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Was There Religious Autobiography in China before the Thirteenth Century?— The Ch'an Master Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1089–1163) as Autobiographer

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Introduction

Wu Pei-yi in his learned and graceful work on autobiography in China, *The Confucian's Progress*, laments that for many centuries even among Buddhists one could not find an example of an autobiography, even a conversion narrative. Buddhists had from the start been interested in hagiography, interested in “recording the achievements and miracles of monks [and, I would add, nuns] in their human pursuits.” He writes:

It was a rare abbot who did not have his biography or tomb inscription composed by a learned monk or member of the Confucian literati. . . . But none of the writers, whatever his religious persuasion, escaped from the rigid canons of Chinese historiography. Almost all biographies of monks are short, succinct and sketchy. Next to nothing is ever said about their interior life; where a modern reader is most curious the biographer is usually reticent. We are almost never told if there were any first stirrings of religiosity, any subsequent doubts or backslidings. Nor is there ever any description of the gradual transformation of the inner self or the circumstances that accompanied sudden illumination. In both content and format Chinese religious biography does not differ from secular biography.¹

Wu offers the example of Hui-neng 慧能 (638–713), the sixth patriarch of Ch'an, as a man whose spiritual autobiography we would love to know. In the famous sermon that begins the *Platform Sūtra*, Hui-neng does offer an account of his origins, his illuminations, his study with and certification by a teacher at a famous Ch'an center. He mentions the events that drastically changed his life. But Hui-neng's narrative, or that attributed to him, tells us nothing of his feelings and thoughts. His report of the illuminations that changed his life is remarkably terse. As an illiterate seller of firewood in a remote province far from any Buddhist centers, he went one day to collect payment from a customer. He says: “Having received my money and turning towards the front gate, I happened to see another man who

¹Wu, *The Confucian's Progress*, 72.

was reciting the *Diamond Sūtra*. Upon hearing it my mind became clear and I was awakened.” This is the account of his most important illumination. Later, now living at the monastery of a famous Ch’an teacher, he spent eight months working in the threshing room. At the end of the eight months he heard of a verse contest that would determine the patriarchal succession, offered a verse, and was recognized as the next patriarch. Again, as Wu says, the modern reader would like to know what happened within him during those eight months. But again Hui-neng is silent.²

Perhaps the terseness of Hui-neng’s account of these moments, the telling of which changed Chinese religious history, is part of its charm. But, in Wu’s account, it remains characteristic of Chinese Buddhist discourse for quite a while. Wu finds that nowhere in early Ch’an literature do we have narratives of the subject’s experience of awakening told as a series of unfolding or obstructing qualities of consciousness. Indeed, Wu states that “for the next five centuries there was not even a repetition of Hui-neng’s meager self-revelation in the numerous sermons delivered throughout China.”³

It is not until the thirteenth century that Wu finds Ch’an Buddhists who “speak unabashedly and in great detail about their own enlightenment.”⁴ Of these thirteenth-century masters, Wu says:

A few of them even went beyond this extraordinary innovation: they reported on their long and tortuous quest, dwelling on every setback and describing every breakthrough. In doing so they not only broke several fundamental Ch’an tenets but created a new genre in Chinese literature. Their self-accounts are the first Chinese spiritual autobiographies.⁵

The man whom Wu identifies as the first Ch’an autobiographer, and indeed the first Chinese spiritual autobiographer, was a Sung Lin-chi 臨濟 school master named Tsu-ch’in 祖欽 (1216–1287). Tsu-ch’in in a sermon tells a detailed story of a temporally extensive process during which he experiences a number of different extraordinary transformations of his awareness. Through this narrative he tells us something of what it was like to be him, something of the moment-to-moment quality of his interior subjectivity over a considerable period of time. Basically the structure is simple: effort, frustration and exhaustion, more effort with the *hua-t’ou* 話頭 “wu” 無 [J. *mu*] followed by a great awakening. In Tsu-ch’in’s sermon we have a “how I came to awakening” narrative, told in a sermon to the assembly of

²Wu, *The Confucian’s Progress*, 72–73.

³Wu, *The Confucian’s Progress*, 74.

⁴Wu, *The Confucian’s Progress*, 74.

⁵Wu, *The Confucian’s Progress*, 74–75. In his first mention of the subgenre, Wu Pei-yi describes “spiritual autobiographies,” both Buddhist and Confucian, as “life stories . . . dominated by but one theme—the tortuous search for enlightenment, for the ultimate meaning of life” (Wu, 41). Such an autobiography centers on a transformation in understanding or awareness, such as that of St. Paul or St. Augustine in the West. A spiritual autobiography, in Wu’s view, ought not only to chronicle events, but to portray something of its subject’s inner life, and convincingly narrate the process through which the subject became an illumined person (Wu, 72).

monks and others at his monastery, as instructions on how to “*tso kung-fu*” 做功夫, make effort that would move them toward awakening.⁶

The excellence of Wu Pei-yi’s study of autobiography in China deserves applause. But it would be a mistake to think that no autobiographical impulse is reflected in sermons of Buddhist masters before Tsu-ch’in; and we may not wish to place the first spiritual autobiographer in China as late as the thirteenth century. In what follows I hope to show that in the twelfth century a Ch’an master famous for other accomplishments, Ta-hui Tsung-kao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163), also in his sermons gave narratives of his Ch’an study and awakening.⁷ Like Tsu-ch’in and Hui-neng, he discussed his own career in the context of sermons meant to instruct his listeners on how to practice. In contrast with Hui-neng and like Tsu-ch’in, Ta-hui in his sermons gave his listeners, as well as the readers of his widely circulated sermon collections, something of the moment-to-moment quality of his body and mind, his “interior subjectivity,” over a considerable period of time.⁸

⁶Wu discusses and translates much of the autobiographical section of Tsu-ch’in’s sermon on pp. 76–87.

⁷Chinese customarily refer to Ta-hui Tsung-kao by his ordination name, Tsung-kao, and not by Ta-hui, one of three names given to Tsung-kao by emperors to honor him. Japanese authors customarily refer to him by the first of the honorific names, Ta-hui, followed by his ordination name. Ta-hui referred to himself by a series of other names, self-chosen or taken from where he was teaching; the most common of these names was “Miao-hsi” 妙喜. The literature in English so far largely uses “Ta-hui Tsung-kao”; I know of only two publications, one of which is Wu’s book, that use “Tsung-kao.” I favor using Tsung-kao, but for the moment will stick with the name by which Tsung-kao is better known in English.

⁸In what follows in this essay I draw on the *Ta-hui P’u-chüeh Ch’an-shih yü-lu* 大慧普覺禪師語錄, the *Ta-hui P’u-chüeh Ch’an-shih p’u-shuo* 大慧普覺禪師普說 in 5 *chüan*, and the *Ta-hui P’u-chüeh Ch’an-shih nien-p’u* 大慧普覺禪師年譜. All of these three were of course collected and edited by disciples of Ta-hui. The *Yü-lu*, T 1998a, 47.811b–943b, was compiled by Yün-wen 蘊聞 and other disciples; its four parts apparently circulated separately. Apparently on Emperor Hsiao-tsung’s instruction the whole work as we have it now was entered into both the K’ai-yüan Temple 開元寺 and the East Temple [Tung-ssu 東寺] editions of the *Ta-tsang-ching* (Tripitaka) in 1171–1172. The *Taishō* text was apparently checked against a Sung text (no longer extant), and thus may be the most reliable text available now. I will hereafter cite this text as “*Yü-lu*”; page numbers will refer to the *Taishō* edition. (The information given here on this and the other two texts discussed in this note is drawn from Ishii, “*Daie goroku no kisoteki kenkyū* [jol]”).

The *Ta-hui p’u-shuo* in 5 *chüan* appears in the *Dai Nihon kōtei daizōkyō* 大日本校訂大藏經 (the “Kyoto” or “Manji” 卅字 *zōkyō*). It contains a four-*chüan* *p’u-shuo* collection which does not duplicate the single *chüan* of *p’u-shuo* in the *Yü-lu*. It is this four-*chüan* collection that I refer to here. There are two early Japanese copies of Sung editions of this work; one is clearly from the Kamakura period. In the early Japanese copies there is a preface dated 1188 and a postface dated 1189 that are presumably reprinted from the Sung text. I will cite this as “*P’u-shuo*.”

