings. In this instance, the stirring was just too much, and he abandoned decorum. And then felt regret.

This is the turning point of the koan and we actualize it when we, like High Seat Fu, go through the wringer.

Xuefeng brings us back to character development, integrating the stirring of emotions with everyday behavior, feeling one way and yet doing the right thing for ourselves and all the many beings. When it's time to bow, the most compassionate activity may be just to bow.

Or perhaps Xuefeng's "don't" has another level of meaning. Stop.

Xutang would have Xuefeng simply acknowledge the place he lives, a place with so much coming and going. So many joys and sorrows. Ten times the going as the coming.

"Walking casually with arms swinging/extinguishing great emptiness."<sup>123</sup>

## CASE 89

# Shiti's “Without Deception”





One day Shiti\* saw his attendant going up to the main hall with his alms bowl. He called the attendant, and the attendant answered, “Yes!”

Ti said, “Where are you going?”

“Up to the main hall.”

Ti said, “How could I not know you are going up to the main hall for the meal?”

“What else is there to say?”

Ti said, “I only ask you about your part in this matter.”

“You seem to ask about my part in this matter. A true person is going up to the main hall for the meal.”

Ti said, “My attendant acts without deception.”

Xutang’s alternate saying: “If you stop investigating, it’s hard to treat the connection well.”



Enter a mini morality tale obscuring a fine turning point! Where are you going?

Since this action  
Is not arisen from condition,  
Nor arisen causelessly,  
It follows that there is no agent.

“If there is no action and no agent,  
Where could the fruit of action be?  
Without a fruit,  
Where is there an experiencer?

So says Nagarjuna in the *Mulamadhaymakakarika*.<sup>124</sup> These verses offer great questions and dharma analysis pointing to the principle of emptiness, but Shiti’s question is about how it functions.

The monk’s best effort, “A true person is going up to the main hall for the meal,” causes the faces of all the buddhas and ancestors to turn red with shame. Shiti manages a rather waggish retort.

Even Xutang’s comment states the obvious. If you give up on inquiry, how can you and your teacher entangle in the buddhadharma?

And then, where does that leave you?

## CASE 90

# Rirong's Dance<sup>†</sup>



Huo went up the main hall to join Rirong Yuan. Rong clapped his hands three times and said, “A fierce tiger is in the hall. Who is a match for it?”

Huo said, “A skilled sparrow hawk soars. Who can capture it?”

Rong said, “Equally matched problem for one another.”

Huo said, “Let’s give it a rest, but this koan is unresolved.”

Rong took his teaching staff and danced back to the abbot's room. Huo had no words.

Rong said, "He is a dead person!"

Xutang's alternate saying: "I win with a single move."



Rirong was a second-generation successor of Nanquan. A tiger and a sparrow hawk, a teacher and a student. Equally matched?

Huo pleads for a break and declares the koan unresolved—a case in point for the saying "the horse has already left the barn."

Rirong dances his way back to his room, leaving the napping Huo for dead. Xutang would have Rirong proclaim his win with a single move.

But say, without being a tiger or sparrow hawk, without winning or losing, without napping or dancing, what is the winning single move?

## CASE 91

# Baizhang's "Difficult Haul"



High Seat Huo came to Baizhang's place. Zhang said, "A monk has this matter, may I ask about it?"

Huo said, "Fortunately, the self has no words. Why should words get in the way?"

Zhang said, "Annan has been secured. Once again, there's concern about the northern frontier."



Huo bared his chest saying, “Give what? Not give what?”

Zhang said, “Important and a difficult haul. Important and a difficult haul.”

Huo said, “You know it when you get it. You know it when you get it.”

Xutang’s alternate saying: “A long and arduous journey. A human face, a beast’s heart.”



First, a couple of case notes. If this is the Huo from the previous case, he would not have been contemporaneous with the most well-known Baizhang. This case must involve a different Huo or a different Baizhang. Second, just so you know, during the Tang dynasty, Annan, the northern portion of present day Vietnam, was a protectorate of the Chinese state.

The “matter” that this Baizhang raises that all Zen practitioners must face is known as “the great matter of birth and death.” At the end of the day at most Zen practice places, you will hear some version of this literal translation:

Spoken to the great assembly:

The great matter birth-death

Impermanence is swift!

It’s fitting for everyone to sober up! Wake up!

Do not let [this opportunity] pass by.<sup>125</sup>

Sober up! Wake up! The key is an awakening experience where the nature of the self is illuminated, where the ten thousand things and the self fit even closer than hand and glove. It is so close. Do not let this opportunity pass.

Huo’s response, “Fortunately, the self has no words. Why should words get in the way?” shows that the key has turned at least

partway. Baizhang too suggests that Huo has some attainment and invites him to not be satisfied with such. As Hakuin said,

But if you do not get buggered up in your present attainment, if you strive day and night to put the four universal vows into practice, striving to lead all sentient beings to salvation and create a Buddha-land on earth, acquiring the deportment of a Bodhisattva and storing up great Dharma assets, preaching the Dharma unflaggingly to benefit sentient beings for endless kalpas—repaying in this way the profound debt you owe the Buddha-[ancestors]—are you not then...a person who has fully realized the four great dharma vows and put them into practice?

[126](#)

The four great dharma vows, of course, are not only for the monastic cloister, but for the suffering of the person you meet at work, the homeless person begging at the intersection, and the neighbor's car stuck in the snow.

And for the larger community issues too. Zhang's "Annan has been secured. Once again, there's concern about the northern frontier" could be "We have the Paris Agreement, but that's not at all enough. And now the United States has withdrawn. What are we to do?"

This way, the long haul, involves giving and receiving, and knowing for yourself. Xutang raises an ugly truth: "A human face, a beast's heart." We might look human as we undertake this long and arduous journey, but few can do it without the heart of a fierce, ruthless, single-focused beast.

Why?

## CASE 92

# Nanyuan's Razor



Before Minghe considered living in the western courtyard [as a resident priest], he was in Xuzhou and heard that Nanyuan\* was appointed to the abbotship in Ruzhou. They once had practiced closely together, so Minghe went to check if Nanyuan clearly understood worldly affairs. He said, “Venerable, you initiated me.

You can't do worldly affairs. I passed through Xuzhou and brought you a Jiangxi razor."

Yuan said, "You came through Xuzhou, why have you brought a Jiangxi razor?"

Ming then took a swipe at Yuan's hand. Yuan said, "Attendant, take [the razor]."

Ming shook out his sleeves and left. Yuan said, "Ha, whoosh, whoosh. Ha, whoosh, whoosh."

Xutang's alternate saying: "Reminiscing by embracing our crooked past."



In the old days, just like today, a close dharma companion was such a treasure! Even the reckless hermit Hanshan also had such feelings:

Scanning the green slopes below,  
I discuss the profound principle with the white cloud.  
Though the feeling of the wild is in mountains and waters,  
truly, I long for a companion of the way.<sup>[127](#)</sup>

Longing for an enduring dharma companion, Minghe went to visit Nanyuan. They had once shared one mind, and the Nanyuan that Minghe remembered was a pure monk. But now Nanyuan was entering the marketplace to teach, setting up social media accounts, and getting his picture on the cover of *Tricycle*.

Minghe brought him a razor, presumably to shave the defilement of worldly affairs from Nanyuan's head. Nanyuan, distracted by shiny things, focuses on the worldly matter of just where this razor came from and why Minghe passed through Xuzhou but brought a razor from Jiangxi. A worldly concern, perhaps.

Try as he might, Minghe couldn't lay a blade on Nanyuan who laughed off such efforts, "Ha, whoosh, whoosh. Ha, whoosh, whoosh."

Ah! The way we were!  
What is this intimacy?

## CASE 93

# Huayan's Defeat and Deficiency



When Attendant Kuo was at Huayan's place, Huayan went up to the main hall and said, "Today, dear ones, I give you fearlessness. If Linji, Deshan, Gaoting, Dayu, Niaohe, or descendants of true wayfarers arrive, then get straight to the point. Huayan will verify you."



Kuo then came forward, bowed, rose, then shouted. Yan also shouted. Kuo again shouted. Yan again shouted. Kuo bowed, rose, and said, “Great assembly, consider this person’s complete defeat and deficiency.”

Kuo then shouted a singular shout, clapped his hands, and went back into the assembly. Huayan went back to the abbot’s room.

At this time, Fengxue served as rector. He went up to the abbot’s room to ask how he was doing. Yan said, “Visitors from [the eastern province of] Zhejiang are so resistant. Kuo’s ‘observance’ of rules and rituals! Today this old monk was absolutely ruined. Now I’ll gather the assembly and we will give him a good beating and stomping, until he flees.”

Xue said, “It’s too late for that. And the venerable’s words are excessive. You said, ‘Get straight to the point.’ He is a descendent of Linji, playing his part in give-and-take.”

Yan then calmed down. Next, Xue went to Kuo to speak about the matter. Kuo said, “Why did you console the old man? I did not ask to come forward. If he had used his stick when I shouted, my words might circulate. He didn’t beat me or my expression, so my words will not travel.”

Xue said, “These words have already traveled!”

Xutang’s alternate saying for Fengxue: “Elder Brother Kuo, you inspected his spine, looking for the spinal fluid.”



It all started out so nicely with promises of no fear and verification by Huayan, a successor of Caoshan, and yet quickly became a *dharmerone* (i.e., spiritually sublimated testosterone) rampage, bruising ears and egos. So male and messy—even here among the descendants of the great Caoshan and Linji. Attendant Kuo (meaning, big, empty, open) had been the attendant for the great Linji descendant, Nanyuan, and showed up here lacking in decorum. Both monks appear to be most concerned about kicking ass, being kicked, and reputation. Sigh.

If you think that monastics and those holding dharma transmission are somehow psychologically developed, spiritually pure, and above the fray of human affairs, take a close look at this case.

Fengxue, though, even before his final enlightenment and transmission from Nanyuan, comes through this locker room smelling good. He mediates, trotting back and forth between disputing elders, trying to soothe feelings all around. And his words, “These words have already traveled!” were prescient as we’re talking about it right now.

One redeeming quality of the Zen school is that such events are (ideally) not buried, but held up for future generations. Xutang brings it out for us to examine, “You inspected his spine, looking for the spinal fluid.”