There is also autobiographical material in Ta-hui’s *Tsung-men wu-k’u* 宗門武庫 (hereafter *Wu-k’u*), which was compiled by Ta-hui’s disciple Tao-ch’ien 道謙. A preface is dated 1186. This text includes many anecdotes and stories that Ta-hui apparently told about himself and about other teachers. The text in the *Taishō* and the *Zokuzōkyō* are based on a Ming dynasty edition. The *Ta-hui P’u-chüeh*

Ta-hui's narratives about his life fall into three categories. The first consists of relatively simple narratives of his definitive awakening. These are limited to or focus almost exclusively on what happened and how he felt during a brief period when he was studying at the capital in present-day Kaifeng with the master from whom he received dharma-transmission, Yüan-wu K'o-ch'in 圓悟克勤 (1063–1135). He tells this, his fundamental conversion or awakening narrative, over and over again. Here is one of his rather long and detailed versions of that story:⁹

I studied for seventeen years. . . . Later at the T'ien-ning 天寧 monastery at the capital I saw Yüan-wu ascend the hall to teach. He raised for our inspection the *kung-an* 公案, "A monk asked Yün-men 雲門, 'What is the place where all the Buddhas are emancipated [enlightened]?'"¹⁰ Yün-men replied, '[Where] the East Mountains walk on the river.'"¹¹ Yüan-wu continued: "If someone were to ask me today what the place is like where all the Buddhas are emancipated, I would reply, 'The *hsün* 薰 wind comes from the south, and produces a slight coolness in the palace.'"¹²

This couplet is found in the following story given in the *T'ang shih chi-shih* 唐詩紀事, *chüan* 40, in the section on the T'ang poet Liu Kung-ch'üan 柳公權. "On a summer day the emperor Wen-tsung was making up linked verses [*lien-chü* 聯句] with various scholars. He

Ch'an-shih nien-p'u, an annalistic biography, was compiled sometime before 1183 by a disciple named Tsu-yung 祖詠, and revised in 1205. The revision was done by Hua-tsang Tsung-yen 華藏宗演 to bring the *Nien-p'u* into accord with information given in a work called *Yün-wo chi-t'an* 雲臥紀談 by another of Ta-hui's dharma-heirs, Hsiao-ying Chung-wen 曉瑩仲溫. The *Yün-wo chi-t'an* must date from sometime after 1178. The *Nien-p'u* was included in a Ming canon (reprinted in *Chung-hua ta-tsang-ching* 中華大藏經, 2nd ed. [第二輯], vol. 4 [第四冊]). It has been edited, annotated and translated into Japanese recently by Ishii Shūdō. Ishii's work is published in three parts as "Daie Fukaku Zenji nempu no kenkyū (jō)," "(chū)" and "(ge)." I cite Ishii's edition because it is a critical edition established by comparison of all the extant texts. The text itself is in parts one and two; part three is Ishii's notes. Thus when I cite "Nempu (jō)" or "Nempu (chū)," I am citing the text; when I cite "Nempu (ge)" I am citing Prof. Ishii's notes.

⁹Ta-hui's awakening account is at T 1998a, 47.883a.

¹⁰Urs App has: "What is the place from whence all the Buddhas come?" (App, *Master Yunmen*, 94). But see *Zengojiten*, 205b on the meaning of *ch'u-shen* 出身, which is more like "come out of bondage."

¹¹Urs App writes: "A key to this exchange may lie in a poem by the Buddhist layman Fu Dashi [497–569] . . . It is found in the *Record of the Mirror of the Teachings* (Ch. Zongjinglu, Jap. Sugyōroku; T48: 448a.21–23) [T 2016]":

[Where] the East Mountains float on the river and the West Mountains wander on and on, in the realm [of this world?] beneath the Great Dipper: just there is the place of great emancipation. (App, *Master Yunmen*, 94)

¹²In Yüan-wu's *Yü-lu*, *chüan* 5 (T 1997, 47.736a) there is a "*shang t'ang*" 上堂 given at the invitation of a "Ta-nei Ch'ing-kuo Fu-je" 大內慶國夫人, but it does not have Yüan-wu's "*hsün* wind" *cho-yü* 著語 [*jakugo*, capping phrase].

offered, 'Others all suffer from the heat, but I like the long summer days.' Liu Kung-ch'üan continued the verse, saying: 'The *hsün* wind comes from the south, and produces a slight coolness in the palace.'" In a recently published Zen dictionary the authors write: "The *hsün* wind is a refreshing breeze that comes from the southeast in the early summer. It brings a cool refreshment that in the middle of summer in the palace everyone has forgotten is possible."¹³ Yüan-wu apparently used this couplet frequently. His *Record of Words* [Yü-lu 語錄] has, "If you do not touch on delusion or enlightenment, how can you say a single word? 'The *hsün* wind comes from the south, and produces a slight coolness in the palace.'"¹⁴ This use in his *Record of Words* may offer a key to the turn he is making away from Yün-men's answer. Yün-men gives an answer which brings into play motion and stillness—the still mountains walk, the moving waters stand still so that they can be walked on. Yüan-wu gives an answer that also seems like a perfect combination of opposites in the same image—summer heat, refreshing coolness. Perhaps the opposites he has in mind are delusion and enlightenment—it is a hot day, but within it coolness arises.¹⁵

At this point for Ta-hui suddenly "before and behind were cut off. It was like bringing a ball of tangled silk up against a knife—in one stroke it was sliced through. At that moment perspiration covered my whole body. Although no moving images arose, yet I was sitting in a place of total nakedness."¹⁶ He continues:

One day I went to enter Yüan-wu's chamber. Yüan-wu said, "For you to reach this state was not easy, it is a pity that you have died and cannot come to life. Not doubting words is a great malady. Don't you know that it is said, 'You must let go your hands while hanging from a cliff, trust yourself and accept the experience. Afterwards you return to life again. I cannot deceive you.'¹⁷ You must believe that there is this principle." I said to myself, based on what I attained today I am already very lively. I cannot understand [what he is talking about?].¹⁸

Yüan-wu assigned me to the "Selecting Leaders Hut" as an attendant without duties.¹⁹ Every day I entered Yüan-wu's chamber several times with scholar-officials for individual instruction. Yüan-wu only raised, "The word that

¹³Koga and Iriya, *Zengo jiten*, 99b.

¹⁴Yüan-wu yü-lu, *chüan* 3, T 1997, 47.724a22–23; the couplet also appears at T 1997, 47.726c.29–727a.1.

¹⁵The imaging of delusion and passion as heat and enlightenment as coolness has a long history in Buddhist literature.

¹⁶Cf. *Blue Cliff Record*, T 2003, case 6, which has: "Though you be clean and naked, bare and purified, totally without fault or worry, this is still not the ultimate" (Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 44).

¹⁷These words appear in the *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*, *chüan* 20, T 2076, 51.362a20–22, entry for Yung-kuang Yüan-chen 永光院眞. Also in the the *Blue Cliff Record*, case 41, in the commentary on the original case, where the saying is attributed to Yung-kuang. Cf. Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 299.

¹⁸This is also told at *P'u-shuo*, 421a.

¹⁹*Tse-mu* 擇木 is an allusion to a sentence: good birds select the trees on which they roost—one selects the leader whom he would follow; *Matthews' Chinese-English Dictionary*, 33.

expresses being and the word that expresses non-being are like wisteria vine clinging to a tree." As soon as someone opened his mouth, Yüan-wu would say, "Wrong!" It was like that for half a year. I just concentrated on investigating [this one *kung-an*?].

One day when I was in the abbot's quarters with some officials partaking of the evening meal, I just held the chopsticks in my hand, and completely forgot to eat. Yüan-wu said "This fellow is investigating 'boxwood Ch'an.'" ²⁰

I offered an analogy. I said, "Teacher, it is the same principle as a dog staring at a pot of hot oil; he can't lick it, but he can't leave it alone either." Yüan-wu said, "You've hit on a wonderful analogy. This is what is called the diamond cage [so hard you can't get out of it], the prickly chestnut ball [that can't be swallowed]." ²¹

Finally Ta-hui asked Yüan-wu what his teacher Wu-tsu Fa-yen 五祖法演 (?–1104) had said when Yüan-wu asked him about this same statement [*hua* 話]. Yüan-wu was not willing to talk about it.

I said, "When you asked [this question of Wu-tsu], you were not just by yourself. You asked in front of the whole assembly. What could prevent you from telling about it now?" Yüan-wu said, "Once I asked him, 'What about "Being' words and 'non-being' words are like wisteria vines clinging to a tree?'" Wu-tsu said, 'You can't describe it, you can't depict it.' I asked further, 'Suppose the tree falls and the vines die—what then?' Wu-tsu said, 'How important their companionship is to them.'" ²² The minute I heard him raise this, I understood. I said, "I got it!" Yüan-wu said, "I am only afraid that you have not yet become able to pass through the *kung-ans*." I said, "Please raise them." Yüan-wu then raised a whole series of *kung-ans*. I cut through them in two or three revolutions. It was like setting out on a journey in a time of great peace—

²⁰Boxwood is an extremely slow-growing tree, growing only an inch in a whole year; it was said that in a year with an intercalary day or month it would shrink an inch! Thus it was an image for going nowhere, or not having much vitality. In this reproving remark it is an image for being stuck in *satori* with nothing at work in you to get you further along. Cf. *Zengaku daijiten*, 327, where this exact passage is quoted.

²¹*Zengaku daijiten*, 145b; *Zengo jiten*, 473a.

²²This *kung-an* is associated with Shu-shan K'uang-jen 疏山匡仁 (also called Kuang-jen 光仁; 837–909). The story told in the *Lien-teng hui-yao* 聯燈會要, *chüan* 13, in the Shu-shan K'uang-jen chapter, and in the *Tsung-jung lu* 從容錄, case 87 (T 2004, 48.283b14), tells of Shu-shan's visit to a dharma-heir of Pai-chang Huai-hai 百丈懷海 (720–814) named Ch'ang-ch'ing Ta-an 長慶大安 (793–883), because he heard that Ta-an was making the statement about the wisteria depending on the tree. Shu-shan asked, if the tree falls down and the vine withers, what then? One interpretation would be that Ta-an's original sentence expresses the view that our discriminating knowledge and awareness is nothing more than an oppositional thing. On "important companionship," an example might be that when one spouse dies the other may die soon after, because the two depend on each other more than they realize.

once on the road you encounter nothing to stop you. Yüan-wu said, "Now you know that I have not deceived you."²³

Second, Ta-hui frequently tells other stories of encounters, activities and insights during his life which are not directly connected to his narrative of definitive awakening under Yüan-wu. These stories form the basis for much of the chronological biography [*nien-p'u* 年譜] that was written about him after his death, in itself an event for a Buddhist monk, since at the time *nien-p'u* had been reserved for only the most celebrated men of affairs and letters.²⁴ These stories include narratives about himself in his pre-awakening period, giving additional details of his studies and travels, his apparent successes and failures, and his growing doubts prior to meeting Yüan-wu.

For example, in 1109 Ta-hui enrolled in Jewel Peak Monastery [Pao-feng Yüan 寶峰院] in the northern part of present day Kiangsi Province, where Chan-t'ang Wen-chun 湛堂文準 (1061–1115) was abbot. Jewel Peak was in the Stone Gate Mountains 石門山. The monastery was also called Le-t'an 泐潭 Monastery after a nearby lake.²⁵ Of all the teachers he met before meeting Yüan-wu, Ta-hui stayed the longest with Chan-t'ang Wen-chun, leaving only because his teacher died. Ta-hui in a sermon toward the latter part of his life tells the story of a conversation that occurred toward the end of Ta-hui's stay at Jewel Peak. Chan-t'ang called the younger monk to him and made the following comment:

"Head monk Kao [i.e., Ta-hui], you understood my Ch'an at once. When I ask you to explain it, you explain it well. When I ask you to hold up stories of the ancients [*nien-ku* 拈古], or make up poems praising the masters of old [*sung-ku* 頌古], to give instructions to the monks, or to give general public instructions [*p'u-shuo* 普說], you also do all these things well."²⁶ There is only one thing that is not right. Do you know what it is?"

I replied, "What is it that I do not know?"

Chan-t'ang said: "Ho! You lack this one release. If you do not obtain this one release, when I am speaking with you in my quarters, there is Ch'an, but the minute you leave my quarters, there is none. When you are awake and thinking, there is Ch'an, but when you are asleep, then there is none. If you are like this, then how are you going to defeat *samsāra*?"

I replied, "This is exactly what I have doubts about."²⁷

²³T 1998a, 47.883ab. Cf. also Ishii, "Nempu (jō)," 128b–129a. This story is also told at *P'u-shuo*, 421a. At T 1998a, 47.883b–c he goes on quite a bit farther after this point, telling more of his post-awakening conversations with Yüan-wu.

²⁴Wu, *The Confucian's Progress*, 157–158, n. 28.

²⁵Ishii, "Nempu (ge)," 133a.

²⁶An abbreviated version of this is at *P'u-shuo*, 426b: "I studied for seventeen years. I composed *gāthās* [*chieh* 偈], songs [*sung* 頌], holding up the ancients [*nien-ku* 拈古], substitute words [*tai-pieh* 代別]—there was nothing that I did not master."

²⁷T 1998b, 47.953b.

The third set consists of expanded stories of his awakening that start from the beginning of his Ch'an studies. These do not go into detail about every event of his extensive and considerable Ch'an studies, though the basic framework is potentially expandable to include more of these depending on the audience and overall sermon direction.

These narratives seem to be worthy of the term "autobiographical narratives." They begin from when Ta-hui first started pursuing Ch'an training, and call attention to a series of roads taken, advances and setbacks. They always culminate many years later in the story of his awakening upon hearing Yüan-wu offer his substitute answer for Yün-men when preaching to the assembly. These parts of sermons are autobiographical in the sense that Ta-hui asks "Who am I?" and answers the question with a narrative. That narrative answer is not simply an account of his "conversion," his awakening under Yüan-wu, but rather gives an overall shape to his entire experience as a student of Ch'an.

These autobiographical narratives in sermons are definitely similar in important ways to those of Tsu-ch'in and his successors cited by Wu. A study of Ta-hui's autobiographical narratives in the context of his career as a whole may permit us to speculate about the origins and motivations of the autobiographical preaching and letter writing identified by Wu that occurred in the thirteenth century in the Lin-chi school.

Ta-hui's autobiographical narratives

Taking as a criterion that the narrative must start from his first studies of Ch'an or before, one can find several autobiographical narratives in Ta-hui's sermons. In the Appendix there is a chart of the constituent elements of these narratives; one can see from this chart that they are by no means identical. There is, however, what we will call a "core narrative," a common set of elements and a common plot structure that appear in all of the autobiographical narratives. In the Appendix the elements that compose the core narrative are marked with asterisks.

The core autobiographical narrative begins at the beginning of Ta-hui's Ch'an study. It usually stresses that he studied with many different teachers; he often points out that he has studied successfully with teachers of all the prominent "houses" or lineages of Ch'an. It brings up his apparent mastery of Ch'an to the point of being able to teach as a head monk (first seat 上座), and his ability to display the deportment and behavior of an accomplished follower of the Buddha. These apparent successes endure over what is a rather long career of being a head monk and an advanced student. It then may bring up his doubt nonetheless about the adequacy and depth of his own awakening. Or it may bring up his knowledge that he has frequently received the approval of teachers even though his mind is not free from doubt, and his consequent reluctance to waste more time studying Ch'an; perhaps the Ch'an he believes in does not still exist. He typically notes that he studied and passed the "East Mountain" *kung-an* before he ever met Yüan-wu, with the implication that the listener should contrast his illumination on passing that *kung-an* then with his final "real" illumination. Then he describes

the difference between his earlier apparent mastery and the fruit of his definitive illumination: following the latter, there are no doubts that Ch'an is not a lie, and no difference in his consciousness, his samādhi, between sleeping and waking.

Let us look at two of Ta-hui's autobiographical narratives, both from sermons [*p'u-shuo*] in the first *chüan* of the four-*chüan* *Ta-hui P'u-chüeh Ch'an-shih p'u-shuo*.

1. Ta-hui's autobiographical narrative at *Pu-shuo* p. 418c

Ta-hui begins with his decision to leave the household life:

I had just started school at thirteen, when after only thirteen days of school I left home to become a monk.²⁸ Soon after my head was shaved I knew that there was This Matter 此事. Although I was in a village temple, I often wanted to buy the "records of words" of various masters. Even though I did not yet understand them I loved the conversations of Yün-men [864–949] and Mu-chou 睦州 [Tao-tsung 道蹤] [d.u.].²⁹ [Mu-chou said,] "All of you! Those who do not yet have insight into Ch'an [lit: who have not yet reached an entry³⁰] must attain entry. Those who have already attained an entry should not be ungrateful to your old teacher [me] afterward."³¹ He also said: "In the present time I tell you clearly; if you even so do not understand, how much more will it be covered over in the future?"³² A monk asked [Mu-chou]: "What word illustrates?" He answered: "To evaluate a man's talent, give him an appropriate position." "How can one be free from the trap of verbal illustration?" "May I beg you to accept this offer?"³³

Because of this I went forth and traveled everywhere visiting [Ch'an] teachers. I mastered Yün-men, Ts'ao-tung 曹洞, Wei-yang 潯仰, Lin-chi,

²⁸*P'u-shuo*, 418c. The *Nien-p'u* describes him as forced to pay a fine and leave the local school at the age of thirteen after only thirteen days because he threw an inkwell that accidentally hit the teacher's hat. This sermon confirms at least part of this. Cf. Ishii, "Nempu (jō)," 113.