This case appears in *The Tiansheng Extensive Record of Lamps*, collected by Li Zunxu in 1029. Li Zunxu was a lay follower of the Linji lineage, and this collection is said to emphasize the superiority of the Linji line. Fengxue is in the Linji lineage of Xutang and, through Hakuin, continues to this day. In *The Record of Empty Hall*, however, Xutang is strongly ecumenical, selecting and upholding cases and teachers from all of the five houses of classical Zen. Li Zunxu might have seen this case as a slight to the Caoshan line.

However, that doesn’t appear to be Xutang’s intention for selecting it. Instead, the key point in this soap opera is Huayan’s defeat and deficiency. There were shouts all around, after all, yet Attendant Kuo spiked the ball in the end zone. Who’s got the most spinal fluid? If you say that Kuo’s shout was better than Huayan’s shout, you’re likely to descend into the same pit where they’re still going at each other, spinal fluid leaking everywhere.

## CASE 94

### Yaoshan's Arrow<sup>†</sup>



A monk asked Yaoshan,\* “On the grassy plain of Level Field Temple, there is a herd of deer with the king deer among them. How do I shoot the king *in* the king deer?”

Shan said, “Look! Arrow!”

The monk fell down. Shan said, “Attendant! Drag this dead man out of here.”

The monk ran out. Shan said, “A fellow playing with mud ball. Where does it end?”

Xutang’s alternate saying: “It’s hard to live alone in the ancient house.”



Who is the self that observes the self? Who is the sovereign *in* the sovereign? From a buddha-logical perspective, getting a clear bead on the seventh consciousness, also known as ego consciousness, as it busily ferries data from the five senses and the discerning sixth consciousness, to and from the vast, dark eighth consciousness, the storehouse consciousness, is a vital piece of cultivating verification.

The seventh consciousness, though, would say of that explanation, “Cool story, friend. Blah, blah, blah.”

“Seventh consciousness, and so on,” is an explanation, and, like all explanations, including our really smart buddha-logical explanations, they lack the power to get to the root of the human propensity to separate from the grassy plain of Level Field Temple.

“Look! Arrow!” Gets right to the point. Like Hakuin said,

Suddenly, satori comes and they are liberated, like the phoenix soaring up from its golden cage, like the crane breaking free of its pen. They release their hands from the cliffside, die the great death, and are reborn into life anew.<sup>[128](#)</sup>

So the monk drops dead. “Drag this dead man out of here.”

When the monk runs off, how do you see him? Reborn into a new awakened life or buried alive? Yaoshan joins with him (and us), playing with the mud ball. Even the king *in* the king of deers is covered with such and dripping wet.

Xutang knows that it’s “hard to live alone in the ancient house.” Reminds me that old Shakyamuni similarly declared, “I alone am the World-Honored One.”

Is this the same “alone” or is it different?

Are you alone or are you together?

## CASE 95

Changzi Kuang's "What Is His  
Name?"



Venerable Changzi Kuang\* asked a monk, “Where are you coming from?”

The monk said, “A stone hut on Mount Jiuhua.”

Zi said, “Who is master of the hut?”

“A descendant of Mazu.”

“What is his name?”



“His dharma name is No Appointment.”

Zi said, “He is No Appointment. You are No Appointment.”

“Where is the eye of the former generation?”

Zi said, “If the hut master’s parent were to come today, they would also suffer my stick.”

The monk said, “I depend on the venerable letting go of the opportunity.”

Zi said, “In one hundred years, it will be rare to find such a guide.”

Xutang’s alternate saying: “The barbarian became Chinese.”



Changzi Kuang was a successor of Shitou. The monk who says his name is “No Appointment,” Buwei, was a successor of Mazu. So although we have representatives of the two branches of the Zen tradition, everybody got along so well, which was so unlike Case 93, “Huayan’s Defeat and Deficiency.” Listen carefully to Changzi Kuang’s verification of the monk, and you might even hear “Hallelujah” playing softly in the background, over the hills and far away.

Although the monk’s circumstances are unknown, it seems that he may have completed his training with Mazu only to receive no appointment to lead a monastery. He chose, then, to live in a stone hut on a sacred mountain, Mount Jiuhua, the abode of Ksitigarbha or Jizo. No Appointment, like Jizo, went straight to hell to liberate beings there.

Changzi Kuang must have seen the depths of the monks’ “no appointment” so fully embodying No Appointment that he promised to greet both Mazu and the monk with blows from the same staff. This is high praise in our hunky Zen way and confirms that Mazu and No Appointment saw with the same eyes and heard with the same ears.

Xutang goes even further. The barbarian, Bodhidharma, has become just this fellow.

Who is the master of your little hut?

## CASE 96

Dongshan's "Not Arrive"<sup>†</sup>



Dongshan asked a monk, “Where have you been?”

The monk said, “Wandering in the mountains.”

Shan said, “Did you arrive at the summit?”

The monk said, “Arrived.”

Shan said, “Was anyone at the summit?”

The monk said, “No one.”

Shan said, “You did not arrive at the summit.”

“If ‘not arrive,’ how would ‘no one’ be known?”

Shan said, “Monk, why not stay?”

The monk said, “I’d stay, but it is not allowed. Someone in the Western Paradise is not consenting.”

Xutang’s alternate saying, “Stay, but it is not allowed. Few mutually recognize this.”



Wandering in the mountains, this monk makes the claim of reaching the summit of the peak of wonder, so much so that “someone” in the Western Paradise, the abode of ultimate bliss, presumably Amitabha Buddha whose realm that is, wouldn’t let him stay, presumably so that he would return to the human world to free all living beings. No small thing.

Dongshan Liangjie checks his understanding by asking who he found at the summit. If you’ve been there, you know who’s there. The monk’s response could be rendered either that there was no one there (empty of self), or that there was no one *else*, no other and nothing outside.

Dongshan’s response can be interpreted as either negating his realization, “You didn’t arrive at the summit,” or affirming it, “You did *not-arrive* at the summit.”

The monk’s defense can either be seen as cheeky, “If I didn’t get there, how would I know there was no one there,” or as a confirmation of the liminal space of the bliss body (*sambhogakaya*).

Dongshan’s query can be seen as either asking the monk to stay on at his place, or about why, if the monk arrived at the summit, he didn’t stay at the peak of life and death.

Xutang’s alternate saying, “Stay, but it is not allowed. Few mutually recognize this,” affirms the whole works, arrived or not, alone or not, know or not, allowed or not, stay or go.

Where have you been?

## CASE 97

# Yunju's "Secret Word"<sup>†</sup>



Government Minister Cheng came to deliver an offering to Venerable Yunju and asked, “The Tathagatha had a secret word. Kasyapa did not hide it away. What is the inner pattern?”

Ju called, “Minister!”

The minister answered, “Here!”

Ju said, “Understand?”



The minister said, “Don’t understand.”

Ju said, “If there is no understanding, the Tathagatha has a secret word. If there is understanding, Kasyapa did not hide it away.”

Xutang’s alternate saying for the place where the government minister did not understand: “I am not this mind. Certainly not this call.”



“I’ve heard there is a secret chord,” sang Leonard Cohen. I’ve heard that there is a secret word, the source word of all words, the last word of Zen. Each of the koans in *The Record of Empty Hall*, and all the buddhas and ancestors have preached it wantonly. Minister Cheng, a highly decorated warlord who later committed suicide by jumping into the Yangze River, had heard the Tathagatha and Kasyapa had it.

The Tathagatha may have been one of the first to discover it, and he shared it with Kasyapa, his successor (at least according to the Zen tradition, and we’re sticking to it). Kasyapa disclosed it everywhere he went, beating the poison drum, shouting out in the marketplaces, and hoisting up the flagpole in the training places, only to order others to knock it down. What a shameless proselytizer.

What is the inner pattern?<sup>[129](#)</sup>

Reader!

Understand?

If you are not this mind, not this call, then the secret is hidden. If you are this mind, this call, it is open for all to see and hear.

## CASE 98

# National Teacher Shao's "True Eye"



Venerable Lumen Zhen asked National Teacher Shao, “Where did you come from recently?”

“Huge Cliff Dwelling, lodging for the night in Secret Valley.”

Men asked, “Among the five eyes, which one is the true eye?”

“I’ve long favored Lumen.”

Men said, “What about this concerns you?”

The national teacher said, “What are we talking about?”

Xutang’s alternate saying for the national teacher: “When hungry there’s no time to be picky.”



Buddhism, as is well known, is a religion of lists. Five hindrances, five aggregates, five degenerations, and, yes, the five eyes—the fleshly eye, the divine eye, the wisdom eye, the dharma eye, and the buddha eye. Which is the true eye?

Which is the true list?

The national teacher Shao, having deeply rested in the Secret Valley under the Huge Cliff Dwelling, liked what he had seen and heard about the sojourner Lumen. In selecting one guy, Lumen, Shao seems to be falling into the trap laid by Lumen about which of the five eyes is the true eye. He has become a fellow of picking and choosing.

What are we talking about, though, the little hunger (who’s right?) or the big hunger (the profound and liberating truth of the buddhadharma)?

See?

Now, what are we talking about?

## CASE 99

# Longce Investigates a Young Boy



A monk brought a little boy to Venerable Longce\* and said, “This child loves to ask about the buddhadharma. Please, Venerable, check and see.”

Ce ordered tea to be served, and when he was finished drinking, passed the cup to the boy. Just as the boy was going to receive the cup, Ce pulled his hand back, and said, “What did you receive?”

The boy said, “Ask in the future.”

The easygoing monk asked, “What is your opinion of this boy?”

Ce said, “A precept-upholding monk only for one or two lifetimes.”

Xutang’s alternate saying: “Let’s play together with this monk.”



Longce was one of the most renowned successors of Xuefeng. Yet, in this case he messes with a little kid. Offering a cup and then pulling it back, what did you get?

The kid did alright. It might seem like only a promise of fulfillment, but check with me later. I’m just a kid, after all.

The easygoing monk, who ought to have checked himself, asked for Longce’s opinion. And, surprise, it can be read in two ways with “only” being the pivot to either meaning. First, the kid will just follow the rules for a couple of lifetimes and then all hell (or heaven) will break loose, or that he will be a lowly monk just following the rules, but not the spirit.