²⁹Yün-men's first teacher was Mu-chou Tao-tsung, also known as Venerable Master Ch'en. The following three exchanges are found among the first four exchanges on p. 35b in the *Mu-chou yü-lu*.

³⁰On *ju-t'ou ch'u* 入頭處, cf. App, *Facets of the Life and Teaching of Ch'an Master Yunmen Wenyan (864–949)*, 329. He translates it as "(place of) entry, a clue." He says it refers to some realization after strenuous effort. He quotes *Chuan-hsin fa-yao* by Huang-po: "If you devote three, five or ten years [to this], you will without fail attain entry, and [then you] will spontaneously understand" (T 2012a, 48.383c6–7). Cf. *Mu-chou yü-lu*, ZZ 119.112a4 and 119.113d14. Also *Yün-men lu*, T 1988, 47.547b1 and 549a16.

³¹I am using the translation by Chang Chung-yuan in his *Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism*, 107.

³²My own translation. Cf. *Zengo jiten*, 212. Cf. also the entry for "Old Venerable Master Ch'en" [Ch'en Tsun-su 陳尊宿] (=Mu-chou) in the *Tsu-t'ang chi*, *chüan* 19.

³³Chang Chung-yuan's translation. Chang's note to this sentence says: "the original text, *Fu-wei shang-hsiang* [伏惟尚饗], is the usual expression used as the last sentence in every eulogy [ceremony of offering to the dead]. Because this is such a common expression, it does not have any particular meaning as used by Mu-chou" (Chang, *Original Teachings*, 124, n. 34).

even “The three worlds are only mind, the ten thousand dharmas are only consciousness”—[the teachings] of all of these various schools of Ch’an. When I got to a place, I only had to enter the interview room of the teacher twice before I would have understood the teaching. But always in the end my feeling of doubt was not broken through.

I studied here and studied there. When Chan-t’ang died I was at his side as an attendant. Because of this it happened that I traveled to Ching-chou 荊州 to ask Chang Wu-chin 張無盡 [Chang Shang-ying 商英, 1043–1121] for a pagoda inscription for Chan-t’ang’s tomb. When we met, we liked each other at first sight. He was a truly awakened man. He only blinked his eyes. I told him everything that I had learned. He winked at me. I asked him, “What do you think of the way I talk about Ch’an?” He said, “What you have seen is very good. The school of the venerable Chun [i.e., Chan-t’ang] is so correct, and it seems that it has given birth to a lion.” I told him the truth; I said, “I do not dare deceive you or myself. I am not there yet.” Chang said, “If so, you had better see K’o-ch’in, the Szechwan monk.”³⁴

So I went to the capital to T’ien-ning monastery to study with the venerable Yüan-wu Fo-kuo 圓悟佛果. I told myself that I would spend one year studying with this old man [i.e., Yüan-wu K’o-ch’in]. If it turned out as it had with all those previous teachers who gave me approval [*yin-k’o* 印可], I was going to write an essay saying that there was no Ch’an—I would not believe that there was a Ch’an school [anymore]. I thought it would be better to teach scriptures and commentaries so as not to lose out on being a person of the Buddhadharma [in my next life].³⁵

Only forty-two days after I registered as a student at T’ien-ning monastery, Madame Chang K’ang-kuo 張康國夫人 suddenly entered the temple, sponsored a vegetarian feast for the monks, and invited the old monk [i.e., Yüan-wu] to ascend the dharma-seat [to preach]. Yüan-wu raised [for the contemplation of the assembled students] the following exchange: “A monk asked Yün-men, ‘What is the place where all the Buddhas are emancipated?’³⁶ Yün-men replied, ‘[Where] the East Mountains walk on the river.’”³⁷

Now I had once in the past when studying with an old master passed this *hua* [*kung-an*]. The old master had asked, “The East mountain walks on the water—how do you understand this?” I had answered: “The East Mountain walks on the water.” In the assembly we call this “being the host, the master, not receiving people’s effort, but returning the goods to be exchanged.” The next day he had again asked, “What about the former question?” I had answered: “You can do as many transformations as you want, a thousand, ten thousand—I will only pay attention to ‘The East mountain walks on the water.’” When someone raises a *kung-an* [*hua*], you again want to open your eyes wide and look. It is called “If you don’t look when someone raises something then you

³⁴*P’u-shuo*, 418d. Chang Shang-ying was also from Szechwan.

³⁵*P’u-shuo*, 418d.

³⁶See n. 10 above.

³⁷See n. 11 above.

will be off the mark.” I had understood well and passed through this bit. He had then asked “What is the intention of this answer?” wanting me to give a turning word. After several days I had said to the old teacher, “Ask me again about the intention of ‘East Mountain walks on the water.’” [When he did,] I answered: “His heels have not touched the ground.” The old teacher deeply approved of it. “This word covers heaven and earth. It is the same as the word that my teacher gave at his teacher’s place.” So I was ruined by his teaching, made to half believe and half doubt. So it is said, “Beneath a great doubt there will definitely be a great awakening.”

Yüan-wu said: “If someone were to ask me today what the place is like where all the Buddhas are emancipated, I would reply, ‘The *hsün* wind comes from the south, and produces a slight coolness in the palace.’”³⁸

When he said that, I suddenly broke open the lacquer cask. As to all the things that had obstructed me, it was like cutting through a tangle of silk thread; one stroke and at once they were all cut through. For the first time I believed that in this world there really is Ch’an. From that moment I never doubted the Buddha, never doubted the patriarchs, never doubted the tongues of the venerable teachers of the empire. For the first time I knew that when the patriarchs and teachers speak of “dharma,” dharma is from the beginning dharma, not dharma, and not not dharma; how in one dharma there is dharma and there is not dharma. From the beginning this truly scratched where I itched. From that moment I made a vow to take that to which I had awakened and give it to all people.³⁹

2. Ta-hui’s autobiographical narrative at *P’u-shuo* p. 411b

Ta-hui’s sermon at *P’u-shuo* pp. 410b–412b is a good example of an autobiographical narrative in which his core narrative about his study and awakening is conveyed.⁴⁰ And even more than in the previous example, his subjective experience is featured and his doubts and inner obstacles are revealed. It begins:

I started studying Ch’an when I was seventeen, and I was thirty-four years old when I shattered the lacquer cask [of deluded mind].⁴¹ Before that I had passed *kung-ans*. I had understood when confronted with “a blow, a shout” [the teaching technique associated with the Lin-chi school]. I had gone [up against] “flint-struck sparks and lightning flashes” and understood.⁴²

When my eyes were open, whatever the Buddha praised, I did; whatever the Buddha disapproved of, I did not dare do. But the minute I got into bed and

³⁸See n. 12 above.

³⁹The autobiographical portion of the sermon runs from 418c13 to 419a6.

⁴⁰The portion of the sermon that I translate and summarize below is found on pp. 411a–d.

⁴¹Actually, if we follow the *Nien-p’u*, he was thirty-seven.

⁴²In the *Blue Cliff Record* Yüan-wu says, “You must realize that what is at stake here does not reside in words and phrases: it is like sparks from struck flint, like the brilliance of flashing lightning. However you manage to deal with this, you cannot get around losing your body and life” (T 2003, 48.177c8–10). Translated by App in *Master Yunmen*, 79.

went to sleep, although I had not died, it was as though I was having an early experience of being dominated by mental and emotional consciousness [*hsin-i-shih* 心意識]. I could not understand it. If in my dream I saw gold bars, I would be joyful. If I dreamed that I was seized for punishment and carried off to be killed, or even saw in my dream the demon minions of King Yama [the lord of punishment in the hells] [coming for me], then I would bring forth fear. When I woke up my whole body would be covered with perspiration.

He continues:

So I turned around and thought to myself, "How would this kind of Ch'an be useful? The Buddha said that [for an awakened person] sleeping and waking are constantly the same.⁴³ For me now dreaming and daytime are two different things. How can I dare open my mouth wide and say that I understand Ch'an? If all of the seventeen hundred patriarchs and teachers in the *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp* had been like this, how would the Buddhadharma ever have been transmitted down to the present?"⁴⁴

I doubted like that for more than ten years. Every day, walking, standing, sitting, lying down, I was constantly trying to get to the bottom of this.

At this point he mentions that as a student he was not a particularly enthusiastic participant in meditation in the seated lotus posture [Ch. *tso-ch'an* 坐禪, J. *zazen*]:

In the past when I was in the assembly of monks studying under a master, I did not very much like to do seated Ch'an. When others were sitting up straight doing seated meditation all night, I in fact would stretch out my two legs and sleep.

Perhaps he intends to contrast the vigorous seated meditation that others were doing with the constant doubting that he was doing, for he says,

The only thing is, I [did do what is important, I] dealt successfully with mental and emotional consciousness. I was constantly in the midst of perfectly clean awareness, and I never let it be interrupted.

⁴³Elsewhere Ta-hui cites the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra* as the source of this statement. *P'u-shuo*, 446b.

⁴⁴"*Ch'uan-teng lu*" probably he refers here to the *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*, published in 1004, which contains 1701 names of dharma-heirs, not all of which had full entries. Cf. Nishitani and Yanagida, *Zenke goroku II*, 478. Two other famous examples of the "transmission of the lamp" genre were published in the Northern Sung: the *T'ien-sheng kuang-teng lu* 天聖廣錄 edited by Li Tsun-hsü 李遵勗 (?-after 1020); and the *Chien-chung ching-kuo hsü-teng lu* 建中靖國續燈錄 edited by Wei-po 惟白. Thus he could here be referring also to the genre as a whole. Elsewhere Ta-hui mentions a "*Hsü-teng lu*," probably referring to the last of these three Northern Sung texts. Cf. Hervouet, ed., *A Sung Bibliography*, 352-353 for a good discussion by Chan Hing-ho of the genre in the Sung.

Next he brings up the subject of the *hua-t'ou* "East Mountain walks on the water" and various mistaken approaches to understanding it:

For example, the case in which a monk asked Yün-men, "What is the place from which all the Buddhas come?" Yün-men said "East Mountain walks on the water." There are lots of people who take baseless and mistaken approaches [to understanding the answer Yün-men gives]. Some say that it expresses the mysteriousness of the Tao, since it is clearly impossible for the East Mountain to walk on the water. Others understand it as just a statement of fact about the East Mountain region, and say, "The East Mountains have rivers and lakes; if you go there you can walk on the water." Others try to understand it in light of the context in which it is raised. [These approaches do not result in correct understandings of Yün-men.]

Then, as in the narrative at *P'u-shuo* p. 418 quoted above, Ta-hui tells that he himself before he met Yüan-wu had been challenged with this *hua-t'ou* by a head monk named Fang.⁴⁵ After working on it constantly for a couple of weeks, when the head monk brought it up to him again, he understood part of it. After that he made up hundreds of turning words for it, but he could not get one that fit definitively. Finally when he was reading the "record of words" from when Tung-lin Chao-chüeh 東林照覺 had been living at Le-t'an (that is, Jewel Peak) in Kiangsi, he came upon an exchange [*wen-ta* 問答, J. *mondo*] in which the answer was "his heels do not touch the ground." He was overjoyed, and went to the head monk to say that he had understood.⁴⁶ When the head monk asked once more the meaning of "The East Mountain walks on water," Ta-hui replied, "His heels have not touched the ground." Ta-hui then reports that not only did he think that he had passed the *kung-an* this time, but he wrote a eulogy [*sung* 頌] about the *hua-t'ou*, and also raised it as an instruction topic.⁴⁷

Finally he comes to his going to the T'ien-ning temple at the capital and, forty-two days after enrolling, hearing Yüan-wu raise this same *kung-an* and offer a substitute for Yün-men's answer. He gives the following account:

Later when I arrived at the T'ien-ning monastery in the capital and had been enrolled for forty-two days, suddenly one day Madame Chang K'ang 長康夫人, whose maiden name was Yü 喻, invited [Yüan-wu] to ascend the high seat [to teach]. He raised "A monk asked Yün-men, 'What is the place where all the Buddhas are emancipated [awakened]?' [Yün]-men replied, '[Where] the East Mountains walk on the river.'" Yüan-wu continued: "I would not have given that answer. If someone were to ask me what the place is like where all

⁴⁵In one sermon he says that he passed this *hua-t'ou* in a Yün-men school context. *P'u-shuo*, 396a.

⁴⁶Tung-lin Chao-chüeh refers to Tung-lin Ch'ang-tsung 常總, known as Chao-chüeh Ch'an-shih (1025–1091). Cf. T 2077, 51.573c.

⁴⁷*Nien-t'i* 拈提; similar to *chü* 舉 [raise], *t'i* 提 [pick up] or *nien* 拈 [choose].

the Buddhas are emancipated, I would reply to him or her, 'The *hsün* wind comes from the south, and produces a slight coolness in the palace.'"

Ta-hui continues:

Suddenly at this point I broke through the lacquer bucket. All of my various views and bits of knowledge from the past [years of study] melted like snow in hot water—they vanished without a trace. I was so lively. It reminds me of the saying, "When the lion eats a person the mad dog also gets a piece." [I take this to mean that the expression of Yüan-wu's greatly awakened mind in these words allowed Ta-hui to get a little piece of awakening himself.] When the following year [Yüan-wu] elevated me to head monk, I made a great vow to take this Matter that is our original allotment and give it to monastics so that they would understand.

In these autobiographical narratives, Ta-hui is not seeking to tell his listeners everything about himself. He selects certain elements as especially significant in that they reflect a certain shape and order that he discerns in the first half of his life. And he selects episodes and an overall plot line that suits his didactic purpose. But he does give an account of his thoughts, attitudes and insights that could have been known only to him. He breaks from what Wu Pei-yi calls the constricting model of historical biography, in which the only facts related are those that can be verified in external sources. He reveals something of his own interiority, of what it was like to be him, and gives a plausible account of the process through which the qualities of his consciousness changed.

Ta-hui and autobiography

Although unlike Wu Pei-yi I have not done a systematic survey of Ch'an or other Buddhist literature prior to Ta-hui, I have for an earlier study read a good deal of the extant *p'u-shuo* and other sermon forms prior to and contemporary with Ta-hui's. It seems to me very likely, as far as we can tell from extant Ch'an literature, that when Ta-hui tells an autobiographical story, a story that focuses on himself, he does a new thing.

Philippe Lejeune, a prominent theorist of autobiography, says that in autobiography the author raises the question, "Who am I?" and the answer is a narrative. Not simply a self-description, a self-portrait, but an extended story.⁴⁸ The answer for most Ch'an masters as depicted in Ch'an literature prior to Ta-hui to the question "Who are you?" or "Who am I?" is a short, pointed, and to the uninitiated, enigmatic and challenging answer. Ta-hui does raise the question, "Who am I?" He answers it, among other questions, with the narrative of the events leading up to his awakening with Yüan-wu.

⁴⁸ Lejeune, *On Autobiography*.

If one has doubts about whether Ta-hui's narratives should properly be called "autobiographical" in the modern Western sense, it is because one needs first to address the issue of how important the question "Who am I?" is to Ta-hui. There is no doubt that the question "what does my experience mean?" is important to Ta-hui. It is the theme of his story of his awakening with Yüan-wu, and the theme of his longer autobiographical story. Perhaps a narrative answer to that question is enough to qualify this as an autobiography. But what about the question "Who am I?" Is this a question Ta-hui really feels a need to answer, for himself or for his listeners, as he tells stories about himself?

It would be wrong to say that Ta-hui's stories are narratives about "the self." Both the contemporary reader and Ta-hui, for different and perhaps not so different reasons, would be uncomfortable with the notion that in the course of living a life a human being ideally discovers or even constructs a unitary self with which he can identify because it is somehow "himself." Nor do I think that Ta-hui is very interested in discovering or displaying his personality, a focus that some scholars require in an autobiography. When I say that Ta-hui focuses our attention on himself, I intend to make no metaphysical claims, nor lend any support to individualism, nor invoke notions of the metaphysical status or value of the individual self. Nor do I see him making any such claims or offering such support. The valuable thing that he has discovered or realized in his life is, in his view, transpersonal and the same for everyone. Nonetheless I think there is a clear difference between what Ta-hui does in these narratives and what the (perhaps legendary or fictional) Hui-neng does in the autobiographical section of the sermon attributed to him. And the difference lies in the way the narrative focuses our attention on the narrator himself, and rewards this attention in ways new to Ch'an literature.