Xutang invited us to play along with the monk and boy.

How will you do it?

## CASE 100

Yantou Doesn't Agree<sup>†</sup>





One day Luoshan attended Yantou as he wandered in the mountains. Suddenly, Luoshan called out, “Venerable!”

Tou said, “What?”

Shan came close, bowed, and then asked, “Venerable, how is it that thirty years ago, you stayed with Dongshan and yet you didn’t agree with Dongshan?”

Tou said, “Yes.”

Shan said, “How is it that you received dharma transmission from Deshan, and yet you didn’t agree with Deshan?”

Tou said, “Yes.”

Shan said, “Leaving aside that you didn’t agree with Deshan, but as for Dongshan, where was his deficiency?”

After a while, Tou said, “Dongshan was a good and proper Buddha, but he had no light.”

Shan then bowed.

Xutang’s alternate saying for Yantou: “He avoided speaking the taboo word.”



Luoshan, who would become a successor of Yantou, had been wondering about the guy. Not only did he not agree with the great Dongshan,<sup>130</sup> but he didn’t even agree with the great Deshan, the person from whom he received transmission. What kind of person is like this?

Yantou is presented in the koan literature as the archetypal brilliant, golden child for whom awakening came easy and deep. He regularly colluded with his teacher and his dharma bro, Xuefeng, to awaken others. Yantou actualized Zen with a swagger.

Yet as an old man, he may not have agreed with his old teacher, Deshan, but their processes were parallel. Deshan, famous for beating whoever appeared, like Yantou here, became soft and malleable as a ripe persimmon. For example,

Attendant Kuo asked Deshan, “Where have all the ancestral teachers gone?”

Shan said, “What? What?”

Kuo said, “The imperial orders were for a fine horse, but out comes a lame tortoise.”

Shan let it rest.

The next day, Shan came from the bath and Kuo passed him tea. All of a sudden, Shan gently patted Kuo's back.

Kuo said, "The old man has finally had a glimpse."

Shan let it rest.<sup>131</sup>

In this case, we find Yantou as an old man and in a very quiet place, wandering with his disciple in the mountains. "What?" "Yes." "Yes."

"Yes" is about all he had to say.

So, I'll ask you. Given that Yantou had received transmission from Deshan, why is it that Luoshan leaves that little matter aside? And what does it mean for a good and proper Buddha like Dongshan to have no light?

Daido Roshi says, "He did not shine, nor was he dull. Do you understand?"<sup>132</sup>

Xutang's alternate saying for Yantou, "He avoided speaking the taboo word," might be a reference to Dongshan's verse for the third of his Five Ranks:

Within *mu* there is a road apart from dust.

Now only don't touch the taboo word

Also surpass the previous dynasty's capacity to cut off  
tongues.<sup>133</sup>

It's hard to agree with someone who doesn't shine their little light, and regarding the most important thing, keeps their tongueless big mouth shut.

# Afterword

Mind is the moment of actualizing the fundamental point; words are the moment of going beyond, unlocking the barrier. Arriving is the moment of casting off the body; not-arriving is the moment of being one with just this, while being free from just this. In this way you must endeavor to actualize the time being.

—Master Dogen

So. You have read Zen master Dosho Port's invitation into the investigation of Xutang's wondrous collection of koans. From there, perhaps you've read all one hundred cases and the comments he provides. Or, perhaps you skipped around, reading and sitting with those cases that captured your imagination. Or, perhaps after glancing at one or two cases, you simply moved on to this Afterword.

All fine. As Dosho Roshi pointed out, we're all of us at different places in our lives as we pick up this book. Some of us have already deeply engaged the koan way and allowed it to shift and transform us. Some may even have "completed" formal training within one koan style or another. There are increasing numbers of us in the West for whom this is true. For those of us in that camp, this is a wonderful book with its old familiar cases crowding up with cases never seen before. As one in that crowd, I opened this book and found teachers and ancestors I did not know, each offering angles on my path in ways that helped in my ongoing clarification of the great matter of life and death.

As that student said, "Oh, shit! A tiger." I would add, "How wonderful!"

So, what should that mean?

Perhaps you're new to this path. Maybe you've trained for a while in the disciplines of just sitting and the observation of liturgy. These are powerful and transformative invitations into the mystery. Really, they are the mystery presented. But here it is possible to find another angle, an invitation into a sharpness of insight into what it means that they are the mystery presented. Just sitting is it. Just offering incense is it. Just bowing is it. This book guides us into understanding what those words mean. And, how words are it, as well.

Maybe your background is from another spirituality, or none at all. Perhaps this book has found itself in your hands through pure serendipity, and even now you're trying to untangle the meaning of these foreign words and these strange anecdotes of encounter and some stranger finding. Be careful. You're holding a manual of magic in your hands. "Come closer." Maybe we do. And with that moment of leaning in there's a slap. And the magic happens.

The delightful thing is that whether we have been walking the Way thirty years or this is the first time one has ever opened a book on Zen and its koans, there is a way in which we are all of us in the very same boat. We're all of us open to that most gentle and generous slap.

Here in this book is one of the places where the masters really reside. Whether these are dead letters or living words is completely ours to decide. The mess of causes and conditions that shape us into who we are, both open us and cloud what we encounter. So, of course, there is no end to practice, whether one is an old hand or someone who has just accidentally been given this book. Each of us as we are. We really are in that same boat. And we all can use that refreshing reminder, that slap into this precious moment.

The turning comes from our willingness to bow into the stories. And so the priest Dosho repeats Master Zhong's query, "Where are you coming from?" A fundamental koan, a pointer to that place, and an invitation to come, or to return, or just to notice. Maybe you know. And, maybe it's good to look. Once or a thousand times. The choice is always ours, is always yours.

Wherever you are on your way, I encourage you to go back and reread the cases, in order, at random. Discover the tigers. However you wish. Read them again. Let them slip into the back of your consciousness. Dig around the corners of the room that they create. Look at all the parts. Notice where that leads. But don't stop. Let the mysteries of life unfold for you. There are always more tigers, waiting.

They will take you to something on the other side of separation and unity. That was the promise of this collection. And it speaks true. They will.

—James Myoun Ford  
Anaheim Zen Sangha  
Empty Moon Zen Network

# Appendix 1: Biographical Notes

All-Together Peak (Qifeng, n.d.): Ninth generation in China through Mazu. I use the English name here, because the case turns on the play with “all together” and “peak.” Case 65 is the only incident given in *The Records of the Transmission of the Lamp* for All-Together Peak.

Baizhang Huaihai (720–814): Ninth generation in China through Mazu. Arguably the foremost successor of Mazu. His past and present selves set the stage for the Wild Fox koan. The record of his teaching is available in English as *The Sayings and Doings of Pai-chang*.<sup>1</sup> Reputed to have developed a new “Zen” vinaya. Cases 61, 91.

Baoying (Nanyuan Huiyong, 860–930): Thirteenth generation in China through Linji in what became the main line of the Linji succession, continuing until today. Regarded as the most important Linji teacher of his generation, but appears only in one case in *Entangling Vines*, Case 185, “Nanyuan’s ‘Pecking and Tapping,’ ” in the major koan collections. “A monk asked him, ‘What is the seamless monument?’ Baoying answered, ‘Eight seams and nine cracks.’ The monk asked, ‘What is the person inside the monument?’ Baoying said, ‘Hair uncombed. Face unwashed.’ ”<sup>2</sup> Baoying’s only successor was Fengxue Yanzhao. Case 38.

Budai (d. 916): Probably legendary, a rotund and jovial monk, his name means “Hemp Sack,” which he is often depicted carrying. A favorite subject of artists, including Hakuin. Regarded as an incarnation of Maitreya Bodhisattva. Case 10.

Caoshan Benji (840–901): Twelfth generation in China through Dongshan Liangjie. Caoshan asked a monk, “When it’s so hot, where will you go to avoid it?” The monk said, “I’ll avoid it inside a boiling cauldron, within the coals of a furnace.” Caoshan said, “How can it be avoided in a boiling cauldron or among the coals of a furnace?” The monk said, “The multitude of sufferings cannot reach there.”<sup>3</sup> Case 22.

Caoxi: See “Huineng.”

Changqing Huileng (854–932): Thirteenth generation in China through Xuefeng. Like his teacher, Xuefeng, he worked long and hard with several teachers before awakening. He is said to have worn out seven meditation cushions. He arrived at Xuefeng’s place as a dead horse and so was given medicine to revive a dead horse. It worked, and as a teacher Changqing had twenty-six successors. Cases 28, 48, and 79.

Changzi Kuang (n.d.): Ninth generation in China, direct successor of Shitou. The *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* has just one story about Changzi Kuang, his first meeting with Shitou, which begins with Shitou asking, “Where are you coming from?”<sup>4</sup> Case 95.

Ciming (Shishuang Chuyuan, 986–1039): Seventeenth generation in China, sixth after Linji. Not to be confused with Shishuang Qingzhu (see below). Ciming had many successors, including his two major disciples, Huanglong Huinan (1002–1069) and Yangqui Fanghui (992–1049), who produced the two collateral lines within the Linji lineage: the Huanglong Pai (Japanese: Oryo, the lineage that led to Eisai and Dogen’s Rinzai inheritance) and Yangqiu Pai (Japanese: Yogi, the lineage that led to Hakuin and modern Rinzai). Ciming may have had a wife, known as “Old Lady Ciming.”<sup>5</sup> Case 71.

Cizhou Matou Fengzang (n.d.): Ninth generation in China through Mazu. This short saying of Cizhou is the only entry in *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*. Case 64.



Cuiwei Wuxue (n.d.): Tenth generation in China through Danxia in the Shitou succession. Cuiwei himself had five successors, including the important Touzi, and was summoned to teach the emperor, received the purple robe, and the title “Great Master Illumining Everywhere.” Case 54.

Danxia Tianran (738–824): Ninth generation in China through Shitou Xiqian. As a young man, Danxia was on his way to take the civil servant exam when he had a dream that his room was filled with white light. He first studied under Mazu who referred him to Shitou. Case 54.