The dramatic tension in Hui-neng's story lies in part in whether the listener or reader can believe that a commoner can penetrate so profoundly to the heart of Buddhist attainment with no or next to no formal instruction, and no formal practice of any form of dhyāna or samādhi. Within the story's plot line, it lies also in the question of whether anyone in authority will recognize real awakening in an illiterate southerner who is not even ordained. It does not lie in self-doubt or in efforts to get over some kind of barrier that one discovers in oneself. It does not lie in the dilemma presented by doubts about the truth or falsity of the tradition to which one has given the best years of one's life. The dramatic tension of the story does not lie in fact in any kind of self-confrontation on Hui-neng's part. It lies in events external to him. Hui-neng may tell his story in part to account for an unlikely claim, and to describe the events that explain why he did not remain an illiterate seller of firewood but became a Ch'an teacher. But as narrator, as Wu Pei-yi points out, he does not show any interest in allowing us to know him as a person by describing his moment-to-moment consciousness or "inner life."

The dramatic tension in Ta-hui's story is created by his doubts about himself, as well as his doubts about the premise of his dreams, his faith and his career. It is much more a story of his self-awareness and self-reflection at crucial moments as those develop and change. At least in the records that have come down to us of Ch'an literature, this is something new.

This is of course not to deny the didactic dimension to Ta-hui's stories. His autobiographical narrative's most explicit point is that there is thorough-going enlightenment, and that it

has definite signs; there are definite criteria one should use to be sure that one has reached it and not some halfway point that leaves one half believing and half doubting. But these stories are more than didactic stories. Ta-hui tells details not needed for his didactic purpose; whether deliberately or not, their effect is to allow Ta-hui himself as a self-reflective person (a fictional “himself,” no doubt) to be known.

Ta-hui’s didactic and political purposes

I think that the reason why Ta-hui introduces autobiographical narrative into Ch’an sermons is that he realizes that the warrant for what he advocates is in part what he has realized and who he is. His path to awakening, his teaching, and his authority to teach, are inseparable. He can demonstrate who he is in the time-honored challenging and enigmatic Ch’an way, through every gesture and movement of his life; but telling them who he is through a straightforward narrative of the classic shape of his Ch’an life might be a better method of reaching at least some of his listeners.

If we look at these narratives in their contexts in the sermons in which they are embedded and their context in the totality of Ta-hui’s consistent message about Ch’an practice, we can discern their didactic and political purposes. For example, let us look again at the sermon that begins at *P’u-shuo* p. 410b in which the second of our narratives is embedded.

1. Ta-hui’s didactic purposes: The sermon at *P’u-shuo* p. 410b

The sermon at *P’u-shuo* p. 410b, in which Ta-hui’s autobiographical narrative translated and summarized above is embedded, is a good example of Ta-hui’s larger discourse centered on the need for awakening [*wu* 悟, *J. satori*] and how awakening is best attained, the discourse for which he became famous. It is a discourse both critical and constructive.

Earlier in this sermon at p. 411, Ta-hui says, “Recently . . . I was saying . . . ‘Why is it that smart, intelligent people for the most part do not finish [that is, thoroughly understand] this matter? The defect is their using thinking and reasoning. They often say, “First I will use my reason, and then I’ll get to the place where no reason is needed.””

After further description of examples of the wrong approaches taken by intellectuals, he recommends looking at one of his three favorite *hua-t’ou*: “What is Buddha? A dry piece of shit.”⁴⁹ He then tells a story of another earlier monk who had reached a glimpse into awakening when reading this *hua-t’ou* in Yün-men’s *Record of Words* (the *Yün-men yü-lu*), and knew for the first time that there was no point in seeking truths available to reason [*tao-li* 道理] as he had before, when he had mastered “mind and nature Ch’an.”

Then he says that among his contemporaries there are those who completely misunderstand this *hua-t’ou* and other marvelous sayings of earlier masters because they explain everything with the concepts of “mind” and “nature.” They say that “a dry piece of shit” is just your mind—there is nowhere and nothing that is not your mind. They thus take a

⁴⁹Cf. App, *Master Yunmen*, 127. Ta-hui does not use the word “*hua-t’ou*” when bringing this up here, though he does elsewhere.

phrase that as an expression of the dharma is a marvelous much-treasured nectar and turn it into a poison.

He then turns to the third of his favorite *hua-t'ou*, Chao-chou's "What was the intention of the Patriarch in coming from the West?" "The cypress tree in the courtyard." Ta-hui says that no matter how people try to "explain" this, it is as though they are describing a dream. "I myself when I was finished studying Ch'an looked at this saying [*hua*]. It was as though it scratched right where I itched."⁵⁰

It is at this point that he begins to tell his story of his own study and awakening, the story that we have given in full above. He finishes this "autobiographical narrative" by telling of his vow to teach others. He then immediately makes the following statement that begins the final section of the sermon:

If you seek views and understandings, if you go in and out of emotional consciousness, all the complications and explanations that have been transmitted will not enliven you. If you want to be alive, then "What is the Buddha? A dried piece of shit." This matter does not depend on having many [words]. "Does a dog have the Buddha nature or not? Not!" "If you call this a bamboo whisk, then you touch it, if you do not call this a bamboo whisk, then you turn your back on it." You must not comment, you must not be silent, you must not think.

Ta-hui thus began his sermon with a discussion of *kung-ans* and *kung-an* practice. And he has moved directly after his own awakening story to draw a contrast between *kung-an* practice that brings about an occasion for awakening, and *kung-an* practice that stays within the realm of samsaric emotions and thoughts. From there he has moved immediately to practical instructions on how to do *hua-t'ou* practice.

How does his autobiographical narrative contribute to the theme of his sermon?

First, in this version of Ta-hui's autobiographical narrative he draws an important contrast between all of the ways of understanding the "East Mountain" *kung-an* that miss the mark and Yüan-wu's understanding that propelled him to awakening. He draws a contrast between his own previous way of arriving at a "solution," which in hindsight he sees as having been merely using his mind, and the non-reasoning approach to a *hua-t'ou* that allows it to deliver its own message, rather than trying to arrive at its message through "rational" contrivance.

Second, his autobiographical narrative tells his hearers that he had practiced for a long time, and that all of the practices in commenting on *kung-an* that he had seemed to succeed in did not really count, because they had not really worked. His story thus lays out a clear difference between seeming success with Ch'an discourse and actual awakened consciousness.

Third, his story tells them that a key to his ultimate success was the focusing and cleansing power of the doubt that was raised in him when he realized that he had not gotten to

⁵⁰Cf. Akizuki, *Jōshū rōku*, 35–36. See also *Tsung-jung lu*, case 47.

his goal despite fooling both himself and others by day. His story supports the idea that a sustained, focused doubt is the force that can push a person beyond mere seeming success with Ch'an discourse, if it is combined with a live word—in this case Yüan-wu's fresh and rationally inexplicable substitute answer—that comes from an enlightened mind. In place of Yüan-wu's substitute word, or one of his own, Ta-hui recommends that students take up his favorite *hua-t'ou*.

Fourth, as we have mentioned above, his story makes the liveliness of an awakened consciousness something that reasoning can never attain, but that as his shortened story somewhat misleadingly illustrates, can be attained in a single moment in which doubt, an enlightened word, and the abandonment of all reasoning and contrivance come together. It reinforces the need for a final breakthrough.

Fifth, it gives his hearers a reason to be skeptical of their *kung-an* practice, or other Ch'an practice, up to this moment. It gives them a criterion by which to judge whether their own Ch'an practice has really resulted in awakening. That criterion is the liveliness conferred by an awakening [*satori*] which is a complete end to emotional consciousness, samsaric mind.

Thus we can see that in telling the story of his own life in the context of a discussion of *hua-t'ou* practice, he has never left the subject of *hua-t'ou* practice, the nature of enlightenment, the absolute necessity of awakening [*satori*], and the futility of reasoning in the context of seeking awakening. His own awakening experience both illustrates and verifies, proves, the worth of the path he teaches.

He seems to ask, Do you want this same liveliness? Don't use your mind, his sermon says, do not take up *kung-an* practice of the kind that involves making comments—as I did with “East Mountain walks on the water.” Rather, leave off all thought and take up a *hua-t'ou*.