Damei Fachang (752–839): Ninth generation in China through Mazu. His name means “Great Plum.” His enlightenment story appears in *The No Gate Barrier*. Damei asked Mazu, “What is buddha?” The ancestor said, “This mind is buddha.”<sup>6</sup> Case 19.

Daochang Ne (Daochang Shan Runa, n.d.): Eleventh generation in China through Cuwei Wuxue. Is said to have had at least two physical signs of a buddha—double pupils and hands that reached down to his knees. When asked, “What is it like to be a man of the Dao?” He responded, “To move without a trace, to get up and sit down without anyone noticing.”<sup>7</sup> Case 85.

Daowu (Tianhuang Daowu, 748–807): Ninth generation in China, direct successor of Shitou. Not to be confused with the later Daowu Yuanzhi (see below). Tianhuang Daowu’s lineage would include Xuedou, Yunmen, and Fayan—two of the five major lineages of Zen in China. In *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*, Daowu is listed first among the successors of Shitou and, like Yaoshan, also studied closely with Mazu. Case 72.

Daowu Yuanzhi (769–835): Tenth generation in China through Yaoshan. Dharma brother (and possibly biological brother) of Yunyan. His relationship with Yunyan is often cited as an example of close dharma friendship. They appear together in several important koans, including *The Blue Cliff Record*, Case 89, “The Hands and Eyes of the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion,” and *The Book of Serenity*, Case 21, “Yunyan

- Sweeps the Ground.” Sometimes confused with Tianhuang Daowu (748–807), a successor of Shitou (see above). Case 14.
- Dizang (Luohan Guichen, 867–928) Fourteenth generation in China through Xuansha. Teacher of Fayuan, the founder of one of the five major lineages of Zen in China. Dizang once entered the dharma hall and said, “If you want to come face-to-face with the essential mystery of our order—here it is!”<sup>8</sup> Case 77.
- Dongshan Cong (Dongshan Xaiocong, d. 1030): Sixteenth generation in China, three generations removed from Yunmen. Not to be confused with Dongshan Shouchu (910–990), a direct disciple of Yunmen. Also not be confused with Dongshan Liangjie (see below). Case 81.
- Dongshan Liangjie (807–869): Eleventh generation in China through Yunyan in the Shitou succession. Pointed out by Nanquan when he was a teenager, and received transmission from Yunyan (“Cloudy Cliff, Cloudy Light”) who had served Baizhang for twenty years without awakening. At sixty, announced his death, but when the monks wept, held a “feast for fools,” and waited until it was over, then died. The record of his teaching is available in English as *The Record of Tung-shan*.<sup>9</sup> Cases 21, 25, 63 76, 94. Also see Case 100, “Yantou Doesn’t Agree.”
- Fenggan (Tiantai Fenggan, ninth century): The teacher of the famous ascetics Hanshan and Shide. Everyone thought these two were crazy, but Fenggan became their intimate friend. Case 9.
- Fengxue Yanzhao (896–993): Fourteenth generation in China through Nanyuan Huiyong. A direct ancestor of Xutang in the Linji transmission that continues today. He once said, “The function of the ancestors’ mind seal is like the Iron Ox. Remove the seal and it remains. If it remains the seal is ruined. If neither removed nor remaining, is there a seal or not?”<sup>10</sup> Cases 70 and 93.
- Fu Daishi (497–569): A renowned and colorful layperson and contemporary of Bodhidharma, often depicted wearing a mix of

- Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist clothing. He is regarded as having invented the revolving bookcase for scriptures. Case 4.
- Guishan Lingyou (771–853): Tenth generation in China through Baizhang. Perhaps most known today for his close teacher-student relationship with his primary successor, Yangshan. Together their names, Guiyang, signified one of the five main lineages of Zen in China. One characteristic of this lineage was the use of embodied dharma expressions, most of which are lost today. Cases 66, 68, 78, 81, and 82.
- Guizong Zhichang (n.d.): Ninth generation in China through Mazu. Appears in Case 69 in *The Blue Cliff Record* with Nanquan and Magu: “Nanquan, Guizong and Magu were going to pay their respect to National Teacher Zhong. When they had come halfway, Nanquan drew a circle on the ground and said, ‘Say something and we’ll go on.’ Guizong sat down in the center of the circle. Magu curtsied like a woman. Quan said, ‘If it’s like this, we will not go.’ Guizong said, ‘What activity of the mind is that?’”<sup>11</sup> Cases 18, 39, and 58.
- Hanshan (Tiantai Hanshan, ninth century): Folk hero, ascetic, and poet. Hanshan means “Cold Mountain.” The great Caodong master Caoshan wrote comments to one set of his verses. Case 9.
- Huangbo Xiyun (d. 850): Tenth generation in China through Baizhang. Featured in the climax of the Wild Fox koan. Teacher of Linji. Reputed to be six feet tall with a pronounced lump on his forehead from years of wholehearted bowing.<sup>12</sup> Case 15.
- Huineng (Dajian Huineng, 638–713): Sixth generation in China. Also known as Caoxi, after the place where he taught, and the Sixth Ancestor. All current Zen lineages include Huineng, and all historical Zen teachers in this record, save one (Helinsu in Case 42), are his successors. Reputed to be an illiterate woodcutter who had an awakening while bringing his firewood to market and hearing a monk chant, “Abiding nowhere, let the mind come forth.” Cases 5 and 49.

Iron Grindstone Liu (Liu Tiemo, n.d.): Eleventh generation in China through Guishan. One of the few women adepts named in either the koan texts or the transmission records. The two stories contained in the *Record of Empty Hall* appear to be the sum total of what is known about her. Cases 66 and 67.

Jiangxi: See “Mazu.”

Jinfeng (n.d.): Thirteenth generation in China through Caoshan. He appears frequently in Dogen’s *Zen Master Dogen’s Three Hundred Koans* (cases 187, 240, 272, and 274).<sup>13</sup> Case 73.

Lay Adept Pang (740–808): Studied with both Shitou and Mazu. Also known widely as “Layman Pang,” but 龐居士 is probably more accurately translated as “Lay Adept Pang.” 士 is the common character for teacher. One of the few householders that appears in this record. He notably appears in the following case in *The Blue Cliff Record*: “Layman Pang took leave of Yaoshan. Shan ordered ten monks to see him off at the gate. Pang pointed at the sky and said, ‘Fine snowflakes, they do not fall elsewhere.’ A monk named Quan asked, ‘Where do they fall?’ The layman slapped him once. Quan said, ‘Layman don’t be hasty.’ Pang said, ‘Is this a suitable way for a monk? Old Yama won’t let you go.’ The layman slapped him again and said, ‘The eye sees as though blind, the mouth speaks as though dumb.’”<sup>14</sup> Cases 19 and 65.

Lingyuan Zhiqin (n.d.): Eleventh generation in China through Guishan. Case 27.

Linji Yixuan (Japanese, Rinzai, d. 866): Eleventh generation in China through Huangbo. Famous for a vigorous style of teaching that frequently involved shouting. His lineage continues today in China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, and in several nations in the West. Case 59.<sup>15</sup>

Longce (Jingqing Daofu, 868–937): Thirteenth generation in China through Xuefeng. Probably best known for Case 16 in *The Blue Cliff Record*: A monk asked Jingqing, “The student has started, please master peck.” Qing said, “Will you be alive or not?” The

monk said, “If not I will suffer being laughed at.” Qing said, “Fellow in the weeds!”<sup>16</sup> Case 99.

Luopu Yuanan (834–898): Twelfth generation in China, third generation from Yaoshan in the line through Chuanzi Dezeng, the boat monk. Early in his life, he served as Linji’s attendant, and later succeeded Jiashan Shanhui after practicing with him for many years. Two important cases involving Luopu occur in *The Record of Going Easy*: Case 35, “Luopu Concedes,” and Case 41, “Luopu with One Foot in the Grave.” Case 37.

Luzu Baoyun (n.d.): Ninth generation in China through Mazu. Case 63.

Magu Baoche (Mayu, n.d.): Ninth generation in China through Mazu. Dogen’s *Genjokoan* concludes with Magu fanning himself. Cases 7 and 62.

Manjusri: The bodhisattva of non-dual wisdom, often paired with Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of great compassion. Manjusri is often depicted with a diamond sword, representing the activity of non-dual wisdom, raised about his head. Cases 1, 3, 11, 12, 51, 87.

Mazu Daoyi (709–788): Eighth generation in China through Nanyue. Also known as “Great Master Ma.” One of the most prolific masters of all time with 139 successors. Cases 55, 56, and 57.<sup>17</sup>

Mingzhou Deqian (n.d.): Fourteenth generation in China in the Yantou branch of the Shitou lineage. Case 41.

Nanquan Puyuan (748–835): Ninth generation in China through Mazu. Also known as “Old Teacher Wang.” Even in a field of iconoclasts, Nanquan stood out, for example, killing a cat to make a point, and the cases in this record. Also the teacher of important master Zhaozhou. Cases 13, 14, 16, 57, 86, 92.

National Teacher Zhong (Nanyang Huizhong, 675–775): Seventh generation in China through Huineng. More commonly known as National Teacher Zhong, he appears in five cases in this record. Cases 5, 6, 7, 8, and 55.

Nanyuan Huiyong: see Baoying.

Qinshan Wensui (n.d.): Twelfth generation in China through Dongshan Liangje. A householder once asked, “How is it when one arrow shatters three barriers?” Qinhan said, “Bring out the master within the barriers for me to see.”<sup>18</sup> Case 74.

Sanjueyin (Tanzhou Sanjue Shan Zongyin, n.d.): Ninth generation in China through Mazu. A monk asked, “What are the three treasures?” “Unhulled rice, barley, and pulse,” answered the master. “The student does not understand.” “The assembly is happily sustained.”<sup>19</sup> Case 62.

Shexian Guisheng (n.d.): Sixteenth generation in China, Linji lineage. Shexian’s successor, Fushan Fayuan (991–1067), had also been offered transmission by the Caodong monk, Taiyang Jingxuan (943–1027), but he declined, given that he had already received Shexian’s transmission. Fushan offered to be a go-between, and should he find an appropriate person, he would transmit Taiyang’s Caodong lineage to them. He would eventually pass it to Touzi Yiqing, keeping the Caodong alive to this day.<sup>20</sup> Cases 34 and 35.