2. Ta-hui's political purpose: His autobiographical narratives in the context of his return from exile

In thinking about these things, one has to remember the need felt by Ch'an masters in general, and Ta-hui in particular, to make claims to authority and transformative power. They felt this need for their tradition of teaching and training, still popular among parts of the elite but definitely under attack and somewhat beleaguered in the early Southern Sung. But they also felt this need for their lineages, and for themselves individually.⁵¹

As do Ta-hui's other sermons, the sermon at *P'u-shuo* p. 411 makes a claim to authority for himself as a teacher. In the context of this sermon his autobiographical story furthers his claim that by virtue of his own experience he can discern between “real” awakening and its counterfeits, and thus teach others. But it is the sermon at *P'u-shuo* p. 418, translated and discussed above, that reveals the most about what offering an autobiographical narrative might mean to Ta-hui in light of the larger social and institutional context in which his preaching takes place.

⁵¹Janet Gyatso discusses competition among teachers and the need to establish one's own lineage over against others as an important factor in the popularity of autobiographical writing by Buddhist monks in Tibet in her *Apparitions of the Self*.

The sermon at *P'u-shuo* p. 418 as a whole focuses on the reality of and nature of awakening. But it is important to note that it was given the evening of the day of his entrance into Mt. Aśoka 阿育王山 as abbot (the twenty-third day of the twelfth month of the Chinese lunar calendar, 1156), his first clerical post after his return from exile.⁵² Mt. Aśoka was both a Ch'an training center and a major pilgrimage center, for it housed the most sacred Buddhist relic in China, the Buddha's finger bone. As one of the monasteries that were soon to be recognized as the "Five Mountains," the five most prominent imperially sanctioned Ch'an monasteries, it merited the leadership of a first-rate Ch'an master as abbot. In this context we can appreciate the significance of the fact that Ta-hui's sermon has as its general theme an introduction of himself and his philosophy of Ch'an practice and awakening. In that context Ta-hui may have found telling an extended story of his life and practice leading up to his awakening an excellent way to give an account of himself and support his own claim to authority.

His autobiographical narrative sermon at *P'u-shuo* p. 418 gives details of his career of study that both an audience of monks inhabiting a Ch'an world and an audience of high officials might both particularly appreciate. For example, it is only in this version of his autobiographical narrative that he tells of his friendship with Chang Shang-ying and Chang's recommendation of Yüan-wu to him as a teacher.⁵³ The former Northern Sung high official who was briefly chief minister was much admired in Buddhist circles as a distinguished scholar of Buddhism and as a prominent defender of Buddhism against its political and ideological enemies. For a man taking up such a prominent abbacy at the command of the throne, reminding his audience that a high official who had been deeply interested in Buddhism had approved of him certainly could have been politically astute.

It is worth remembering the timing of these sermons in Ta-hui's life and the life of the Southern Sung regime. When Ta-hui preached the sermon at *P'u-shuo* p. 418 and probably also the one at *P'u-shuo* p. 411, he was returning to monastic life not too far from the court in the capital at present-day Hang-chou after a long period spent in exile among the "southern barbarians." In 1137 he had been given the abbacy of the major temple on Mt. Ching 徑山, which he had expanded further into a major center where he could teach seventeen hundred monks and receive visits from women, nuns and literati. Four years later he had been accused of the unmonkly behavior of talking politics with Chang Chiu-ch'eng 張九成 (1092–1159), a high official whose faction opposed the policies of the current chief minister, Ch'in Kuei 秦檜 (1090–1155). He had been defrocked, and, like Chang, exiled. A few years later a court document reviewing Ta-hui's exile noted that Ta-hui's scurrilous political behavior had only gotten worse, and he was banished deeper into the hinterlands of the malarial south. In 1156, after Ch'in Kuei's death, he had been given his freedom to return. He had been given the abbacy at Mt. Aśoka at the recommendation of his age-mate, the Ts'ao-tung school abbot

⁵²This and other biographical detail and historical context discussed in this section are discussed at more length in Levering, "Ch'an Enlightenment for Laymen." See also Ishii, *Zen goroku*, 403–499, for a discussion of Sung Ch'an and a biography of Ta-hui.

⁵³On this, see my "Dahui Zonggao and Zhang Shangying."

Hung-chih Cheng-chüeh 宏智正覺. While his ordination had been rescinded, he had not cut off all contact with Ch'an students and literati during his exile. But nonetheless he needed to reintroduce himself and set forth his claim to suitability for high monastic office.

Career patterns among Sung Ch'an monks culminated in abbacies; it was as abbot that a master taught and produced dharma-heirs, though the head monks of the Ch'an training hall shared in the teaching duties. For the imperially regulated temples, which included of course all of the wealthy ones that could accommodate many students, abbots were chosen by the court on the recommendation of local officials. Local officials in turn usually took the recommendation of the other abbots in the surrounding area.⁵⁴

There was thus not a highly organized national or local Buddhist institution that conferred sacerdotal or teaching authority on monks, or assigned pastors to temples. A Buddhist monk who sought to be a teacher and abbot had to make it on his own reputation, with the patronage of his teacher and possibly the support of fellow members of his lineage. Individual charisma and the ability to substantiate a claim to awakened insight were crucial to a monastic career.

While Ta-hui was in exile, his lineage brothers and cousins seem to have been in retreat. Ch'in Kuei favored T'ien-t'ai Buddhism over Ch'an. Major Ch'an centers such as his old dharma-seat at Mt. Ching were occupied by Ts'ao-tung Ch'an teachers, not by other successful students of Yüan-wu or members of Ta-hui's own Lin-chi school. So perhaps there was all the more need for Ta-hui to bring forth an autobiographical narrative as one way to claim the authority to teach.⁵⁵

The sermon at *P'u-shuo* pp. 425–426, which contains an autobiographical narrative (see Appendix), can also perhaps best be understood in this context. The sermon begins with the question, "How could it be wrong for Lin-chi lineage monks to study the teachings of other lineages?" The sermon is primarily about Ta-hui's understanding of Ts'ao-tung *kung-an* and other Ts'ao-tung teachings, and his successful experience in studying with Ts'ao-tung teachers. After considerable discussion of these subjects, including autobiographical discussion, Ta-hui tells his narrative about his own awakening.

He then concludes, "At this point I suddenly broke through the lacquer bucket. From that moment daytime and nighttime . . . naturally [*tsu-jan* 自然] became the same. For the first time I knew that 'there is not an inch of grass for ten thousand miles, when I go out my door there is grass everywhere' and 'knock on empty sky and you get a sound, strike wood and you get no sound' [these apparently were sayings popular in the Ts'ao-tung tradition] were not statements of ordinary theory. . . . How much less should I emphasize [promote] things like 'the buddha before the empty kalpa' [a reference to the teaching of contemporary Ts'ao-tung teachers] and 'when you open your mouth you fall into the grass' and 'within nonbeing you sing, within being you harmonize'—they have nothing to do with it."⁵⁶

⁵⁴See for example Huang, "Elite and Clergy in Northern Sung Hang-chou," and a number of articles by Morten Schlutter.

⁵⁵Cf. Schlutter, "Silent Illumination."

⁵⁶*P'u-shuo*, 426b–c.

So the point of telling his autobiographical narrative in this context seems to be threefold. First, to claim the authority to judge Ts'ao-tung Ch'an by virtue of his having studied Ts'ao-tung teachings and in his own view mastered them. Second, to report that his awakening showed him the meaning of things he had studied in Ts'ao-tung contexts, like the "no grass for ten thousand miles" *hua-t'ou*. And third, to elevate the banner of Sung Lin-chi lineage Ch'an above that of his and his lineage's currently more established rivals, the Ts'ao-tung lineage heirs.

A comparison of Ta-hui's autobiographical narratives in his *P'u-shuo* with those of Tsu-ch'in

Limitations of space prevent a translation or even full description of Tsu-ch'in's autobiographical narrative in the sermon recorded at the beginning of the second *chüan* of his *Hsüeh-yen Ho-shang yü-lu* 雪巖和尚語錄, which Wu discusses. The reader will have to consult Wu and/or Tsu-ch'in's *Record of Words* on her own. All that can be done here is offer some brief point-by-point comparisons.

Tsu-ch'in's story about himself is considerably longer than any of Ta-hui's autobiographical narratives. Further, it brings together more of the materials available from Tsu-ch'in's life into a meaningful shape than Ta-hui's narrative does. One might say it attempts a greater completeness as autobiography than any of Ta-hui's accounts in his narratives do. Tsu-ch'in tells in a single sermon about a greater number of turns in his search, as well as a greater number of illuminations. This makes the listener's contemplation of him as a person a more leisurely and complete experience. But Tsu-ch'in's and Ta-hui's narratives are basically the same in structure. And though Wu Pei-yi points out that Tsu-ch'in does a new thing in Chinese literature by using six hundred characters in narrating three days of his life, more than most official biographers used for the entire life of their subjects, no one of his illuminations is actually narrated at greater length or in a more leisurely, self-revealing way than Ta-hui's narrative of his time in the capital with Yüan-wu in the first example given above.⁵⁷ So in that sense there is not a qualitative difference.