Sixth Ancestor: See “Huineng.”

Shishuang Qingzhu (807–888): Eleventh generation in China through Shitou, Yaoshan, and Daowu. When a monk asked, “How is it when arising-extinguishing is incessant?” Shishuang responded “Cease all activity, do nothing whatever, be like a thought that lasts ten thousand years, be so cold and lifeless the spirits of the dead will come sighing around you, be a bolt of fine white silk, be dead ashes inside a censer in a forgotten old graveyard.” This expression is often criticized by later teachers like Dahui and Hakuin as one-sided. Case 40.

Shiti (n.d.): Eleventh generation in China, second generation teacher from Nanquan in the Huairang lineage. Case 89.

Xitang Zhizang (735–814): Ninth generation in China through Mazu. Two of his successors, Jiling Daoyi (quoted in the commentary to Case 13) and Hongshe, were Korean monks and transmitted



Zen to their native land, contributing to the establishment of the “Nine Mountain” schools. Cases 17, 55, and 60.

Xuedou Chongxian (980–1052): Sixteenth generation in China through Zhimen Chongxian in the Yunmen succession. Xuedou selected the cases for *The Blue Cliff Record* and wrote verses for each case, occasionally adding a capping phrase. Case 81.

Xuefeng Yicun (822–908): Twelfth generation in China through Deshan in the Shitou succession. Before settling down and teaching, Xuefeng traveled widely, often serving as the monastery cook. He represents the type of practitioner who must work hard for many years before the final fruition of the Way. His great awakening came through an interaction with his dharma brother, Yantou, who represents the opposite type, those who come to great awakening quickly, and seemingly without much difficulty. Two of the five schools of Zen, the Yunmen and Fayan schools, bloomed through him. An entire volume of *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp* is dedicated to him and his successors.<sup>21</sup> Cases 24, 25, 26, 27, and 83.

Yangshan Huiji (807–883): Eleventh generation in China. Along with his teacher, Guishan, he founded one of the main lines of Zen in China, the Guiyang lineage. Here’s an example of his teaching: “A monk asked, ‘What is the difference between heaven and hell?’ Yangshan drew a line on the ground.”<sup>22</sup> Cases 68, 78, and 82.

Yaoshan Weiyan (751–834): Ninth generation in China, direct successor of Shitou. Trained first with Shitou, then Mazu, then returned to Shitou. Dogen explained zazen with the Yaoshan’s “thinking, not-thinking, non-thinking” koan.<sup>23</sup> Case 94.

Yantou Quanhua (828–887): Twelfth generation in China through Deshan. Close dharma friend of Xuefeng. Xutang awakened with the koan “Yantou’s Old Sail” (see introduction). Yantou had a well-known and provocative death. As the Tang dynasty collapsed, gangs ravaged the countryside. Arriving at Yantou’s place, the gang leader ran him through with a sword. Yantou let

out a shout that could be heard for miles. This story raised great doubt in the young Hakuin that he didn't resolve until his great awakening years later. "Torei praised the loud groan Hakuin uttered when he died as 'a final Zen utterance worthy of [Yentou].'"<sup>24</sup> Case 100.

Yunju Daoying (d. 902): Twelfth generation in China through Dongshan in the Shitou succession. Here's an example of his teaching: "Yunju asked Xuefeng, 'Has the snow outside the gate melted or not?' Xuefeng said, 'Not a single flake exists, how can it melt?' Yunju said, 'It's melted.'"<sup>25</sup> Cases 30 and 97.

Yunmen Wenyan (864–949): Thirteenth generation in China through Xuefeng. His teaching is widely admired among Zen adepts past and present for its uncanny way of enclosing heaven and earth, following the waves, and cutting off the myriad streams. His first awakening came when Muzhou, a successor of Huangbo, slammed his door with Yunmen's leg in the way, breaking the leg.<sup>26</sup> Cases 31, 32, and 33.<sup>27</sup>

Yunyan Tansheng (780–841): Tenth generation in China through Yaoshan. Not regarded as the shiniest zafu on the platform, and yet precipitated the awakening of one of the bright lights of the tradition, Dongshan Liangjie, despite what Yantou says in Case 100, whose lineage led to Dogen and modern Soto.<sup>28</sup>

Zhangjing (n.d.): Ninth generation in China through Mazu. Case 23.

Zhaozhou Congshen (778–897): Tenth generation in China through Nanquan. Known for his gentle way of "lip Ch'an." He didn't settle down to teach until eighty years old, and then lived another forty years. Koan cases involving him, including the *mu* koan, occur repeatedly in all the major collections. Zhaozhou's lineage died out after a couple of generations.<sup>29</sup> Cases 16, 20, 57.

Zhuyu Shan (n.d.): Tenth generation in China through Nanquan. Zhuyu's entry in *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp* has three incidents, two involving Zhaozhou. Case 20.



## Appendix 2: Koan Collections and Sources

Seven koan collections are referenced in the commentary to *The Record of Empty Hall: One Hundred Classic Koans*. Some have more than one title. Some have the same title, but different translations are quoted. Only English translations that have been published appear in italics. Three of these collections, *Wumenguan* (*The Gateless Barrier*), *Congrong lu* (*Book of Serenity*), and *Sonmun yomsong chip* (*Collection of Analyses and Verses of the Son School*), are from the early to mid-thirteenth century like *The Record of Empty Hall*. Xutang, however, was likely to have been familiar with only two, *Wumenguan* (*The Gateless Barrier*) and *Biyan Lu* (*The Blue Cliff Record*). This appendix aims at clarifying any confusion that may arise.

1. *Wumenguan*, 無門關, or Japanese, *Mumonkan*. Translated variously, including as *The Gateless Gate*, *The Gateless Barrier*, or *The No Gate Barrier*. Wumen Huikai compiled the cases, and wrote short, incisive commentaries and verses. Published in 1228. There are many translations of this essential Zen text. In this volume, I refer to three:
  - a. Robert Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-Men Kuan* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990).
  - b. David Hinton, *No-Gate Gateway: The Original Wu-Men Kuan* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2018).
  - c. Wumen Huikai, *The No Gate Barrier*, trans. Dosho Port and Simon Askelöf (unpublished).

Other reliable translations with sound commentaries include:

- a. Koun Yamada, *Gateless Gate* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979).
  - b. Zenkei Shibayama, *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1974).
  - c. Nyogen Senzaki, *Eloquent Silence: Nyogen Senzaki's Gateless Gate* (Boston: Wisdom, 2008).
2. *Biyan Lu*, 碧巖錄, Japanese, *Hekiganroku*. Usually translated as *The Blue Cliff Record*. The koans were compiled with added verses in 1125 by the Yunmen lineage master, Xuedou Chongxian, who appears in this volume in Case 81, “Dongshan Cong’s ‘Sign for Later Generations.’ ” In 1135, the Linji lineage master, Yuanwu Keqin, added introductions, commentaries, and notes. For a deep look at the text from a scholarly perspective, see Steven Heine, *Chan Rhetoric of Uncertainty in the Blue Cliff Record: Sharpening a Sword at the Dragon Gate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). In this volume, I refer to two translations:
- a. Yuanwu Keqin, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 1977).
  - b. Yuanwu Keqin, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Dosho Port and Simon Askelöf (unpublished).
3. *Congrong lu*, 從容錄, Japanese, *Shoyoroku*. Translated variously as *The Book of Serenity*, *The Book of Equanimity*, and *The Record of Going Easy*. These koan cases were compiled with added verses by Caodong lineage master Hongzhi Zhengjue, and another Caodong lineage master not directly related to Hongzhi, Wansong Xingxiu, added introductions, commentaries, and notes, essentially following the format of *The Blue Cliff Record*. First published in 1228. In this volume, I refer to two translations:
- a. Wansong Xingxiu, *The Book of Serenity: One Hundred Zen Dialogues*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne

Press, 1990).

b. Wansong Xingxiu, *The Record of Going Easy*, trans. Dosho Port and Simon Askelöf (unpublished).

Also see:

- c. Gerry Shishin Wick, *The Book of Equanimity: Illuminating Classic Zen Koans* (Boston: Wisdom, 2005).
4. *Shumon katto shu*, 宗門葛藤集, “Zen School’s Collection of Entangling Vines.” Includes 272 koan cases without commentaries or verses, collected from mostly Chinese sources, probably in the seventeenth century, by unknown Japanese Rinzai monks. An English version is *Entangling Vines: A Classic Collection of Zen Koans*, trans. Thomas Yūhō Kirchner (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2013).
  5. *Denkoroku*, 伝光録, *Record of the Transmission of Illumination*. Includes the incidents of awakening of fifty-two ancestors in the Caodong/Soto lineage, collected with commentary and verses in 1300 by the Soto master Keizan Jokin. Several translations available. The version used in this volume is *Record of the Transmission of Illumination* trans. William M. Bodiford (Tokyo: Sotoshu Shumuchō, 2017). It can also be found online at Soto Zen-Net, <https://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/library/denkoroku/index.html>.
  6. *Sonmun yomsong chip*, 禪門拈頌集, *Collection of Analyses and Verses of the Son School*. This amazing work by the Korean master Hyesim (1178–1234) and his disciple Gag’un (n.d.) includes 1,463 koan cases with a rich selection of verses and commentaries mostly from the Chinese tradition. Published in 1226. A selection of 100 of the 1,463 koan cases is available in English in *Collected Works of Korean Buddhism, Gong’an Collections I and II*, trans. Juhn Y. Ahn (Seoul, Korea: Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, 2012). Online: [http://www.international.ucla.edu/media/files/o7-1\\_Gongan\\_I\\_web-py-zjw.pdf](http://www.international.ucla.edu/media/files/o7-1_Gongan_I_web-py-zjw.pdf) and [http://www.international.ucla.edu/media/files/o7-2\\_Gongan\\_II\\_web-br-ooe.pdf](http://www.international.ucla.edu/media/files/o7-2_Gongan_II_web-br-ooe.pdf).

7. *Xutanglu*, 虛堂和尚語錄, Japanese, *Kidoroku*, Yoel Hoffman, *Every End Exposed: The 100 Perfect Koans of Master Kido* (Brookline, MA: Autumn Press, 1977). This is an early translation of the same text translated in this volume and provides an alternative rendering of every case, along with capping phrases attributed to Hakuin. The sources for what are generally attributed to Rinzai Zen are not given and are probably best understood as what one Japanese source shared with Hoffman.

## Appendix 3: Notes on Translations

This appendix offers the reader the opportunity to compare other translations of the cases in *The Record of Empty Hall*. It is not intended to be exhaustive; that is, there may well be other versions, but I've provided references for one or two of those available. If a case is not included in this appendix, it means that I have been unsuccessful in locating another version.

Note that full citations to text references are given only at first mention.

### Case 2: The World-Honored One Cares for Each and Goes

For a Dogen reference to this case, see Rev. Shohaku Okumura, “The 7th Chapter of Shobogenzo Ikaka-myoju (One Bright Jewel) Lecture (8),” *Dharma Eye: News of Soto Zen Buddhism*, no. 42 (September 2018): 13, <https://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/42e.pdf>: “The next day, Xuansha asked the monk, ‘The entire ten-direction world is one bright jewel. How do you understand it?’ This means that he spoke of the fixed dharma yesterday; he speaks with his second tongue today. Today he speaks of the not-fixed-dharma. Having pushed yesterday aside, he is nodding and laughing.”

### Case 4: Fu Daishi Explains a Sutra

Yuanwu Keqín, Case 67, “Mahasattva Fu Expounds the Scripture,” *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary

(Boston: Shambhala, 1977), 376.

## Case 5: The National Teacher Zhong's "Single Wisp of Cloud"

For an extended version of this case, see Daoyuan, *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*, vol. 2, *The Early Masters*, trans. Rudolph S. Whitfield (Printed in Germany: Books on Demand, 2015), 135

## Case 6: Nanquan's Debt of Gratitude

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:132.

## Case 7: Magu's Bodacious Presentation

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:133.

## Case 8: The National Teacher Cultivates Practice

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:134.

## Case 9: Fenggan's Old Mirror

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, vol. 7, *Biographies and Extended Discourses*, trans. Rudolph S. Whitfield (Printed in Germany: Books on Demand, 2019).

## Case 10: Budai's True Name

Background for Budai can be found in Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 7:61–63.

## Case 11: Manjusri Counts the Saints

Yuanwu Keqin, Case 35, “The Dialogue of Manjusri and Wu Cho,” *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Cleary and Cleary, 216.

## Case 12: Manjusri Dreams a Dream of You

Yuanwu Keqin, Case 35, “The Dialogue of Manjusri and Wu Cho,” *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Cleary and Cleary, 217–20.

## Case 13: Nanquan Sells His Body

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:216.

## Case 14: Nanquan Offers New Tightly-Whities

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, vol. 4, *The Shitou Line*, trans. Rudolph S. Whitfield (Printed in Germany: Books on Demand, 2017), 59.

## Case 15: Huangbo’s “Teachers of Zen”

Yuanwu Keqin, Case 35, “The Dialogue of Manjusri and Wu Cho,” *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Cleary and Cleary, 72.

## Case 16: Zhaozhou and Nanquan Are Saved

Zhaozhou Congshen, *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu*, trans. James Green (Boston: Shambhala, 1998), 13.

## Case 18: Guizong’s Song of Himself

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:205.

## Case 19: Pang’s “Mixed and Broken Bits”

Layman Pang, *The Sayings of Layman Pang: A Zen Classic of China*, trans. James Green (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), 83; Daoyuan,

*Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 4:249.

## Case 20: Zhaozhou Leans His Staff

Zhaozhou, *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu*, trans. James Green, 148.

## Case 21: Dongshan Dies Counting

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 4:115. This incident is also referenced in the entry for Xuefeng in the same volume, 140–41, but it has a different response from Xuefeng. When asked about the three bodies, he responded, “Nine times this old fellow got a turning word from Dongshan. The monk was about to ask again when the master said, ‘Throw this monk out!’”<sup>30</sup>

## Case 22: Shishi Rejoices Grinding a Cup and Tray

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 4:72–73.

## Case 23: Zhangjing and the Disappearing Circle

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:182.

## Case 24: Xuefeng Is Set Straight

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 4:142–43.

## Case 25: Dongshan’s “No-Knowing Face”

Tung-shan, *The Record of Tung-shan*, trans. William F. Powell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 38.

## Case 26: Xuefeng Seals What



Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, vol. 5, *Heirs of Master Xuefeng Yicun et al*, trans. Rudolph S. Whitfield (Printed in Germany: Books on Demand, 2018), 78.

## Case 28: Changqing's Great Assembly Bows

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 5:58.

## Case 29: Lingshu Breaks an Alms Bowl

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, vol. 3, *The Nanyue Huirang Lineage*, trans. Rudolph S. Whitfield (Printed in Germany: Books on Demand, 2018), 106.

## Case 31: Yunmen's Got Words

Yunmen, *Zen Master Yunmen: His Life and Sayings*, trans. Urs App (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1994), 224.

## Case 37: Luopu's "Not Meeting the Founder"

From the *Wudeng huiyuan* (Collected Essentials of the Five Lamplight Histories), issued 1252, another in the genre of transmission-of-the-light texts. This is the only case in the *Record of Empty Hall* taken from the *Wudeng huiyuan*. To my knowledge, no English translation of the text is available.

## Case 41: Open Heart's "One Person"

Andy Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage: The Masters and Their Teachings* (Boston: Wisdom, 2000), 306.

## Case 42: Helin Su's "Place for No You"

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:47.

## Case 48: Guanyin Does Not Go to Korea

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 5:59–60.

## Case 54: Danxia’s “Lucky Guy and It Sucks to Be You”

Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 151.

## Case 57: Zhaozhou Bows and Withdraws

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:214.

## Case 58: Guizong’s Roughness

Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 92.

## Case 59: Linji’s “Great Compassion”

Linji Yixuan, *The Record of Linji: A New Translation of the “Linji lu” in Light of Ten Japanese Zen Commentaries*, trans. Jeffrey L. Broughton with Elise Yoko Watanabe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 32.

## Case 61: Baizhang’s “One Person”

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:167; Huaihai, *The Sayings and Doings of Pai-chang*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1978), 26.

## Case 62: Sanjueyin’s “Crossing Over”

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:175.

## Case 63: Luzu’s “Only This Way”

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:175.

### Case 64: Cizhou's "Knowing Yet Not Knowing"

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:239. For this difficult-to-translate case, Whitfield has the following for the first line: "Knowing without knowing is not not-knowing, yet it is to talk unknowingly."

### Case 65: All-Together Peak's "How Many?"

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:230.

### Case 66: Iron Grindstone Liu Visits Guishan

Yuanwu Keqin, Case 24, "Kuei Shan and Iron Grindstone Liu," *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Cleary and Cleary, 159. Also see Pat Enkyo O'Hara, "Iron Grindstone Liu's Feast," in *The Hidden Lamp: Stories from Twenty-Five Centuries of Awakened Women*, ed. Zenshin Florence Caplow and Reigetsu Susan Moon (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2013), 145–46.

### Case 67: Iron Grindstone Liu's "Upside Down"

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 3:58; Wansong Xingxiu, *The Book of Serenity: One Hundred Zen Dialogues*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), 253.

### Case 68: Guishan's Centered, Harmonious Functioning

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 2:256.

### Case 69: Hongzhou Miling's "Nothing Can Surpass This"

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 3:175–76.

### Case 73: Jinfeng's Pillow

Eihei Dogen, *The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dōgen's Three Hundred Koans*, trans. Kazuaki Tanahashi and John Daido Looi (Boston: Shambhala, 2005), 373.

### Case 74: Dongshan's Tea Party

Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage*, 214.

### Case 75: Xuansha's "One Bright Pearl"

The more common version of a dialogue with Xuanshan about the one bright pearl can be found here: Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 3:48; and extensive commentary here: Eihei Dogen, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2012), 34–38.

### Case 76: Xuansha's "No Relationship"

Wansong Xingxiu, Case 81, "Xuansha Comes to the District," *The Book of Serenity*, trans. Cleary, 346–49.

### Case 79: Changqing's "Almost Let Him Slip By"

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 5:57–58.

### Case 85: Daochang's "Hear and See"

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 4: 97–98.

### Case 86: Nanquan's "Windy Night"

Wansong Xingxiu, Case 27, “Fayan Points to a Blind,” *The Book of Serenity*, trans. Cleary, 116.

## Case 90: Rirong’s Dance

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 3:117.

## Case 94: Yaoshan’s Arrow

Yuanwu Keqin, Case 81, “Yao Shan’s Shooting the Elk of Elks,” *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Cleary and Cleary, 443.

## Case 96: Dongshan’s “Not Arrive”

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 4:109; Eihei Dogen, *The True Dharma Eye*, trans. Kazuaki Tanahashi and John Daido Looi, 66.

## Case 97: Yunju’s “Secret Word”

Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 4:193.

## Case 100: Yantou Doesn’t Agree

Eihei Dogen, *The True Dharma Eye*, trans. Kazuaki Tanahashi and John Daido Looi, 372–73.

# Notes

## Introduction

1. Japanese, Kido Chigu; Korean, Hodang Chiu; 虛堂智愚, also known as Xijingsou.
2. Hakuin Zenji, *Complete Poison Blossoms from a Thicket of Thorn: The Zen Records of Hakuin Zenji*, trans. Norman Waddell (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2017), 54.
3. *Entangling Vines: A Classic Collection of Zen Koans*, trans. Thomas Yūhō Kirchner (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2013), 74.
4. All of the citations here involving Xutang's work with Yun'an are from *Xutang lu*, book 4, as found in Hakuin Zenji, *Complete Poison Blossoms from a Thicket of Thorn*, 344–45.
5. Ibid., 38.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 112.
8. Kirchner, *Entangling Vines*, 126.
9. Steven Heine, *Chinese Chan to Japanese Zen: A Remarkable Century of Transmission and Transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 101.
10. Eihei Dogen, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi (Boston: Shambhala, 2012), 110–11.
11. Heine, *Chinese Chan to Japanese Zen*, 115.
12. Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, vol. 2, *Japan*, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005), 39.