The second set of narratives by Ta-hui discussed at the beginning of this essay include many stories that support and flesh out the rather skeletal autobiographical narratives of his career as a Ch'an student just discussed. The stories that Ta-hui tells about himself in his several volumes of collected sermons and letters can be woven together by the reader or biographer into a document far more than equal to Tsu-ch'in's in length, range of events, and depth of self-revelation.

Wu Pei-yi correctly brings up the fact that such telling of stories about oneself in a sermon is an oral form. It is like the self-revealing speeches of characters in dramas of the time, or like the great elaboration indulged in by storytellers, as compared to the terseness

⁵⁷Wu, *The Confucian's Progress*, 83.

used by narrators who tell stories or write biographies in the written language.⁵⁸ At first glance it seems not fitting to compare an oral performance like Tsu-ch'in's long sermon to the cumulative autobiographical material in a published compilation like Ta-hui's sermon collection. But we should remember that by Ta-hui's time and after, sermons were given in the full expectation that they would be written down, edited, collected, printed and circulated widely. So if sermons were an oral form, they also were performed with one eye to an eventual written product. Wu Pei-yi brings up many factors that formed necessary conditions for the development of Buddhist autobiography in the Yüan (and by extension the Southern Sung), but neglects to take into account the widespread use of printing new in the Sung!

A further point against the view that Tsu-ch'in created a new genre is the fact the narratives of Tsu-ch'in's successors in the thirteenth century are again shorter and less complete—more like Ta-hui's.⁵⁹ So Tsu-ch'in's unusually long autobiographical narrative in a sermon did not set a whole new pattern. It merely provided an impressive variation on one set by Ta-hui.

There are definitely differences in degree. When one reads Tsu-ch'in's sermon beside Ta-hui's, one must agree with Wu when he writes, "Undoubtedly before Tsu-ch'in many Chinese seekers of truth or salvation had undergone hardships equal to or greater than his, but none had made such a candid admission of the despair or described the agonies in such plain and direct language." Ta-hui's doubts and frustrations were no doubt agonizing to him. But Ta-hui does not depict with as much vividness as Tsu-ch'in the agonies he felt. These differences, though, are of degree rather than kind. The basic pattern for Tsu-ch'in's story is there in Ta-hui's.

Wu Pei-yi notes that Tsu-ch'in's autobiographical narrative is embedded in a sermon on death, and notes that in China (and elsewhere?) all autobiography is autonecology.⁶⁰ Ta-hui too has sermons about death, but does not tell his autobiographical narrative in that context.⁶¹ In fact, Tsu-ch'in's launching on an account of his own path to awakening seems oddly placed in a sermon about death. It is that fact perhaps that leads Wu Pei-yi to feel that his primary intention was not to contribute to the overall structure and didactic purpose of a sermon but to tell his own story. Yet on this point too perhaps Tsu-ch'in and Ta-hui are not so far apart. By telling many stories about himself in his sermons, Ta-hui shaped a necrology, albeit one he did not author. He influenced not only his pagoda inscription but also his *Nien-p'u*. He made possible a *Nien-p'u* that was more than a dry recitation of facts, thus helping to create the

⁵⁸Wu, *The Confucian's Progress*, 83–85. Wu's illuminating discussion of Ch'an sermon performances and Ch'an use of the vernacular is helpful and thought-provoking. However, it needs to be supplemented by a more thorough understanding of the way in which Ch'an was not simply borrowing vernacular expressions from popular oral and written literature, it was also creating its own extensive vocabulary of images and expressions, making its own contribution to the development of the vernacular as an expressive medium.

⁵⁹These are discussed in Wu, *The Confucian's Progress*, 87–92.

⁶⁰Wu, *The Confucian's Progress*, 76. See the section of Wu's book entitled "Self-Written Necrologies," pp. 24–32.

⁶¹See my "Ta-hui and Lay Buddhists: Chan Sermons on Death."

myth about himself that circulated after his death. Tsu-ch'in, heir to the Sung Lin-chi Ch'an of Ta-hui's and Yüan-wu's time in so many of his ideas and so much of his language, probably knew the corpus of Ta-hui's sermons and his *Nien-p'u*. Perhaps, having seen what Ta-hui had wittingly or unwittingly accomplished by telling stories about himself, Tsu-ch'in wanted to do the same.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Wu Pei-yi writes that "a group of thirteenth century masters spoke unabashedly and in great detail about their own enlightenment," and thereby "created a new genre in Chinese literature."⁶² If it is true that a new genre for China, a kind of "spiritual autobiography," was created in this *p'u-shuo* literature, one finds in Ta-hui's collected sermons good evidence that that genre was created in the twelfth century or before. The extant sources suggest that Wu Pei-yi's new genre was quite possibly created by Ta-hui Tsung-kao.⁶³

⁶²Wu, *The Confucian's Progress*, 74. Wu Pei-yi suggests that the long annalistic biography compiled for Ta-hui after his death and undoubtedly known to Han-shan Te-ch'ing 憨山德清 of the Ming dynasty may have influenced that latter's own *nien-p'u*, one of the major autobiographical works of Chinese Buddhism (Wu, 157–158).

⁶³Of course extant sources may not reflect what actually was happening, so any such conclusion must be tentative. We should note that Robert M. Gimello mentions in an unpublished paper on Chüeh-fan Hui-hung 覺範慧洪 that Hui-hung in a substantial preface (dated 1123) to one of his works gives a self-contained autobiography. If this is a "spiritual autobiography," it would make Ta-hui's the first in a Ch'an sermon, but not the first in any medium by a Ch'an writer. Cf. Gimello, "Ch'an Buddhism, Learning, and Letters in the Northern Sung."

Appendix: Elements in Ta-hui's narratives of his progress toward awakening⁶⁴

a.	Did not have much schooling				418		
b.	Knew of Ch'an enlightenment early	396			418	426	446
b-1.	Studied Ch'an texts early				418		446
c.	Studied for seventeen years	396		411		426	
c-1.	Went to many teachers	396	399		418		446
c-2.	Studied with all houses				418		
c-3.	Passed <i>kung-an</i>			411	418		446
c-4.	Mastered all the Ch'an forms				418	426	
d.	Studied and discussed <i>kung-an</i>	396					
e.	Called out " <i>chu-ren-kung</i> " 主人公 <i>kung-an</i>						446
f.	"Solved" "East Mountain" <i>kung-an</i>		399	411			
g.	Sleeping/waking			411		426	446
g-1.	Doubts persisted	396		411	418		
h.	Studied with Chan-t'ang				418		
h-1.	Chan-t'ang said he sometimes had Ch'an, sometimes not						
i.	Chan-t'ang recommended Yüan-wu						
j.	Visited Chang Shang-ying				418		
j-1.	Chang approved, Ta-hui confessed doubt				418		
k.	Chang recommended Yüan-wu				418		
l.	Went to capital to seek Yüan-wu	396					
m.	Doubted whether Ch'an exists—wanted to write that there is no Ch'an	396			418	426	
n.	Vowed to become lecturer on sūtras and commentaries				418	426	
o.	Doubted Yüan-wu: he might be like all others who had given <i>yin-k'o</i> ; would stay a year		399		418	426	
o-1.	Forty-two days					426	
p.	Heard Yüan-wu bring up "East Mountain" <i>kung-an</i>	396	399	411	418	426	446
p-1.	All previous doubts disappeared	396	399		418		
p-2.	All previous worries disappeared				418		
p-3.	Sleeping and waking the same					426	446
p-4.	Could solve all <i>kung-an</i>						446
p-5.	Knew what teacher and teaching were		399				
q.	Had solved "East Mountain" <i>kung-an</i> before	396			418		
r.	Extended story of his study for six more months with Yüan-wu						
s.	Wonder of total transformation				418		
t.	Vowed to exert energy to reach others			411	418		

⁶⁴This table lists short references to elements of Ta-hui's stories about himself that concern his life and Ch'an study up through his first encounter with Yuan-wu K'o-ch'in that are found in his sermons. Some are told as part of longer connected autobiographical narratives, some separately, and some in both forms. The six page numbers that form columns to the right refer to Ta-hui's connected narratives. Where no page numbers are listed for an element, the story or comment appears only outside of connected narratives.

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