13. Hakuin Zenji, *Complete Poison Blossoms from a Thicket of Thorn*, 13. Ryutaku-ji is one of the monasteries where Hakuin taught.
14. I'm unaware of a translation of "The Essential Collection of the Lamplight Connections within the [Chan] Tradition." "The Record of the Transmission of the Lamplight [Compiled during the] Jingde [Era]," by Daoyuan, has been translated by Rudolph S. Whitfield as the multivolume *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, and is cited often in this book.
15. Yoel Hoffman, *Every End Exposed: The 100 Perfect Koans of Master Kido* (Brookline, MA: Autumn Press, 1977), 126–27.
16. Yuanwu Keqin, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 1977).
17. Wansong Xingxiu, *The Book of Serenity: One Hundred Zen Dialogues*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1990).
18. Wumen Huikai, *The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-Men Kuan*, trans. Robert Aitken (Berkeley, CA: North Point Press, 1991).
19. Based on an email from Dr. Steven Heine, May 20, 2019.
20. Joan Sutherland, *Acequias & Gates: Miscellaneous Koans and Writings on Miscellaneous Koans*, <https://joansutherlanddharmaworks.org/Detailed/58.html>.
21. Case 6: "Nanquan's Debt of Gratitude."
22. Shitou Xiqian, *The Agreement of Difference and Sameness in Wild Fox Zen* blog, trans. Dosho Port, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/wildfoxzen/2019/08/harmony-of-difference-and-sameness-alternate-translation.html>.
23. "A monk asked Zhaozhou, 'Even a dog has the buddha nature, no?' Zhou said, 'No.'"

## Cases

1. William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of

California Press, 1983), 93.

- [2.](#) Rodney Smith, *Awakening: A Paradigm Shift of the Heart* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2014), 115.
- [3.](#) Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 21.
- [4.](#) Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 22. This is paraphrasing Hakuin.
- [5.](#) Yuanwu Keqin, Case 1, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Dosho Port and Simon Askelöf (unpublished):

Emperor Wu of Liang asked Bodhidharma, “What is the highest meaning of the holy truth?”

Dharma said, “Empty suchness, no holy.”

The emperor asked, “Who is the person facing me?”

Dharma said, “Don’t know.”

The emperor was not pleased.

Dharma then crossed the river to Wei. The emperor later asked Chi Kung about this.

Duke Zhi said, “Does your majesty know who that was?”

The emperor said, “Don’t know.”

Duke Zhi said, “That was Guan Yin.”

The emperor felt regret and sent envoys to invite him back.

Duke Zhi said, “Don’t send anyone after him. Even if every person in the whole country went, he would not return.”

- [6.](#) Ibid., Case 18.
- [7.](#) Ibid., Case 99.
- [8.](#) Wumen Huikai, Case 17, “The National Teacher’s Three Calls,” *The No Gate Barrier*, trans. Dosho Port and Simon Askelöf (unpublished).
- [9.](#) Unpublished translation by Dainin Katagiri Roshi.
- [10.](#) Eihei Dogen, *Dogen’s Extensive Record: A Translation of the Eihei Koroku*, trans. Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2004), 125.



- [11.](#) Yuanwu Keqin, Case 69, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Port and Askelöf: “Nanquan, Guizong and Magu were going to pay their respect to National Teacher Zhong. When they had come halfway, Nanquan drew a circle on the ground and said, ‘Say something and we’ll go on.’ Guizong sat down in the center of the circle. Magu curtsied like a woman. Quan said, ‘If it’s like this, we will not go.’ Guizong said, ‘What activity of the mind is that?’ ”
- [12.](#) Daoyuan, *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*, vol. 4, *The Shitou Line*, trans. Rudolph S. Whitfield (Printed in Germany: Books on Demand, 2017), 105.
- [13.](#) Hell, hungry ghost, animal, human, fighting gods, and god realms.
- [14.](#) Yuanwu Keqin, Case 31, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Port and Askelöf:

Magu came to Zhangjing and walked around Zhangjing’s seat three times holding his staff, shook the staff once, and then stood still. Jing said, “Right, right.” Magu also went to Nanquan and walked around his seat three times. He shook the staff, and then stood still. Quan said, “Wrong, wrong.” After a long time, Magu said, “Zhangjing said, ‘Right.’ Why does the venerable say ‘Wrong?’ ” Quan said, “Zhangjing is right. You are wrong. This is the power of the wind that turns around and around and in the end is dissolved.”

- [15.](#) Eihei Dogen, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen’s Shobo Genzo*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2012), 72.
- [16.](#) Hakuin Zenji, *Complete Poison Blossoms from a Thicket of Thorn*, 315.
- [17.](#) Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 28.
- [18.](#) Ibid., 29.
- [19.](#) The rules governing monastic behavior.

- [20.](#) Thomas Cleary, *Secrets of the Blue Cliff Record: Zen Comments by Hakuin and Tenkei* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2000), 112–13.
- [21.](#) Ibid.
- [22.](#) Hakuin Zenji, *Complete Poison Blossoms from a Thicket of Thorn*, 202.
- [23.](#) Case 204, “Nanquan Sells His Body,” *Collected Works of Korean Buddhism*, vol. 7.1, *Gongan Collections I*, trans. Juhn Y. Ahn (Seoul, Korea: Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, 2012), 343.
- [24.](#) Eihei Dogen, *Dogen’s Extensive Record: A Translation of the Eihei Koroku*, trans. Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2004), 470. Modified.
- [25.](#) Case 204, “Nanquan Sells His Body,” *Collected Works of Korean Buddhism*, vol. 7.1, *Gongan Collections I*, trans Ahn, 342.
- [26.](#) Ibid., 348. Foyan Qingyuan (1067–1120), was a dharma heir of Wuzu Fayan. Along with Fojian Huiqin and Yuanwu Keqin, he is known as one of Three Buddhas of East Mountain.
- [27.](#) Attributed to Asvaghosa, *The Awakening of Faith*, trans. Yoshito S. Hakeda (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 35.
- [28.](#) *The Nirvana Sutra (Mahaparinirvana-Sutra)*, vol. 1, trans. Mark L. Blum (Berkeley, CA: Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai America, Inc., 2013), 59.
- [29.](#) Attributed to Asvaghosa, *The Awakening of Faith*, trans. Hakeda, 34.
- [30.](#) See Case 14, “Nanquan Offers New Tightly-Whities.”
- [31.](#) Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 35.
- [32.](#) Ibid., 36.
- [33.](#) Yuanwu Keqin, Case 45, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Port and Askelöf.

Jingqing asked a monk, “What is the sound outside the gate?”

The monk said, “The sound of raindrops.”

Qing said, “Living beings are upside down and lose themselves chasing after things.”

The monk said, “Teacher, what about you?”

Qing said, “Reaching not to lose myself.”

34. Libo is identified in *Records of Transmitting the Lamp* as a person who had retired from public service and become a recluse, then later was recalled to serve as a high-ranking official, the provincial governor of Jiangzhou.
35. *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti: A Mahayana Scripture*, trans. Robert Thurman (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 52.
36. Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 39.
37. Wansong Xingxiu, *The Book of Serenity*, trans. Cleary, 422–24. Cleary translates this phrase as “He puts people in a deadly rush.” This phrase (氣急殺人) is still a colloquial expression in modern Chinese.
38. Eihei Dogen, “Instructions for the Zen Cook,” *From the Zen Kitchen to Enlightenment*, trans. Thomas Wright (New York, Weatherhill: 1983), 5–6.
39. Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 4:72.
40. Eihei Dogen, *Shobo Genzo Genjo Koan*, trans. Kenneth Port and Dosho Port (unpublished).
41. Jingqing (868–937) was one of Xuefeng’s prominent successors, he is also known as Longce and appears in *The Blue Cliff Record* several times, and here in Case 99, “Longce Investigates a Young Boy.”
42. See Case 84, “Deshan’s Beating People.”
43. Wansong Xingxiu, *Going Through the Mystery’s One Hundred Questions*, question 11, “Beating Buddhas and Ancestors,” trans. Dosho Port (unpublished).

44. Dongshan's enlightenment poem. Tung-shan, *The Record of Tung-shan*, trans. William F. Powell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 26.
45. Yuanwu Keqin, Case 51, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
46. David Hinton, *No-Gate Gateway: The Original Wu-Men Kuan* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2018), 134.
47. Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, vol. 5, *Heirs of Master Xuefeng Yicun et al*, trans. Rudolph S. Whitfield (Printed in Germany: Books on Demand, 2018), 79.
48. Eihei Dogen, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi, 88.
49. Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 49.
50. See Case 6, "Nanquan's Debt of Gratitude."
51. Eihei Dōgen, "Instructions for the Zen Cook," *From the Zen Kitchen to Enlightenment*, 5–6.
52. Wumen Huikai, Case 9, "The Buddha of Supremely Pervading Surpassing Wisdom," *The No Gate Barrier*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
53. *Soto School Scriptures for Daily Services and Practice*, 33–37.
54. Yuanwu Keqin, Case 41, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
55. Also known as Aryadeva.
56. Although our text only says "types," it probably means the ninety-six types of heretics, mentioned by Nagarjuna in *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra* and elsewhere.
57. Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 53.
58. This is the buddha field of Amitabha Buddha, Sukhavati, "blissful" or "full of happiness" in Sanskrit, "ultimate bliss" in Chinese. It also can refer to the region we now call India.
59. Yuanwu Keqin, Case 100, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Port and Askelöf.

- [60.](#) Cowboy Junkies, “Cheap Is How I Feel,” from *The Caution Horses*, RCA, 1990.
- [61.](#) Dogen Kigen, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, trans. Kazuaki Tanahashi (New York: North Point Press, 1985), 219.
- [62.](#) Roy Scranton, *We’re Doomed. Now What? Essays on War and Climate Change* (New York: Soho Press, 2018), 69.
- [63.](#) Nagarjuna, *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, trans. Jay L. Garfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 36.
- [64.](#) Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 72.
- [65.](#) Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 58.
- [66.](#) Shitou Xiqian, “Song of the Grass-Roof Hermitage.” *Cultivating the Empty Field: The Silent Illumination of Zen Master Hongzhi*, trans. Taigen Dan Leighton and Yi Wu (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2000), 72–73.
- [67.](#) Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 60.
- [68.](#) Wumen Huikai, Case 42, “Woman Coming Out of Concentration,” *The No Gate Barrier*, trans. Port and Askeöl.
- [69.](#) Hakuin Zenji, *Complete Poison Blossoms from a Thicket of Thorn*, 30.
- [70.](#) This monk is known by a single character 坦 Tan. It seems fitting for him to go by the English translation.
- [71.](#) Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 401–2.
- [72.](#) See Case 36, “Gong’s Change or No Change?”
- [73.](#) Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 768. Modified.
- [74.](#) Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 67.
- [75.](#) Yuanwu Keqin, Case 22, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Port and Askeöl.
- [76.](#) I’ve been unable to find another translation of this case. Also, it isn’t clear from the text whether the Cuiyan involved here is

Cuiyan Wuxue (n.d), tenth generation in China through Danxia Tianran; Cuiyan Lingcan (n.d.), thirteenth generation in China through Xuefeng; Cuiyan Kezhan (d. 1064); or Cuiyan Kezhen, eighteenth generation in China through Shishuan Chuyuan; or some other Cuiyan.

[77.](#) *Soto School Scriptures for Daily Services and Practice*, 33–37.

[78.](#) *Ibid.*, 28.

[79.](#) Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 5:59–60.

[80.](#) Wumen Huikai, Case 23, “Don’t Think Good versus Evil,” *The No Gate Barrier*, trans. Port and Askelöf.

[81.](#) *Soto School Scriptures for Daily Services and Practice*, 33–37.

[82.](#) Torei Enji, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp of the Zen School* (Boston: Charles E. Tuttle, 1996), 151.

[83.](#) Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 51.

[84.](#) Hakuun Yasutani, *Flowers Fall: A Commentary on Zen Master Dogen’s Genjokoan*, trans. Paul Jaffe (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), xxii.

[85.](#) *Ibid.*, 67–68.

[86.](#) Eihei Dogen, “Fukanzazengi,” trans. Dosho Port (unpublished).

[87.](#) Mazu Daoyi, *Master Ma’s Ordinary Mind: The Sayings of Zen Master Mazu Daoyi*, trans. Fumio Yamada (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2017), 101.

[88.](#) Robert Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-Men Kuan* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 162.

[89.](#) Hinton, *No-Gate Gateway*, 132.

[90.](#) Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 81.

[91.](#) Linji Yixuan, *The Record of Linji*, trans. Ruth Fuller Sasaki, ed. Thomas Yuho Kirchner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 129.

[92.](#) *Soto School Scriptures for Daily Services and Practice*, 34.

[93.](#) Torei Enji, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 201.

[94.](#) Hakuin Zenji, *Complete Poison Blossoms from a Thicket of Thorn*, 57.



95. Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 84.
96. Wansong Xingxiu, Case 23, *The Record of Going Easy*, trans. Dosho Port and Simon Askelöf (unpublished).
97. Eihei Dogen, “Fukanzazengi,” trans. Port.
98. Wansong Xingxiu, *The Record of Going Easy*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
99. Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 87.
100. Yuanwu Keqin, Case 96, “Chao Chou’s Three Turning Words,” *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Cleary and Cleary, 525.
101. Ibid., 113.
102. Torei Enji, *The Undying Lamp of the Zen School: The Testament of Zen Master Torei*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), 39.
103. Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 364.
104. Tanya Storch, *The History of Chinese Buddhist Bibliography: Censorship and Transformation of the Tripitaka* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2014), 201.
105. *Soto School Scriptures for Daily Services and Practice*, 33–37.
106. Torei Enji, *The Undying Lamp of the Zen School*, trans. Cleary, 44.
107. Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 213–14.
108. See Rev. Shohaku Okumura, “The 7th Chapter of Shobogenzo Ikka-myoju (One Bright Jewel) Lecture (5),” *Dharma Eye*, no. 39, <https://global.sotozennet.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/39e.pdf>, 18.
109. Albert Low, *Hakuin on Kensho: The Four Ways of Knowing* (Boston: Shambhala, 2006), 56.
110. Eihei Dogen, “Fukanzazengi,” trans. Port.
111. Wansong Xingxiu, Case 81, “Xuansha Arrives in the District,” *The Record of Going Easy*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
112. Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 5:49.

- [113.](#) Yuanwu Keqin, Case 16, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
- [114.](#) Shitou Xiqian, *The Agreement of Difference and Sameness in Wild Fox Zen* blog, trans. Dosho Port, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/wildfoxzen/2019/08/harmony-of-difference-and-sameness-alternate-translation.html>.
- [115.](#) Wansong Xingxiu, Case 12, “Dizang Planting the Fields,” *The Record of Going Easy*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
- [116.](#) Xutang’s alternate saying, 牛轡, is quite difficult to translate, and this attempt is more provisional than much of the rest of *The Record of Empty Hall*. The first character is “water buffalo,” but the second refers to “death of a disembodied spirit.” Given the context with the rebirth of Guishan’s water buffalo, this rendering seems reasonable.
- [117.](#) Yuanwu Keqin, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Cleary and Cleary, 160. Modified.
- [118.](#) See more about 道理, the Way’s inner pattern, in Case 26, “Xuefeng Seals What.”
- [119.](#) Wumen Huikai, Case 23, “Don’t Think Good versus Evil,” “The No Gate Barrier,” trans. Port and Askelöf. For a clear, cool commentary, see Case 26, “Fa-Yan: Two Monks Roll Up the Blinds,” in Robert Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier*, 166–70,
- [120.](#) Hoffman, *Every End Exposed*, 105.
- [121.](#) *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), 1179.
- [122.](#) Jason Protass, “Buddhist Monks and Chinese Poems: Song Dynasty Monastic Literary Culture,” PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 182–83.
- [123.](#) From Xutang’s death poem, Xutang *lu*, Tripitika CBETA.org, <http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/zh-cn/T47:1063b.15f>.
- [124.](#) Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, trans. Jay L. Garfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 47.



- [125.](#) Translation by Dosho Port.
- [126.](#) Hakuin Zenji, *Complete Poison Blossoms from a Thicket of Thorn*, 149.
- [127.](#) Hanshan, *The Complete Cold Mountain: Poems of the Legendary Hermit Hanshan*, trans. Kazuaki Tanahashi and Peter Levitt (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2019). See Case 9, “Fenggan’s Old Mirror” for more on Hanshan.
- [128.](#) Hakuin Zenji, *Complete Poison Blossoms from a Thicket of Thorn*, 330.
- [129.](#) For an explanation of translating 理, li, as “inner pattern,” see Case 26, “Xuefeng Seals What.”
- [130.](#) See Case 74, “Dongshan’s Tea Party,” for an example of Yantou visiting Dongshan.
- [131.](#) Wansong Xingxiu, Case 14, *The Record of Going Easy*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
- [132.](#) Eihei Dogen, *The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dōgen’s Three Hundred Koans*, trans. Kazuaki Tanahashi and John Daido Looori (Boston: Shambhala, 2005), 373.
- [133.](#) Translation by Dosho Port.

## Appendices

- [1.](#) Huaihai, *The Sayings and Doings of Pai-chang*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1978).
- [2.](#) Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 250. Modified.
- [3.](#) Yuanwu Keqin, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Cleary and Cleary, 261.
- [4.](#) Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 4:53.
- [5.](#) For the salacious details see Eihei Dogen, *Dogen’s Pure Standards for the Zen Community: A Translation of the Eihei Shingi*, trans. Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 133–34.

- [6.](#) Wumen Huikai, Case 30, “This Mind, This Buddha,” *The No Gate Barrier*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
- [7.](#) Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, 4:98.
- [8.](#) Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 302.
- [9.](#) Tung-shan, *The Record of Tung-shan*, trans. Powell.
- [10.](#) Yuanwu Keqin, Case 38, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
- [11.](#) Ibid., Case 69.
- [12.](#) Huangbo Xiyun, *A Bird in Flight Leaves No Trace: The Zen Teachings of Huangbo with a Modern Commentary*, trans. Seong-Uk Kim and Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2019).
- [13.](#) Eihei Dogen, *The True Dharma Eye*, trans. Kazuaki Tanahashi and John Daido Looi.
- [14.](#) Yuanwu Keqin, Case 38, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
- [15.](#) Linji Yixuan, *The Record of Linji: A New Translation of the “Linji lu” in Light of Ten Japanese Zen Commentaries*, trans. Jeffrey L. Broughton with Elise Yoko Watanabe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- [16.](#) Yuanwu Keqin, Case 16, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
- [17.](#) Mazu Daoyi, *Master Ma’s Ordinary Mind*.
- [18.](#) Yuanwu Keqin, Case 56, *The Blue Cliff Record*, trans. Port and Askelöf.
- [19.](#) Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, vol. 2, *The Early Masters*, trans. Rudolph S. Whitfield (Printed in Germany: Books on Demand, 2018), 175.
- [20.](#) “Go-between” transmission is controversial. See William M. Bodiford, *Record of the Transmission of Illumination*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Sotoshu Shumicho, 2017), 34–35.
- [21.](#) Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, vol. 5.
- [22.](#) Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, 170.

- [23.](#) *Soto Zen Ancestors in China: The Recorded Teachings of Shitou Xiqian, Yaoshan Weiyang and Yunyan Tansheng*, trans. James Mitchell (San Francisco: Ithuriel's Spear, 2005).
- [24.](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Wild Ivy: The Spiritual Autobiography of Zen Master Hakuin*, trans. Norman Waddell (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), 130.
- [25.](#) Eihei Dogen, *Dōgen's Extensive Record: A Translation of the Eihei Koroku*, trans. Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2004), 363. Modified.
- [26.](#) Yunmen, *Zen Master Yunmen: His Life and Sayings*, trans. Urs App (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2019).
- [27.](#) *Soto Zen Ancestors in China*.
- [28.](#) Ibid.
- [29.](#) Zhaozhou Congshen, *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu*, trans. James Green (Boston: Shambhala, 1998), 13.
- [30.](#) Daoyuan, *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*, vol. 4.

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